

PROFESSIONAL VITALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM NINE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

By

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To the faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of SUSANA REYES-GONZALEZ find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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PROFESSIONAL VITALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM NINE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Abstract

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Expanding expectations for student achievement and the demands arising out of the numerous daily tasks for which principals are responsible have led to several research studies on stress and burnout in the principalship. Among the job duties of today's school principals are meeting the needs of students, parents, teachers, support staff, community members, and administration. They must be managers overseeing the daily operations of a school. A few of these daily operations include scheduling, budgeting, reporting safety, dealing with disruptions, handling student discipline, and addressing parent concerns.

The research on principals' experience with stress and burnout in this increasingly demanding environment exists. However, there is little research that focuses on the experience of school principals who are successful and remain hopeful, positive, and persist in the job. Further, there is little research that focuses on utilizing the construct of professional vitality (Harvey, 2002) to increase our understanding of the personal characteristics that principals possess which enable them persist in the job in the midst of this challenging profession.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the practices of nine school principals in their role as school leaders and their perspectives on dealing with the daily challenges of their jobs. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used as the method for collecting the data. Further, the study sought to expand on the study by Harvey (2002), which focused on

professional vitality as a construct for understanding what may contribute to school principals' ability to thrive and therefore, persist in their jobs.

Analysis of the data revealed that persistent, successful principals deal with various stressors inherent in the job of school principal. Further, the data illustrated that substantial stress is due to time constraints and accountability demands. The data also showed that the qualities of professional vitality: vigor, passion, facility, and job satisfaction can be used to describe how these principals view their experience in the principalship; and thus, may contribute to their persistence.

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Dedication

Dedico esta tesis doctoral a mis padres, Maximino Reyes Munguía y Maria del Socorro Reyes García. Estoy eternamente agradecida por todo su apoyo y amor. Sin ustedes no podría haber logrado todo lo que he logrado en mi vida. Ustedes son mi inspiración.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Expanding expectations for student achievement and the demands arising out of the numerous daily tasks for which principals are responsible have led to several research studies on stress and burnout in the principalship. Among the job duties of today's school principals are meeting the needs of students, parents, teachers, support staff, community members, and administration. They must be managers overseeing the daily operations of a school such as scheduling, budgeting, reporting, and dealing with disruptions.

Further, the school principal's job description has expanded beyond daily management of the school site including facilities, parent communications, discipline, staff supervision and evaluation, fiscal responsibilities, safety of staff and students, and addressing concerns, requests, and directives from the district office directors and superintendent (Norton, 2003).

Facilities involve ensuring the school building is clean, safe, and available for use by staff, students, and community at all times. Throughout the year, there are many requests from various groups to use the school building for an activity. It may be a student group, the parent organization, community groups, or district athletic teams. Hence, the building needs to be clean, inviting, and available, which means having scheduling systems in place and effective supervision of custodial staff.

Maintaining in regular contact with parents involves making phone calls, answering email, meeting with them throughout the year, holding open house and evening informational meetings, interacting with the school's parent organization, sending notices and newsletters, and attending academic, athletic and community events. The community and parents expect the school principal to be responsive to their needs. They make their wishes known to the school

staff, the principal, the district, and the school board. These expectations have become a part of the principal's daily responsibilities, which often mean long days that can extend into the evening past nine in the evening for elementary principals and past ten or twelve at night for secondary principals. Weekends are not necessarily weekends anymore. School dances and athletic events take place on Saturdays and secondary principals are expected to be on site supervising the activities and addressing any safety needs that arise. Principals from every level, elementary, middle, or high school often go in to work on weekends in order to catch up and prepare for the upcoming week. Having a Saturday and Sunday free from school responsibilities has become a luxury.

Staff supervision and evaluation is a responsibility that is mired with numerous guidelines outlined in the district's policies and in the teacher's contract. Principals need to be knowledgeable of these policies and guidelines so that their work as evaluators does not come into question when they are faced with handling a concern about a teacher's performance. At the same time, principals are responsible for the professional growth of their teachers.

Principals are the instructional leaders and are expected to build the capacity of their teachers to deliver quality instruction. If students do not do well, the teacher is not doing a good job, which can translate into the perception that the principal is ineffective. In many instances, if a principal organizes a workshop on quality instructional practices before or after school, teachers do not have to participate. Teachers are not obligated to arrive before their contracted day or stay beyond it. Some teachers will stay and embrace the opportunity to learn and grow professionally. Others may not be motivated and may choose not to participate. Often times, these are the teachers who most need the training. The responsibility for addressing these teachers' lack of willingness to learn and become more effective lies with the principal. It is up

to him/her to provide the necessary supports and guidance that will assist in developing these teachers' skills or go about the arduous process of evaluating them out of the profession. Staff supervision is clearly challenging and complex.

Budgetary constraints, both in terms of the actual dollar amount and restrictions, limit what principals can do with their school program. For example, the school budget is usually comprised of a number of different categorical allocations. Some monies are discretionary and can be used for anything that supports the school site or program such as supplies, professional development, or teacher stipends. However, this amount rarely covers all of the schools' needs. Other dollars are more restrictive with stipulations for specific uses limited to student needs, teacher training, certain supplies, or technology. Thus, principals need to have a solid understanding of how the various funds allocated to their schools can be used in order to administer the budgets effectively. It is clear that the list of managerial duties can go on and on.

The demanding nature of the job is further exacerbated by increasing expectations for student achievement under legislation of the 2001 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, (NCLB) as well as responsibilities for providing quality, research-based staff development and support through the added role of principal as instructional leader. To this end, principals are required to facilitate the creation of a vision for achievement in their schools. To do this, they must develop communication structures and processes that foster meaningful and effective collaboration among staff and the larger community. Shared decision-making is expected and principals are questioned if they deviate from this new norm (Whitaker, 2002). Moreover, principals are responsible for creating and sustaining a culture of teaching and learning driven by high quality scientifically based instruction and assessment. Clearly, the mandates and guidelines under NCLB along with state

expectations for significant learning improvement for all students in writing and science will continue to take the role of the principal as the instructional leader to new heights. Indeed, the remaining subject areas such as the arts, social studies, and physical education will be added to the list of performance expectations in the years to come.

Moreover, the principal as instructional leader requires that principals oversee, evaluate, and participate in the school improvement process to the level of being both teacher/instructor and school leader. The instructional leadership role encompasses interactions with parents, teachers, and students on a level that demonstrates knowledge of individual student learning progress (i.e. Student Learning Plans). Principals are expected to be knowledgeable of effective, research-based pedagogical practices and able to impart and model these skills for staff and students (Sorenson, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Tucker, 2002). Principals are expected to analyze assessment results and provide leadership for utilizing the results to drive changes in classroom instruction in order to improve student learning (McCloud, Podmostko, & Usdan, 2000). One would speculate that the level of stress resulting from the ever increasing demands for improved learning and achievement is significant.

Research Problem

School principals are faced with numerous tasks on a daily basis. These responsibilities include meeting the needs of students, parents, teachers, support staff, community members, and administration. Compounding this are increasing expectations for student achievement under the No Child Left Behind legislation and the requirements as outlined in the Essential Academic Learning Requirements for the state of Washington. They are expected to provide quality, research-based staff development and support through their role as instructional leaders. Some school principals express satisfaction with aspects of the job related to working with students and staff, but they have become burdened with the myriad of demands as they relate to legislative

mandates, school safety, school improvement plans, curriculum alignment, and high-stakes accountability (Cusick, 2003). Research also indicates increasing demands leading to high stress and burnout may contribute to the number of principals leaving the profession (Whitaker, 1996).

In light of the changing demands and growing responsibilities, discussion about recruiting and retaining school principals has become a topic of increasing interest among educational researchers (Brock & Fraser, 2006). Studies have shown that principals leave positions due to inadequate compensation, the ever-increasing workload, long hours and stress associated with the job (Cusick, 2003; Moos, 1999; Whitaker, 2003).

Studies on retention offer ideas for changing the position in ways that would make it more manageable. For example, some suggest that reconfiguring the job so that it is shared among other staff or administrators could help in retaining those already on the job. Other suggestions include providing ongoing professional training and support, establishing school size standards, reducing the ratio of staff to administrator, and increasing salaries and benefits (Cusick, 2003; Brock & Fraser, 2006; Whitaker, 2003).

Research on recruiting and retention offers a view on current issues surrounding the principalship as they relate to attractiveness of the job, the realities of the demands of the job, and the present challenges facing school districts as they seek candidates for the position. However, it may behoove current school leaders to address the barriers to attracting and retaining quality leaders by asking those currently in the profession to share their perspectives around their motivation for continuing in the role. Brock, Carlson, and Grady (1992) contend that principals who love what they do are more likely to persist in the job and are more likely to encourage teachers to consider the principal position. Additionally, their enjoyment and satisfaction with

the job may offer a positive perception about the principalship for those teachers who may aspire to and view the position as a future career.

For the purposes of this study, *professional vitality* will serve as the primary framework for gaining an understanding of a principal's persistence in this clearly demanding role. The challenging nature of the principal's job and conditions that exist to make the high levels of stress a reality are clearly present and are addressed throughout the literature. Harvey & Donaldson (2003) suggest looking at the principalship from a more positive perspective. They contend this may be done by taking a look at what works for principals in helping them handle the stress and subsequently, "reinforcing what makes the principalship fulfilling both personally and professionally" (Donaldson & Harvey, 2003, p. 30). To this end, they use the construct of "professional vitality" which presents an "optimistic and hopeful way to think about the modern-day principal" (p. 30).

Professional vitality consists of *passion*, *vigor*, *facility*, and *satisfaction*. Donaldson & Harvey (2003) explain *passion* as a "strong inner sense of purpose". *Vigor* is having the mental, physical, and emotional energy to do the job. *Facility* is defined as the "skill at the job" or "savvy" and *satisfaction* is described as a "sense of pleasure, accomplishment, and fulfillment" (p.30). Donaldson & Harvey (2003) contend that principals who have a sense of high professional vitality will experience lower levels of stress. They suggest that professional developers look for ways to "reinforce a principal's passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction" (p.32). Further, the motivation derived from being professionally vital may contribute to persistence in the job.

The nature of motivation revolves around the energy and persistence leading to productiveness and the mobilization of others to act (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A variety of

definitions of motivation are presented in the literature. Motivation can be defined as the desire to achieve a goal (Hays & Hill, 2000). Definitions provided by Kunz & Pfaff (2002) explain motivation as a behavior a person chooses because it makes him or her feel competent and self-directed. Motivation is also described as the joy a person derives from performing a task or being completely absorbed in the activity (Kunz & Pfaff, 2002).

Deci and Ryan (2000) present two types of motivation, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the “inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (p. 70). This type of motivation requires no specific rewards because it is a source of enjoyment and vitality in one’s life. An environment that fosters a sense of competence and autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation deals with performing an activity in order to attain an outcome. For example, a person earns a paycheck for the work he or she performs.

However, extrinsic motivation can also be internalized and integrated such that carrying out a task becomes meaningful and satisfying and, subsequently, becomes more of a behavior from within the person rather than from the external social context (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, in the current environment of high stakes testing, a principal may feel more motivated if he or she feels valued, connected to others, and whose autonomy and competence is recognized and respected. Thus, even in the face of the seemingly daunting challenges of NCLB and state requirements, a principal can internalize the behaviors of a positive attitude, dedication, and determination to stay the course. Thus, professionally vital principals possess the energy and motivation necessary for moving forward, being productive, staying positive, and consequently, experience enjoyment and fulfillment in the job.

As presented in the introduction, the position of school principal is becoming increasingly more complex and demanding. The literature in the field is also filled with ideas and strategies for coping with stress in the principalship (Allison, 1997; Fields, 2005; Metzger, 2003) and further informs those who work in principal certification programs on how to provide prospective administrators with tools for their future work as principals. While considerable research in the area of principal burnout, stress, and their work and experiences exist, there is little current research on the present challenges and stressors facing principals and how they cope given the rigorous accountability expectations of today's educational environment. Further, there is a lack of current research that addresses the experience of principals who choose to remain in their positions and their reasons for staying the course. Likewise, there is little research that seeks to look at the principalship through an alternative lense such as that presented by Donaldson & Harvey (2003). Therefore, this study will use the construct of professional vitality to frame the discussion of principals' passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction in order to learn more about why some principals persist in the job and what conditions exist that may foster professional vitality.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the practices of nine school principals in their role as school leaders and their perspectives on dealing with the daily challenges of their jobs. Further, it sought to expand on the study by Harvey (2002), which focused on professional vitality as a construct for understanding what may contribute to school principals' ability to thrive in their jobs. Specifically, it explored the perspectives of nine current principals' experiences in the role of school leader and what they did to manage this demanding job and the circumstances that would continue to attract them to the role and remain in their position. To

this end, school principals were be able to share what they perceive assisted them in carrying out their professional and personal lives effectively and successfully. Therefore, this study addressed the following questions: What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? What coping strategies do principals use? How do principals perceive these strategies assist them? Why do they persist in their positions? What role does professional vitality play in their choice to persist in their jobs? Additionally, the study was written in real time, within the context of the state of Washington and American education in 2007.

Validity and Ethics

The study included nine principals from all levels of the K-12 span. Due to the small sample, transferability to a larger population may be a challenge. Likewise, the location, which was limited to a region in the state of Washington, may not allow for transferability. Furthermore, the participants served as principals in the same school district, further limiting the extent of applicability of the findings to a larger population (Shavelson, 1996).

However, this was a qualitative study and qualitative research is more concerned with validity of the findings than whether the findings can be applied to a larger population. To this end, accuracy of the findings is critical if the results are to inform current research or practice (Creswell, 2003). Much like Creswell (2003) describes, validity in this study was used to determine the significance of the findings from the viewpoint of the researcher. Bogdan & Biklen (2003) and Creswell (2003) present a variety of strategies that may be employed in order to ensure accuracy of the findings.

One of these is the importance of clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2003). My professional experience as a former school principal could affect my analysis of the data. I kept

this in mind as I carried out the interview process, being careful not to lead participants in a certain direction as they answered questions. I anticipated there could be times I might feel a strong sense of “I know how you feel and have been there” and empathy for the participants. In order to maintain validity, I made a conscious effort to keep these feelings in check. I did this by maintaining constant self-awareness of my biases and feelings about the topic. I was cognizant of how I responded and conversed with the principals in order to keep the focus on the interviewees’ experiences rather than on mine.

Another strategy I used was to follow up with the participants with additional questions to make sure that the information I gathered was thorough and consistent. During the interview process, I also asked follow up questions in order to ensure that I understood what the principals were trying to convey (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The use of pseudonyms for the districts, schools, and participants protected their identity. Each participant was provided with a copy of an informed consent form, which included a statement about the purpose of the research study. Their signature indicated their willingness to participate in the study with the knowledge that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. By providing full disclosure and assurance of confidentiality, no harm to the participants emotional or otherwise was anticipated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Implications and Significance

The expected benefits of this study included informing educational leaders about principals’ experiences of stress on the job in light of current education reform. This could impact the nature of future professional development on effective management of stress on the job for current and prospective administrators as they consider the principalship. It might also provide district leaders with ideas or strategies for retaining school principals.

Moreover, it would add to the research on educational leadership as it relates to the experience of the school leader in an era that is mired in a plethora of rules, regulations, expectations, and demands imposed on the principalship by various key players in the field. The position of the school principal as he/she strives to address and meet the needs of all constituencies would be served well by this study as it sought to discover why principals choose to do what they do and what allows them to maintain an enthusiastic and energetic attitude and persist on the job. Learning about what allowed these principals to persist and remain positive, fulfilled, and passionate about their work may also inform preservice programs for aspiring principals, which can impact their ability to take on such a role and maintain professional vitality throughout their careers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to gain an understanding of the impact of the increasing accountability expectations for high student performance and the myriad daily demands of the job, one can look to the literature that explores and discusses the topics of the perceived principal shortage and principals' experiences of stress and burnout. Reviewing the current literature related to the nature of the job of principal and its relationship to principal shortage and stress and burnout will support the present study as principals relate their perspective of their work environment and its connection to their experience of stress and burnout.

The job is clearly demanding, complex, and characterized by various stressors that include high stakes testing, long workdays, and increasing expectations from parents, community, state and federal government. Further, as the research questions are explored, opportunities for analysis and coding supported by the literature may arise in order to illustrate the reality of this challenging profession. What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? What coping strategies do principals use? How do principals perceive these strategies assist them? Why do they persist in their positions? What role does professional vitality play in their choice to persist in their jobs?

Principal Shortage

Current literature on the principalship and school administration indicates there is a shortage of applicants for administrative positions. A 1998 study by the Educational Research Service (ERS) for the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) included 403 participants

responding to a survey about their experiences with filling principal vacancies. The researchers found that about half of the participating school districts reported a shortage of applicants for principal positions. These shortages were reported as existing in all types of schools and at all levels, elementary, middle, and high schools. Respondents from all levels were also asked to provide their views on possible reasons for this phenomenon. Salaries that do not match the demand and responsibilities of the job, the long hours and the high stress nature of the job were the most common reasons given as to why potential applicants decide not to apply for the position (ERS, 1998).

Other studies found similar results. In a survey by the Association of California School Administrators, 90% of the participating school districts reported a shortage of applicants who demonstrate the knowledge and skill required of principals for today's schools. They may possess the necessary certification, but may not possess the skills and knowledge that school districts are now requiring principals to have such as in-depth knowledge of curriculum, learning standards, assessment, and leading school improvement efforts (Metzger, 2003). In another study of a large district, 194 people with principal certification were asked to respond to a survey about the attractiveness of the job, the satisfaction of their current job as compared to the anticipated satisfaction of the principalship, and recommendations for changes in the job. Results showed perceptions of the principalship consisted of a general sense of unattractiveness due to the likely loss of family time because of the demands on their time and high stakes accountability mandates. The most common recommendation for making the job more attractive was to assign some of the principal job duties to other personnel in order to ease the workload (Muñoz, Rinehart, & Winter, 2001).

