IN THEIR OWN WORDS: USING RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVES TO EXPLORE THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON DISCOURSES ABOUT IDENTITY OF SELF-AS-PRINCIPAL

by

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Abstract

This study explored how socio-cultural and contextual factors influence construction of identity of self-as-principal. Bakhtin’s theories of intertextuality, self and other, and utterance and the theories of Mead, Dewey, Bruner, and Cherryholmes regarding the social construction of the self provided a context for examining self-as-principal as described through retrospective narratives. Discourse analysis was used to examine transcripts of 83 oral history interviews with retired Virginia principals1 whose careers spanned the 1920’s to the 1990’s. Focus was on construction of the identity of self–as–principal through examination of structural metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), descriptions of others, storying of self as protagonist, storying of conflict situations and how stated opinions and philosophy are reinforced/contradicted by examples provided within the texts (Potter & Wetherill, 1987). Certain socio-cultural factors such as race, gender, and religion, and certain contextual factors, such as level of school (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school), era, school size, open space schools, career track, special education, school district emerged as determiners of cohorts sharing discourse features about self-as-principal. The most profound discourse contrasts about self-as-principal resulted when the cohorts analyzed took into account both race and gender. Very different structural metaphors for each cohort by level and race/gender regarding self-as-principal emerged during the analysis. Age, years of tenure as principal, educational background, rural vs. urban locations, and areas of the state did not seem to generate defined discourse cohorts. The findings of this narrative/discourse analysis provide insight into how self-as-principal is constructed, understood and primarily influenced and confirm that this is a rich approach to better understanding how socio-cultural and contextual factors influence role definition for educators.

1 These interviews were collected as part of the Oral History of the Principalship project, directed by Dr. Patrick Carlton, here at Virginia Tech.
Dedication

To Jonathan, Jacob George and Jasmine Mee-Hyun
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Chapter 1
Introduction: Locating The Study

Introduction

Identity bargaining is the process through which one shapes the institutional identity projected and maintained for one’s self and for others. (Weinstein, 1969, p. 757)

Educators construct identities within the intensively embedded context of particular schools and school systems (Greenfield, 1987; Regan & Brooks, 1995). Far from being isolates, these institutions and organizing structures are located at the nexus of larger social, historical, cultural, and political forces and networks, as well as particular local contexts and expectations about schooling and the purposes of education (Bruner, 1996; Goodlad, 1990). They are neither stagnant nor very flexible (Urban & Wagoner, 1996).

The educational enterprise in this country, even if limited to public K-12 education, is massively, intricately complex. Driving factors of this complexity include, but are not limited to: a) large variations in size and resource allocation across districts and, often, within districts; b) disagreement about the goals of schooling; c) regional differences and varying student populations; d) differing levels of political interference; e) the economics and politics of information dissemination; f) variations in teacher and administrative preparation and pools, state licensing, and state mandates; and g) differing standards and expectations from one location to another.

One of the most ubiquitous complicating factors is that educators use a limited professional vocabulary which mistakenly assumes common understanding of terms (Cherryholmes, 1988). As educators, we come to our understandings of basic concepts and labels through a process involving our personal experiences with that issue, be it “reading”, “inclusion”, “learning”, or what have you. Our understandings, which are often predicated within metaphorical frames, guide our actions, our interpretations of results, and our future understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This can and does lead to widely disparate understandings of the same terms. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to disentangle from the discourse what it is that someone means, even when the person speaking is using very familiar terms. This problem is encountered repeatedly in educational research where searching for a common term may yield work premised on vastly different assumptions or frames of the problem under investigation. The situation is further complicated in often highly irresponsible ways by the media and political pundits.

Various roles within the educational enterprise as earlier defined are subject to the same difficulty. We assume a common understanding of “teacher”, “student”, “principal” when, in reality, the understandings of ourselves within these roles and of others taking these roles is highly shaped by context and experience, and is in constant construction (see, for example, Nias, 1989, and Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985, with regard to teacher identities; and Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986, and Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie & Hurwitz, 1984, with regard to the identities of principals). All of these roles are points of intersection which can only be understood referentially and in context. Yet, we continue to bandy about role names as if we all understood in common what we were talking about.
Thus, in contrast to popular wisdom which somehow assumes that the role definitions of those who work within schools are set and interchangeable, teachers, principals, and others must imaginatively define their roles themselves. This definition is constructed within the constraints of their own biological-biographical-cultural limitations (Bruner, 1990, 1996) and moral imaginations (Johnson, 1993). They do this within or against a professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) which regularly locates them in somewhat ambiguous and conflicting role expectations.

Many studies of the principalship acknowledge the impact factors beyond the local school and community have had on role definition (i.e., Beck & Murphy, 1993; Morris et al., 1984). Waves of educational reform, curriculum restructuring, teacher education efforts, and programs to prepare educational administrators have all come and gone in various forms throughout the history of American education (see, for example, Goodlad, 1990; Kliebard, 1986; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). As various mantles of rhetoric and ideas, political and economic concerns, federal and state mandates, local and national norms, scientific efficiency models and humanism get tossed at the schools, bits and pieces of cloth get stuck and remain. It is into whatever patchwork comprises the culture of any particular school/school system, that those who would take the occupational roles of those within the educational enterprise known in this country as K-12 education are thrown. Their efforts to improvise obtain differing results based on a huge variety of factors.

From a standpoint of identity construction, the roles of “teacher” and “principal” are parallel in several interesting ways. Like teachers working within an assigned role, principals enacting their role operate in relation to many different Others. Teachers work primarily with students, peers, parents and administration as their immediate constituents; principals work primarily with teachers, parents, the local community, the central office and the state as immediate publics, supposedly in the best interests of the education of children (Morris et al., 1984). The principal’s role, like that of teachers’, encompasses moral agency. An individual’s enactment of the role of principal or teacher is similarly constrained by “the metaphors that person lives by” which delimit the possibilities he or she sees for the role (Bredeson, 1985; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

In the literature, however, the role of principal is discussed in largely stereotypical ways, (e.g., instructional leader vs. building manager), each of which frames the role dramatically differently. Leadership styles are discussed as masks to be assumed and discarded at will, a matter of cognitive selection without regard for who is doing the masking or where it is being done. Theories of educational administration, often contradictory, attempt to explicate the complexities of the role of principal regardless of setting or the characteristics of the person assuming the role. “Research on the administrative career traditionally draws upon role theory, leadership and decision-making theory, and professional socialization theory” (Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996, p. 271). The limitations of these theories as traditionally expounded to explain the choices, conceptualizations, actions, or successes of those who are not white male principals of secondary schools aspiring, it is assumed, to the superintendency has only recently been examined (see, for example, Grogan, 1996; Hart, 1993; Marshall et al., 1996; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1986). This is true despite the fact that several researchers have statistically analyzed survey research on the principalship over the past thirty years and found certain personal and contextual factors, such as gender, race, school size, and location to be statistically significant in explaining differences in principal behaviors (see, for example, Gross & Herriott, 1965; Gross & Trask, 1976; Zheng, 1996).
Statement of the Problem

It is my contention that the identity of self-as-principal is intricately intertwined with several factors: a) particular contexts where the role is enacted; b) beliefs and metaphorical understandings about education and leadership; c) biographical, biological and socio-cultural constraints; and d) personal needs. Thus, identity of self-as-principal is a very specific construction co-created in a particular setting by a particular person. As such, it is constantly negotiated with the others with whom the principal is in relationship—teachers, students, parents, the local community, other principals, the superintendent, the state department’s edicts, educational research and trends. And, it is framed by expectations and understandings of power and agency, resources and responsibilities.

I wanted to understand more concretely, from the perspective of the principals themselves, how they story, construct and understand the role of the principal as they themselves enacted it. I wanted to know if and how biological–biographical–socio-cultural–historical–local circumstances seem to influence those constructions. I was interested in analyzing discourse to reveal evidence of influences on identity of self-as-principal.

