

The Impact of Dialogue and Narrative on Aspiring and Novice Principals

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## Abstract

The study aims to present the perceptions of three novice principals. Data collected for this study were captured from one-to-one dialogues and interviews. This study presents a research-and-practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership theories and practice. Moreover, this article resonates with the *2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*. Research suggests that implementing field-based research conducted by aspiring school principals equips them with a real-world view. Aspiring school principals need to master “timely knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and other characteristics required of educational leaders” to achieve real student success in present-day schools (NPBE, 2015, p.5). Thus, research conducted by aspiring Hispanic school principals about Hispanic novice principals is a timely development since “the contribution of Latina/o educators and administrators in schools is significant when acknowledging that Latina/o students represent the fastest growing ethnic group in US schools” (Murkami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse & Bryne-Jimenez, 2016, p.281).

*Keywords:* leadership, principal, qualitative, collaboration, transformational

### The Impact of Dialogue and Narrative on Aspiring and Novice Principals

Leaders must “learn about their learning” (Van Velsor, 2004, p.208). While there are many definitions of leadership within the educational leadership literature, one that resonates with the spirit of this article is the following: “leadership is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task (Chemers, 2000, p.27). This timely research study conducted by aspiring Hispanic school principals is significant because Latina/o students represent the fastest growing ethnic group in US schools (Murkami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse & Bryne- Jimenez, 2016).

In that case, the first goal of this article is to present a research-and-practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership theories and practice. Second, this study is a collaboration between an educational administration professor, and three graduate students who will embark on their leadership journey. Therefore, this article is at the intersection of theory and practice. Moreover, this article resonates with the *2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBE, 2015)*, because the faculty of this leadership preparation program understand that implementing field-based research conducted by aspiring principals equips future instructional leaders with a real-world view and “timely knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and other characteristics required of educational leaders” to achieve real student success in present-day schools (NPBE, 2015, p.5).

### **Participants**

Recently, a study conducted by McClellan and Casey (2015) addressed the need for principal preparation programs to delve into the transitional pathways that exist from the assistant role to the principalship. In that case, the intent of this study is to present the perceptions of three elementary novice principals captured by three aspiring school principals via

a pre-practicum field-based research experience. Naturally, this study was conducted by aspiring school principals as part of their graduate school experience. The aim of this study was to have aspiring principals conduct research in authentic school settings to learn more about the real-life, day-to-day challenges novice school principals face (Archer, 2005). Relatedly, *novice principal* is being defined as a school principal who is within the first 3 years of his/her principalship (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Purposefully, this study contributes to the field of Education Administration by presenting one research practice that could prepare aspiring principals for their professional pathway. By having aspiring principals have a one-to-one dialogue with a novice school principal, they can learn about the realities, personal skills, and do's and don'ts of the principalship professional pathway. McClellan and Casey (2015) called this process, "an integrated approach of identity, expertise, and adult supervision" (p. 722).

Participant selection was purposeful following Merriam's (1998) suggestion that in a qualitative study, the sample is purposefully selected, small, and somewhat homogeneous. Participants were provided with a full disclosure about this research study and voluntarily gave their consent to participate. The participants were three female novice elementary school principals. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. **Sami**, the first participant, was in her first year as an elementary school principal at the time this study occurred. The second participant, **Letty**, was a third-year elementary school principal. **Monica**, the third participant, was in her second year of her elementary school principalship. Two of the participants (Monica and Letty) were from the same school district. Sami represented a larger more urban school district.

### **Comparisons of Schools' Demographics**

One characteristic that these novice school principals share is their schools' largely homogeneous Hispanic student enrollment. In fact, as depicted in *Table 1*, all three schools have more than 96% Hispanic student enrollment. Additionally, specific demographic data regarding Rocket, and Moon schools as well as teachers' and students' characteristics are displayed in *Table 1*. According to demographic projections nearly one in every four children currently attending schools in the United States is a Latina/o, and this number will more than double by 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Murkami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse, and Byrne-Jimenez (2016) the researchers concluded that teachers and principals of similar backgrounds as the students in increasingly diverse communities, can potentially make a positive impact at closing the achievement gaps.

In that case, Sami, the principal of Rocket Elementary, knows too well that although her school is located in a large urban area in a Texas community, the English language learner (ELL) student population is higher (60.8%) compared to Moon Elementary (34.6%) and Sun Elementary (35.9%). Although, Rocket Elementary is not located along the Texas- Mexico border, based on its ELL data, according to Sami, "*Rocket Elementary had the highest number of English language learners due to a high influx of immigrant students whose parents move to larger urban areas in search of jobs*".