The demands of the job are changing with increasing pressure from staff, administration, and parents to improve schools and student achievement. Long 60-80 hour workweeks are also attributed to this shortage. Other reasons include increased pressures from school reform efforts, excessive time demands, dwindling parent and community support, and lack of respect (Muñoz, Rinehart, & Winter 2001; Whitaker, 2001; Galvin, Pounder, & Shepherd, 2003). Moreover, “the principal is expected to be a manager, instructional leader, motivator, lay psychologist, and public relations expert” (Caddell & Malone, 2000, p. 162).

Cooley and Shen (2000) present the findings of a study on teacher and principal perceptions of the “factors that influence, increase, and retain principals in urban schools districts”. The purpose of the study was to ascertain what contributes to a person’s decision to apply or not apply for the principalship. A survey of 198 teachers, 306 principals, and 370 superintendents was conducted. The results of the study showed that both teachers and principals perceived that factors influencing application to the urban principalship include “impact of administrative position on my home life”, “relationship between the board, administrators, and teachers”, “emotional aspects”, “salary”, “poor working conditions”, and “lack of support for administrators” (p. 449). Principals also stated “stress of the position” influenced a person’s decision to apply for a principalship. The study supports the notion that, in fact, the shortage exists and the perceived reasons for this are readily offered by those in the trenches as well as by the teachers and superintendents they serve.

Crow and Pounder (2005) describe the “alarming shortage of qualified administrators” as attributable to the changing role of the school principal, which is characterized by increasingly complex administrative and supervisory responsibilities. The result is a general feeling of discouragement due to the increased workload and the impact this has on their personal lives.

Similarly, Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) contend that the demands on principals' time and mandates for improved student achievement for which they are held accountable, contribute to the reduction of applicants for the principalship.

Findings from a nationwide study (Jones, 2001) on the supply and demand of school principals indicate that there are more than enough educators acquiring principal certification. Nonetheless, the general response from superintendents in the study is that there is a shortage of "qualified" candidates. Projections for the shortage are as high as 55% for high school and middle school vacancies and 47% for elementary school. The attrition rate over the span of eight years in the principalship may be as high as 55%. Factors contributing to these rates include the general nature of the job, inadequate compensation for the high demands of the job, and the present era of high stakes accountability for assessment results (Andrews & Grogan, 2002).

Celio, Harvey, Roza, & Wishon (2003) report similar findings. Their study included a survey of 83 public school districts in 10 regions of the country. The information requested included principal applicant pool data as well as qualification requirements for the position. One hundred fifty telephone interviews were also conducted with district personnel in both public and private schools. The researchers reviewed surveys completed by superintendents that asked them to share what professional qualities and experiences they look for in new principals. Results indicated that the nature of the shortage is more a matter of why there is one rather than if it is a reality. In fact, there are plenty of certified applicants for the number of vacancies. However, numerous reasons were found that might explain why there appears to be a diminishing number of principal applicants (Celio et al., 2003). Some of these include the realities of school status with respect to demographics, student achievement, and location.

Districts that present the most challenging working conditions, which, in many cases include low income and minority student populations, may see a reduction of principal applicants.

Celio (et al., 2003) concludes that the shortage of principals needs to be better defined if the issue is to be addressed effectively. That is, if the schools and districts that are most in need of highly skilled qualified principals want to see them in the applicant pool, they must gain a better understanding of the actual nature of the principalship as it exists today. Adequate remuneration, better training and support, and rethinking the position as it relates to current education reform and the skills needed to be a successful instructional leader must all be considered and acted upon if school districts want to see more qualified and willing candidates for the job (Celio et al., 2003).

Stress and Burnout

Throughout the literature, numerous references are made to the nature of the position of school principal at all levels. Time and time again, the idea of a principal shortage is paired with descriptions of the challenges and demands of the job as the salient reason for the shortage. Demanding workloads, excessive work hours, inadequate compensation, lack of respect from parents, staff, and community, high-stakes testing and accountability for increased student performance are but a few of the factors contributing to the high stress levels experienced on the job and the experience of burnout as a consequence (Andrews & Grogan, 2002; Caddell & Malone, 2000; d'Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002; Norton, 2002; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Whitaker, 1996; Whitaker, 2001). Ripley (1997) encapsulates the stressful nature of the principalship in the following statement:

Principals today are pulled in different directions and some are breaking under the stress.

They are pressured to do this by one group, to do that by another, they must deal with

parents who want one thing while the staff wants another. Principals must deal with tension every day. (p. 276)

The clinical definition for *stress* is “the sum of the biological reactions to any adverse stimulus, mental or emotional, internal or external, that tends to disturb the organism’s balance” (Queen & Queen, 2005, p. 7) and *burnout* is a “state of chronic stress—physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from the inability to cope effectively with the daily stresses of leadership over an extended period of time” (Queen & Queen, 2005, p.7). Carr (1994) describes stress as that which puts pressure or strain on a person, which originates from a physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual state. Burnout has also been classified by fatigue and discontentment (Friedman, 1995). Symptoms of stress and burnout can include anxiety, irritability, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, ulcers, or illness (Friedman, 1995; Gates & Gmelch, 1998; Carr, 1994; Holt & Turner, 2005; Queen & Queen, 2005).

In an effort to gain a better understanding of burnout and the variables that may contribute to its presence in the lives of individuals, Maslach & Jackson (1981) conducted a study in which a scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), was used for measuring burnout. The scale was administered to 1025 professionals who performed service-oriented work. Their participants included physicians, police, nurses, social workers, and counselors. The findings showed that burnout might be described and measured by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The results also proved the scale to be highly reliable and valid for measuring burnout. The need to learn more about why burnout exists and the variables present in service-oriented jobs that might contribute to the experience of burnout prompted the study. The goal was to test the scale and, if proven reliable, use it to achieve a better understanding of burnout. Further, Maslach & Jackson (1981) sought to

contribute to possible future research that could lead to ideas for addressing the problem of burnout in the lives of professionals who work in environments that can be emotionally draining as they strive to provide support to their clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI has subsequently been used in various studies to further the research in the area of stress and burnout.

Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001) further describe burnout as a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (p. 399). As found by Maslach & Jackson (1981), this syndrome is explained as comprised of three dimensions as measured by the MBI. These are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the experience of feeling overwhelmed and drained as experienced by individuals whose jobs focus on addressing the needs of others. Depersonalization is the feeling of “not feeling” empathy or care for the very recipients of the service and consequently leads to diminished capacity to respond to their needs. An attitude of indifference or cynicism develops. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to the feeling of being ineffective in one’s work. Numerous research studies on this phenomenon have yielded commonalities in definitions of burnout and the three dimensions as presented by Maslach & Jackson (1981), Maslach & Jackson (1984), and Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001).

One study that sought to expand on the phenomena of stress and burnout was conducted by Gates & Gmelch (1998) using the Administrative Stress Index. They conducted a quantitative study focusing on identifying personal, professional, and organizational characteristics that contribute to administrator burnout. Additionally, they wanted to determine which correlational relationships stood out and what role social support plays in job satisfaction, burnout, and performance.

Six hundred fifty-six randomly selected participants comprised of elementary principals, junior high/middle school principals, high school principals, and superintendents responded to the Administrator Work Inventory (AWI). The AWI included six instruments, which were the Administrator Stress Index, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the Administrative Role Questionnaire, the Social Support Questionnaire, the Type A Personality survey, the BEM Sex-Role Inventory, and a seventh section for general information.

The study identified four sources of stress—role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress. Role-based stress deals with how administrators see themselves in their role as they carry out their “principal-role” duties in their schools. Task-based stress develops as a result of the numerous tasks principals handle on a day-to-day basis such as scheduling issues, facility problems, reporting deadlines, meetings, and supervising extra-curricular activities. Stress arising from situations that are out of the principals’ immediate control such as dealing with limited resources and asking for budgetary support is boundary-spanning stress. Lastly, conflict-mediating stress arises from the tensions related to managing conflict that is tied to the human element of the job. This includes handling parent complaints, student discipline, and staff conflicts (Gates & Gmelch, 1998).

Results supported the assertion that burnout is multidimensional. This was also upheld by the correlation analysis and the literature, which linked personal, professional, and organizational characteristics to the three dimensions of burnout—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and the impact on health and performance (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The study offers significant insight into the three dimensions of burnout and the variables that influence each. Findings also indicated that good physical health, effective coping techniques, and job satisfaction are buffers to burnout (Gates & Gmelch, 1998).

Stress can also be defined as “an interactional phenomenon, which occurs when the perceived demands of a situation are considered to be greater than the individual’s perceived resources for dealing with those demands” (Allison, 1997, p. 40). Allison (1997) studied principals with high stress scores and those with low stress scores in order to determine common coping strategies and to explore the relationship between coping strategies and stress scores, and compare and contrast principals’ coping techniques with respect to administrative level, gender, professional education, and age. The goal of the study was to “add to the understanding of coping and stress in the [principalship] as they relate to the person and the environment” (Allison, 1997, p. 40).

The study surveyed 643 elementary and secondary school principals in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The survey was comprised of the Administrative Stress Index (ASI), the Demographic and Biographic Inventory (DBI), and the Coping Preference Scale (CPS). The ASI identifies sources of job stress among administrators and has been in several stress and school administrator research studies. The DBI provided information about the administrator and their work environment. The CPS listed a number of common strategies for coping with stress (Allison, 1997).

Results showed that principals try to alleviate the effects of stress by utilizing a variety of coping techniques. Allison (1997) found that principals with high stress scores tended to use more work-related coping strategies while those with low stress scores used techniques related to their own personal health and well-being. Furthermore, principals with higher stress scores used fewer coping techniques than did those with low stress scores. The most common techniques used included maintaining a positive attitude, keeping a realistic perspective, having a physical health regimen, and participating in activities that foster intellectual, social, and spiritual growth.

Allison (1997) further concluded that principals who possess knowledge of and apply a variety of coping strategies are likely to be healthier and less likely to experience stress than those who do not

In the face of demands from present day education reform mandates, the research on stress, burnout, and coping indicates that principals are indeed experiencing higher levels of stress. In fact, citing various research studies on leadership challenges, d'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan (2002) conclude, "the role of, and expectations for, the principalship are increasing in intensity and complexity and are causing many principals to reflect on why they should continue to do the job or why aspiring principals might be discouraged from applying" (p.469).

Furthermore, Metzger (2003) describes how the increasing demands on educational leaders contribute to high stress levels and how these may negatively impact a leader's professional and personal life.

In a study of 128 superintendents, coping techniques used by leaders for managing stress were explored (Metzger, 2003). What did the administrators do in their daily lives that alleviated the pressures of their position and contributed to their own personal growth and development? Results indicated that self/inner development is important in the lives of educational leaders. *Self/inner development* refers to "aspects of personal development that emphasize inner dimensions of being which have generally been neglected in professional development and preparation programs of administrators" (Metzger, 2003, p.659). Six themes emerged—balance, self-actualization, personal improvement, values, inner focus, and relationships. Some of the practices used by administrators to foster self/inner development included reading, physical activity, meditation, listening to music, spending time with family and friends, and seeking silence and solitude.

Recommendations for incorporating self/inner development strategies into the workplace included providing mentors for leaders who could serve as role models in creating a sense of balance through engaging dialogue and collegial discussions. Using terms associated with self/inner development such as values, ethics, heart, and love also facilitate a better understanding of the importance of this topic. Results suggested a need for incorporating practices that support and enhance self/inner development in the personal and professional lives of educational leaders in order to impact the effectiveness of current leaders and at the same time address the shortages of educational administrators (Metzger, 2003).

Additional research in the area of personal development and effective management of stress on the job points to the need for investigating the conditions that can exist in the lives of those principals who experience success in handling the stress that can be so detrimental to their health and job performance. Looking at the principalship from the perspective of what makes it rewarding, Donaldson & Harvey, (2003) describe four qualities of “professional vitality” (p. 30), passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction. Passion relates to the inner feeling of purpose for doing the job. Vigor refers to mental, physical, and emotional energy. Facility is defined as skillfulness and satisfaction is the feeling of accomplishment and fulfillment for doing one’s work.

Looking for ways to better understand the concept of professional vitality can help professional developers come up with more strategies for providing principals with support and professional development that can “reinforce a principal’s passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction” (Donaldson & Harvey, 2003, p. 32). Indeed, according to results from their survey study, the factor most likely to foster a healthy professional life for a school principal is how supported they feel by those around them (Donaldson & Harvey, 2003).

Summary

The literature abounds with descriptions, anecdotes, definitions, perceptions, and beliefs about the phenomenon of a principal shortage and the experience of stress and burnout by educational leaders on all levels. While a substantial amount of current research on these topics informs professionals about the negative impact of stress and burnout on the lives of school principals, a limited amount of research explores the lives of those principals who experience success, fulfillment, and good health even in the face of the demands presented by the present-day “era of accountability” (Tschannen-Moran & Tucker, 2002, p.1).

The review of the literature clearly supports the notion that research is lacking on what it is that allows some principals to experience fulfillment in their jobs and enables them to persist and remain optimistic, energetic, and enthusiastic about their work in the context of today’s turbulent educational environment. If “we believe that good school principals are the cornerstone of good schools and that without leadership from the principal efforts to raise student achievement cannot succeed” (Tschannen-Moran & Tucker, 2002, p.1), then it follows that further studies that explore the lives of principals who thrive and persist in the job and the conditions that exist in their lives that foster an invigorating, satisfying, and fulfilling professional and personal life are in order.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter provides a description of the research methodology. The chapter consists of four sections. The first section describes qualitative research and open-ended, semi-structured interviews as the primary technique employed in this study. The second section provides a rationale for a qualitative approach in this study. The third section offers a description of criteria and process for selecting the participants. The final section presents an overview of data collection and analysis.

Qualitative Research

Bogdan & Biklen (2003) define qualitative research as the research approach whereby data are collected through observation, interviews, reviewing documents, or through first person accounts resulting in rich description of people, places, and conversations, which help to illustrate and develop understanding of the human experience in specific situations. Strategies for inquiry can include narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies or case studies (Creswell, 2003).

The data are not measured using numbers or statistical inferences. The intent of this type of research is to investigate a topic in its context in order to learn and understand it on a broader and deeper level. There is no specific question to answer or hypothesis to test rather it is a function of what may be discovered; hence, the use of strategies of inquiry in an inductive process (Creswell, 2003). The researcher may want to understand a situation, a person, or a phenomenon more thoroughly and from the perspectives of those involved in the natural setting. To do this, the researcher enters the natural setting of those whom he/she wants to learn about and collects data using one or more qualitative research techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Bogdan & Biklen (2003) present five characteristics of qualitative research—naturalistic, descriptive, concern with process, inductive, and meaning. The study may exhibit just one of these or the extent to which these are demonstrated can vary.

First, qualitative research is naturalistic. The researcher is interested in collecting data through the natural existence of the participants. The natural setting is very important because it provides the context for describing the focus of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In this study, the intent was to gain an understanding of principals' perceptions of and experiences with the realities of today's education environment which include high stakes testing and increasing demands caused by expectations for them as instructional leaders along with the traditional role of overseeing the daily operations of a school building.

Qualitative research is descriptive. The data and its presentation are descriptive. In other words, text and pictures are used to present and explain the results. In this study, the data consist of interview notes and transcription. The written research often contains quotations, which can help describe a situation through a rich, engaging narrative form. Detail is also very important for presenting and explaining the nuances of the focus of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In this study, interviews with the principals provide information about the nature of the principalship in their own words, which are used to illustrate how they perceive and understand their jobs and how they describe their choice to stay the course. Their words are the data.

Qualitative researchers are interested in the process not just the results. How do people interact with each other in certain situations? How does a culture of a school come into existence? The elements of human interaction, and their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs play a role in what the researcher discovers. These are an essential part of the process (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2003). The interview process in this study included questions that were open ended. This allowed participants the opportunity to provide a perspective unique to their experience.

Qualitative research is inductive. The researcher does not go into it knowing what to look for and how to find it. There is nothing to prove or disprove. The goal is to learn and understand the focus of the study. The researcher does not know exactly what he/she will discover (Creswell, 2003). The present study followed this inductive approach, which guided the discovery process as the principals related their experiences.

Finally, the meaning that is derived from the research is of vital importance. Researchers seek to learn about the ways in which people understand their world. What do they think about a situation or circumstance? They want to see things from the participants' point of view. This is accomplished by giving the participants opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This study's use of the interview process described by Rubin & Rubin (2005) as a conversation facilitated learning about the principalship through the eyes of those in the ranks.

The strengths of using the qualitative approach for this study are inherent in the characteristics previously described. Researchers can gain rich, in-depth, knowledge of how people interact with their world and how they explain it and interpret their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The findings of a qualitative research study can present a holistic picture of a process or phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research allows the researcher to get close to people, hear them describe the way in which they make meaning about their experiences, and observe their interactions in their setting. The meaning and understanding that is gained by collecting data through this approach cannot as easily be handled through the use of a quantitative methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Therefore, this study sought to gain a more

in-depth understanding of principals' experiences of stress, coping strategies, and their fulfillment and persistence in the job by providing them with the opportunity to share their perspectives.

Rationale for Selecting a Qualitative Lens

Much of the current research on the topic of stress, burnout, and principal shortage has been quantitative in nature using descriptive statistics to offer insight on these issues. A qualitative approach was used in this study for the purpose of gaining a different understanding of school principals' experience of stress, how they deal with this experience, and their reasons for staying in the position. Few examples in the literature using this approach to explore the experience of the principalship exist (Metzger, 2003). The lack of qualitative research in this area is the primary reason for utilizing a qualitative approach in this study. A qualitative study may provide a broader or deeper understanding of principals' experiences in today's high stakes environment on a different, more personal level, which may subsequently add to the literature or lead to future studies using a qualitative approach.