My ultimate goal was to see if people sharing different primary group identities talk about their identity/role of being principal in similar ways. For example, I wanted to know if female principals have a distinctive way of talking about their role compared with male principals; if African-American and Caucasian principals have distinct discourses regarding their role; if career path plays a role; if region plays a role; if elementary vs. secondary principals have distinct discourses regarding their role as principal; if historical time period defines discourse.

Therefore, my research questions were fairly straightforward. How do retired principals locate themselves and describe themselves, their actions, their understandings about education, their goals as principals and their daily routines in their stories about their tenures as principals? As they (re)construct their identity of self-as-principal in the context of an interview, how is their understanding of that role revealed as they locate themselves within their stories vis-à-vis teachers, students, parents, the state, superintendents, and central office, received knowledge, educational trends, mandates?

Context for this Study

When I started thinking about primary influences on the identity construction of educators, I began looking at the body of work which has been conducted on teacher identity. Many of my initial ideas about using discourse analysis to explore the identity of self-as-principal came from this literature. As is evident from the following review of the literature, there has been more research conducted in the area of teacher identity than in the area of principal identity. For those interested in this research approach or who want to trace the evolution of my thinking, I have included a short review of the relevant literature pertaining to teachers as well as that pertaining to principals.

Narrative Research Regarding the Construction of Identity as a Teacher

Recent ethnographic and narrative research into teacher identity has found that those for whom self-as-teacher is a primary identity exhibit a fused professional and personal identity. This identity embodies aspects of teaching as a vocation as opposed to merely
teaching as an occupational role (see, for example, Casey, 1993; Cohen, 1991; Hansen, 1995; Nias, 1989; Van Vorhis, 1992). In seeking to identify important influences on construction of teacher identity, several qualitative researchers have collected and analyzed teachers’ life stories. In doing so, they have discovered a variety of variables they consider to be significant in terms of how they influence teachers to construct, understand and make meaning out of their identity as a teacher. These include particular school contexts (Nias, 1989), biography (Casey, 1993; Cohen, 1991), career trajectory (Huberman, 1995; Sikes, et al., 1985), teacher preparation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), and personal goals (Van Vorhis, 1992; Casey, 1993). All of these studies try to look at the identity construction of self-as-teacher from the teachers’ point of view, and they attempt to relate what they find to the larger social, cultural, professional and political contexts within which identity constructions take place.

Research into the Construction of Identity as a Principal

Research into the role of the principal.

A search of the literature regarding the principalship revealed few comparable investigations into the construction of identity of self-as-principal in K-12 schools. A review of literature focused on the role of the principal yields a large number of quantitative studies primarily aimed at making recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the person taking on the role or attempts to define exhaustively the role through observation of those in it. There are many survey studies of the perceptions of the role of principal with regard to specific aspects of the job description (i.e., curriculum development, guidance, special education, extra-curricular programs, public relations, staff morale, supervision, and staff selection). There are a variety of survey studies of perceptions of the holistic role of principal as perceived from both the principals’ point of view and that of others (i.e., superintendents, teachers, students, school boards), sometimes with the goal of exploring the degree of consensus among them. There are hundreds of quantitative studies focused on related topics such as leadership style, socialization of first-year principals, and patterns of career trajectories. There are several national survey studies into aspects of the role of principal and the demographic characteristics of principals (see, for example, Baehr, 1975; Becker, 1971; Byrne, Hines & McCleary, 1978; Hemphill, Richards, & Peterson, 1965; Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelly, & McCleary, 1988; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe, 1981; Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe & Melton, 1993). There is a large “effective schools” body of literature that focuses on the role of the principal as instructional leader and largely parallels the effective teacher literature, using structured observation to develop a comprehensive task analysis of the day-to-day activities of “effective principals.”
Research into relationships between socio-cultural factors and contextual factors and the role of the principal.

There is a small but growing body of research which focuses on the relationship between gender and leadership style. There are a few meta-analyses which review large numbers of studies on the contrasts between male and female leadership styles (i.e., Eagley, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Shakeshaft, 1986) for the purpose of drawing some patterns and conclusions about how leadership styles differ by gender. Gross and Trask (1976) did an extensive, but rather statistically simplistic, study on gender differences as well. Although others have done studies of comparisons of the differences in leadership style by gender, Gross’ and Trask’s work is noteworthy because it examined a large set of sociological and contextual issues. Gross and Herriott (1965), Hart (1993), and Ortiz (1982) all do meta-analyses of differences facing women and minorities in terms of career tracks and socialization in educational administration which take into account socio-cultural issues as a centerpiece of their analytical frameworks.

Hallinger and Murphy (1987) looked across studies to examine links between organizational context and principal effectiveness. Zheng (1996) statistically analyzed relationships among school contexts, principal characteristics and instructional leadership effectiveness and found significant differences in leadership behavior related to such factors as gender, work experience, school size and percentage of minority enrollment. While done within the limits of a positivist paradigm that creates forced-choice responses rather than focusing on the principals’ own understandings of their needs and priorities, these studies nonetheless give credence to the importance of looking at how personal and contextual factors do influence role definition as principal.

Extant qualitative research into the role of the principal.

Qualitative studies focused on the role of the principal are few and far between. Qualitative researchers investigating the principalship tend to take one of three approaches. The first is the ethnographic approach and thus is focused on one or two principals and their schools (e.g., Derrington, 1989; Dillard, 1995; Greenfield & Beam, 1980; Reitzug & Reeves, 1992; Waddell, 1996; Wolcott, 1973). The second is a collapsed study which typically includes principals of different levels, genders, race in an attempt to find a comprehensive description of the ways principals, or educational administrators in general, deal with certain issues, for example, decision-making (Blase, 1995; Morris, Crowson, Hurvitz & Porter-Gehrie, 1981). The third is an investigation into how certain roles are implemented, for instance, the elementary principalship (Becker, 1971), career assistant principals (Marshall et al., 1996) or the leadership style of African-American principals (Lamotey, 1989). Some of these combine an ethnographic and interview approach to look at a larger number of principals and try to amalgamate common patterns and characteristics. Other studies rely primarily on interview analysis or on analysis of observed behaviors.

A short review of some of the qualitative research on the principalship related to construction of identity of self-as-principal follows. One shortcoming with many of the studies is that they begin with theoretical constructs such as “effective” or “instructional leadership” and thus the focus of the research is imposed upon rather than generated from the data. The data are not further analyzed by gender, race or level. Inevitably, as in the following examples, the conclusion is that no decisive conclusion or pattern can be determined.
For example, Morris et al. (1984) studied 26 Chicago elementary and high school principals to look at the principalship from the inside out rather than the outside in. Their ethnographic approach included an occupational analysis of days in the lives of principals which they analyzed according to level. There was no analysis by race or gender. They did find that career track influenced role definition for principals (e.g., that central office experience prior to the principalship affected how the resources of the central office were perceived and used by principals).

Webster (1994) interviewed over 150 high school principals in 23 states. His work, initially to find a “model” for the high school principalship, became a forum to present the voices of high school principals about aspects of their work with the aim of refuting negative media focused on the principalship. He does not present an analysis of the interviews by gender, race, location, size or career track but considers the role of high school principal itself to define his cohort. This probably contributes to his inability to generalize his findings.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) did an interview study of eight principals identified as outstanding for the purpose of creating portraits of effective principals. The result was eight case studies under the rubric of “effective principal” which portrayed detailed description of the leadership styles of different individuals in the role. The unit of analysis was the individual, however, and there was no attempt to look across interviews or to situate the cases within larger contexts.

Morris et al. (1981) completed an ethnographic study of sixteen principals in Chicago to explore the principal’s effect on students and teachers, on superiors, parents and laymen, and on themselves as career oriented professionals. They found that principals shaped their jobs to suit their personal preferences and work styles and that the principals engaged in various means of creative insubordination to protect their schools and carry out their work as they saw fit. Principals from different levels of schools and of both genders were included and no attempt was made to further analyze the results by cohort group. The study did elucidate many of the contextual constraints faced by principals and the strategies that principals use as a result of these.