Accordingly, the Texas Education Code Chapter 89.BB and Commissioners Rules are important to highlight since the three schools in this study used one or a combination of these four plans to educate the ELL student population at their respective school.

1. The transitional bilingual/early exit model requires literacy instruction and academic content areas in the student's native language, along with instruction in English oral language. A student in this program exits from Bilingual Education until the end of first grade, and no earlier than two years or later than five years after the student enrolls in school (TEA, 2016, p. 5)
2. The transitional bilingual/late exit is a bilingual program model that serves a

student identified as limited English proficient in both English and Spanish, or another language, and transfers the student to English only instruction” (TEA, 2016, p. 5). A student is eligible to exit this program no earlier than six or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school. The goal of this program is high academic skills in both English and Spanish.

3. The dual language immersion/two-way biliteracy that integrates students proficient in English and students identified as limited English proficient (TEA, 2016).

4. The dual language immersion/one-way biliteracy that integrates students proficient in English and students identified as limited English proficient (TEA, 2016).

Sami, Letty and Monica, as Hispanic principals, agreed that they have the ability to understand the cultural and linguistic challenges associated with Hispanic students.

Researchers suggest that Latino principals are able to understand the challenges often associated with Hispanic students and their cultural and linguistic differences (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Murkami et.al, 2016). Positively speaking, researchers have concluded that Hispanic principals respect and give tribute to the Hispanic students’ immediate and extended family (Gonzalez, 1998; Murkami et al., 2016). Moreover, another characteristic that these three Hispanic principals share is that they honor their students’ culture and respect their aspirational capacity (Yosso, 2006). Aspirational capacity is defined as “hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2006, pg.77). Consequently, Sami, who is the newest principal was also the one that experienced the greatest amount of academic challenges. If we were to focus strictly on the percentage of teachers’ years of experience, Rocket Elementary has the highest percentage of teachers in the 0-5 range of experience (22%), compared to Moon (0%) and Sun’s (54.4%). According to research Hispanic teachers are more likely to have high expectations for students of color and work in highly underrepresented, high-poverty schools (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012).

TABLE 1  
Summary of Novice Principals' Schools

Participant Pseudonym	School Pseudonym	Number of Students	Percentage of Hispanic Students	Percentage of ELL students	Percentage of Students with Free & Reduced Lunch	Teachers Years of Experience 0-5	Teachers Years of Experience 6-10	Teachers Years of Experience 11-20	Teachers Years of Experience 20 or more
Sami	Rocket Elementary	689	96.5%	60.8%	90%	22.8%	22.8%	26.9%	6.9%
Monica	Moon Elementary	615	97.4%	34.6%	67.3%	0	30.8%	46.2%	23.1%
Letty	Sun Elementary	791	98.2%	35.9%	54.4%	6.6%	28.3%	54.4%	10.7%

### Method

This research study utilized a qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) design and methodology. Data for this article were collected from two south Texas borderlands community novice elementary school principals, and one large urban novice school principal. The data were collected by three educational administration graduate student researchers, and their professor. Prior to entering their field-based experiences, the graduate students received Institutional Review Board training presented by their professor. In addition, once all the signed IRB forms and consents were collected, the graduate students started their research work. As co-researchers, the graduate students utilized narrative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to interview the three novice school principals. The researchers used a two-phase approach to gather the participants' experiences. First, they used a 10-question open-ended questionnaire, and then a conversational interview using the same questionnaire. In addition, in order to obtain the voluntary participants' consent, a copy of the open-ended questionnaire was e-mailed to the participants in advance. The researchers' goal was to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the content of the questions. Once the participants agreed to voluntarily participate, the researchers followed up with a face- to-face interview using the same questionnaire, the face-to-face interview allowed

the participants, and the graduate student researchers to expand their experiences. The focus of the face-to-face interviews was to capture the novice principals' personal reflections on the challenges they encountered and experienced during their novice principal year(s).

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from the three open-ended questionnaires and the individual face-to-face interviews were compiled, the professor, and the graduate student researchers using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) to analyze participants' responses. First, each graduate student researcher analyzed his or her own interview transcript and created initial hand-written codes for the participant's responses. Second, each graduate student researcher exchanged transcripts, and created an independent list of codes for the participant's responses. Third, the professor analyzed each interview transcript independently. Finally, the three researchers met, reviewed all the codes to determine inter-coding consistency. Moreover, contradictions were resolved through consensus evaluation. The analyzed data revealed three emerging themes: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and student outcomes. Thus, the emerging themes with illustrative participants' quotes (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010) which provide data descriptors is being presented for the readers' examination.