We know the numbers with respect to the experience of stress and burnout (Gates & Gmelch, 1998; Whitaker, 1996; Metzger, 2003). We know there appears to be a perception of a shortage of principals in some form or another (ERS, 1998; Pounder & Shepherd, 2003; Celio et al., 2003). What do we know about the experiences of those in the ranks that choose to stay? What makes them persist? What do they do about the stressors that exist in their environment? How might professional vitality inform the nature of their experience? In light of all the obvious pressures of the job, a different, possibly more positive, picture of the principalship may be gained by providing principals an opportunity to share their perspectives. This study,

therefore, sought to explore these questions through interviews of nine school principals in a school district in eastern Washington.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

The term, *principal*, refers to a school principal of any level, elementary, middle, or high school. The participants included three elementary school principals, three middle school principals, and three high school principals.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in its *2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey*, lists four years as the average number of years a principal may be in his or her current school and seven as the average number of years in any school. This information was used as initial criteria for selecting the principals. Due to time constraints and the professional demands for the researcher, proximity and accessibility were also determinants for selecting the principals. The district's size and diversity were also factors in the participant selection process, as it provided a broad range of participants and schools from which to select. To this end, two professional contacts in a nearby district assisted in locating school principals who fit the criteria of four years in their current school or seven years in any school.

Once these contacts compiled a list of principals meeting the initial criteria, they were asked to assist in selecting nine principals they considered successful, thriving and persisting in their positions. These two professional contacts hold administrative roles in which they supervise and provide leadership, support, and professional development for school principals. The credibility their role lends to assisting with the selection was a factor in the decision to ask them to develop specific criteria, which could be used to define *successful*, *thriving*, and *persisting* school principals. Their definition included the following characteristics: hard working, have a life outside of work, effective instructional leaders, continue to learn and

participate in professional development activities, may be pursuing further certification such as the superintendent credential or the doctorate, and are considered to be doing a good job by the broader school community.

The criteria the two professional contacts developed for selecting the principals aligned with the leadership qualities of effective principals as outlined in the literature. Whitaker (2003) contends that the effective principal is defined as an instructional leader responsible not only for the daily management of the school but also the curricular and instructional program. Moreover, the accountability demands as they relate to NCLB and state standards, impact how the larger community views the role of the school principal (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Further, key stakeholders including parents, community members, and teachers “look to the principal to spearhead change efforts at the school level” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, p. 573). They are expected to motivate their staffs toward improved student achievement and their success is directly linked with the results (NSBE, 1999).

Leading a balanced life and coping with the unpredictability of the job with respect to management and student learning is also addressed in the literature as an important attribute contributing to effective leadership and likewise aligns with the criteria utilized by the professional contacts for selecting the participants for the present study. Indeed, Allison (1997) found that the principals who are resourceful, cope with stress effectively, and maintain a balance between their professional and personal life are more likely to be successful. Moreover, Gmelch & Gates (1998) found that an educational leader’s performance is positively impacted by taking care of themselves on a personal level such as through exercise and utilizing effective coping strategies to deal with stress. Additionally, principals who participate in a variety of activities that support their personal and professional growth were found to be important

characteristics of an effective leader (Whitaker, 1996). Hence, the criteria that the two professional contacts utilized for selecting the principals for this study matched findings and discussions in the literature around effective leadership and effective management of stress present in the job of today's school leader.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews of nine elementary, middle, and high school principals guided by eleven open-ended questions. Sixteen follow-up questions in later interviews took place in person, via telephone, or email as determined through the principals' availability and my schedule. The participants included both male and female principals. The interviews took place in the principals' offices or in a room in their school and all were between 60 to 90 minutes in length. The interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for the principals. The principals were able to provide their views and perceptions of their experiences of stress in their job as school principal. Follow up took the form of probing and exploring with additional questions for clarification or elaboration (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 1998). The goal was to obtain "depth, detail, vividness, richness, and nuance" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 129). This interview process and structure followed the responsive interviewing model (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) where the researcher seeks depth and themes that might emerge from the conversations using open ended questions initially and following up with more focused questions as needed.

The following initial guiding questions were used.

1. Tell me about your school.
2. Describe your experience as a principal.
3. What is it like being a principal in this school?

4. How is it different than other jobs you have had?
5. What are some challenges you face?
6. What are your work hours? Are you here on the weekends?
7. Can you use some key words to describe the challenges of the job?
8. In your position there are a lot of difficult situations. Which ones stand out for you?
9. Has there ever been a time when you thought about leaving the position?
10. Why did you come back or stay?
11. Are there things about your job you did not expect?

Other questions were used for probing and exploring in order to take the conversation further and encourage elaboration, clarification, and obtain richer, more detailed answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Some of these questions were asked during the initial interview and other times they were asked during the follow up interviews. The course of the conversation developed as the principals became more comfortable with the process of sharing their thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives. For some, this evolved during the first interview, for others it was not until the second interview. These questions included:

1. Tell about other aspects of your position.
2. How does it [work] affect you outside of the school day?
3. Can you elaborate?
4. What keeps you going?
5. Describe a difficult situation you experienced in this job and the specific thing that helped you get through it.
6. How did that [something that happened] make you feel?

7. Can you give an instance, a defining moment that made you realize you want to stay the course in the principalship?
8. How are you doing in your job? How do you think you do at the end of the day?
9. How would you rate how you're doing? How overall? Who do you credit for that?
10. What is it that makes you stick around?
11. How do you manage when you know that you don't feel good about a situation or when things go awry?
12. How would you describe the way in which you approach your work?
13. What makes this job worthwhile to you?
14. Where would you say your energy to do this work comes from?
15. What makes a difference in whether you feel competent, skilled, and successful in your job?
16. Given what you have said about your work, how do you understand the principalship in your life?

These questions allowed me to guide the principals in providing elaboration and clarification. As I facilitated the process for the principals to share freely, I was thoughtful about the way I asked a question by using *slant probes*. These slant probes helped me "...to determine the lenses through which people see and interpret their worlds" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.171). For example, I may have used a question similar to the following: How did that [something that happened] make you feel?

Choosing open-ended, semi-structured interviews as the sole method of collecting the data was intentional. If we are to learn about the nature of the principalship experience, then it follows that stories told by those in the ranks can provide the richest data. Equally important was drawing examples from them about stressful experiences on the job. The detail with which they shared these experiences allowed for gaining an understanding about their unique experiences in

real time and in the context of the present educational environment. Thus, by collecting data that illustrate these principals' experience of stress and coping was not only relevant to their lives, but also provided a backdrop for the analysis that resulted from data that reflected their experience of professional vitality and how this construct could be used to explain their persistence on the job. "We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say" (Seidman, 1998, p. 102).

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed which resulted in data categorized according to the literature on stress and burnout and emerging themes (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The detailed process for analyzing the data is provided in chapter 5, and the findings are discussed in chapters 6 and 7 and presented in the context of current literature on the experience of stress and burnout in the principalship. Additionally, the construct of professional vitality as presented by Harvey (2002) is utilized for presenting the data related to the principals' decision to stay the course and the connection of passion, vigor, facility and satisfaction to their persistence on the job.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the context of the study. The first section will provide a general narrative description of the district in which this interview study took place. It is important to note here that feasibility and accessibility to the researcher were the main determinants for selecting this district for the study. The second section offers a description of the principals and their schools including school size, grade levels, and brief listing of demographic information. The final section is a chapter summary.

The School District

The Delta School District is located in eastern Washington and is one of the larger districts in the state. Numerous lakes, rivers, and ski mountains surround this area. Several high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools serve the children of this community. For the most part, the district's students perform well on the state assessment, Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The district prides itself in the level of performance by its high school students, as students are required to pass it in order to graduate. The number of students taking advanced placement tests continues to rise, as do their test scores, which are above state and national averages. District curriculum includes the arts, professional-technical education, and foreign language, combined with a variety of after-school programs including academic support, enrichment activities, and sports. The district is also a leader in technology and staff development, providing hundreds of free courses and inservice opportunities for staff at its Delta Professional Development Center. The district is also recognized as a leader in curriculum development and instruction.

The district's student population is somewhat diverse. The demographic data on the district list the ethnic breakdown as 82% white, 3.7% Native American, 2.6% Asian, 4.6% Black, and 3.6% Hispanic. Approximately 49% of the students participate in the free or reduced-priced lunch program. The special education population is approximately 14% which is higher than the 12% that the state funds. This group of students includes students with learning, physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. About 3.2% of the students are English Language Learners and qualify for transitional bilingual support services (OSPI, 2007).

The district provides several support staff for its schools, which include school directors, teachers on special assignment, principal assistants, and various office staff who assist with student attendance, discipline, data management, public relations, athletics, and activities. This varies by school site and grade level span. The nine participants in this study are school principals in this district and their schools vary by size, location, demographics, and grade level span. Three of the schools are elementary schools, three are middle schools, and three are high schools. By selecting three of each level, the data collected provided a balanced representation of each of the grade spans allowing for comparisons of differences and similarities between each school and across the levels. It is clear that not every school principal's experience is identical to another. Likewise, the assumptions about what each school site may offer in regard to the leadership experience, due to its size or grade span, could also be explored by including at least three principals from each of the levels.

Descriptions of the individual schools include staff size, demographics including ethnic breakdown, special programs participation such as bilingual education or special education, and the percentage of students who participate in the free or reduced lunch program. In order to protect the anonymity of the schools and principals, only the general location of each school

within the city is described. Sharing the aforementioned details of their work environment provides a view of each principal's unique experience. Further, the details provide a context for the perspectives that each of the principals shared through the interview process.

The Principals and Their Schools

David is the principal of Avery Elementary. Avery Elementary School is a newer building and is located in the northwest part of the city. The staff includes 23 classroom teachers who serve approximately 475 students, kindergarten through sixth grade. Other staff members include custodians, cafeteria workers, instructional assistants, a nurse, an instructional coach, and specialists for art, music, fitness and health, and library. David's direct support comes from his two secretaries, one office manager, and the school counselor. He describes his student population as one that comes from mostly working class parents who are very supportive. There is an active parent group. The demographics are 90% white and 10% comprised of Black, Native American, Asian, and Hispanic students. Approximately 52% of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program, and about 16% of the students receive special education services (OSPI, 2007). The student population includes students with very special needs due to disabilities such as Asperger Syndrome or autism.

David followed a nontraditional path to the principalship. Typically, a school principal works as a teacher for three or more years and then goes into the principalship. For David, it was different. After earning his master's degree in counseling, David accepted the position of school psychologist with the Delta School District. He worked in the resource room setting with special education teachers. Later, he became a special education administrator and supervised psychologists and special education staff. He had always wanted to be a school principal but had no teaching experience. David took additional classes and earned his teaching credential,

resigned from his administrative post in special education and taught for five years, teaching second and fourth grade. Once he had the teaching experience, David applied for the principalship. He was first a principal for a small school, which served upper middle class students. Then he moved to a high poverty school where he served as principal for four years. He has been in his current position for three years. David also has his doctorate and continues to participate in a variety of professional development activities both with his administrative colleagues and his teaching staff.

Nancy is the principal of Kirby Elementary and has been a principal for six years. The school is located on the south side of the city and serves approximately 450 students. There are 19 classroom teachers, two special education teachers, three reading recovery teachers, one Title I teacher for mathematics, and one English Language Development teacher. Specialists include library, art, fitness and health, and music. Other support staff includes instructional assistants, custodians, and cafeteria workers. The office staff is comprised of two secretaries, one office manager, one counselor, and a principal assistant. A principal assistant is a certified teacher, administrative intern or administrator who assists with student needs such as attendance, discipline, and also provides support as needed and assigned by the principal. This position, however, is not an administrative position. The principal assistant is paid according to the teacher salary schedule.

The student population is comprised of 50% white students, 4% Native American, 5% Asian, 19% Black, and 6% Hispanic. Eighty percent of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. This school has about 9% of the students qualifying for language support through bilingual services as they learn English. The special education population is

approximately 16% (OSPI, 2007). The school building is older and includes a few portable classrooms.

Like David, Nancy has her doctorate. She began her administrative career in another state, and eventually moved to eastern Washington where she took a principalship in a school in the Delta School District. Nancy's main interest is working with a community that is linguistically and culturally diverse which is why she chose to go to Kirby to serve as principal when the position became available.

Rick is the principal of Conway Elementary, which is located in the southeast region of the city. The school was constructed in the early 1990s and serves just under 500 students kindergarten through sixth grade. The school serves a predominantly white and upper middle class community. Student demographics for Conway Elementary are as follows: 7% of the students participate in the free and reduced lunch program; 89% of the students are white; 2% are Hispanic; 2% are Black; and, 4% are Asian (OSPI, 2007). Twelve percent of the students receive special services under the special education program and are served by their general education teacher and the special education resource teacher. There are three classrooms at each grade level. The school offers music, art, library, and health and fitness. Rick is supported in the office by a half-time counselor, one half-time secretary and two full-time secretaries. He also works with two custodians, a kitchen manager, and two food service assistants. Additionally, the staff includes several instructional assistants and half-time instructional coach. Rick's school has performed very well on state mandated assessments and has been recognized for students' achievement.

Conway Elementary does not qualify for special funding such as Title I funds because of its overall high socio-economic status and solid performance on the state assessments. This

leaves Rick to rely heavily on volunteers to assist with some of the daily operations of the school. The parents and community are very involved in the school, are supportive, but also “really look out for their kids . . . they scrutinize everyone and everything”.

Rick began his career teaching in a private school both in elementary and middle school. He worked as a teacher in western Washington for a few years before becoming a principal. He is in his sixth year as principal of Conway. Along with participation in ongoing professional development provided by the district, Rick is also currently working on his superintendent’s credential and is considering entering a doctoral program.

Scott is the principal of Adison Middle School. The school is in the northwest part of town and serves approximately 730 seventh and eighth grade students. About 34% of the students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. The majority of the student population is white, about 90%. The rest is comprised of 2% Asian, 2% Black, 3% Native American and 3% Hispanic. Ten percent of the students qualify for special education services (OSPI, 2007). The staff consists of 42 teachers, three instructional coaches, several instructional assistants, two secretaries, one office manager, two counselors, one assistant principal, one principal assistant, and an intervention specialist. Other support staff includes an interpreter, cafeteria workers, and custodians.

Scott holds a doctorate and is involved in regular professional development offered by Delta School district. This is Scott’s 27th year in public education, 21 of which have been in administration. He taught middle school and high school for six years, was an assistant principal two years at a high school in another district, and then served three years as the principal of that district’s middle school. He continued his administrative career there serving ten years as high

school principal before coming to the Delta School District where he is in his sixth year as principal of Adison Middle School.

Cathy is the principal of Wilson Middle School, also located in the northwest part of the city. Of the 720 students the school serves, 85% are White, 6% are Native American, 4% are Black, 3% are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian. Fourteen percent of the students are provided with special education services and 63% qualify for the free and reduced lunch program (OSPI, 2007). The staff includes over 45 teachers, several instructional coaches and instructional assistants. Cathy's support is provided by one office manager, four secretaries, two counselors, one substance abuse specialist, one assistant principal, and one principal assistant. The school also has a district resource officer available. Additional staff includes custodians and cafeteria workers.

Cathy began her career as a special education teacher and did this for a few years before returning to school to complete her master's and doctorate. While doing this, she completed credential requirements for the principal certificate. She began her administrative career as an assistant principal. She then worked as a principal of an elementary for three years before coming to Wilson Middle School where she has been the principal for the past seven years. She most recently completed coursework and internship requirements for the superintendent's certificate. Like the rest of her colleagues, Cathy also continues to participate in a variety of professional development activities.

Merit Middle School, where Brian is the principal, is located in the southeast part of the city. Approximately 820 seventh and eighth grade students attend this school. Forty percent qualify for the free and reduced lunch program and about 9% received special education services. The student population is comprised of 85% white, three percent Hispanic, 5% Black,

3% Asian, and 2% Native American (OSPI, 2007). The staff consists of 43 teachers including five special education teachers. The school has two instructional coaches, a district resource officer, custodians, cafeteria workers, and several instructional assistants. Brian's office support includes four secretaries, one office manager, a student assistance specialist, three counselors, one assistant principal, and one principal assistant.

Brian began his administrative career in western Washington as an assistant principal middle school level. He did this for four years and then spent four years as principal of a middle school before moving to eastern Washington. He has been the principal of Merit Middle School for nine years. Brian also continues to refine his skills and knowledge through ongoing professional development provided by the district.

Joe is the principal of Bristol High School, which is home to about 1800 students grade nine through twelve. It is located on the north side of the city. About 30% of the students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. Nine percent qualify for special education services. The student population is made up of 90% white while the remaining 10% is comprised of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students, about 2% of each group (OSPI, 2007). The staff numbers around 130. It includes 92 teachers, two teachers on special assignment who help with activities and discipline, five counselors, one office manager, six secretaries, two bookkeepers, one data processing clerk, one bookroom clerk, one administrative assistant, three assistant principals, a district resource officer and several other support staff such as instructional coaches, instructional assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers, interpreters, and computer specialists.

Joe has been in school administration for over 20 years. He began his career in public education as a middle school science and social studies teacher. Later, he served as assistant

principal for five years at another high school in the Delta School District and 13 years as principal of one the middle schools. He is in his third year at Bristol High.

Nathan is the principal of Griffith High School where he serves a student population of about 2,000. Nathan describes the school as an inner city high school. About 85% of the students are white. Fifteen percent are students of color, 3% Hispanic, 6% Black, 3% Asian, and 2% Native American. Eight percent qualify for special education services and 30% participate in the free and reduced lunch program (OSPI, 2007). The staff is composed of 112 teaching personnel, several instructional assistants, cafeteria workers, custodians, and a computer support specialist. The office support staff consists of one office manager, six secretaries, three bookkeepers, one bookroom clerk, and one data processor. Nathan's administrative team includes three assistant principals, two administrative assistants, and two administrative interns. He also counts on six counselors and one district resource officer.

Before beginning his career in school administration, Nathan taught for 12 years at a high school in a nearby district. Upon earning his administrative credentials, Nathan went on to an assistant principalship at one of the other high schools in the Delta School District where he spent four years overseeing student administration primarily discipline and attendance. He then came to Griffith High School where he served as assistant principal for one year before moving into his current role. He is in his fifth year as principal of Griffith. Nathan continues to participate in a variety of professional development activities. He stays current on his professional reading and takes the initiative to seek out training opportunities for school principals in the district.