Blase (1995) studied the challenges and approaches to leadership experienced by eight principals identified as having a democratic leadership style. Principals were interviewed and observed. Rural and urban male and female principals of elementary, middle, and high schools were included in order to get a comprehensive view of the barriers and supports principals face in trying to implement a more democratic style of leadership.

Dwyer (1983) did an ethnographic study of five principals which focused on their strategies for instructional management. Like the other studies, this one had a mix of levels, genders, and races. The observations led to the development of three modified antecedent categories: principal characteristics, community context, and institutional context. This further supports the fertile ground of research on the principalship by cohort group and suggests that our understanding of leadership must be connected to an exploration of the personal characteristics of principals.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) studied twelve effective principals in schools with collaborative cultures. Again, the criteria and categories were predetermined but they did find some consistent characteristics of style across the cases in terms of how these principals used communication, staff development, power sharing with teachers, and cultural
linkages to control teachers in predetermined directions. Insight was generated beyond a listing of what was done by principals to a more sophisticated understanding of how those mechanisms and behaviors were carried out and were understood by the principals themselves.

Lightfoot (1983) studied six secondary principals considered to be effective. She found that although no consistent leadership style was exhibited, these principals used styles which were suited to their particular context. Taken as a collage, this compendium of styles contributed to a definition of successful leadership as comprised of characteristics traditionally associated with both males and females.

Gorton and McIntyre (1978) did a follow-up study to the national survey study of the senior high principalship. They interviewed 60 senior high school principals identified as exemplary by superintendents across the country as well as “significant others”, (i.e., teachers, parents, and students), around each principal. Beyond noting that 54 of the 60 were male and 53 of the 60 were white, there is no breakdown of the analysis by race or gender. In an effort to be representative, a variety of school sizes, locations and contexts were included. Again, the conclusion was that the most striking finding was the diversity of response.

I contend that this inability to draw conclusions is because the analysis, in an attempt to be comprehensive, typically includes people from a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds and mixes a variety of factors. For instance, in the literature, school size appears to have a significant effect on role definition and priorities. But the desire to get a “comprehensive” look at an issue means that large and small schools are included in the study, confounding the results. Other instances of when being too general might confound results: when a study includes several different levels of the principalship, includes a variety of different positions in educational administration (e.g., Regan & Brooks, 1995), or includes principals from a variety of different minority groups (e.g., Amodeo & Emslie, 1985; Ortiz, 1982). This is an issue even when limited to one gender, as in several studies of women educational administrators which collapse different races and different positions into a study of women in educational administration (e.g., Bloom & Munro, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). The issue is not with the work itself, which is often very fine, but with the missed opportunities by not analyzing the data by more individual cohorts based on position, race, gender, context, etc.

A review of extant qualitative studies on the principalship thus reveals that the focus has been on 1) a comprehensive description of a particular person enacting the role of principal; 2) a study of principals meeting criteria of a preconceived construct (such as democratic leader or transformational leader or effective principal); or, 3) a comprehensive description of the role itself. What is not explored is the process by which different people negotiate the construction of identity of self-as-principal and how this might be influenced by larger contexts within which the role is negotiated. The problem with those authors who have attempted to do ethnographic studies focusing on people of specific cohorts by race, gender and position is that, as mentioned earlier, these tend to be studies of one to three individuals in an attempt to characterize the experience of individuals meeting the criteria for that cohort (e.g., Lamotey, 1989; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995). Generalizations or understanding across so small a number of individuals are difficult to make. Greater numbers of cases or studies of a few cases matched on several socio-cultural and contextual factors might yield more insight into how identity of self-as-principal is conducted and how it is influenced by socio-cultural or contextual factors. This would remove the difficulty of assuming that
individual cases represent cohort groups, thus avoiding the same tokenistic thinking that many minorities and females face in real life being inadvertently replicated in the research.

**A Call for a Different Kind of Research**

There has been a call for thicker description of the role of principal (e.g., Beck & Murphy, 1993; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986). Lamenting the lack of coherence and insight produced by the multitudinous studies in this area, Beck and Murphy (1992), among several others, note that “traditional methods used to inform us about the principalship, while useful, had conveyed a disturbingly thin base of information” (p. 387). They call for qualitative approaches designed to produce a more robust understanding of the principalship, noting the need to move “beyond micro-level descriptions” (ibid.) and to locate the role within larger socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Greenfield (1987a) notes that specific contexts of schooling seem to have a great deal of impact on how the role of the principal is defined. However, he suggests that “personal qualities of ...the principal continue to receive limited attention by researchers” (p. 58).

He uses Weinstein’s (1969) notion of identity bargaining to explain that understanding the negotiated identity of self-as-principal is key to understanding the principalship and is an area which needs to be further explored.

Marshall (1988) calls specifically for the use of sociolinguistics1 as a tool to understanding the culture of schools and educational administration. She builds a case for analysis of communication to provide insight currently missing into how language uses and reproduces power, and how men and women use communication differently as educational administrators.

Ortiz (1982) calls for more attention to the sociological aspects of role definition in educational administration and notes that a focus on language may further elucidate socio-cultural influences and understandings of educational administrators.

Krug (1992) noted that there is a difference between an observer’s description of an action and the interpretation of that action by the one who acted. He suggests that better understanding people’s interpretations of their actions, rather than merely recording their actions, might reveal patterns by cohort groups and illuminate differences among principals. This focus on interpretation might generate more insight into the role of the principal than tabulations of actions and behavior, and might grant insight into how principals understand and make meaning of their identity-as-principal.

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1 That is, analysis of language used to describe self and role taking into account socio-cultural factors such as race, gender and class.
**A focus on language.**

A few researchers in the area of educational administration have focused on language and, in particular, on metaphor. Studies have included research into the use of metaphor in the written sources about educational administration over time to describe the role of principal (Beck & Murphy, 1992, 1993), and into the relationships between explicit and implicit metaphor, and interpretation of the role of principal (Bredeson, 1985). Chapters in two books (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Morris, et al., 1984) discuss the embeddedness of identity of self-as-principal and describe potential connections between micro and macro contexts. But this is not the focus of these studies and is presented as commentary rather than as the result of exploring these issues during the research.

**Narrative research.**

I did find six studies in the area of educational administration which used a discourse analysis approach to understanding from the point of view of the participants understanding about self-as-principal. These are more parallel to the studies mentioned earlier investigating teacher identity and yield some valuable insights into the reality of educational administrators as they see it.

Kempner (1991) interpreted the findings from interviews with 144 school administrators which were part of a larger study of 420 administrators in Oregon who were stratified by race, gender, size and region of school, and administrative position. He focused on entry stories into the principalship. Kempner found that there was a distinct white male discourse that correlated with the mainstream discourse of educational administration.

Hurty’s (1995) study of seventeen women elementary principals is one example of exploration of how a particular socio-cultural cohort group approached the principalship. Her question centered around how these female principals defined power. Looking at what the women said about power led her to make several observations about the discourse of power of female principal. These included the emergence of a common definition of power by the female principals as “the ability to get the job done,” the women’s connection of power to relationship, communication, collaboration, and creativity, and the absence of reference to reliance on coercion and domination.

Crow’s (1990) analysis of 120 elementary principals’ responses to three open-ended questions designed to elicit perceptions held by principals about the central office illuminated ways that principals feel central office influences role definition. Major themes emerged around autonomy, conflict, and credibility and how each of these impacted the principals’ relationships with teachers.

Though they are not specifically focused on the principalship, three other studies are worth mentioning here in conjunction with a literature review on educators’ identities in embedded contexts. Edson (1988, 1995) did a longitudinal interview and survey study of women aspiring to positions in educational administration. Grogan (1996) used a feminist
poststructuralist\(^2\) approach to analyze the discourses of female educational administrators who aspire to the superintendency. Using the women’s voices and descriptions of their experiences, both studies create a collage of the barriers, concerns, and images of leadership and self these female educators held and faced. Power relationships, mentoring opportunities or lack thereof, the impact of affirmative action, and sexual harassment are but a few of the contextual factors that emerge as relevant to these educational administrators’ perceptions of themselves.