### **Instructional Leadership**

In a study conducted by Spillane, Camburn and Pareja (2007), the data collected from 52 principals indicated that when the principals are not directly leading an activity, classroom teachers are leading those activities 32% of the time, compared to assistant principals 14.3% of the time. These results suggest that classroom teachers emerge as important stakeholders in the organizational structures and vision of school. Spillane et al. (2007) identify the relationship as *co-leading*. In fact, Spillane et al. (2007) "found that teachers are more likely than assistant



principals and other professional staff to co-perform with principals on matters of curriculum and instruction. Similarly, based on the data collected from Letty, she recognized that the educational goals for the school that she currently leads are extremely high. **Sun Elementary**, a pseudonym, is an Exemplary campus based on its students' academic performance in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test in 2015 (TEA, 2015c). In addition, the campus had been nominated twice for the Blue-Ribbon Schools Award by the Texas Education Agency. The award honors schools for academic excellence and making significant progress in closing the achievement gap. This is the second nomination for Sun Elementary. As a recipient of this prestigious award, it is important that Letty maintain the campus at its current level of academic rigor. During the interview, Letty expanded her plan by explaining the importance of promoting foundational skills such as reading, math, writing, and English speaking. In addition, Letty shared her thoughts related to instructional leadership: *“Our goals are mostly data driven. It is vital to know your students and their demographics, their needs and strengths, in order to set the campus goals. I believe that having high expectations for all students and teachers is a must. Higher level education is an automatic expectation for all students”*.

“Leaders in higher performing schools are distinguished from their counterparts in otherwise similar lower performing schools by their personal involvement in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and teachers (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008, p. 662). As exemplified by Letty, she shared her teacher expectations: *“Each teacher needs to know their classroom demographic data in order to provide those students identified with specific needs the adequate interventions in a timely manner (whether it be academic, psychologically or physically). I focus on data and instructional observations and I believe that when I am seeking*

*to enhance a teacher's classroom practice, I must provide clear expectations. It is important to always monitor the implementation process and provide feedback to teachers in order to set standards for all. Observational and academic data will provide a better input on the impact of the classroom practices".* Letty's instructional leadership characteristics are aligned to the 2015 *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL, 2015) because she is implementing coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote the mission, vision, and core values of the school by encouraging high expectations for students' learning that are aligned with academic standards and culturally responsive teaching (PSEL, Standard 4).

In addition, Monica, the principal at **Moon Elementary**, shared the following thoughts regarding instructional leadership: *"Teachers are extremely important. I provide feedback to teachers whether it relates to students' data or teachers' evaluation. I believe in addressing the issues that might be impeding student achievement immediately. As an instructional leader, my main focus is the students. It is unbelievable to manage meetings and provide feedback to students on an individual basis. However, with the help of my assistant principal we meet with students after assessments to provide feedback and encourage them to excel in their studies. This practice provides students with a sense of responsibility and ownership".* Monica's instructional practices reflect her knowledge of creating and sustaining a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community (PSEL, Standard 5).

"In general, the data comparisons revealed that there are substantial qualitative differences between the leadership of otherwise similar high-and-low performing schools, and that those differences appear to matter for student outcomes. The leadership in the higher

performing schools was reported to be, among other things, more focused on teaching and learning, to be a stronger instructional resource for teachers, and to be more active participants in and leaders of teacher learning and development” (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008, pg. 658). For example, Monica shared these thoughts with the graduate student researcher: *“To go above and beyond is what a principal needs to practice during the daily decisions and responsibilities. I believe that going above and beyond as a teacher will make you a strong teacher and sticking to this motto as a principal makes me an effective leader. When addressing issues with students or teachers I believe that I must do more than what is required. At every level of my career my goal has been to lead, to be part of the leadership system. As an educator for ten years I taught at different grade levels because I wanted to be exposed to the vertical alignment of the curriculum. As a principal, I believe that curriculum alignment is essential for student achievement”*.

In the opinion of the researchers, Monica is leading by example and using her own experiential knowledge to empower teachers and students to become independent learners, which is directly connected to aligning systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self (PSEL, Standard 4).