Greg is the principal of the third high school in this study, Union High School. Union is located in the south part of the city. The school serves approximately 1,750 students. The

student body is made up of 87% white, 3% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 4% Black, and 2% Native American. About 25% of the students participate in the lunch program and 8% qualify for special education services (OSPI, 2007). Much like Bristol and Griffith, the staff includes 94 teachers, three instructional coaches, several instructional assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers, one district resource officer, seven secretaries, one office manager, two bookkeepers, one bookroom clerk, and one data processing specialist. Greg's administrative team includes three assistant principals, an athletic director, and a principal assistant. There are also five counselors and a student assistance specialist who handles student issues related to drug and alcohol abuse and anger management.

Greg's administrative career includes being an athletic director, an assistant principal for six years at another high school in the Delta School District, and a principal of a high school in nearby district for eight years. He has been in his current role for three years. Greg also participates in district sponsored professional development. A summary of the principals' experience and general information about their schools is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Principals and their Schools

Years of Experience Were Rounded in Order to Protect Confidentiality

Principal	Years of Experience	School	Grade Levels	Number of Students
David	10	Avery Elementary	K-6	475
Nancy	10	Kirby Elementary	K-6	450
Rick	10	Conway Elementary	K-6	485
Scott	20	Adison Middle	7-8	730
Cathy	20	Wilson Middle	7-8	720
Brian	10	Merit Middle	7-8	820
Joe	20	Bristol High	9-12	1800
Nathan	10	Griffith High	9-12	2000
Greg	10	Union High	9-12	1750

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a general overview of the school district and a description of the principals’ and their schools. Feasibility and accessibility to the researcher were the main determinants for selecting this district for the study. The information included demographic data on the district and the respective schools. The principals’ career track and number of years in the principalship and past experiences in the classroom, other educator roles, or administration were also presented. In the next chapter, the process for analysis of the data will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section presents the process for examining the data. The second section presents the results of the analysis that revealed the factors that make the principalship a stressful job and the principals' strategies for managing and coping with the stress. The analysis is presented in the context of the research questions and the literature on stress and burnout. The third section provides a chapter summary.

Data Analysis

This section describes the process for examining the data collected through interviews of nine school principals. Data analysis evolved from the research questions, which were then coded accordingly. A description of this process follows.

The principals' responses were analyzed for possible answers to the research questions and emerging themes related to the research questions. To this end, coding categories were generated from the research questions. What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? What coping strategies do principals use? How do principals perceive these strategies assist them? Why do they persist in their positions? What role does professional vitality play in their choice to persist in their jobs?

The coding process involved organizing the material and grouping it based on similarities in the use of phrases or wording by the principals. The data were then labeled accordingly, sometimes using the principals' words such as the word "frenetic" for categorizing their descriptions of the principal's work environment or using comments such as "You're the person who's trying to tend to the needs of students, parents, staff, and district" for coding under the

notion of relationships and conflicts that arise in the job. Likewise words or phrases such as “multi-tasking”, “negotiating the waters of the system”, and “maintaining a focus” were useful in the coding process. Some of the stressors that emerged from the analysis included the numerous tasks they are responsible for, responding to the concerns of students, parents, teacher, and other administrators, and dealing with the pressures of increased expectations of student achievement.

Additionally, the strategies these principals employ to manage and cope with these stressors were present in the transcription data and were coded and categorized in the same manner, using words, phrases, or statements that described their techniques for handling the stress involved in such a demanding job. As the process evolved, the data showed that there are numerous factors that make the principalship a stressful job and the principals’ employ various strategies for managing and coping with the stress.

While there were numerous sources of stress that the principals described as part of the jobs, there were two stressors that consistently showed up throughout the conversations. These were demand on time and the pressure of accountability and were subsequently categorized as emerging themes.

The interview data were likewise analyzed for similarities with the qualities of passion, vigor, facility, and job satisfaction. This was done by analyzing the principals’ descriptions of their beliefs about their work, their reasons for doing this job, the source of their energy for the job, and the meaning they find in their work. These included statements made by the principals about how they view their role as principal and how they describe their passion, vigor, facility, or satisfaction with the job. The use of these terms was not always present in the discourse. For example, none of the principals used the words: vigor or facility. However, excerpts of the transcripts facilitated coding under these categories based on how the principals described their

experiences using similar language (Seidman, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Creswell, 2003). An example of this is when a participant explained that he finds his job exciting and approaches it with “energy and zest”. This sort of statement was interpreted by the interviewer as a connection to the participant’s experience of vigor and passion for his job and consequently coded as such. In this way, the construct of professional vitality could be used to show that it may contribute to these principals’ persistence in the job.

The results of the data analysis are presented in the next section and in Chapter 7. The following section presents the stressors these principals experience on the job and the coping strategies they use to help them deal with the stress. Chapter 7 presents the emerging themes: demand on time, accountability, and professional vitality. The interview data is used for presenting these results (Creswell, 2003; Seidman, 1998; Biklen & Bogdan, 2003). Additional details on the process for analyzing, coding, and categorizing the data are provided within each of the chapters.

Stress Factors and Coping Strategies

As the reality of current public education reform issues continue to create added pressures for educators, the principalship becomes an increasingly important topic of discussion in the literature as it relates to shortages, stress, and burnout. As McCloud (et al., 2000) writes, Being an effective building manager used to be good enough. But now they [principals] must do more. They must know academic content and pedagogical techniques. They must work with teachers to strengthen skills. They must collect, analyze and use data in ways that fuel excellence. They must rally students, teachers, parents, local health and social service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses, and other

community residents and partners around the common goal of raising student performance. (p. 2)

In light of the growing concern around student achievement and the need for principals who can lead a school toward improvement, one could speculate that the stress involved with doing this job is also increasing. Furthermore, principals continue to be responsible for their schools' daily business of attending to student, staff, and parent needs, maintaining a safe environment, and overseeing the overall school program. This reality coupled with the increasing demands related to mandates for improved student learning begs the question: What are the stressors and how does a principal approach these and the challenges that come with this redefined role?

Factors That Make the Principalship a Stressful Job

The findings aligned with the four sources of stress identified by Gates & Gmelch (1998)—role based, task-based, boundary-spanning, and conflict-mediating stress. Conflict-mediating stress (Gates & Gmelch, 1998) refers to such aspects of the job as student discipline and dealing with conflicts within the school between parents and teachers, teachers and teachers, and the like. These were all mentioned by the principals as adding to the stress they experienced in their jobs. In analyzing the principals' responses, the nature of task-based stress developing as a result of the numerous tasks principals handle on a day-to-day basis also arose (Gates & Gmelch, 1998). The increasing demands and expectations and their impact on the role of the principal are also stressors in the jobs of the participating principals in this study. Gates & Gmelch (1998) describes role-based stress as that which is based on administrators' "role-set interactions and beliefs or attitudes about his or her role in the schools" (p.147). Finally, the boundary-spanning stress that Gates & Gmelch (1998) refer to is described by the principals in

this study as the dynamics of present-day realities and conditions over which they have no control.

Analysis of the data drove the coding of stressful experiences in the principalship under each of these categories. While the principals did not express their experiences by labeling them as such, the process of analysis led to clear patterns and coding categories that were then classified under the four sources of stress presented by Gates & Gmelch (1998). Final analysis yielded the factors that make the principalship a stressful job for these principals.

The principals shared numerous factors as stressors in their role as school principal. One of these was the expectation for student achievement as mandated by the state and federal government under the No Child Left Behind Act. These principals consistently shared the pressure that comes from having to address the learning needs of all students. They continually have to ensure that teachers are learning how to become better teachers, that students are demonstrating growth in their learning, and that they, as principals, are spending a significant amount of time classrooms. They are expected to facilitate professional development activities and collaborate with teachers to analyze student-learning data and set the course for future instruction. These expectations are a great source of stress for the principals.

Conflict that arises when they are faced with having to deal with issues that are not directly related to learning or their presence in classrooms as is expected was a recurring stressor mentioned by each of the principals. Some of these include student discipline and attendance issues, managing conflict between parents and teachers, between teachers and teachers, and between students and teachers. The workload as it relates to the myriad of paperwork, reports, email, returning phone calls, facilitating and attending meetings, responding to district needs,

athletics, club activities, and facilities such as making sure there is heat in the building and that everything is in working order were all mentioned as sources of stress on the job.

The principals also expressed frustration with the long hours and weekends spent on the job. David, principal of Avery Elementary, talked about these stressors as he described how intertwined they are with the demands for student achievement.

When I do walk-throughs [time spent by principals in classrooms collecting data about student learning] and that's another huge stressor now, it's getting out in the classroom more than we ever were before and we know that's where we need to be and there is just not more hours for me to be in the classrooms. I'm usually a 10 or 11 hour day person and I'm here every weekend one day or so and I do a half-day at home.

He further illustrated how the daily demands of the job impact his ability to spend more time in classrooms by sharing that he often feels exasperated by the time constraints and the numerous things that come up.

I try to do walk throughs and spend four or five hours a week in the classroom and there are days that I just can't get to it. Then you got kids lined up at the door or staff or parents. It's just frustrating. How do you get the time to do that? And, that's where some of the stressors come in. How do you get it all done in a day and feel like you've done a good job? Even though . . . [you] take pride in your work . . . but you still feel like you should be doing more because the expectation is out there.

The principals depicted their experiences on the job through descriptions of fast paced activity, having to “think on your feet” because of unexpected situations or events over which they have not control, and the reality of having to constantly make multiple decisions in the span

of a short time. They talked about long hours, the “sheer volume of work”, and having to meet the needs of numerous constituencies.

Rick, principal of Conway Elementary, talked about his work hours and working at home as being factors that make the job feel like it is “consuming”. He takes work home. He thinks about work when he is not at school and spends time mulling over how to go about solving an issue with a teacher or parent or how to address any number of problems that can arise on a daily basis.

[Work hours] 8 to 6 used to be standard, now it’s for sure a 10 hour day or more. I take things home, email. During observation/evaluation time, I take that home. I always have some kind of little project I’m working on. Weekends vary, and I try hard not let it interfere that much. It’s kind of consuming in certain ways, it gets in the way, the night meetings. You’re sort of constantly thinking about it, there’s email, I got one of these [shows the researcher a Blackberry] that I can get my email, there’s benefits and pitfalls, you sort of get sucked into it, your job is constantly with you. I rely on it [Blackberry], and I want to make sure that I get information and that I can communicate. I can do that after the kids are asleep, and I can get on it at 11:30 at night and sometimes it’s easier ‘cause I have something on my mind and I’d rather take care of it then, then come in and knowing that I’m going to be here in the morning and get hit with things, have teachers and parents coming in. It’s a job that’s constantly on your mind no matter where you are. You’re constantly thinking about it. Your job’s never done. I have trouble falling asleep. I wake up in the middle of the night and my mind starts going with iterations of how we can solve this problem or that. So it’s consuming that way. I can’t say it’s every night but there’s always a reminder and it’s always there.

Rick further describes the principal as the “classic middle manager”. As the principal, Rick spends a lot of his time responding to the needs of various constituencies. He has to ensure that he follows district policy and guidelines and sometimes this can make parents or community members unhappy. This can also mean that by doing what the superintendent or other district administrators ask him to do, he might upset his staff. He is the person in the middle who has to work through these processes and facilitate a positive ending.

You’re the person who’s trying to tend to the needs of students, parents, staff, and district. And your job is to somehow moderate the conversations and facilitate the conversation and figure out how to make the needs of all those different groups mesh because sometimes they’re very different from one another, and it’s my job to play that point person all the time.

David shared similar experiences of having to handle a myriad of issues on a daily basis and how this contributes to feelings of stress and a sense of not doing a good job. He, like Rick, feels the need to make sure everybody is happy. He described himself as a “cheerleader” for his staff to encourage them along the way.

Sometimes we’re the messengers and then people get mad. We have to strike a balance with it all. We’re stressed, the teachers are stressed but we’re required to do everything that we do. And I have to help people with that . . . just being the best possible cheerleader that you can be for staff.

The other principals experienced this struggle as well. As the school principal, they find they constantly have to respond to various people’s concerns. Much of this has to be addressed in a timely manner, which leads to less time in classrooms or less time spent

interacting with students in the hallways, lunchroom, or playground. Managing this aspect of the job is a source of significant stress for these principals.

Nancy, the principal of Kirby Elementary, shared about the experience of leading in a Title I school. The Title I program provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state. Nancy's school is one of these schools. When asked what it is like to be the principal of Kirby Elementary, Nancy shared the following.

Well, you know, you're multi-tasking constantly. You're always putting relationships first whether that's with staff or students, or with families or community members. I mean one day you can be talking with a community member who's angry because two kinders picked all the tulips in their yard, the next moment you have a custody battle going on, and the next moment you're doing an observation of a teacher, and the next minute you got two kids that were angry on the playground and then you find out something's not working like air conditioning in one of your units. I mean it's just, you have to constantly kind of balance what's most important with really caring about the person and always remembering that all of it needs to run toward the center which is the child.

Nancy also expressed concern over the unique challenges of serving in a Title I school and how these may not necessarily be present in more affluent schools and consequently, when issues of student achievement arise, the struggles her students face on daily basis are not taken into consideration. She speaks about the emphasis on test scores rather than on the "whole

child” and how her day is mired with unforeseen circumstances that students have to face every day which ultimately, impact their ability to perform academically.

I mean working in a Title environment; it’s a lot of tension and a lot of stress for everybody involved. Because when Johnny comes crying because Johnny’s dad went to jail last night and Johnny’s mom is in rehab and now he’s in foster care. This staff takes that on their shoulders. How can we make Johnny’s day better? And it’s a huge, huge, emotional piece. Or a child will come and it’ll be his 6th school in one year and so the whole detachment issues and his inability to make friendships become something that clearly impact learning so then we have to figure out what we can do for that child. It’s just constant and having as healthy a relationship with my staff as possible is critical. If they’re going to serve students, I have to serve them. I mean that’s a constant dance here in this building. The efforts people make are just as important as the scores. Judging the school by one number only impacts the ability to keep trying. It’s keeping the troops rallied without any kind of acknowledgement that the rallying and the efforts are valuable not just the scores. That’s the hardest part.

Being a principal in the middle school setting also poses its own unique set of challenges. Adison Middle School is a busy place serving about 730 seventh and eighth grade students. Athletic activities and other student events take up much of his time, and Scott emphasized the considerable time commitment of the job along with the daily, unplanned situations or conflicts that arise.

The more challenging thing is everything you’re expected to do plus work a hundred nights a year. So you do all the daily school things, but you also attend all the activities, sports, etc. I think it is such a huge job. Because it’s a tremendous commitment to be

away from your family and away from other things that you give up. [The day starts at] 7:30 a.m. Two to three nights a week I try to be at every activity. I take work home.

Three or four hours a week in the evenings I may spend working at home. You deal with conflict. It comes with the job, sometimes, through the course of the day. When things pile up, when there's a lot of conflict that you can't help, you can't reconcile, that gets to be stressful. I can just feel it. At night, I think about school things.

At Merit Middle School, Brian makes it his job to ensure the staff is not overwhelmed and that not too many things come their way. He lets his supervisor know that part of his role is being that person in the middle who facilitates how and what things take place.

I've been pretty open with my boss that a big part of my job is standing at the front door and keeping things out. Like great ideas, great initiatives but we have a focus on two or three things, and I've gotta manage the lives of teachers and not let them get overwhelmed by things. So that's a difficult thing. So managing all that and saying "no" and trying to maintain good relations at the same time is difficult.

Brian sees this as one of the stressors that is a part of the job. Again, much like Rick and David shared, the experience of being the middle manager means that they cannot make everyone happy all of the time. David tries to put it in perspective and enjoys supporting his teachers. "And then just being the best possible cheerleader that you can be for staff. The district office and staff, how can you please them all? I have to be a district leader and a building leader." Clearly, it is a difficult process and maintaining positive relationships is a delicate balance

Not having direct control over all that happens or can happen becomes a source of stress for Brian as well. Concern for the well being of those he serves and their safety is constantly on

his mind. This is truer in today's environment than in the past due to the growing incidence of school violence in recent years.

I worry about how my teams are working together and the conflicts they have with one another and that's kind of a constant nagging worry. I worry about anything could happen. Someone could come in the building or something bad could happen to a student. That's always there, that never goes away.

The pressures that come with the job of school principal were readily offered by all of the principals. The work load, long hours, and increasingly challenging tasks driven by education reform were felt equally by each of these principals no matter the level of the K-12 spectrum in which they were serving. Cathy's experience in the middle school setting is similar, as she, too, is busy with evening work and the fast paced environment during the school day.

They [the hours] can be really crazy. I typically work a 16 hour day. I have a brand new AP but it takes time to train her. It's hard to figure out the staff sometimes. I sometimes have to clarify and clarify what needs to be done that it makes me ill, but I have to do this if I am going to lead change in our schools. Sometimes there are things that come up. A kid doesn't get home so I have to come back and deal with it. I don't know, some days I don't know if I can put it into words, because some days are really hard.

Cathy's comment about not being able to find the words to describe the challenges of the job is quite telling. She clearly considers the work not only demanding, but also emotionally draining at times. One of the things that Cathy discussed was the concern with students' choices and how this can impact her emotionally. All three middle schools and the three high schools in this study have a counselor on staff who works with students when issues of drug or alcohol use arise. When asked about this, all of the principals concurred that it can be an issue in their

schools and that it is disconcerting when students make these types of choices. Cathy speaks about it as something that affects her emotionally. When asked about student problems with drug and alcohol use and how it makes her feel, she had the following to say.

Oh yeah, it's very significant. Last year, we had several suspensions related to this. It makes me feel really bad that kids would choose to do that. I struggle with, you know, when kids use drugs or are caught with them on school grounds, we suspend them, but it can be reduced if they go to counseling which is good so we get them back sooner. Some of the parents are not very responsive—sometimes they are using too. Our resource officer is very helpful. We have kids that will be incarcerated for a long time. And that breaks my heart.

The role of principal is clearly one of instructional leader as expressed by all of the principals. However, the nature of the work environment aside from achievement expectations appears to be just as busy and unpredictable as ever, if not more. Indeed, the three high school principals in this study talked about the tension between their role as managers of the school building and their role of instructional leader. They find themselves constantly struggling to balance the increased management responsibilities with leadership that focuses on student learning. Furthermore, the high school principalship is known for being a position characterized by an enormous and expanding workload, especially in today's educational environment where graduation requirements are tied to meeting the standard on the WASL. While the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education along with Governor Christine Gregoire are working to delay the new graduation requirements, the expectation is still there.