Regan and Brooks (1995) studied themselves and their female colleagues in educational administration primarily through using narrative as a form of knowing. In their words:

> The foundation for our narrative is the stories of our individual experiences and their retelling led us to making meaning of our own experiences and began the process by which we would consider their meaning in the larger, more sweeping context of educational administration...Telling and retelling our stories was leading us to understand gender as a category of experiences and the attributes that define those experiences. (p. 68-69)

**Rationale for this study.**

Based on my review of the literature, there have been no narrative studies relying primarily on discourse analysis to probe individuals’ construction, understandings, and meaning of self-as-principal.

This narrative/discourse analysis provides insight into how self-as-principal is constructed, understood and primarily influenced. By looking at how individuals who share identities talk about their understanding and enactment of the role of principal, we can gain better insight into how that role was constructed by particular individuals in particular locations at particular times and build on the work others have done in investigating the construction of educator identities. Such insight can 1) shed light into how significant features of the educational landscape are incorporated locally into the identity of principals; 2) elucidate some of the differing discourses around role construction as principal; 3) provide information as to how principals themselves conceive of their role and work; and, 4) provide insight into the social organizations of schools. The study can further understandings of how selves are constructed through narrative because this study uses retrospective, as opposed to reflection-in-action, narratives as data. Finally, the study provides some further clues concerning significant biographical-biological-cultural influences on construction of identity.

\(^2\) Grogan defines feminist poststructuralism as “a combination of the espousal of social change fundamental to feminist critical theory and the focus on language and discourse offered by poststructuralism” (1996, p.26).
Entering This Study

Documentary Notes and Organization of Text

For this study I examined the transcripts of 83 interviews conducted with retired building principals in the state of Virginia collected as part of the Oral History of the Principalship project (see Appendices A, B and C). I analyzed these transcripts in various cohorts defined by a variety of socio-cultural and contextual factors. I was looking for significant discourse features about self-as-principal presented by each cohort in an attempt to better understand primary influences on how principals define their role and describe their identity-as-principal in an interview situation. The cohorts that yielded discourse contrasts are presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

It was my contention that narrative analysis would serve as a fruitful entry point to understanding construction of identity of self-as-principal. To support that contention, Chapter Two examines the implications of an oral history interview text as a narrative of identity construction. Although these interviews were conducted as part of the Oral History of the Principalship project for the purposes of recording historical material related to the principalship in the United States, I did not approach the texts as would an oral historian, as representations of true events to be historically confirmed and situated using additional sources. Unlike an oral historian, I was not concerned with the veracity of the accounts of described events, because I was not interested in compiling a historical record. Rather, I considered the texts to be narrative constructions of identity of self-as-principal. Relevant to this use of the interview texts as investigations into the construction of identity of self-as-principal are 1) an understanding of structural metaphors; 2) psychological and philosophical concerns regarding construction of self and identity; and, 3) an understanding of the use of narrative as a meaning making tool. In Chapter 2 these are examined along with aspects of self/identity construction within the contexts of cultural psychology.

3 The interviews were conducted with retired school principals over a ten-year period and the resulting transcripts were thus typed up by many different individuals, each with his or her style of punctuation, notation, etc. I have lightly edited the transcripts analyzed in this study to improve readability by correcting spelling mistakes, adding and standardizing punctuation, suturing relevant sections from different parts of a transcript, standardizing presentation style (i.e., all of the interviewers’ comments are in italics), eliminating use of names where they were not clear or necessary, and removing counter markings and editorial comments by the interviewer, or inserting missing words in brackets. Ellipses indicate skipped material. Square brackets indicate inserted material. Where interviewers have left “uhms”, “uhs”, etc., or have recorded comments interspersed in the interviewee’s responses, I have left them as well but this does not necessarily reflect articulateness as these practices were not uniformly applied across the transcripts. I have taken pains to make changes in the interest of clarity as well as retention of voice but acknowledge that I may have made inadvertent errors in this process.
The structure of narrative itself is delineated, including its praxis and its relationship to larger discourses.

Analysis showed that discourse patterns about self-as-principal emerged along lines of gender, race, level of school, certain aspects of the educational landscape such as special education mandates and open schools, narratives about integration, certain locations, and school size. Chapter Three looks at the results of an analysis of the discourses about identity of self-as-principal of the white male interviewees by level cohort. Chapter Four looks at the results of an analysis of discourses about identity of self-as-principal by cohorts organized by race and gender. Chapter Five reviews contextual factors found to be significant in the discourses about identity of self-as-principal, and uses a cohort of interviews from one county as the basis of a case study on the impact of location and administrative culture on construction of self-as-principal.

In presenting what I found as central discourse features of each cohort and across the entire sample, I fully realize that this is only my interpretation of what I saw. Others working with the same data may construct different understandings of what they see. What I hope to demonstrate adequately by presenting frequent excerpts from the transcripts is that my analysis is based on these principals’ voices. I want you to read/hear those voices and to see that they were coming from several interviewees, not just one or two.

To that end, throughout the analysis chapters I have left the coding on the transcripts excerpts so that you can see for yourselves that the quotes come from a number of individuals. “S”, “M” or “E” refers to level of principalship (high school/secondary, middle school, or elementary, respectively), “W” and “B” refer to race (here, Caucasian/White and African-American/Black, respectively; I use White and Black in the analysis summaries to denote race largely because those are the terms used by the interviewees), and “M” and “F” refer to gender (male and female, respectively). The number is the code the interview carries in the Oral History of the Principalship project. “F” after the number means that the interviewee was a principal in Fairfax County.

The coding will allow you to observe that in Chapter 5 several quotes used in Chapters 3 and 4 are repeated. This is quite intentional and is designed to allow the reader to better understand how our constructions of identity may be viewed through multiple socio-cultural and contextual lenses. For example, a discourse feature that emerged from the cohort of White male middle school principals was their positive attitude toward special

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4 My understanding of the term moral imagination as it applies to educators is succinctly captured by Blumberg and Greenfield’s definition: “...the capacity to help us see the discrepancy between how things are and how they might be and in so doing invite us to act on those imagined possibilities and, through our actions, transform the present—to move closer to the imagined (and possible) future. It is moral imagination because the possibilities envisioned, the standards that serve to illuminate the discrepancy between the present and what is possible, are rooted in an awareness of and a commitment to the standards of good practice that characterize membership in the normative community of educators (1986, p.227-228).
education. This is discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, when discussing the various ways federal mandates are implemented on a local level and how that impacts understanding of role definition as principal, several of these quotes are repeated to contrast them with the attitudes expressed by the elementary principals regardless of race or gender. Likewise, quotes seen throughout the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 selected primarily to illustrate discourse features found in particular cohorts are collected in Chapter 5 to demonstrate how they can also be examined as examples of religious references found throughout the narratives across race, gender and level. Use of repeated quotes is my attempt to make visible the process of self-construction that I believe this study supports.

I found that generally I could not find common patterns with fewer than seven interviews in a cohort. I also lacked a lot of information on these interviewees that might have alerted me to additional cohorts sharing discourse features about identity of self-as-principal. I did find ample evidence that these retired principals tended to construct a self-as-principal which fused personal and professional identities. This was repeatedly demonstrated by the vividness of recollection present in almost all of the oral history interviews I have looked at from the Oral History of the Principalship data base.

I want to note here that my aim was to identify socio-cultural and contextual factors found to significantly influence discourses about identity of self-as-principal and to describe how they were used by interviewees in their narratives to describe selves-as-principals-in-action. My purpose was not to use the transcripts to explore leadership style as matched to gender or race, to survey principals’ beliefs about topics such as discipline or merit pay, or to attempt to interpret the meanings behind what was said, (i.e., to second guess why a particular principal had a particular opinion). This is an important distinction between a socio-cultural discourse analysis, and either a content or psychological analysis of interview transcripts (see Appendix D). This study was conducted on two levels; as a case study of a particular theory and as a particular methodology applied to a specific set of interviews which generated information about not only what but how certain socio-cultural and contextual factors influence construction of identity of self-as-principals in these oral history interviews. Chapter 6 examines how this study also relates to a particular understanding of self, identity and role, which I only discovered well into the process of doing the study and which further underscores the dialogical process of qualitative research. Chapter 6 concludes with implications and recommendations for further study. Methodological notes and information about the sample selection process are provided in the appendices.