According to Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008), “successful leadership influences teaching and learning through face-to-face relationships and by structuring the way the teachers do their work” (p. 660). In that case Sami, the novice principal at **Rocket Elementary**, is no exception. She had the following thoughts regarding instructional leadership: *As the principal, I make data-based decisions on a daily basis. All of my actions and decisions are guided by data, and whether they enhance student achievement and teacher performance. I am not the type of instructional leader that does things in a certain manner based on tradition. However,*

*instructional practices that render positive results at this school will continue to be practiced, all other practices that do not render the same results are constantly modified or discontinued.*

In her own leadership style Monica prepares the school and the community for improvement, promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement, instilling mutual commitment and accountability, and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement (PSEL, Standard 10). According to Sami, new practices at her campus are implemented if they are meant to help meet the needs of the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students. If it is a best practice it will support campus efforts to meet the needs of all students. Pressing issues at her campus are to increase teacher capacity as they try to ensure student achievement on standardized testing. While this elementary school is not an improvement required campus, it has seen a decline of about ten points each school year over the past three years. Sami, states that *“the campus went from “Recognized” to barely meeting expectations under the former school administration”*. Furthermore, of all three novice school principals who participated in this study, Sami is the one with the fewest years of experience; she was a first-year principal at the time of this study. Compared to Monica, and Letty, Sami faces the greatest challenges; half of the principal’s staff is new to the profession or the campus, and based on her own analysis of the school’s data *“the students have a weak instructional foundation from three school years of low rigor and expectations”*. According to research on leadership best practices, Sami needs to assess and develop the capacity of staff to assess the value and applicability of emerging educational trends and the findings of research for the school and its improvement (PSEL, Standard 10).

### **Transformational Leadership**

The novice school principals who are at different stages of their leadership journey shared their perspectives about the relationship between leaders and their followers. These three novice school principals report using the motivational, collaborative, and interpersonal skills that are emphasized in transformational leadership. According to McClellan and Casey, “educational leadership scholars know that despite efforts to prepare prescriptively aspiring administrators, much depends on the individual. Leaders must have the skill and the will to adapt into transitioning roles” (2015, p. 722,). In fact, according to Letty’s interview, she states the following thoughts, *“the most pressing issues for me are maintaining the test scores and climate at its current level. Continuing high expectations and results is what I need to maintain as the instructional leader. Therefore, I believe that my leadership style is more collaborative because I lead by example, and model lessons, for example if a teacher is in need of additional help. I also do not want to make any changes if a teacher is currently successful in the classroom.*

The principals’ effective leadership practices stimulate the campus morale, and energize teachers’ motivation for campus improvement (Edmonds, 1982; Mintrop, 2003). Additionally, according to Sashkin (2004) a principal’s self-confidence is the most important characteristic of a transitional leader. Letty reports that she values the inclusion and practice of a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement (PSEL, Standard 7).

Similarly, it is important to have principals participate in the learning as a leader, learner, or both (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Monica reports the following: *“Just like the school*

*districts have the mentoring programs for novice teachers, I believe that development for all teachers should be an ongoing process. They should be allowed to observe other teachers who are being successful in order to learn from their practices. Having a group of cooperative teachers has made my principalship a smooth one. Today, with college readiness standards, we must be knowledgeable on how to deliver this expectation and how teachers can provide higher order thinking lessons to the students. As stated before, I believe that teachers can meet the standards and demands of the state through professional development”.* Therefore, not only does Monica report that she provides support for teachers, but she obtains information on the type of professional development to which she sends the teachers. She wants to stay informed of any workshop because she believes that she must have the knowledge about those workshops in order to be able to efficiently help teachers. In the opinion of the researchers, Monica is demonstrating a mature comfort level to empower and motivate teachers and staff to the highest levels of professional practice and to continuous learning and improvement (PSEL, Standard 6).

Successful transformational leaders differentiate supervision, meaning that they do not apply the same supervisory techniques to all. “Great principals identify their teachers’ strengths and capitalize on them” (Hall, 2009, p. 11). Sami, who is learning about the principalship at a very fast pace offers the following recommendations: *“My leadership style is a collaborative and transformational approach. I strongly believe that all students can and will learn when provided with adequate instruction. Therefore, I understand that a large part of my responsibility is to ensure that all students receive an adequate instruction, and I take this very seriously. I embrace a growth mindset and promote an environment where accountability for adults is as high as that for students. I strive to create a culture of achievement where striving for excellence is the standard”.* In doing so, she states that she “walks the walk” with teachers

and makes sure that she knows their everyday struggles as well as what they do and offers her support at all times. She also creates systems that facilitate success and makes sure that follow-up is present. For example, her campus has Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and she makes sure that they have a protocol/agenda for each meeting, and that an administrator is present during the time that they meet (Hord, 2004). Sami reports making sure that the PLC's are effective and cultivate collaboration across the different grade levels, which is arguably conducive to developing a shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and core values of the school (PSEL, Standard 1).