Joe, principal of Bristol High, meets with his site council on a regular basis. This site council is comprised of parents, teachers, and students. Its purpose is to provide a venue for collaboration and shared decision-making. Joe appreciates the value of having such a group in his school, but he finds himself struggling with the time it takes to make decisions and move forward.

The pace of change in this large high school is slow. You gotta be able to temper it [his impatience] in a way that doesn't shut people out because when you take a look at the human dynamics of change, people are all along the continuum. It takes time in terms of listening . . . people feeling that they've had an opportunity to be heard and feel valued. And that's a challenge. There are times when I finally just want to say 'enough, this is what we're doing. This is where we're going and we're going now.' On the other hand I also have this obligation and also value the process of shared ownership and shared decision-making and that's a real tension for me.

Dealing concurrently with matters that revolve around building management creep up along the way for high school principals as well. This is also related to the aspect of the job that places the principal in the middle of everything, as Rick put it, the "classic middle manager" and the dynamics of this reality as it relates to responding to the needs of everyone, students, teachers, other staff, parents, district administrators, and community members. Joe, principal of Bristol High, describes the experience in the following way.

And then we have a lot of other stuff that we have to pay attention to. You know there's issues with students, there's issues with budget, politics, allergies, medical issues, IEPs, 504s, you know all that stuff. It really gets complicated so there's times when you're wondering whether you are paying enough attention to an area. There are times when I

get back from district meetings feeling this giant load on my shoulders, because they remind you of all the things you need to do.

Like to today, I was here at 6:30, and I'll probably get home at midnight. So, yeah, there's weeks where it's probably 60-70 hours, others are 50 . . . you got night responsibilities, parent groups, additional responsibilities the district wants you to be engaged in. I regularly come in on Sundays and spend a couple of hours getting ready for the week.

I think it's hard for any principal whether it's elementary, middle, or high school. I think you think about it all the time. I have a tendency to wake up at 3, 3:30 or 4:00 regularly, and I go to sleep pretty quickly, but then I come out of it, and I start thinking about what's going on, what the issues are, can't shut it down. I think about it on the weekends . . . probably 90% of the time in some way, in some capacity.

In speaking with Greg, principal of Union High, the demands placed on him in his role are just as present. The reality of navigating through the plethora of requests and concerns brought to his attention are compounded by the increasing responsibilities of his role as instructional leader.

The focus of the district is for principals to be instructional leaders. That takes time, you know, to look at kids differently and their learning than we used to. That work is pretty intense, but there's lots of things that come down on the principal's shoulders. We got all these other things that happen. The baseball, football field, the water doesn't work out there, the field is flooded, you know all those things come down to somebody being able to fix it, and it comes back to the principal. Parents call and I have to deal with it. and I just, I have no idea of how many hours I spend on [other kinds of] activities . . .

probably I spent about 10 hours on those issues [recently] even though that's not my primary role. But when you have parents coming in and [they're] in to see the principal and that is what they want . . . [sighs] we had multiple meetings.

When asked to describe the job using words or phrases, Greg said, "Sheer demand on time; job is consuming; it's intense; strong emotional issues; significant parent worry over graduation requirements; time is a big issue." Clearly, the challenges principal face are significant and require a tremendous amount of time and skill for handling them effectively.

Nathan's experience as assistant principal in his current school was much more stressful for him than his principalship. He described 80-hour weeks where he was responsible for supervising and evaluating 110 teachers, developing the master schedule, and providing professional development for the entire staff. As principal, he is also very busy and looks out for his assistant principals so they do not spend enormous amounts of time at school each day.

My days are a little bit longer than my assistant principals. I really require them to leave. They do not stay here until 8 o'clock at night ever. They'll get here anywhere from 6:30 to 7:00 so I like to get here early and read emails and stuff like that, but they're out the door by 4:00 at the latest. And I'm usually here until 5:00 – 5:30 you know trying to finish up, making sure that I get my emails read...But my first year as principal by Christmas time, I had no room in this office to stack any more reading material. I had filled every drawer. My desk was a disaster.

The bottom for me was just running in high gear all the time and not getting the things done. I don't know how a human being can do this. Well, you don't get it done. It goes into the drawer, it goes into the pile, it gets thrown away and then [you] put on a happy face and say everything's fine but in reality it's not fine.

For Nathan, reaching the bottom as he described it, led him to explore ways in which he could help himself be more efficient and effective in his job. Eventually, he came across a professional development opportunity that addressed the kind of situation that Nathan was experiencing in the job. This helped him to become more organized, focused, and stay current in his work so that things do not pile up.

The principals' stories illustrate in great detail the ever-present stressors. Furthermore, the experience as described by the principals has changed dramatically and is exacerbated by today's education environment which is mired with pressures related to increasing expectations for student achievement under NCLB as measured by state assessments such as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning as well as daily managerial issues that are inherent in the job of running a school. Safety issues, student discipline and attendance, outside factors that impact students' ability to be engaged in the learning process such as family problems and socio-economic issues all contribute to the enormity of the job as well as to the experience of stress on the job.

Principals have to deal with people, conflict, and various constituencies. All of the stakeholders: students, staff, parents, community, state officials, district officials, want something to happen and the principal's job is to reconcile these demands and at the same time develop, implement, and carry out the vision for their school. As Scott explained, the expectations "for the job now . . . with the level of scrutiny—news camera outside your window when WASL scores are released" has made it a more challenging job than it ever has been.

All of this leads to principals spending more time at work or taking more work home. They find themselves being pulled in different directions and, thus, feel like they are running in high gear all of the time. Sometimes they do not get to everything and consequently may feel the

need to put on a happy face as Nathan mentioned. Sometimes, they come across opportunities to learn about ways to handle the demands of the job, much like Nathan did. Hence, the importance of finding ways to manage the stress led to conversations about what these principals do that helps them manage and cope with the stressors.

Principals' Strategies for Managing and Coping With the Stress

Nathan incorporated several changes into his daily work life in order to find that “balance” to which each of these principals consistently referred. He still believes that there “are at times tremendous amounts of stress”, but he has been very deliberate about finding ways to alleviate it. One of these is the training he attended which was mentioned in the previous section. The other principals also made it a point to seek and utilize a variety of strategies for coping with the inevitable stress associated with their busy and demanding role.

Metzger (2003), in her study of the coping techniques used by administrators, presented the concept of “self/inner development”. The administrators in her study provided definitions and practices that fostered their self/inner development. Terms used by the principals to define this included balance, self-actualization, values, personal improvement, inner focus, and relationships. The principals also used words like ethics, values, heart, love, morals, and spirit. Metzger (2003) contends that school leaders need to pay attention to all aspects of their lives, personally and professionally, if they are to be successful in meeting the demands of their job. Allison (1997) concludes that principals “who have more extensive coping repertoires are more likely to be in better health and experience lower levels of stress” (p.52).

The present study found similarities with Metzger’s (2003) results of the importance of including activities in daily life that foster sense of balance and well-being and in the words of one of the principals, the value of having and maintaining a “life outside of work”. With respect

to the strategies employed for managing and coping with the stressors, the principals in this study also shared their perspectives on how these coping techniques impact their ability to carry out their work.

Joe, principal of Bristol High, spoke at length about the consuming nature of the job. He related experiences with waking up in the middle of the night thinking about how he was going to deal with various issues. He also talked about how he often thought about the job even when not at work. Several of the other principals also shared similar experiences of taking the work home with them even without necessarily intending to do so. Losing sleep and thinking about work at home were common among all of the principals. Likewise, there was the reality of doing work at home such as checking email, writing letters, making phone calls, completing grant applications, and reading curriculum or professional literature. Consequently, through the discourse between the interviewer and the principals, conversations developed around what they did to manage this and how it helped them.

Joe stressed the importance of making time for family and how he had to work at this, as both he and his wife are in the education profession. “[We] try to find a sacred time probably on Saturday and the evenings . . . to make sure you reconnect and have quality interactions and personal conversations that are important.” He also makes it a point to engage in some form of physical activity four times a week. He takes trips every so often and enjoys gardening and spending time with his dog. Joe finds that his work is inevitably connected to his personal life, but it helps to incorporate the aforementioned activities because it is a big job to be a principal. The job “is about life”. “There’s a wide range of experiences, successes, failure, and . . . there’s a wide range of emotions.” And that is “why it’s really important to make sure that you try to stay centered as much as you can.”

When Nathan spoke about what he does that makes the job doable for him he stressed the importance for him of focusing on staying current in his job and in his reading. He described training for school administrators he attended where he learned how to make more effective use of his support staff so that he can focus more on the instructional leadership component of his job.

Principal education both formal and on the job experience have very little to do with leadership and how you survive. And that's the reason we struggle so much with learning improvement in schools. It's not a doable job that way. You get so frenetic that you can't collect your thoughts and get paid for what you're there for which is to lead, to be an analyzer and a thinker. Why can I manage a school of 2,000 plus kids and go home every day and have a great relationship with my family and get more work done than they're [other principal colleagues] getting done in twice as much time? It's because we're missing that piece in principal training.

Nathan believes that school principals need to utilize a variety of strategies that can assist them in being more effective. "How do you maintain optimum performance throughout the entire day? Without having the huge dips that we feel in the afternoon and all that?" He realized that it was time for him to take better care of himself in order to stay healthy. He also stressed the importance of relationships both in the school system and outside of school. He believes this helps him "perform at full potential." Some of the strategies he believes help him include taking breaks even if only for five minutes to get up, stretch, and walk around. He focused on learning about himself and maintaining a healthy diet, which includes snacks during the day instead of going without eating all day, which is what he used to do.

He also talked about the importance of maintaining the balance between work and personal life. “If you excel at your career at the expense of making some kind of gain with your family, I think you missed it.” He contends that the job can be done well while keeping a balance in one’s life.

We all get out of balance on occasion . . . but living out of balance all the time [is] just really a prescription for a disaster somewhere down the road. Failing families, failing marriages, I was horrible at spending time with family but now I’m better. Having time to consider family, reading, spiritual life, exercise, good diet. It’s all possible. It’s too bad they don’t teach that in school administration classes. The people that go into administration typically [work] a 60 to 80 hour work week. That doesn’t mean that’s healthy . . . things over time start to fail. It’s either going to be your health or your family. Something’s going to give somewhere along the line.

Nathan’s approach to his work and his perspective of the importance of having that balance present in his life between work, health, and family relationships coincides with Metzger’s (2003) findings and the contention that self/inner development is important for the personal and professional development of school administrators’ lives. Such is the case for the other principals in the study. Each of them talked about what helps them maintain a positive outlook and keep things in perspective so that they can do their job and feel that they do it effectively and at the same time have a healthy life outside of school.

Cathy, one of the middle school principals, talked about the long hours and all the activity involved in running a school of 700 adolescents. She described a job riddled with the emotionally charged realities of the lives of the young adults she serves along with the challenges present in education today as “greater than they’ve ever been.” Participating in

professional growth activities such as the superintendent's certification program added to the load. "I could just feel the stress, so tense. I don't need to do that. I think I pushed myself so much." Cathy realized that she needed to change how and what she did in order to take better care of herself. She is now much more thoughtful about how she spends her time and what she schedules into her days. Spending more time with her young children is now a priority as is exercising and taking the time to "step back" and be more intentional about taking time for herself. "I take better care of myself so I feel less stressed." She expressed how this ultimately impacted her effectiveness on the job. "This summer was the first vacation that I actually took. I figured out that I needed to do this, and I actually do better at my job."

At the elementary school level, the impact of the job's stressors on the lives of the principals was just as great. David spoke of the seemingly immense nature of the position that he often he feels he is not doing a good enough job because of the various pieces to it and the inevitable interruptions that come his way throughout the day. He also works long hours, goes in to work on weekends, and spends at least half a day during the weekend working at home. With the number of hours at work and the increasing demands and subsequent stress, David, too, realized he needed to start doing other things outside of work and is also learning how to work more effectively and efficiently so that he does not have to go into work on weekends. In order for him to keep things in balance, David also makes sure to spend quality time with his family engaging in conversations and activities such as vacationing that take his mind off of the pressures of the job.

Nancy enjoys exercising and taking time to be with family. She believes this is essential for her in her role as principal of Kirby Elementary. The challenges of the job take an emotional toll on her staff and, as their administrator, Nancy strives to set the example by taking care of

herself. In order to be effective in her work, Nancy maintains an open door her staff. She sees this as a critical component for managing “a stressful environment”. She also uses strategies such as reading humorous books to her teachers to help decrease the stress levels. This helps her keep things in perspective as well and makes the work more feasible because if her staff feels supported, then she can do her job more effectively when it comes to asking them to take on the challenges of the high stakes environment in which they work.

Other activities such as monthly staff breakfasts and recognizing staff efforts add to her ability to carry out her work. Equally important to Nancy are taking vacations, “having time off and letting go. I take time to nourish my soul with the things that matter to me, like playing my guitar.” She tries to go home by five and encourages her staff to do the same. She will make regular announcements over the intercom “‘I’m going home, you all should be too. Your car should be pulling out of the parking lot, go get a life.’ I say things like that because I think it’s important that people take care of themselves.”

All of the principals mentioned incorporating a variety of strategies that help them manage the stressors of the job. For example, all of them spoke of the clarity of mind that exercise and taking time off gives them. Rick described bike riding as “not just good for the body but you get out and [your] mind just goes and [you] take in scenery and fresh air.” Spending time with family and engaging in activities together were equally important. Even little things help. Rick spends time reading for enjoyment and “One day a week I treat myself to Starbucks or whatever and it definitely, absolutely helps me.” Scott talked about how his four-year old grandson can make all the problems associated with his workday go away. Greg also mentioned his granddaughter and shared that “it’s as good as it gets”. He also enjoys woodwork,

gardening, and taking time off for traveling. He believes it is good to do this both for his marriage and his job.

For these principals, doing things like this allows them to return to the job ready and able to take on the challenges that come with facilitating the daily lives of students, teachers, staff, and anybody else who happens to walk in to the school looking for support or answers to their questions or problems. Clearly, maintaining a focus on the important aspects of their personal lives whether it is playing the drums in a band, reading, gardening, exercising, or being with family and friends, as well as doing things at work such as eating healthy, taking breaks, and actively supporting their staff are elements these principals find critical to their own effectiveness both at managing the stressors of the job and carrying out their work.

Chapter Summary

The intent of this chapter was to present the process for examining the data. Secondly, the analysis of the data, which revealed that principals deal with substantial stress on the job, was provided. The strategies they employ for coping with this stress were shared.

The process of examining the data brought to light the increasing demands of the job these principals face on a daily basis. The demands include the daily managerial tasks that come with running a school building such as scheduling, staffing, meeting with parents, students, and staff, and responding to issues related to attendance and behavior management. Effectively handling the needs around athletics and student activities were also brought up as sources of stress. Another stressor that these principals cited as significant was the reality of being the “classic middle manager”. In other words, they constantly have to navigate their way through the various conflicting issues that arise between those they serve. Parents have needs. The district administration has expectations. Teachers and staff expect support and guidance.

Sometimes, the needs of one group are in direct conflict with another. Principals have to be able to work with all of these groups and to respond effectively and efficiently to their concerns.

Their stories illustrate in great detail the ever-present stressors.

Furthermore, the job as described by the principals has changed dramatically in recent years due to the present education environment, which is mired with pressures related to increasing expectations for student achievement. This coupled with the daily managerial issues that are inherent in the job of running a school along with outside factors that impact students' ability to be engaged in the learning process such as family problems and socio-economic issues all contribute to the enormity of the job and the subsequent experience of stress.

The principals shared several strategies they employ, which help them maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. This led to the discussion in the second section on principals' strategies for managing and coping with the stress. The strategies they employ for managing this stress were seen as significant in their efforts to maintain a healthy balance between their work and personal lives. As the data show, they often referred to the importance of making sure that the job, although consuming by nature, does not completely take over their lives. They repeatedly shared that by doing even the littlest of things such as treating themselves to Starbucks once a week makes a difference. Other strategies mentioned included taking time to enjoy hobbies, spending time with family, taking breaks while at work, and getting out of the office and into the hallways, lunchroom, and classrooms to spend time with staff and students. Doing fun, relaxing activities such as taking vacations were also important for alleviating the pressures of the job. "Nourishing" the soul through reading or playing a favorite instrument were important activities that fostered spiritual health for some of the principals.

Literature around stress and burnout was utilized to support the findings related to the following research questions: What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? What coping strategies do principals use? How do principals perceive these strategies assist them? The stressors of the job and the strategies for coping with these as shared by these principals provide a picture of the lives of these principals. Metzger (2003) contends that all of these strategies assist administrators in maintaining a balance and that taking care of the “inner/self” and seeking opportunities to nurture this as Nancy eloquently put it “nourish [the] soul” are key elements for effectively managing the stress involved in such a demanding job.

CHAPTER 6

DEMAND ON TIME, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND PROFESSIONAL VITALITY

This chapter consists of sections on three important additional themes that emerged from the data: 1) demand on time, 2) accountability, and 3) personal characteristics of the principals, especially their professional vitality and persistence in the principalship. The analysis of the first two themes is presented in the context of the research question: What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? The third theme is presented in the context of the construct of professional vitality and the research questions: Why do they persist in their positions? What role does professional vitality play in their choice to persist in their jobs? The last section provides a chapter summary.

Time

A salient concern, consistently mentioned by the principals, was the impact of time constraints on both performance and satisfaction. There is simply not enough time to get it all done. Every participant spoke at length about the ongoing issue with time constraints in their jobs. As the data show, there are numerous responsibilities present in this job that principals face everyday. They spoke of the “sheer volume” of emails, the load they felt on their shoulders when they return from district meetings with lists of deadlines, and the constant activity that is present in the work life of a school principal. David pointedly asked the question. “How do you get it all done in a day?” Nancy described the time constraints and how she approached them by “multi-tasking”. Every principal described long hours especially with all of the evening activities that take place. The middle and high school principals experienced more of this than the elementary school principals. However, evening events occur at all levels. Working at home

in the evenings and on weekends is inevitable. These principals understand this reality, but recognize that for them, it is critical that they strike some sort of balance with this. This could mean limiting themselves to a couple of hours during the weekend or figuring out how to be more efficient with their time at work in order to reduce the amount of time spent working on the weekends. Brian and Nathan both described a strategy they use to help them with this. Brian and his secretary attended training where they learned how to be more efficient.