Discourse Analysis and Researcher as Instrument: Confluence of Product as Process

Discourse analysis is about conceptual coherence, not about vocabulary. Were I to have searched for only particular words, this document would have been thin indeed. While certain distinctive phrasings and use of pronouns did emerge from certain cohorts (e.g., the use of the word “youngster” and the phrase “take charge” among retired white male high school principals), it was the differences in how role and identity was conceptualized by cohort that are of much more interest.

Central to an understanding of this approach to analysis is an understanding of what Bertaux (1981), Moustakas (1990), and others refer to as saturation. This refers to a process in qualitative research through which the data are constantly returned to during the
analysis and repeatedly tested against emerging theories. When subsequent data (in this case, transcripts) begin to repeatedly confirm the tentative pattern and no new possibilities are introduced, the pattern is said to be saturated. Examples of patterns include repeated form or content, expressed attitudes, common expressions, metaphors or consistent omissions. Depending upon the prevalence and complexity of the emerging patterns, this might take several samples or many more to determine. In this study, discourse features are declared representative of a cohort if they are repeatedly confirmed or echoed in a similar way by several individuals in the cohort, (not necessarily by everyone but certainly by a significant minority), and there is no coherent oppositional or contradictory pattern present in the cohort.

What I found as central features of a cohort’s discourse about self-as-principal are like the large overlapping core of complex Venn diagrams or like the color that emerges when three or four different colors of cellophane are layered in an overlapping pile. Some of the voices are cogent, easily quotable, emblematic of others who ramble on untidily but express similar conceptions of the role of the principalship and identity self-as-principal.

I think it is important in qualitative research, since the researcher is her own instrument, for you to know how and where I positioned myself in this project and how I was thinking about this work. In following my elaborate plan of data analysis, I have been faithful to Moustakas’ (1990) outline of the process used in heuristic research (see Appendix D). I have immersed myself in these transcripts, looking at each of the elements I outlined, taking notes, diagramming, outlining, synthesizing. I let each transcript tell me anew what being a principal was about for this interviewee. I thought, wrote summaries, went back to the transcripts, back to the words. Many times a dense cacophony of words threatened to submerge me.

Surfacing for air, I sought quiet. This was very noisy reading. I didn’t know, with the exception of the one interview I did myself, any of these people. It was as if I kept returning to the same restaurant and, sitting behind the potted palms, eavesdropped daily on others’ conversations, parsing out patterns, listening to recurrent ways of describing the world, trying to figure out what those people who describe their work and lives so similarly have in common. This was difficult at times because the conversations began at different places and ended in various ways. Some were conversations between strangers; others between friends. Questions and topics varied widely. I was not always sure if what these people were talking about was the same as the last dyad, even though so many of the words were the same. And the stories! I visualized children, teachers, parents, and others—the restaurant was filled with ghosts that formed and then faded in the course of a conversation, that lingered and hovered near me trying to seize undue attention and confusing me as to their relationships with the speaker.

Then, because I did not only listen but taped the conversations at the next table, I listened to the tapes again and again, thinking, looking, piecing, returning to the words to see if what I think I heard was really there. I wished at times that I could go back to people, ask them questions, fill in gaps. But they had eaten, paid, and gone and I was only left with words. This is how it felt.

The other metaphor that comes to mind is one of a kaleidoscope. I feel like all of the pieces were there—the words of the eighty-three interviewees finally chosen all assembled. Then, with a twist of the wrist, I looked at the patterns through the lenses of gender, race, level, etc., to first bring out the blues and then to check if there really was lots of red or was
what I initially saw as red really orange and pink and is there really enough pink to say that it is a major part of the pattern...This lets you peek into the process of this kind of research.

The focus was always on the words. How things were being said, what was being said, what was not said—and all of this, by whom? “In the beginning was the Word.” I don’t think so. Who we are, where we are, what we are doing and when we are doing it delineate what words we have to use and predict what words we will use to define and present our selves. That is what I found, a fascinating sort of finding when applied to descriptions of the fused personal and professional identity of principal as happens in these interviews.

I know a lot about these people and my waking and sleeping hours reverberate with their voices which I have seen in the form of their words. It is an incredibly intimate experience. I appreciate that they were willing to narrate these stories of self-as-principal so that I could have them to analyze and learn from. Although now I can admit that the thought of some of these principals as responsible for my child’s education or as my boss would make me shudder, there are in these transcripts stories of true heroism and compassion and moral imagination and records of earlier times and lifeways.

As Dewey points out, one attends to what captures one’s interest. The construction of the dissertation was a very rich process in this way. I indulged my love of language, my interest in voice, my emerging thoughts about dialogical formation of selves and socio-cultural construction of identity, my curiosity about people, my attempts to understand where other educators are coming from, my ahistorical picture of educational history and my delight in story—all in one project! I hope you will enjoy my findings as much as I have enjoyed the finding of them.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Frameworks: The Relationship Between Discourse Analysis and Retrospective Narratives About Self-as-Principal

Introduction
In this chapter, I outline why it should be possible to elucidate important influences on identity of self and role definition by applying a method of socio-cultural discourse analysis to narrative constructions of self-as-principal such as those found in the interview transcripts from the Oral History of the Principalship database. (For an explicit description of the methodology used, see Appendix D.) First, I look at the relationship of the role of narrative in self-construction to the design of the study. Then, I present several approaches to examining self-construction through discourse analysis of narratives about identity of self-as-principal. I explicate micro and macro contexts that influence both the content and the form of narratives co-created in interview situations. I give an overview of some of the general results I obtained, followed by how the next three chapters present those results in more detail. Last, I explicitly acknowledge the intertextuality\(^1\) of text construction. Through this discussion, my goal is to explicate the nature of the transcript data, and to describe a theoretical approach which builds on their nature as data and provides a roadmap for exploring the research questions.

Relationship of Theory to Study Design
Narrative is a primary human meaning making strategy (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995; Mishler, 1986; Johnson, 1993; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Through telling the stories that comprise a narrative, a person comes to understand what s/he thinks happened, what was important, and what was not. A narrative produced in response to interview queries in the established context of an oral history interview is a series of stories (Mishler, 1986). In the case of the interview transcripts analyzed for this study, the stories described self-as-principal.

According to Bakhtin, discourse is action, not reflection (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 204). Thus, the text of the discourse of an oral history interview regarding an earlier self-as-principal represents active reconstruction, or explicit construction for the first time, of what that person understood that role to be.

It should be possible, therefore, to use narrative to explore construction of identity of self-as-principal within the context of Bruner’s (1990, 1996) notion of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology suggests that the narratives we construct to make meaning of our lives

\(^1\) This is Bakhtin’s term which refers to the fact that no text, oral or written, exists in isolation but simultaneously forms itself using existing texts and exerts influence on those texts which it borrows as it is formed.
come from socio-cultural meta-narratives. That is, the stories we tell are embedded in our culture, evolving from who we are and what our experiences have been, and they correspond to our primary identities of gender, race and ethnicity, as well as secondary identities such as sibling, son or daughter, experience in the military, or one’s professional identity. Casey’s (1993) study, *I Answer With My Life*, provides a model for how this might be done. Casey’s approach to the analysis of teacher stories stressed the use of discourse analysis and a reliance on the theoretical frame of Bakhtin’s theories of intertextuality, self and other, and utterance to examine texts produced by interviewees sharing different combinations of primary identities. Building on Casey’s work, this study examined narratives used by interviewees to [re]construct their identities as principals-in-action. Textual discourses were analyzed to see how membership in different primary group identities might describe contrasting role definitions.

In this study, primary identities (i.e., gender, race, age cohort) and secondary identities (i.e., rural/urban, military service, elementary/secondary, career trajectory) were used as starting points for looking at contrasting group (Elder, 1981) discourses. Attention during narrative analysis was focused on construction of the identity of self-as-principal through examination of structural metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Descriptions of others, storying of self as protagonist, storying of conflict situations, and how stated opinions and philosophy are reinforced/contradicted by examples provided within the texts were examined (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Features of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) and examples of moral imagination or lack thereof (Johnson, 1993) were also explored as perspectives for understanding self-construction in narrative.