### **Student Outcomes**

Student outcomes are related to the amount and quality of instructional leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Research on effective school models and sustainability clearly focuses on the importance of the instructional leader's role in student outcomes and teacher learning (Edmonds, 1979; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). However, in this line of work instructional leaders have to find their own personal sense of balance, and not let the job become their life. As exemplified by Letty: *“As a novice principal my day does go by fast and there is a lot that goes on behind the everyday duties, such as conferences with parents and teachers that not all the staff is aware of. Furthermore, as a novice principal I like my job because I believe that the overall campus has a positive climate. I learned a lot from my first principal when I started my career in education”*. In this quote, Letty acknowledges that she is incrementally learning how to prioritize and balance her day, which is a skill that is associated with prioritizing students' learning as opposed to managing a campus (Gray & Lewis, 2012). According to Gray and Lewis, “a paradigm shift in principal-preparation

programs from training *managers* to empowering instructional *leaders* will foster improved teaching and increased student achievement (2012, p. 69).

In essence the “leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 667). According to Monica, as a result of on-the-job learning her strengths and confidence in her job abilities have grown every year so she now has more time to focus on instructional leadership priorities. For example, Monica shared the following thoughts: *“I believe that I lead with a strong work ethic and with a mentality that going above and beyond will strengthen my leadership role and the school. I believe that a true leader stays true and strong to her professional beliefs with both students and teachers in mind”*. Not only do true leaders stay true to their professional beliefs but they also foster leadership characteristics for those individuals working with them (Viloria, 2018). According to Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, “schools at different levels of development will need different leadership emphases” (2008, p. 668). As exemplified in (PESL, Standard 10), Monica develops and promotes leadership among teachers and staff for inquiry, experimentation and innovation, and initiating and implementing improvement. Furthermore, “leaders’ oversight of teaching and the curriculum has more impact in elementary than in high schools” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 663).

Relatedly, Viloria (2018) describes a borderlands school principal as exemplifying intuition in order to pursue culturally-knowledgeable practices that provide Latina/o students with the navigational capital, and culturally-relevant practices to advocate for educational equity.

Sami, as a first-year principal from a large urban school district facing more difficult challenges, relies on having a strong mentor. Some large school districts are redefining the central office – principal relationship and making sure that central office personnel function is primarily



to support the principal's role as an instructional leader (Carraway & Young, 2015). For example, Gwinnett County, the largest district in Georgia, has developed two objectives: (1) building a pipeline of new principals who are ready to tackle the most underperforming schools and (2) fully supporting those leaders, especially during their novice years (Mendel & Mitgang, 2013). Consequently, Sami shared the following remarks: *"I strongly believe in this school as an organization and I am very optimistic about the future success of the students. My mentor, who is also my current supervisor and was a principal at a similar campus to mine "turned it around" by taking it from low performing to high achieving. He provides valuable insight and guidance. I can call him anytime.* As a mentor Sami's current supervisor holds her to high expectations and makes sure that she is accountable just like she holds teachers accountable on campus. This relationship establishes the contextual knowledge that Sami needs to increment her confidence to impact student outcomes.

Most novice school principals will have a mentor assigned to them by the school district though it is always a good idea to have a mentor with whom the novice principal feels comfortable. For example: Sami shared the following thoughts: *"My mentor is my current supervisor. As a principal at a similar campus to mine he "turned around" the school by taking it from low performing to high achieving. He provides valuable insight and guidance. I can call him anytime and know that he holds me to high expectations and makes sure that I am accountable just like I hold teachers accountable on campus. His guidance is fundamental to my success as a principal"*. In addition, Monica had these thoughts regarding her mentor: *"The person I consider to be my mentor is my first administrator. I was able to learn about being a positive leader with high expectations, and outstanding results"*.