We never learned in administrative school how to manage an office, how to manage the flow of papers. I knew there were a lot of inefficiencies and lack of knowledge of how to work with a secretary. We were taught how to manage the paperwork and everything. You'll notice there's nothing on the walls, and I'm not supposed to have anything on my desk, no papers, no pictures, etc. The whole idea is that this isn't a place that I hang out. I hang out there [points to outside of office toward classrooms]. I have a laptop now. So I'm in the classrooms a lot with it rather than having to transcribe and go back and forth. There are no files here. When Mia [secretary] comes in and does my mail, she brings it in and she takes it all out. I don't do any of my scheduling. She does it all for me. She does all that [mail, filing] and my phone calls. Because of that, it probably has cut two or more hours off my day.

Nathan described having similar results of better efficiency after participating in the same training with his secretary. "If you look at my office it's not as much as it would have been in the past. That's because now I focus on always being current in my job and in my reading." His office, too, was not the focus of his work. Nathan makes it a point to delegate more to his secretary in order for him to have more time to do what he sees as the crux of his job, instructional leadership.

More telling is the presence of this theme throughout the data. It consistently showed up throughout the analysis and can also be identified in the previous chapter's discussion of stressors present in this job. Time constraints related to deadlines for reporting, preparing students for the state assessment, scheduled activities, and the numerous other time sensitive aspects of the job were constantly brought up. For example, the three high school principals described the pressure they feel about getting freshmen, sophomores, and juniors prepared to meet the standards and pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) so they can graduate, as passing this assessment is now a requirement for graduation.

Having the time to spend in classrooms and provide meaningful feedback was also a struggle due to the various other issues they have to respond to. They all mentioned that when something happens, it is usually the principal that is called. There are processes and people in place that can serve for resolving issues before they get to the principal. However, a parent can strongly request to see the principal and school staff are obligated to accommodate them. This pulls the principals away from whatever they are doing, and again, time with a parent means time away from other equally important and pressing activities. Other times, the reverse can happen. District meetings require the principals' attendance, which may keep them from addressing parent or staff concerns. They are pulled in many different directions all of which take a tremendous amount of time.

The theme of time as described by Greg when he illustrated the job as one that is characterized by a "sheer demand on time" and the seemingly endless tasks involved in the job were consistently described by the principals as were the various methods they used to ensure that they did a good job while maintaining a positive outlook even in the midst of all of the time

constraints. He further encapsulates this frustration when he described how time spent on so many other things takes him away from what should be the main focus, student learning.

I finally got into the classroom yesterday. There are peripheral issues and yet they are central to the environment and takes time at the end of the day. You really want to focus here but other factors pull you aside and that adds to the stress and pushes the work into the evening and the early morning because it's not like you can sit in the office.

What Greg has found is that if he is to spend time in classrooms, more time is spent later in the day working on what he cannot get to during the course of the day. Again, it appears that these principals are constantly struggling with working in an environment that pulls them in many different directions; thus, limiting the amount of time they have to spend on any given issue. There is not enough time to do it all. As will be shown in the following section, the issue with time comes up repeatedly throughout the conversations with these principals. The data show that demand on time may be interpreted as a theme that is embedded throughout the principalship experience for these principals.

Accountability

The high stakes environment that these principals work in was a recurring theme. Principals are accountable to parents, teachers, community members, and district administration. They are expected to respond to the requests brought forward from each of these groups. They are expected to provide timely information and resolutions to concerns. To their supervisors, the superintendent and other district administrators, these principals must demonstrate effective leadership of their school through improved student achievement, safe and orderly learning environments, and efficient management of the daily operations of a school.

While accountability was described in many ways, the area that appeared to be of most concern for these principals was that of being held accountable by the district administration for the state and federal requirements for student achievement as measured by the WASL and as outlined by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Graduation requirements, AYP expectations under the NCLB legislation, school improvement planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, professional development of teachers, shared leadership and collaboration with teachers around student learning, and the instructional leadership role were all repeatedly mentioned by the principals. Rick, the principal of Conway Elementary expressed his concern about the increasing pressures associated with the expectation that all students need to meet the standard.

It's high stakes, high pressure. When the district started talking about alignment of curriculum and all these new ideas, Conway never paid attention because the test scores were fine. All of a sudden we're being asked to do what everyone else does. Not only was it sudden but we were also five to seven years behind and that demand was hugely stressful for folks and that was right about when I got here. There were a lot of mixed messages and a lot of frustration, and I was extremely frustrated because I felt like the target was constantly moving.

Although Rick's school is performing well on the state assessment, the Washington Assessment for Student Learning (WASL), the levels of stress do not decline. If anything, he feels the pressure even more.

The better they [students] do the more pressure. Last year we were above 90% on the WASL and then asked to apply for blue ribbon but that comes with a 30-page application, and I ended up doing it over the winter break. 'cause I couldn't ask the staff to do more.

Test scores are the WASL and how the public sees it. We feel more pressure now and to keep the level up is going to be really hard.

The school improvement process as it relates to these mandates and how it affects the job was also mentioned by Brian, principal of Merit Middle School. When asked about the challenges he faces in his job Brian shared, “There’s the challenge of continual improvement. What to do with teachers that are not being very successful and who are reluctant to improve.” Brian also described the added pressure of managing the stress of the staff that comes with achievement expectations. He not only deals with his own stress, but that of his staff as well.

Scott, principal of Adison Middle School, described how the job has changed over the years. Scott has been in school administration for over 20 years and sees dramatic changes in the role of the principal in today’s environment. “It’s quite a different job than it was 20 years ago”. When asked how the job is different, he offered the following description.

I’d say the scrutiny in terms of the accountability and the public and the parents of the students [is different]. I’d say the expectations certainly have changed. The introduction of an outside standard of measurement was I think a huge level in the change of the job. I think when I first started the measure of success for a school was what the community and the students and staff members thought of it to be. It was the perception of the community that would determine success or failure of the school. And now with the introduction of outside measures and outside standards that I think took the job to a different level. Not only now is the perception of the community and staff members and kids, but it’s also that measurement in terms of student achievement that has really changed the position. It’s changed the job in that principals are now far more connected with instruction and student achievement than they ever were when I first started.

While Scott believes that this change is an overall positive one, the level of accountability that is now placed on public schools is a new stressor facing principals. Scott emphasized that it has led to a more consistent focus on improvement, which in his eyes is a good thing.

Joe, principal of Bristol High, also discussed accountability and the stress associated with their roles as instructional leaders. He described the pace as “frenetic and high stakes”. “There is tremendous tension about the amount of content that teachers are expected to teach. They feel it as a responsibility and accountability. So we feel it.”

Cathy, principal of Wilson Middle School, offered similar comments about the how testing has become the focus of the job. As she described how the seventh grade did not make the progress in math that they had expected, she added that they have also not met Adequate Yearly Progress in special education. She said, “We’re on their watch list . . . I don’t like the bad press. I do feel the entire weight of the school on me”.

Union High School’s principal, Greg, also describes the high stakes environment of No Child Left Behind and how the daily operations of the school impact his ability to maintain the necessary focus on student learning. Being an instructional leader is how principal leadership is defined in the Delta School District. Trying to do it all is frustrating for Greg.

At the same time you’re really looking at this idea of instructional leadership . . . for our first collaboration meeting . . . what kind of message are we going to give when we break up in our small learning teams? That typically causes me to start work at 4:30 in the morning at home on my laptop. The sheer volume of [*shows emails to researcher*] 35-45 emails, it’s an absolute nightmare. You know part of it is you take that kind of emotional stress home and you get lots of phone calls. What it does is detract from the time in the classroom.

Nathan, principal of Griffith High School, shared about his school's progress and effort toward improvement. As he talked about the various activities he oversees in order to ensure that student learning is improving, it became clear that this was the crux of the job for Nathan in his current role.

I find two things very valuable for me as a principal of a school, one is learning about pedagogy and the other one is how I effectively measure student learning as a principal. My leadership of getting 110 teachers all marching in the same direction is key. I will say though that there are times of tremendous stress.

The increasing demands and expectations and their impact on the role of principal are clearly stressors in the jobs of the participating principals in this study. The principal's role now, more than ever, includes the complex process of leading a school toward higher student achievement and navigating through the plethora of demands from all stakeholders that come with this role (Whitaker, 2001; Sorenson, 2005).

David, principal of Avery Elementary, further encapsulates the realities and complexities of school leadership as he described his role in the context of current education reform.

You know in talking with other principals and the demands of NCLB. It demands us to really know the curriculum as well as you possibly can. I think that's a huge stressor in K-6 across content. How do you learn all of that? Talk about teachers keeping up with a lot of staff development. And the principal just not able to articulate is just frustrating. It used to be that a broad overview in the curricular areas was good enough. I know good teaching practices. However, the specifics of the curriculum and what they should be doing, what time of the year, and the specifics of what's going on in the units of study and what's going on in Connected Math, what should specifically they be doing. [It] is a

huge challenge. How do you pace yourself? You know you're doing a good job with kids but somehow with the accountability you always have a feeling that you should be doing more. There's more staff development coming and you never get on top of it . . . It just seems like if we could just slow down a bit. What I do here is talk a lot about all of us supporting each other, work together and we'll climb the hill a little bit at a time. So every week when we have collaboration . . . what we've done the last three years, we meet an extra half hour a week . . . [to] collaborate. We look at scores; we work on whatever book study, or student learning issue that is of concern. We do this every week in order to get a little bit better at what we're being asked to do for our kids.

When asked to describe some of the challenges of the job using key words David said, "Pacing, testing, NCLB, stressful, too often we're judged by our test scores and that's hard." This was clearly a major factor impacting the work environment of the principals in this district. All of them referred to NCLB and high stakes testing several times during the interview process as well as during follow up conversations.

Nancy, principal of Kirby Elementary, also expressed frustration about the pressures surrounding learning expectations and the seemingly impersonal nature of looking at a child's growth by way of test scores. "I think what happens is that principals feel the pressure of high stakes testing, but they don't feel like they can voice their concerns about that pressure without appearing weak to superiors." Her frustration was voiced further when she described the "elephant in the room".

And no matter if people say it's not all about the test scores, the elephant in the room is that it is. That's the elephant in the room. It's all about the test scores. Now that's a sad

thing, but this is reality. And so I always want to keep my focus on educating the whole child and hopefully the test scores will be part of that, but I don't see my kids as numbers. In these principals' view, the No Child Left Behind Act appears to place them at the center of accountability for their individual schools; however, they also continue to be responsible for the daily operations of their schools. The multiple roles they play are difficult to negotiate. "They are expected to be the building managers, human resource administrators, change agents, disciplinarians, cheerleaders, instructional leaders and in some cases surrogate parents" (Burney & Elmore, 2000, p.1).

As the themes of demands on time and accountability emerged from the data, the personal characteristics of these principals that allow them to be successful while maintaining balance between the job and their personal lives led to the third theme. What is it about these principals that enable them to be successful and to persist in the job?

Professional Vitality and Persistence in the Principalship

Harvey & Donaldson (2003) present the notion of addressing the stressful nature of the principal's job by looking at it in a positive way. As the analysis of the principals' responses in this study have shown, the conditions that exist to make the high levels of stress a reality are clearly present. Moreover, the literature abounds with various research studies that present additional data substantiating that the experience of stress and burnout is alive and well in the principalship. Harvey (2002) suggests in order to learn more about what can assist school principals in thriving in their jobs, researchers can take an alternative approach for viewing the experience of being a principal. One way this can be accomplished is by taking a look at what works for principals in helping them handle the stress, be and feel successful, and subsequently, reinforce ". . . what makes the principalship fulfilling both personally and professionally"

(Donaldson & Harvey, 2003, p. 30). Hence, the construct “professional vitality” which presents an “optimistic and hopeful way to think about the modern-day principal” (p. 30) is used as the framework for presenting the final section of the results of the present study.

Harvey (2002) defines professional vitality as “...a characteristic possessed by individuals who are able to consistently perform the work of their chosen profession with passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction” (p. 28). This section will provide a description of the four qualities that characterize professional vitality in conjunction with interview data that further support the notion of professional vitality present in the lives of these principals. To this end, data from the present study will be used to further the discussion of how this construct may add to the understanding of the principalship as experienced and shared by these principals.

Analysis of the interview data resulted in coding the text, which consisted of words, sentences, or paragraphs under the attributes of professional vitality. First, the principals’ statements were reviewed and sorted by similarity in meaning. The groups of text were then analyzed to see if they could be connected to any of the four characteristics of professional vitality. While the word, passion, was used by the principals without any prompting by the interviewer, the terms professional vitality, vigor, facility, passion, and job satisfaction were not a part of any of the questions asked during the interview process. The Principals provided their own words and these were coded accordingly to reflect connection to the qualities of professional vitality. What follows is the result of this effort.

Passion

Harvey (2002) offers the following definition for passion: “a compelling inner desire to enhance the lives of children/students through one’s own contributions as an educational leader”

(p.29). He contends that passion is critical in order for principals to experience vitality in their work.

Kouzes & Posner (2002) further support the importance of passion for successful leadership. They write, “Exemplary leaders have a passion for their . . . causes” (p. 116). Those who have passion lead because they have a vision for something more. They long to make a difference. The choice to lead is driven by meaning and purpose. It is this sense of meaning and purpose that helps leaders work through their days and the myriad challenges and uncertainties they face. Kouzes & Posner (2002) cite the experiences of mountain climber, Arlene Blum, who responds to the question of what makes a leader successful with the following. “ ‘The real dividing line is passion. As long as you believe what you’re doing is meaningful, you can cut through fear and exhaustion and take that next step’ ” (p.184).

Thus, passion is at the heart of what Harvey (2002) contends is what drives successful school principals to carry out their work. Lyman (2000, cited in Harvey 2002) connects the concept of caring to the idea of passion. Caring is what causes passion to develop into the actions that lead toward the creation of an environment in which children learn. And, they not only learn from teachers who teach, but from teachers who live and work with a sense of trust and support they garner through the relationships that principals purposefully develop with them. Harvey (2002) contends that passion is essential for this to happen.

The principals in the present study all shared their perspectives on what the job means to them. The sense of purpose and desire to do good for others and to lead their schools in the quest for greater student learning was recounted in various ways by each of them. Joe said that his job is worthwhile because he knows that what he does makes a difference.

Public education is hard work. I think it's necessary that you have a passion about what you do, truly believe in what you do. I think it's my role to provide the leadership [for] our mission, why we exist, what our purpose is. My passion is for helping to create and maintain a vision for a great education experience for our kids.

The belief that making a difference in a child's life is a driving force for Nancy as well. "The principalship for me [is] really having a sense of purpose and a sense of compassion." She further elaborated on this sense of purpose and what it means to her as the principal of Kirby Elementary.

I accept and honor that responsibility because I believe that the purpose is really to serve these families in these communities and these children in our midst. I don't know if I would have the same level of commitment if it wasn't something significantly important to me as a person.

Rick also offered his perspective of what the job means to him and what it is that makes him show up to work every day. "I like helping people. The kids are invigorating. I feel like I'm helping improve things here. I feel like I'm making a difference."

The desire to make a difference and finding enjoyment from serving others were also qualities that David talked about when describing his role. "It's so gratifying being here with kids. And, seeing what important part of their lives school is. I think that's the biggest part."

Cathy, too, believes that the purpose and meaning behind her work are guided by the passion and commitment she has for serving the students of Wilson Middle School. Cathy used the words "love and believe" to describe her motivation for the work she does and through the coding and analysis process, these pieces of text data were placed under the characteristic of passion (Creswell, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). "I love working with

middle school kids. I think I do it because I wanted to work with kids who faced challenges. And I believe that I can help. I really believe in what we can do.”

Scott’s descriptions of the passion he has for his job also consisted of the use of similar words or phrases such as a sense of mission, making a difference, serving others, and having a positive impact on students, teachers, and the community.

I try to make a difference in the lives of kids here. The feeling you have an impact and give back to the community; that you can build a school that is a positive place for kids, for parents and teachers. I think it’s probably a sense of service that is a huge part of it for me. I think we’re doing important work here. So I think the mission or the purpose certainly for me is clear when I show up to work everyday.

Brian’s passion comes from knowing that he is helping students learn and that he is shaping a positive climate and culture for everyone in his school. He especially enjoys seeing students be successful. “It’s the kids. I get more from them than anything else.” Being there for his staff in these times of high stakes testing is also important to him as was evidenced in his comments about “keeping [extra] things out” so that they do not become too overwhelmed.

The high school principals expressed their passion for the job and what it means to the lives of the students and teachers they serve. Nathan refers to his belief in accomplishing the goals he and his staff have established for student learning and the love for the job itself.

I believe deep down inside that we really can do it here. I took the principal’s position because I believed I could influence student learning. I still believe this to be true, if I didn’t, I would immediately begin the process to change buildings, districts, or career. I love my job, the people I work with, and even the challenges I have faced and the anticipation of facing new challenges tomorrow.

Greg also shared his perspective on how his devotion to his work and the passion behind this commitment keeps him moving forward with the goal of reaching students, families, and teachers.

Our mission right now is to help these young people. They really count on us. My message to the staff is we have lots of kids here who'll overcome any deficiencies and will go to college and succeed. We have a portion of our population that really needs us to be role models, to build their confidence, to build their skills, to show them that the sky is the limit. And I think that really drives us. We do this work by connecting with those kids. We're going to change students' futures.

The compelling desire to make a difference in the lives of students was key for describing the passion these principals have for doing the challenging work of school principal. Throughout the conversations in the interview process, this passion was consistently tied to the tireless effort these principals put into the job. It is what they referred to as the reason for staying the course despite the increasing demands of the job. The energy and motivation with which they approach their work are driven by this passion and thus allows them to perform their work with vigor.