**Context and Theory: Narrative as a Way of Constructing Self**

**Premise**

A person has many identities or selves (James, 1890; see also Hermans & Kempen, 1993). These are not constant over time but are constantly negotiated within the settings in which s/he exists (Bruner, 1990). The identity of self as a K-12 principal is, of necessity, a complex and multifaceted one. This identity emerges through interaction and transaction with all of the members of the ecology of the educational enterprise that exist in relation to the role of principal as assumed in a particular location by a particular person.

Looking at an earlier identity recreated in narrative by one’s present self-as-interviewee should allow examination of the process of [re]construction of that identity through narrative. Presumably, the nature of those narratives, if subjected to a process of socio-cultural discourse analysis, should illuminate what meta-narratives are being drawn on to construct an identity of self-as-principal. Therefore, narratives created during oral history interviews about self-as-principal should reveal insights into the meanings and understandings a person had about that role as well as primary socio-cultural and contextual factors that influenced those meanings and understandings.
The Dialogic Self: Self Construction Within the Context of Cultural Psychology

In Bakhtinian terms, the self is always in dialogue (see also Bruner, 1990; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Moreover, it is as author that one languages a former self as other. In the case of these retired administrators, their identity of self-as-principal is a past identity. “The [current] self’s time is open, ‘unfinished’, whereas the other we conceive is ‘completed’ insofar as we see him as what he is” (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p.79). Yet, it seems to have been a consuming identity for those in the sample, bridging the personal and the professional, narrated without difficulty. Obviously, as attested to by the strong opinions and vivid examples that punctuate the transcripts, it is an earlier identity that is easily storied.

If one adheres to the notion of a negotiated self, and one admits to the identity of self-as-principal as a former self, it is important to look at what defines that self-in-action. (For a more extended discussion of the implications of such a view of self-construction, see Chapter 6.) Bruner (1990) points out that what is necessary is “to get a general notion of a particular self in practice.” To do this, one must “sample its uses in a variety of ...culturally specifiable contexts” (p. 119). Bakhtin (in Clark & Holquist, 1984) asserts:

What the self is answerable to is the social environment; what the self is responsible for is the authorship of its responses. Self creates itself in crafting an architectonic relation between the unique locus of life activity which the individual human organism constitutes and the constantly changing natural and cultural environment which surrounds it. (p. 68)

Bruner (1990) contends that the best way to see the self is through retrospective autobiography. This is because Bruner understands self as a product/producer of culture, and understands the construction of identity to be undertaken as an imaginative process in response to perceived choices (see also Johnson, 1993).

Bruner (1990) denigrates the idea that it would be possible to articulate self-in-action, past or present, in anything other than narrative form. If we really want to know “what the person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for, what kinds of plights he thought he was in, and so on” (p. 120), we have to ask, and listen. The result will be “an account of what one thinks one did in what settings for what felt reasons. It will inevitably be a narrative and...its form will be as revealing as its substance” (p. 119).

One way to get a sense of a self is through that person’s description of others in the same setting. Hankiss (1981) points out:

Human memory selects, emphasizes, rearranges, and gives new colour to everything that happened in reality; and, more important, it endows certain fundamental episodes with a symbolic meaning, often to the point of turning them almost into myths, by locating them at the focal point of the explanatory system of the self. It is through this system that what a person has to say about himself is expressed in a particular way, for instance by telling stories having others than himself as protagonists; one finds out about people through the way that they talk about others. (p. 203)

Thus, it was necessary in this study to pay close attention to how principals talk about the others in their stories, including students, teachers, parents, superintendents, peers, professors, mentors and staff.
Professional Knowledge and Political Landscapes: Essential Aspects of Cultural Psychology

A second avenue of exploration was through examination of significant features of the professional knowledge and political landscapes wherein or against which self-in-action operated. Building on Clandinin’s and Connelly’s (1995) metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape, it is intriguing to think of the epistemological and moral world in which principals live and work. Where Clandinin and Connelly, along with others, looked at teachers’ narratives for what they revealed about theory-practice relationships in and out of the classroom, the parallel for principals is clearly present. Therefore, investigating how received knowledge is funneled into and implemented in schools, the relationships among and between all of those who live and work in a school and the larger social and political and professional networks at the nexus of which the school exists, and how identities as educators are forged in concert with and in reaction to what they perceive to be the cultural status quo are all issues relevant to self construction as principal. Clandinin and Connelly discuss several issues relevant to teachers as they negotiate their identities, including role ambiguity, conflicting expectations, different levels of functions, peer relationships, community norms, and issues of moral agency. These are all relevant to self-as-principal as well, differing for principals only in terms of specifics and locations within the educational enterprise. Looking at how interviewees narrate their negotiation of these further illuminates their understandings of their roles.

This is a more localized example of what Bruner (1996) terms cultural psychology where “illustration of the biological, evolutionary, individual psychological and cultural insights” is used to “help us grasp the nature of human mental functioning” (p. 161). In discussing what he terms the double task of “culturalism”, Bruner says that,

On the “macro” side, it looks at the culture as a system of values, rights, exchanges, obligations, opportunities, power. On the “micro” side, it examines how the demands of a cultural system affect those who must operate within it. In that latter spirit, it concentrates on how individual beings construct “realities” and meanings that adapt them to the system, at what personal cost, with what expected outcomes. (p. 11-12)

According to Bruner (1996), culturalism takes inherent psycho-biological constraints for granted and “considers how they are managed by the culture and its instituted educational system” (p.12). Thus, exploration of the features of cultural psychology exposed through narratives of self-as-principal would seem to reveal the most powerful cultural influences on identity construction and understanding of the role of principal. These might turn out to be gender, micro or macro politics, time period, race, educational opportunity, educational trends, locale, or school context.
Metaphor in Educational Discourse: How Possibilities for Action are Structured

Metaphors abound in educational discourse. (For a historical view of the usage of metaphors in educational discourse, see Beck & Murphy 1993; Bredeson, 1985; Taylor, 1984.) Any investigation of spoken or written discourse in the field of education is permeated with explicit, implicit and structural metaphors. In this section I first examine briefly the way metaphor is generally used in educational discourse. Then, I distinguish explicit and implicit metaphor from what I will call structural metaphor, and outline what I think they are and what they reveal about the user in discourse. Finally, I discuss Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) theory of structural metaphor and sketch its implications for this project.

Taylor (1984) points out that educational discourse is similar to any other discourse that draws on concepts and theories from a variety of disciplines. Educational theorists and practitioners use language that regularly and carelessly draws on metaphors from disparate fields such as psychology, philosophy, history, and sociology. The result is that metaphors are often not taken very seriously in both verbal and written educational discourses. This seeming nonchalance with metaphor has simultaneously, in true Bakhtinian terms, helped to mold the discourse, even as it appropriated pieces of it.

Certain metaphors have insinuated themselves into large pockets of the common parlance of education by professionals and lay people alike. The far-reaching consequences of widely used metaphors about education are rarely explicitly delineated or explored [e.g., “education as social engineering”, “education as initiation” or “education as information processing” (Taylor, 1984); “curriculum as means of production”, curriculum as site for growth” or curriculum as route for travel” (Kliebard, 1975)].

In a more specific way, metaphor has defined aspects of the professional educational discourse as well:

The metaphors of education represent the claims made by groups to impose their own sets of meanings on experience. Metaphor is part of a linguistic code that helps to create relevance and to constrain social identities. Educational discourse is conducted in accordance with codes associated with certain role performances—for example, those of educational psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and historians; school, college and university administrators; teachers and headmasters; inspectors, curriculum consultants and others involved in educational activities. These codes embrace a variety of metaphorical usages, some of which are in common, many of which are particular to a group of “insiders”, who share a set of agreed references. (Taylor, 1984, p. 17)

Thus, examining the discourses of K-12 principals should reveal sets of metaphors they use to describe education and their role. These may or may not be different according to different primary group memberships. But they will reveal important understandings about education that describe the basis of their actions because “metaphor comes to be seen as a ubiquitous feature of our thinking and our discourse, the basis of the conceptual systems by means of which we understand and act within our worlds” (Taylor, 1984, p. 5).