### Discussion

According to three novice school principals (Sami, Monica, and Letty) leadership practices impact student outcomes at each of their respective campuses differently. All novice school principals share the fact that they have had first-hand exposure to the role from observing and working with their previous principal (Spillane & Lee, 2014) during their own pathway to the principalship. Yet, “beginning principals are often struck by how taking on the official title immediately results in staff members being more cautious and distant with them” (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p.435). In reality, being selected as a school principal is the first step in the novice school principal’s leadership journey. According to research, novice school principals have managed to learn the ropes about the business of running a school and have become adept to practice the educational leadership theories that they have learned in graduate school and their challenge is applying theoretical knowledge in real job situations (Karpinski, 2008; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). In fact, aspiring novice school principals exhibit these leadership attributes, which “consist of having self-awareness and a leaders’ orientation, envisioning and developing as a leader, being open to experience and reflection, gaining confidence, and identifying with role models” (McClellan & Casey, 2015).

In conclusion, this article is based on a study conducted by three Education Administration graduate students and their professor. The goal of this article is to share with aspiring principals first-hand accounts from novice school principals of what sitting in the principal’s chair for the first time feels like. Lessons learned based on the intersection of theory and practice will inform future novice school principals. Our hope is that aspiring school principals use this study to unpack research-and-practice-based educational leadership theories and practice. Additionally, the lessons learned from this study suggest that school principals who

are informed by data and instructional observations enhance a teacher's classroom practice and expectations. Thus, it is important to always monitor the implementation process and provide feedback to teachers in order to set standards for all. Observational and academic data may provide a better input on the impact of the classroom practices.

To summarize the dialogue and narrative between graduate students conducting this study and novice principals, the following thoughts are presented to encapsulate the spirit of this study's intent to provide aspiring principals with a research-and-practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership theories and practice:

*“As an aspiring principal, I have really obtained vital information that will help me become a successful leader. I have understood that the culture of the organization is built upon the guidance of the principal. Thus, the principal is the pillar of the organization and without proper guidance to enhance successful students, there will be no learning”.*

*“Through the research study I conducted on the novice principal I learned that we can plan, but sometimes things do not always go the way we originally planned it to be. You have to be an individual that is able to think quickly, and have a positive attitude. Never quit and every mistake is a learning moment and we grow from it. Novice principals need to trust their teachers and encourage them to do their best with 100% support. The first few years may be long days and hours, but when the staff sees the principal engaged in the school's daily operations and doing things with the students and staff, then maybe the accepting will come easier. After all, we should all be aiming for the same goal and that would be to lead a successful school and prepare the students for a bright future”.*

*“Interviewing a novice principal helped me understand the importance of passion and dedication. I learned that your school organization will follow your lead if you show them that you care about everyone who pertains to it. I also learned that great things take time, and leadership plays a significant role in the success of any organization”.*

The key takeaways from the novice principal interviews support the idea that “leadership is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (Chemers, 2000, p.27). For example, Sami’s self-described leadership practices embrace collaboration and teacher mentorship, as exemplified in this excerpt from the interviewer’s notes:

*“Her leadership style is that of a collaborative and transformational approach. She strongly believes that all students can and will learn when provided with adequate instruction. She is aware that ensuring that all students receive an adequate instruction is her responsibility, which she takes very seriously. She embraces a growth mindset and an environment where accountability for adults is as high as that for students. She strives to create a culture of achievement where striving for excellence is the standard”.*

Furthermore, Monica shares the similar leadership qualities as demonstrated in the following excerpt from the interviewer’s notes:

*“Her leadership style is more collaborative because she leads by example and models lessons if a teacher is in need of additional professional development and support. As an instructional leader, the most pressing issues at her current*

*campus are maintaining the assessment scores and a positive school climate. Therefore, underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students are provided with tutorials at the beginning of the school year and consistently throughout the school year. The campus also holds RTI meetings for the best interest of the students and their needs. Then, at the end of the school year, the principal and the school counselor meet to discuss which students improved and which ones will need to be provided with additional services to help them become successful students”.*

Finally, Letty concurred and added the following thoughts which were taken from the interviewer’s notes:

*“Letty believes that teachers can meet the standards and demands of the state through professional development. Not only does she provide professional development support for teachers but she gets informed on the type of professional development that she sends teachers to because she feels that she must have knowledge in those workshops in order to be able to help her teachers efficiently”.*

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In this study, only three participants’ interviews were included. Therefore, the researchers’ intent is not to generalize its findings. The data analysis only represents the perceptions of the novice school principals who participated in this study. However, it is hoped that the information gleaned from in-depth interviews of experienced professionals will be a first step and add to the understanding of the topic.

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