Vigor

Vigor as defined by Harvey (2002) is the “energy of actions and is enacted largely out of a passion to make a difference. This energy of vigor takes the form of the mental, physical and emotional exertion demonstrated by school leaders in the performance of their jobs” (p.32). The Principals' experiences with the day-to-day activities of their jobs and the stressors that come along with these were shared throughout the interview process. While the reality of the demanding nature of the job appeared to cause feelings of high stress and frustration, the

principals, nonetheless, consistently expressed feeling energized, enthusiastic, and positive about their work.

Joe related how he approaches his work, “with energy, commitment, and a sense of purpose. This helps guide my work.” He also made a connection between the energy he expends in doing his work and the purpose behind it.

I feel a sense of purpose. I feel that the work I am doing is important work. If you keep that in front of you and if you understand that, then I think it helps you to maintain the kind of energy, the kind of interest, and certainly the kind of commitment that you need to have in order to stay productive.

Nathan also expressed his enthusiasm for his work, which is driven by the goals he has for his school. He shared that his students and teachers help him perform the job with energy and zeal. He is also very happy in his role and does not intend to leave until the work is done.

The thing is right now we have more work to do. And I think we have two more years of work to do. And maybe we have three or four. I want to stay here until the work is done as long as the staff will have me. I am so happy with what I am doing right here right now. It’s awesome. I love it.

Greg described how he enjoys being around students and visiting classrooms and spending time listening to teachers’ dialogue about student learning. He finds this invigorating and encouraging because of the potential that it has on impacting the lives of kids.

First of all, you know, it’s the interactions with the kids. Lots of the sitting in and watching the teachers collaborate. I mean I’ve seen some of the best professional conversations I’ve ever seen in my life and it just is great. It almost takes your breath away because you know what it’s going to do for kids in the classroom. You watch them

wrestle with an issue and you listen to them talk about how they can solve it. That kind of professional dialogue is really fun and exciting.

Among the middle school and elementary school principals, there were similar discussions about the drive to touch the lives of students and teachers and the energy and enthusiasm for carrying out this work. Cathy shared that the opportunity to influence the lives of 700-plus students on a daily basis is an incredible responsibility. “I have a responsibility to do this well. I take the responsibility seriously and am driven to ensure that they have the best experiences possible, academic and social.”

Scott was also very forthcoming about his approach to the work he does with students and teachers. “I get enjoyment and fulfillment out of my job.” He also referred to the importance of relationships. “The relationship piece with people fills you back up as you go through the day and go through the school year. The feedback you get from kids . . . being able to be in a situation where you can help them. That’s fulfilling”.

Brian, too, finds that the improvements he sees in student learning validate his work and encourage him to continue with the focus of getting better and better at serving kids. His teachers, some of whom have been in the ranks for over 20 years, are learning how to work in an environment that is a more restrictive than they are accustomed to as well as learning different ways of teaching. Brian derives a sense of renewed enthusiasm for his work when his efforts to help teachers grow and move in new directions result in improved services for students.

Nancy’s love of working with children and the passion she brings to this work keep her energized throughout her day. When asked to describe how she approaches her work, Nancy shared what she believes others might see. “Probably people would say ‘passionately’. I mean I hope it looks like passion and not just wild, random hyperactivity. But I’m fairly passionate

about what I do.” Her words, “wild, random hyperactivity”, paint a vivid picture of the energy Harvey (2002) refers to when he writes, “...vigor is the actual energy of one’s actions and comes from one’s passionate concern for the welfare of others” (p.33).

Both David and Rick talked about enjoying the work they do with students. They especially enjoy the challenges of the work and being there to support their teachers as they move toward higher student achievement. The busyness of their daily experiences in the school system is not only characterized by the reality of everything that happens, but also by their belief and passion for the work. Rick states, “I like helping people. The kids are invigorating. I enjoy challenges”. David also finds being around kids “gratifying” as well as being there to be a “cheerleader” for his staff. The desire to impact the lives of students, teachers, and their communities drives what they do on a daily basis. Hence, what they do, how they do it, and why they do it is driven by the energy generated from their passion for serving their schools.

In discussing vigor as it relates to the passion they bring to the job, the recurring theme in this study was the importance of the work that principals do and the passion for serving students, staff, and parents in order to make a difference. The vigor or energy these principals bring to their work was continually tied to their passion and, as Nancy stated, to their “sense of vocational purpose with kids”. The challenging nature of the principalship calls for people who are not only passionate and energized about the job but also able to carry out the work with skill and talent.

Facility

Professionally vital principals according to Harvey (2002) possess facility and match it well with the passion and vigor they bring to the arena. He proposes that facility or the skill acquired through the course of their careers serves to enhance principals’ performance and thus,

contribute to overall professional vitality. Thus, facility is defined as “the ability to effectively harness the energy of one’s passion into actions that display the savvy and confidence of a craftsman” (Harvey, 2002, p.35).

The traits of an effective principal not only include being an efficient and savvy building manager, but also having the ability to utilize data to make decisions about instruction, knowing how to provide quality professional development for teachers and staff, and being able to facilitate change. This means principals must be skilled in working with people and bringing them together around student learning. Also critical is having a comprehensive understanding about curriculum, content, and evidence-based pedagogical practices that contribute to improved student learning. Further, to know is not enough. They have to be able to facilitate the actions necessary to implement new ways of teaching and collaborating among their staff (EWA, 2001). Bottoms & O’Neill (2001) see the principal as the key player in school improvement.

Today’s principal must be prepared to focus time, attention and effort on changing what students are taught, how they are taught, and what they are learning. This formidable challenge demands a new breed of school leaders, with skills and knowledge far greater than those expected of ‘school managers’ in the past. (p.6)

Professionally vital principals perform the aforementioned with skill even in the midst of frustrations, stress, conflict, and the fast-paced, high stakes environment. In other words, these principals clearly experience and struggle with the stressfulness of their jobs, but they do so with the confidence that they possess the skills, knowledge, and the wherewithal to accomplish the task. The principals in the present study shared their perspectives about how they do their work and what it means to them to be successful. Only one of the principals, David, principal of Browne Elementary, elaborated on struggling with feelings of inadequacy brought about by the

tumultuous work environment of schools, which is characterized by the demand to do more for student learning. Even so, David believes he is doing a good job.

It's not that you're not doing a good job, it's just the expectations are so high in order to feel like you're doing a good job. How do you get it all done in a day and feel like you've done a good job? Even though you've done all the things and take pride in your work. But you still feel like you should be doing more because the expectation is out there.

While it appears that David does not feel he performs his job well, at the same time he is cognizant of the effort and skill he puts into it and his desire to achieve and continue the quest for a rich educational environment for his students and staff. He spoke to this when he shared examples of collaboration with his teachers and his role in facilitating conversation around data, teaching, and learning.

What I do here is talk a lot about all of us supporting each other, working together...climb[ing] the hill a little bit at a time. So every week when we have collaboration on Thursdays, we look at scores, work on [our] book study, or student learning issue that is of concern. We do this every week in order to get a little bit better at what we're being asked to do for our kids. We have a terrific instructional leadership team. They help make decisions about staff development so it's a shared leadership.

Hence, although David may not feel completely competent, he does demonstrate the facility to perform his job well. One would actually argue that David is, in fact, confident. He believes he is doing a good job. His struggle, understandably so, is associated more so with the ever-increasing demands placed on the principal than the quality of his work.

The other principals all felt quite confident and skilled in their work. Cathy talked about the time constraints and how they impact her sense of being able to accomplish everything; however, she believes she is adept at garnering the “collective wisdom” of others to figure things out. “I also know I have the ability to get others engaged in work that’s difficult”. This is a component of the “craftsmanship” Harvey (2002) refers to where the leader knows what to do in a given situation and how to do it. Cathy engages the support and skills of her staff and knows how to do it and for what reasons.

Nancy also emphasized knowing that she can do the job. She referred to using differentiated leadership whereby she maintains the same vision and goals for everyone but handles situations differently according to the individual needs of the people involved and the factors unique to the issue.

I really enjoy differentiated administration where you’re constantly having the same value and the same vision for your staff and your students while treating different challenges and different pieces with an understanding of what you think needs to happen that moment. I guess part of it is being able to anticipate where the current is going and then either you’re riding the wave or you might be paddling upstream for a while and just kind of being able to move with things.

Hence, Nancy believes she is able to discern how to approach situations and handle them accordingly. She demonstrates skill in responding appropriately to what is happening by recognizing the uniqueness of each issue and taking this into consideration as she decides how to proceed.

Joe feels very confident about his work and the way in which he carries out the daily tasks associated with managing a school along with facilitating change through dialogue, learning about pedagogy, staying focused on the vision, building relationships, and being able to move in and out of situations with ease and a sense of efficacy. When in the midst of the hectic environment of the school system, Joe is able to step back and self-assess in order to stay productive and effective.

So [when] you wonder whether you're doing a good job, that's when I have to sit down and say, 'OK, time to get grounded. Why I am here? What are my priorities? What's my vision for my school? How do I get back where I need to be?' The best thing I can do is get out there with the kids. I find it's very cathartic for me. Again, you have to just be able to cull away through that stuff and get to the essence of the job.

Harvey (2002) also presents the concept of facility as principals' ability to "think on their feet and learn by doing" (p.36). Such is the case for Rick. He gets his sense of efficacy from knowing that he can respond to a situation at a moment's notice and do so effectively. He believes his ability to utilize his skills effectively has been developed through his experiences in the principalship. "My time and experience on the job certainly has helped me to deal with things more effectively and efficiently." He goes on to further define what it means to him to be an effective principal and that he feels he is doing a good job.

Ultimately, to be an effective principal, people have to be able to count on you for different things. Sometimes they count on you to be the instructional leader. Sometimes they count on you to have heat in their room. Sometimes they count on you to listen when they're having a difficult time in their personal lives. [*pauses*] I feel like I do a good job.

Scott also sees his years in school administration as key in helping him become more effective. He has acquired better communication skills and has a deeper understanding of what it means to do people work, as such is the nature of being a school principal.

I think for me now I rely probably more on experience. I look at it differently than I did when I entered the principalship. The more I've gotten into it the more I've understood that it's working with people. It's the ability to build consensus among a group of people. It's the ability to use sound judgment to move people along. It's the ability to treasure and value people and understand that there's a lot of different ways to get things done.

Nathan approaches his work thoughtfully and effectively utilizes his resources with the focus always on making sure that the decisions he makes or the steps he takes impact his school's objectives. In fact, he describes himself as being "extraordinarily confident in my learning/preparation and even more confident in my ability to work with others, be creative, and learn new things."

Brian maintains a focus on the overarching goals of his school so that when things come at him, he is able to handle them effectively. "What I compare it to is an air traffic controller. There are things coming all the time and you have to keep your cool and manage everything and see patterns and all that." By keeping it all in perspective and recognizing the patterns, Brian is able to draw on his knowledge and experience to respond appropriately. "I guess after having been a principal as long as I have I'm more comfortable kind of knowing how to work the gray areas."

The principals in this study clearly face daunting challenges in their roles. The demands of the job and the human element of the work that is involved fills their days with unexpected

and sometimes volatile situations to which they must be able to respond and address effectively. They identified the stressors and how the stress manifests itself in the form of emotional frustrations, anxiety, desperation, feelings of inadequacy and sometimes heartbreak. What makes the difference for these principals? The data collected in this study suggest that the passion for the students and the mission to improve their educational experiences along with the energy expended as a result of this passion in the form of actions that further their efforts, and the skill with which they do it all combine to create the presence of professional vitality in the lives of these principals. Furthermore, these principals not only experience passion, vigor, and facility, they enjoy job satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction

For the purposes of this study, the definition of job satisfaction follows Harvey's (2002) description. He cites Locke (1976) as defining this term using the following words, " 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences.' " (p.37).

Much has been researched about stress and burnout in the principalship. In chapter 2, the review of the literature, characteristics associated with burnout include three dimensions, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur when levels of stress associated with working in service oriented fields are high and unpredictable due to the significant amount of work related stressors present in the environment (Maslach & Jackson, 1984). The principalship is mired with stressors that impact principals' work and personal lives. Harvey (2002) contends that when principals are professionally vital, they experience job satisfaction, which is in opposition to feelings related to the three dimensions of burnout and consequently, can help principals maintain their passion, vigor, and facility.

Analysis of interview data resulted in coding for job satisfaction when the principals used words, phrases, or sentences that could be connected to the idea of job satisfaction. They used terms or phrases such as “the job is worthwhile”, “positive feedback”, “support from others”, and words that described their feelings about the job such as “love”, “enjoy”, “happy”, “gratifying” “would choose this profession again” and “great career”. To further illustrate job satisfaction, the principals in this study all expressed a love for what they do. They enjoy working with students and adults and find it to be hard work but also very rewarding. The satisfaction they get from knowing they are impacting the lives of children may offset the struggles they experience when having to deal with the demands of their jobs.

Joe was very forthcoming about the reality of the job’s demands but also expressed that he would not choose another profession. He enjoys working with students, finding it very rewarding and fulfilling.

This is where I want to be. I feel the most grounded when I am with students whether it’s at lunch, in the classroom, or activities and that is so important to me, so valuable to me, that I can’t sacrifice that. So I’ve never, never, been or had any kind of desire to do anything else.

Joe also spoke of the importance of receiving validation from the district leadership for his work. In fact, he shared that knowing that what he does makes a difference “and [*emphasis on the word and*] that it is appreciated” makes his job worthwhile. He went further, stating, “The idea of retirement frightens me!”

Cathy also expressed how she appreciates the praise and affirmation she receives from staff, supervisors and students. “When a parent says, ‘thank you.’ When a student says, ‘I know

you believe in me.’ When a staff member has said, ‘You’ve made me grow more than anyone else.’ It makes me want to continue.”

Nancy also finds the work very rewarding. She stated several times how much she loves her work, but also emphasized that feeling supported by her supervisor, colleagues, and staff was important. Another thing she mentioned was how satisfying it is when students know her and will respond to her when they are having problems.

I measure success . . . if I can get the most needy kid with the most angry, angry, attitude to come with me without twisting his arm and just with love, I know that I’m doing the right thing, and I’m in the right place. If I can help make someone be a better teacher, a better student, that makes me want to be a better leader. So it becomes kind of this positive feedback loop where I’m impacting someone positively so they’re impacting someone positively, and that comes back positive to me. It’s all about that energy you generate. So that keeps me going.

The feedback Nancy receives from teachers is also very important and makes the job satisfying. Nancy described an incident where a teacher shared how much she had influenced her and helped her become a better teacher.

I once had a teacher tell me that I made her want to be a better teacher, that I gave her the *ganas*, [*Spanish word for desire or drive*], and . . . that was the most humbling and amazing compliment that anyone could give me and that made me realize . . . I was in the right place.

Nancy stressed the value she sees in her work and her belief in its importance which makes it exciting and rewarding. She describes the job as an “opportunity to work in an environment where you see tomorrow’s future today . . . that you are humble enough and

honored enough to be serving that population. I love coming to work in the morning. I can't wait to get here." It is this sense of mission and service that Nancy finds rewarding about her job.

The passion for the job, the vigor with which they carry out their work, and the facility or skills they possess that enable them to do the job effectively allow these principals to feel satisfied with their work and find it rewarding and worthwhile. Nathan explained that his skills and knowledge help him lead his staff in a direction that is beneficial for students and consequently, he gets enjoyment out of seeing the progress and growth that is made. "Seeing progress towards our goals makes the work worthwhile." He also expressed appreciation for the support he receives from his superintendent. "The neat thing is that this superintendent is a listener. He's very interested in hearing what the system is trying to tell him . . . [that's] . . . also good." He emphasized how important it is for him to stay the course alongside a supportive staff. "I want to stay here until the work is done as long as the staff will have me. I am so happy with what I am doing right here right now." The combination of his skills, his passion for the work, and the energy he expends doing the work render results that cause Nathan to feel the work is rewarding, enjoyable, and worth doing. Consequently he is focused on moving forward and continuing the work.

Besides enjoying the challenge, Rick also appreciates the support and positive feedback he receives from his staff. The positive feedback fuels feelings of seeing the job as meaningful and subsequently can lead to a sense of fulfillment in doing this work.

People on staff say to me that I am doing a good job. Enough do this and they're thoughtful. They're thoughtful enough to stop by every once in a while say, 'I know it's

really hard and you're doing a good job, thanks.' It reminds me what I need to do. It's meaningful.

Knowing the work is hard and embracing it is something Rick focuses on when he describes how he derives satisfaction from his job. "It's the drive for excellence. Anyone who is in education and certainly anyone who is a principal, [is] not going to be satisfied if [they're] not doing a good job." To feel that he is doing a good job includes the feedback and support that comes from staff and supervisors.

The other principals shared similar thoughts about how they find the work satisfying and what makes it so. Greg admitted that much of the satisfaction that comes from working as a principal is "intangible". The work "doesn't happen or get completed right away." It is manifested through collaborative dialogue with teachers around student learning, asking students what they need, and spending time with them in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. These interactions are meaningful for Greg and make the job satisfying, ". . . watching the teachers collaborate . . . it almost takes your breath away because you know what it's going to do for kids in the classroom."

The feedback, the support, and the combination of passion, vigor, and skill clearly impact the level of satisfaction these principals get from doing the work of school principal. The personal connection with students and staff that occur through daily interactions make a difference as well. The feedback does not need to be direct. Interacting with students and staff and helping them work through a situation, solve a problem, or simply listen and be there are enough to evoke positive feelings of serving, being effective and consequently experience fulfillment from doing this work. As Scott describes, he does not believe he could continue if he did not feel that he could affect the lives of those he works with in a positive way.

I think it's the feedback you get from parents, from kids, from staff members and certainly from central office people as well. That's fulfilling for me. On a daily basis the thing that keeps me coming back . . . when I got here today, I had an early morning meeting but after that I went and hung out before school with our students up in the lunchroom and just had a chance to talk to several kids and it ran the gamut. We had a kid that's going through a tough time at home. I was able to help. [I] had a staff member with an issue that came and visited with me up there. That personal connection is the thing that kind of keeps me coming back. If I didn't have that I don't think I'd be as satisfied in the job.