Looking at the metaphors used in educational discourse presents a messy picture—one that reflects Lemke’s (1995) assertion that all meaning in discourse is political. Taylor (1984) describes the process:
In the task of making the world of education comprehensible and manageable we pile metaphor on metaphor, ordering and classifying for our own purposes phenomena we have already metaphorized, and often in the process destroying the meaning that these phenomena have acquired for those closest to them. Take, for example, the way in which contemporary educational discourse has been politicized. Words such as ‘child centered’, ‘unstreamed’ and creativity on the one hand, and ‘basics’, ‘core curriculum’ and ‘excellence’ on the other have become the property of left and right respectively, serving to label the political and social affiliations of those who employ them. (p. 8)

The metaphors employed by retired principals can provide many clues as to an individual’s social and political and ideological affiliations within the field of education. Examination of discourse for explicit and implicit metaphors used by individual speakers may reveal appropriation of, reaction to, or rebellion against the dominant metaphors being used by particular people at particular times. This provides a window into others’ understandings of the purposes of education as revealed by their speech. Explicit metaphors may reveal underlying belief systems and/or may reflect the larger discourses most available to speakers to describe their experience (e.g., speaking of being a leader as “being the captain of the ship”). Implicit metaphors do the same thing in a more subtle way; listening to the way one speaks about teaching and learning, for instance, may tell you if there is an underlying metaphor present in how one views particular areas of one’s work. For example, as a teacher, I may view “discipline” as something I do to students or something I set up for students, something I get them to do or sets of consequences I design as a default. The statements I make about discipline will likely support an implicit orientational metaphor that reveals how I think of discipline and, therefore, guides my actions in that area. The implicit and explicit metaphors I use to describe my self-in-action will be drawn both from the contexts wherein I act and my experience base. This is because speakers are connected in an intimate, if largely unconscious way, to the professional knowledge and political landscapes wherein which they have defined their roles and constructed their identities (Bredeson, 1985).

This is more sophisticated than merely looking at the explicit metaphors used to describe role, although theoretically this, too, can provide insight into role definition. The transcripts yielded a wide variety of implicit and explicit metaphors used to explicate role. These were drawn mostly from military, sports, and religious realms, and formed uneven patterns of correspondence to primary or secondary group identities. Where patterns emerged, this became another piece in looking at how the role of principal may be negotiated differentially or defined, leading to the construction of contrasting discourses.

While potentially revealing solely on their explicit and implicit levels, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue for a much more primary role for the function of metaphor, one that goes beyond language. They assert that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p.3). But, we cannot see conceptual structures of thinking and action. One way to uncover these and make them more explicit is by looking at language; “since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like” (ibid.).

Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) work reveals the systematicity of a number of underlying structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors “that we live by.” They
emphasize the experiential bases of metaphor and the role that such underlying metaphors play in maintaining cultural coherence. Orientational metaphors reveal how we understand relationships and actions among people and between people and objects, ideas, and events. Orientational metaphors, when explored, can reveal how we evaluate certain actions or attitudes, (e.g., move “up” to the high school; put someone “down” by insulting them), and can be explicit or implicit. Ontological metaphors are used “to comprehend events, actions, activities, and states. Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, activities as substances, states as containers” (p. 30).

In the case of this study, for example, how interviewees described the entry and exit from the role of principal generally reflected “the principalship” as a state that one can “enter and exit.” Events were given adjectives such as “smooth,” “difficult,” “challenging,” and “exciting” as if they were concrete objects. This supports Lakoff and Johnson’s contentions and opens fertile ground for examining the transcripts in a very different way.

In trying to understand how individuals understood the role of principal and thus constructed an identity as principal while taking that role, this notion of action and thought as metaphorically structured has particular implications. Each person negotiating that identity in a particular time and place brings much to those experiences that it is impossible for the listener/reader to know. What we do know, however, is that cultural assumptions, values and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our “world” in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 57)

If Lakoff and Johnson are correct, then metaphors do not merely describe realities for us but rather, in a very fundamental way, they help create social and political realities. Cultural metaphors that are adopted (e.g., TIME IS MONEY) will guide future actions which will then, of course, fit the metaphor. “This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense, metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 156).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that “we draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor” (p. 158). The obvious implication is that an examination of the structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors being used by an individual in describing his/her experience provides direct insight into how that individual felt about and understood those experiences.

**Moral Agency and Ethical Dilemmas as Framing Identity of Self-as-Principal: The Role of Moral Imagination**

The educational enterprise, as defined in this country through the public school system of K-12 education, is largely a moral endeavor. It is permeated with moral dilemmas and moral decision making. Each of the roles of those who participate in that enterprise, (i.e., teachers, students, parents, legislators, the local community, and, of course, school administrators), thus encapsulates moral agency. Principals, charged with responsibility for
ensuring that the business of schooling is carried out in the various locations where they have custodial jurisdiction, assume a role largely defined by the necessity to make moral and ethical decisions (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Manley-Cosimir, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1992; Smith & Blase, 1991; Strike, Haller & Soltis, 1988).

Bakhtin connects patterns of ethical action to formation of identity arguing that they are inextricably fused. He assumes that each of us is “without an alibi in existence”:

We must ourselves be responsible, or answerable, for ourselves. Each of us occupies a unique time and place in life, an existence conceived not as a passive state but as an activity, an event. I calibrate the time and place of my own position, which is always shifting, in the existence of other human beings and of the natural world by means of the values I articulate in deeds. Ethics is not abstract principles but the pattern of the actual deeds I perform in the event that is my life. My self is that which through such performances answers other selves and the world from the unique time and place I occupy in existence. (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 64)

For example, in order for you to understand who I conceive myself to be in any particular role, you must understand my telling about what I did and why I did it. But it is necessary to move beyond what I tell about you to how I tell you about my self–in–action in order to truly understand what I think about who I was.

Thus, in order to really understand how a principal constituted his/her identity as a principal, one must have some grasp on the moral deliberations that helped to frame that role (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Johnson, 1993). Johnson (1993) defines moral deliberation as “that dimension of this complex adaptive process which concerns the development of our character, the nature of our relations to others, and our ability to discern constructive solutions that realize possibilities for meaning and well-being in our interdependent lives” (p. 160). Building maintenance, supporting teachers, community relations, discipline policies, curriculum decisions, and resource allocation are but a few of the administrative responsibilities with which school principals are vested to greater and lesser degrees. How principals understand how much of the responsibility of these decisions lies where and how they story their approaches to these responsibilities reveals much about how they construe their role/identity as a principal.

Johnson (1993) argues that “the way we frame and categorize a given situation will determine how we reason about it, and how we frame it will depend on which metaphorical concepts we are using” (p. 2). Thus, the various structural metaphors by which principals understand the processes and purposes of education guide and frame their understanding of the possible responses to a given situation (Bredeson, 1985). Understanding the extent of moral imagination is central to understanding the identity of self-as-principal, (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986). Therefore, an analysis of underlying structural metaphors existing in his/her narrative about self-as-principal may be instructive.

How a narrator stories his/her “problems” and the process of their resolutions reveals much about how s/he saw his/her responsibilities as principal, and what s/he understood to be appropriate courses of action. Comparison of the underlying structural metaphors being employed can therefore help to determine if common conceptualizations of the moral aspects of the principalship existed among interviewees. Then it should be possible to discern whether these underlying structural metaphors contribute to the
formation of contrasting discourses. Thus, analysis of the structural metaphors surrounding accounts of self-as-principal in action existing in the texts produced by oral history interviews becomes an appropriate tool for understanding construction of identity.