Job satisfaction was described by each of the principals through the use of similar words or phrases that illustrated a sense of happiness and enthusiasm for the job. Likewise the belief that they influence the lives of the people they work with in a positive way was repeatedly stated as something that makes the job worthwhile and meaningful, two qualities that Harvey (2002) connects to job satisfaction. Indeed, without job satisfaction, Harvey (2002) contends that the other three elements, passion, vigor, and facility could be negatively impacted if a principal is not experiencing satisfaction in his work. Clearly, feelings of accomplishment and fulfillment and knowing they are making a difference and that their work is appreciated are important for these principals and contribute to their persistence in the job.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the themes that emerged as a result of examining the data. These were demand on time, accountability, and professional vitality and persistence. Demand on time was consistently voiced and, thus, emerged as a theme that was, in effect, embedded throughout the conversations that took place with the principals. The frustration with not enough time to get

the job done was shared by all of the principals. Giving up one thing in order to address another was a recurring issue that these principals encountered.

Accountability was the second theme discussed in this chapter. Principals are accountable to parents, teachers, district administration, and state and federal governments. The main focus of accountability that these principals discussed was that on student achievement. This was repeatedly shared as a key contributor to the pressures of the job in today's educational environment. Again, time was brought up as an issue affecting the ability to meet the student learning targets under AYP as measured by the WASL. Being accountable to so many different groups was repeatedly brought up. Literature around the increasingly demanding role of the principal as it relates to student achievement was referenced and supported the analysis.

The third theme, professional vitality and persistence, was presented in the last section. Professional vitality and the four qualities that comprise it were discussed alongside examples of the principals' statements that coincided with Harvey's (2002) definition of this construct. The four qualities are passion, vigor, facility, and job satisfaction. The principals were not prompted to use these terms for describing their experiences. Rather, the principals' responses to the interview questions were analyzed to see if the words or phrases they used might fall under any of the four qualities. In some instances, the principals used the words *passion* and *satisfaction*.

Findings showed that these principals are passionate about their work. They are energized, and thus, experience a sense of vigor as a result of the passion they have for the job. All of the principals in this study believe they have the skills to do the job well. Lastly, all of these principals find the job satisfying for a number of reasons. The positive feedback and support they receive from their staff and district leadership were seen as important for them to feel happy in their jobs. They also mentioned that they find meaning and purpose in what they

do and consequently, this makes the job satisfying. If they feel they are making a difference and that students are benefiting, then the job is worthwhile. Ultimately, this contributes to their persistence in the job.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section provides a review of the research problem and purpose of the study. The second section presents the similarities and differences in experiences between the elementary, middle, and high school principals. Discussion of the data analysis is presented in the third section. The fourth and fifth sections present the summary and implications.

Review of the Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

The problem addressed by this study is the need to expand on the current research in the area of stress in the principalship in the context of current education reform and the role that professional vitality plays in a school principal's persistence in the job. Indeed, the lack of research exploring the perspectives of principals' who thrive and remain enthusiastic, hopeful, and fulfilled in their jobs affirmed the rationale for carrying out the present study.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn about the practices of school principals in their role and their perspectives on dealing with the daily challenges of their jobs. Further, it sought to expand on the study by Harvey (2002), which focused on professional vitality as a construct for understanding what may contribute to school principals' ability to thrive in their jobs. Harvey (2002) used the construct of professional vitality to frame the discussion of principals' passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction in order to learn more about why some principals persist in the job and what conditions exist that may foster professional vitality. Professional vitality is defined by Harvey (2002) as "a characteristic demonstrated by individuals who are able to consistently perform the work of their chosen profession with passion, vigor, facility, and satisfaction" (p. 28).

The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are the stressors in the principalship in light of the ever-increasing demands school principals face under current state education reform? (2) What coping strategies do principals use? (3) How do principals perceive these strategies assist them? (4) Why do they persist in their positions? (5) What role does professional vitality play in their choice to persist in their jobs?

While the literature is replete with research on the nature of stress and the principalship (Allison 1997, Fields, 2005; Metzger, 2003; Whitaker, 1996) as well as speculation about a principal shortage (Armstrong, 2004; Caddell & Malone, 2000; Eckman, 2004; Celio et al., 2003; Whitaker, 2001), much of this research provides quantitative data on levels of stress and burnout tied to the demands of the job as they relate to the daily operations and interactions with various constituencies, which include the impact of the increasing expectation of the principal as instructional leader (Whitaker, 1996, Metzger, 2003). The use of a qualitative approach in this study led to a different, perhaps, more in-depth exploration on what the experience is like for nine school principals in eastern Washington. Further, the construct of professional vitality offered an opportunity to explore the principalship through a different lens, one that takes on a positive outlook and seeks to understand what contributes to persistence on the job for principals who are viewed as successful by their supervisors and the broader school community.

Similarities and Differences in Experiences

Description of these principals' experience of stress on the job and the stressors that contribute to this were shared through the detailed and vivid accounts they provided in the interview process. They also related their experience of professional vitality through their own words, which were categorized under each of the attributes: passion, vigor, facility, and job satisfaction. Similarities and differences were present in the experiences of these principals with

respect to the grade level span, elementary, middle, or high school. A description of these follows.

Similarities

All of the principals provided rich descriptions of their experiences of stress on the job. They all work with staff, students, and parents. Conflicts that arise regarding discipline, attendance, and relationships among students and students, students and teachers, and teachers and parents were present in the work life of each of these principals. Likewise, the expectation of responding to district administration needs was a source of stress for all of the principals. Building management including maintenance such as cleanliness and proper heating, budgetary issues, scheduling, and reporting deadlines were also stressors that all of the principals mentioned. The concerns over student achievement, teacher professional development and capacity, and their own growth as instructional leaders also proved to be a significant source of stress for these principals. All of the principals consistently spoke about how increasing demands for student achievement impacted them emotionally and thus, caused feeling of stress. This was true of all three levels of the K-12 span in this study. It did not matter whether it was an elementary school doing well on state assessments in an affluent community, an elementary school in a high poverty area not doing so well, or a high school where concerns over graduation requirements loomed large.

Each of the principals shared similar approaches to managing the stress they experienced on the job. Techniques such as making sure to take time off, spending time with family and friends, and having interests outside of school were offered by all of the principals. Also important were such activities as reading for enjoyment and taking time for exercise. Keeping things in perspective and drawing from experience were also common among these principals for

addressing stressful situations. All were cognizant of the importance of keeping a balance between their personal and professional lives and took action to ensure they addressed this for themselves.

With respect to the attributes of professional vitality, every principal exhibited characteristics that could be categorized under passion, vigor, facility, and job satisfaction. They all spoke of love for the job and being passionate about serving students and families. They found themselves energized to work toward improving the educational experiences of their students because they care deeply about them. They all believe they have the skills and savvy to carry out their work effectively and find the job satisfying. All of them mentioned the importance of receiving positive feedback from those around them including students, staff, and district leadership. They said it made the job meaningful and kept them coming back to it every day. They especially find purpose in knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of students “and that it is appreciated”. While mostly similarities existed between the principals’ experiences, there were some differences worth noting.

Differences

In describing stressful experiences, the major difference between the three levels of was the issue of time that high school principals spend on the job. This is due to the nature of this position as it relates to the numerous school events around athletics, student clubs, and other activities such as choir and band. That’s not to say these do not exist at the elementary and middle school levels. It is simply that the time commitment presented by these types of activities is at a much larger scale at the high school level.

Another difference is the pressure that comes with the requirement that all students must pass the 10th grade WASL in order to graduate. This has parents, district leaders, teachers, and

students worried; hence, the high school principals experience a lot of stress around this issue, more so than the elementary and middle school principals. They spend a lot of time listening to complaints and concerns from the various stakeholders, responding to the media, and as Scott put it, “being scrutinized by everyone” when WASL scores are announced.

The size of the high schools also contributed to more stress for these principals than for the elementary or middle school principals. The high schools serve close to 2,000 students while the elementary schools served up to 485 students and the middle schools up to 820. This difference is significant and poses more opportunities for stressful situations to arise even though the high schools have more support staff for the administrator.

Additionally, the age groups of students that the middle and high schools serve impact the nature of student discipline. This can take on a variety of forms including fighting, truancy, and most noted by the principals, issues related to student drug and alcohol use. Dealing with these kinds of issues troubled the principals and sometimes caused feelings of despair and sadness as Cathy related when she said, “It breaks my heart”. Hence, while the differences are few, the degree of stress that these differences posed for the principals is worth noting and as the data showed was readily shared by the principals.

Discussion

Harvey (2002) sought to explore the relationship between role stress and professional vitality using an 18-item scale that measured professional vitality. The goal was to test for validity and reliability of the Professional Vitality Scale and how it might inform educators about factors that assist principals in thriving in their demanding jobs. Results from his study indicated that professional vitality may be a useful construct for understanding the experiences of school

principals and the resources they utilize which impact their ability to remain positive, passionate, and persistent in the job.

The present study sought to expand on the Harvey (2002) study through interviews of nine school principals. The interviews provided the principals the opportunity to share their perspectives about their jobs and their experiences related to stress, coping strategies, and what keeps them going and persisting in the job. The professional vitality characteristics of vigor, facility, passion, and job satisfaction were used as coding categories in the analysis of the principals' statements when asked questions related to their persistence in the job.

Initial sorting of the data rendered factors that make the job stressful for these principals and the strategies they use for managing and coping with the stress. These data illustrated these principals' experiences, which provided a backdrop for subsequent findings as the process of examining the data evolved. Further analysis of the data yielded the themes: demand on time, accountability, and personal characteristics of the principals related to the nature of professional vitality and its connection to their persistence in the principalship.

First, every school principal in this study offered myriad anecdotes illustrating the stressful nature of the job and the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. These challenges were not limited to the daily ins and outs of running a school such as student issues, parent demands, district level directives, community expectations, and teacher needs. From their perspective, the principals' own appreciation for the variables for which they had no control such as socio-economic, family and societal issues, and teachers' willingness to rise to the occasion or lack thereof and the impact these have on their ability to move a school toward improvement were not seen as important factors worth considering by other groups such as parents, state and federal constituents, or the media when evaluating their schools' performance on assessments.

These concerns contributed to feelings of frustration, defeatism, and exasperation. The notion of being the “middle man” negotiating and mediating the various conflicts that arise from serving numerous constituencies was also a tremendous source of stress and pressure for these principals. However, the challenges of the job were not enough to make them leave the job.

What they did to offset these feelings and manage the levels of stress associated with the high stakes environment in which they work included taking time for themselves during the course of the school day, spending time with kids in the hallways, at lunch, in the classroom, and enjoying the positive experiences associated with the professional growth their staff demonstrated after implementing a variety of collaborative strategies for learning together. As David expressed, even though he feels inadequate at times, he stays focused on the kids and strives to be the “cheerleader” for the school as it inches along toward improvement both in student learning and teacher capacity.

Other strategies for coping with the stress included friendships with colleagues, spending time with family, and taking time to exercise, doing something enjoyable such as playing a musical instrument, reading for pleasure, taking vacations, and simple things like treating themselves to Starbucks once a week. Acknowledging the importance of staying balanced as described by Nathan was also key for many of the principals. Staying balanced was different for each of the principals. Sometimes this took the form of making sure to eat well during the school day, accepting the nature of the job as “not for the faint of heart”, sitting down and reflecting on their purpose for doing what they do, and staying organized. All of these strategies helped them manage the day-to-day stressors of this increasingly demanding job and reinforced the characteristics of professional vitality as revealed in the analysis of the data.

The first two themes discussed fall within two areas: time constraints and accountability for improved student learning by all students as outlined by state and federal mandates. These two issues were also seen as significantly contributing to the experience of stress, exasperation, and feelings of inadequacy. Every principal shared the frustration with the issue of limited time to “get it all done”. Equally disconcerting was the pressure to get all students to standard. Further, the accountability demands were explicitly listed as sources of significant stress. In this study, time constraints and accountability demands emerged as clear themes across all three levels of the principalship, elementary, middle, and high school.

The third theme the analysis yielded revolved around the characteristics of professional vitality: vigor, facility, passion, and job satisfaction and can be connected to these principals’ persistence on the job. The attribute tied to professional vitality that was most often described by these principals throughout the interview process and without direct prompting was the passion they possess for the job they do for students, teachers, and their communities. The vigor with which the principals do their job and the satisfaction they find in it was attributed to their passion for the work they do. Passion was described as the love for the kids, the sense of purpose, and the meaning they find in the service they provide their students, staff, parents, and communities as they strive to achieve improved learning for the students in their schools. Facility or the skill and knowledge they developed throughout their careers that enable them to do the job also contributed to their sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.

While the qualities of professional vitality appear to exist in the lives of these principals as personal characteristics, they also stressed the importance of being supported and validated in their work by those around them. The praise and appreciation received from staff, administration, and students was referred to as something that made a difference for them in

feeling competent, confident, and satisfied in their work. This support also contributed to their persistence on the job as Joe eloquently put it “the feedback I receive is essential to my efficacy...knowing that what I am doing makes a difference and that it is appreciated”.

The findings also show that even in the midst of challenges and feelings of defeat or inadequacy, the principals were still able to express satisfaction with the job and a desire to continue in the role. They were able to articulate their ability to do the job well although at any given moment they could face new seemingly insurmountable challenges such as dealing with issues of a student’s substance abuse problem. The “heartbreak” they might feel about something as serious as this could be mitigated by the resources they could provide their students, which would reduce the amount of suspension time and consequently get them back in school “where they belong” sooner. Issues such as these that are out of their control were not enough to make them give up.

These principals possessed the passion for making a difference in students’ lives, the facility or wherewithal to handle situations, and the vigor with which to act effectively. Subsequently, they experienced meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in their jobs. Their perspectives support the notion of professional vitality, and its role in helping them persist in the midst of a job characterized by turbulent times in education reform and the everyday managerial demands as well as the unpredictability of interactions between the people they serve.

Summary

The analysis of the interview data illustrate the reality of the principalship in today’s high stakes testing environment, which is largely driven by federal mandates such as Adequately Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act as measured by state assessments such as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The principals in this study provided rich,

detailed, perspectives about their experience of stress related to the daily aspects of the job as well as the pressures and stress resulting from these current education reform mandates. The nine principals shared about what they do to cope, what helps them move forward, and central to the purpose of this study, they gave vivid descriptions of the way(s) in which they find job fulfilling, enjoyable, challenging, and worthwhile. As Harvey (2002) states, professional vitality as a construct can help educators "...understand how principals [can] thrive and not merely survive under stressful job conditions" (p. 122). In this way, their perspectives may add to the current literature and research on the principalship.

Implications

While this study offers the perspectives from a small number of principals, which is one of its limitations, the results not only show that stress is experienced at very high levels in today's principalship but also that it is possible to experience fulfillment, enjoyment, and a desire to persist in this increasingly demanding career. The rich contributions from these principals can add to the current literature on principals' experiences of stress as well as to the topics of principal shortage and burnout from a more positive point of view. To this end, the characteristics exhibited by these principals who choose to remain in the field, offer an opportunity for educational researchers to approach the concern around stress and burnout in the principalship using the construct of a different, more positive perspective, that of professional vitality. Additionally, given the concern about principal shortage, future research could address the need for supporting the professional vitality of principals currently in the profession.

Furthermore, research could be well-served by more in-depth studies of the lives of principals who have been in the position for specific periods of time or exploring specific groups of principals such as male, female, diverse groups, locations such as rural, urban, inner city, or

size of district or school. Narrowly defined studies such as these could provide a more thorough understanding of the school principal experience for different groups of leaders. Further, it "... could increase the understanding of what (and how) personal and contextual factors influence professional vitality.... [and] add richness to the understanding of this construct" (Harvey, 2002, p. 137).

Professional developers might also use this research for designing trainings for current principals that focus on supporting them in maintaining or developing a sense of professional vitality. Professional development can include opportunities for principals to reflect upon their experience and their belief about their leadership and how it ties to the attributes of professional vitality, which may help them find renewed hope and energy for staying the course. This could involve learning about each attribute and the extent to which they experience each of these in their professional lives. Further, principals can explore ways in which to foster the presence of vigor, facility, passion, and job satisfaction in their lives. In light of the current literature focusing on the presence of stress and burnout in this profession, professional development activities that foster professional vitality could help alleviate some of the issues related to stress and burnout. However, professional developers need to create this type of training and district administrators such as school superintendents or other principal supervisors need to provide the time and resources for principals to participate in such professional development.

Preservice principal programs could find this information helpful in assisting aspiring principals as they learn about the profession and the reality of the stressful experiences involved in the job and how professional vitality can play a role in helping them be successful and persevere in this challenging career. Learning about themselves, and their reason for seeking the position can prepare these new principals to take on the challenges with vigor, passion, and

facility. In this way, new principals may be more likely to remain professionally vital throughout their careers.

Lastly, self-reflection and assessment can support principals, both current and pre-service, in their quest for understanding the role and the meaning and purpose of the job. All of the principals in this study shared that they found tremendous value in having the opportunity to share their stories. They felt validated, and it reaffirmed the importance of their work. If opportunities are available for our principals to take time for reflection and learning about their own sense of vigor, facility, and passion for their work, then they may have a better chance of maintaining professional vitality throughout their careers.

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Appendix
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Susana Reyes-González, sussusana@yahoo.com (509) 945-1161.

RESEARCHERS' STATEMENT

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You can ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or about this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

The purpose of this study is to explore principals' experiences of stress on the job. The expected benefits include informing educational leaders about principals' experiences of stress on the job in light of current education reform. This could impact the nature of future professional development focused on the effective management of stress on the job for current and prospective administrators as they consider the principalship. It can also provide strategies for retaining school principals.

PROCEDURES

I will ask you several interview questions related to the research question stated above. I will audiotape the conversation. The interview will take no more than an hour and half. You may refuse to answer any question and you may stop the interview at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential. I will be the only person who will have access to the interview transcript. If you wish, you may ask to see the interview transcript.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

This study involves interviews. There are no anticipated risks; however, there is a possibility that participants may experience discomfort in sharing about stressful experiences related to their job. If you experience any discomfort or stress from the interview, you may stop it at any time. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in his research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have general questions about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant, I can call the WSU Institutional Review Board at 509-335-9661. This project has been reviewed and approved for human participation by the WSU IRB.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date