**Narrative Construction of Self: Socio-Cultural Contexts**

What, then, is involved in constructing a narrative of identity construction in the context of an oral history interview? Kohli (1981), in summarizing Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) work on the structure of narrative, says that “a narrative has two functions: one is referential, the other is evaluative” (p. 67). Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) reinforces that these functions are fused in the context of the oral history interview:

The narrative encompasses not only the temporal and causal organization of facts and events considered significant, but also the value judgments that make sense of this particular life experience. (p. 77)

Ferrarotti (1981) says that a narrative of a former self-in-action is “the privileged domain of that singular universal which appears to us as the protagonist of the biographical method–as we understand it” (p.24). But even within the context of a single role such as school principals, we are nonunitary subjects (Bloom & Munro, 1995). As Mouffe (1988) emphasizes:

We are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really, as the social relations in which we participate and the subject-positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersections of those subject positions (p. 34).

This suggests that these texts must be seen as both whole and partial entities, with an acute awareness of their intertextuality. Casey (1993) explains:

In Bakhtin’s theory, there are no isolated individuals, for the continual constitution and reconstitution of any worldview (in utterance) is inexplicably bound up with its relationship to other worldviews, (in a system of intertextuality); all language is essentially social. (p. 25)

The remainder of this chapter looks at the micro and macro contexts implicit in this approach to understanding how a text of an oral history interview is produced, and looks at how common and contrasting discourses across interviews come to be.
The texts produced by the narratives constructed during the course of these interviews share language and meanings, as do each individual interviewer and interviewee. The language that each uses to construct his/her story reflects his/her time, understandings, connections with the professional knowledge and political landscapes wherein his/her tenure as principal took place. Because each interviewee shares a number of primary and secondary identities with others who are retired principals, the texts of each interview must be seen as a collage of layers of response with different aspects of the descriptions of one’s identity of self-as-principal being primarily influenced by different selves.

Although the individual stories are of particular people in particular locations at particular times, certain commonalities of language and understanding should cut across groups to reveal universal elements for people who share certain identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Taken as clusters, distinct images and understandings of the role of principal as understood by those who embodied it should emerge, constructed from various contrast discourses. These emergent discourses will be integrally connected with the larger social and educational discourses that help to frame them at the same time that they impact and form nuances of the larger discourses (Cherryholmes, 1988).

On both a micro and macro level, the narrative that is produced within the framework of a research interview is contextually embedded. It is erroneous to assume that a narrative’s integrity is independent of social networks. Indeed, it is this very embeddedness that offers defense against the charge of relativism often levied at poststructuralist analysis.

Texts and discourse-practices often tell more than one story, each of which can have more than one interpretation, each of which can be subjected to more than one critical analysis. One cannot attribute just any story to a text or discourse practice, however, because the opportunities and constraints for the stories that might be told and how they might be interpreted and criticized are shaped by which words are on the page, by background culture, historical events, professional activities and research findings—by the everyday rules and activities of our discourses and practices (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 157).

The rest of this section will describe potential mediating influences on the narrative produced in an interview situation.
The micro context: Interview as speech event.
The narrative response, although it may not be consciously recognized as an explicit storyizing of identity, is heavily influenced on an immediate level by several factors. These include: a) the local interview context (relationship between participants, location, degree of interest on the part of both participants, setting, gender, race, and age of participants, level of common understanding of role), b) the particular questions asked (including the wording of those questions, the timing of those questions, the interviewee’s understanding of those questions), c) acuity of memory of the interviewee, d) level of esteem of both participants, and e) motivation of each to participate in the interview. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) says that oral history interviewers ask “not for a narrative focused on the inner self but rather for an accurate narrative focused on the social self viewed in relation to its past” (p. 78). This is a mediated accuracy, not a “pure” one. (For Bakhtin’s more in-depth description of the interview as ritual, see Clark & Holquist, 1984; for rich descriptions of the interview as a speech event, see Briggs, 1986; Mishler, 1986.)

On a micro-level, this description of the text produced through an oral history interview has immediate implications for data analysis that are very different from the methods typically used (e.g., Weiss, 1994). As opposed to either an exclusive focus on decontextualized coding for content analysis or a case study approach, Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) argues that since facts and events take their meaning from the narrative structure in which they are embedded...we must construct a specific interpretive model able to take into account the narrative and textual dimension, the social context, the symbolic representations brought into play and, finally, the relations among these diverse elements. (p.78)

While complicating any strategy of data analysis, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be aware of and account for this structural complexity in order to plumb the richness of the data. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) contends that in fact, when one makes the effort to examine the form and not only the content of the collected material, refrains can be heard on the tape, and recurrences—relations among facts, events and comments—can be discerned in the transcript. These elements come to shape the meaning system that governs and informs the life story (p. 79).

Seen within this context, it becomes clear why a content analysis of oral history narratives is not a good match for this project and, indeed, misses the point. (For a further discussion of the shortcomings of an exclusive focus on content analysis for oral history narratives, see Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991.)

The macro context: Connections to other narratives.
In order to really understand the nature of this data, it is necessary to understand the relationships of the individual narratives both to larger discourses and to each other (Thompson, 1988). Lemke (1995) insists that the textual, in the broad sense of all the meanings we make, whether in words or by deeds, is deeply political. Our meanings shape and are shaped by our
social relationships, both as individuals and as members of social groups. These social relationships bind us into communities, cultures and subcultures. The meanings we make define not only our selves, they also define our communities, our age-groups, our genders and our era in history. Even more, they define the relationships between communities, age-groups, social classes, cultures and subcultures—all of which are essentially political relationships. (p. 1)

Thus, it is the layering of the stories in the texts that produces a coherent picture of what meanings have been made. It is only when a variety of perspectives and viewpoints are juxtaposed that the essential character of whatever is being looked at emerges.

This is akin to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia. Bakhtin contends that it is the actual language that is socially and politically active and activated. In Bakhtin’s (1981) words:

*Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life...the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of the utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.* (p. 273, 276)

Casey (1993) adds:

*Bakhtin’s theory of the subject is not only social; it is also fundamentally moral and political. Unlike Althusser’s (1972) interpellated subject, this self is more than a creation of discourse; she can also be one of its makers. Unlike the alienated persona of post-modern discourse, this self is not a jumble of fragments; she can articulate her own coherence. Acting within the limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power.* (p. 24)

Therefore, oral history interview texts must be looked at both as unitary constructions and as collages of response framed by membership in a variety of primary groups (Bloom & Munro, 1995; Casey, 1993; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Transcripts must be analyzed for internal structure, rhetorical device, reinforcement and contradiction, discourse patterns and contextual themes recognizing that certain responses or emphases within the text may reflect more than one primary group identity (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Of course, talking about micro and macro contexts is an artificial dualism in the context of a speech event as both converge in what the speaker says. Hermans and Kempen (1993) use the term multi-voicedness to refer to “not only the simultaneous existence of different individual voices but also to the simultaneous existence of the voice of the individual and the voice of a group” (p.77). Cherryholmes (1988) uses the term discourses-practices to capture the dialogical nature of speech and action. Both illustrate the concept of simultaneity required to understand the dialogical nature of meaning making.
Looking for Contrasting Discourses

In using a heuristic method of inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) to discern contrast discourses, Ferrarotti (1981) suggests that the basic heuristic unit needs to be the group as opposed to the individual.

By destructuring and restructuring the context, group praxis mediates and actively retranslates the social totality in its formal and informal microstructures, in its lines of force and communication, in its norms and sanctions, and in its modalities and networks of affective interactions, etc. The group becomes in turn—and simultaneously—the object of the synthetic praxis of its members. The primary group thus reveals itself as the fundamental mediation between the social and the individual. (p. 24)

Building on Lemke’s (1995) definition of discourse as “persistent habits of speaking and acting, characteristic of some social group, through which it construes its worldview: its beliefs, opinions and values” (p. 95), one should be able to parse out primary groups through examination of the discourse around a particular role or set of situations. Etter-Lewis (1991) points out that

on a most fundamental level, language is the organizing force that molds oral narrative according to a narrator’s distinct style. Styles vary as widely as individuals, but recurring patterns indicate more than speakers’ personal quirks. Speech patterns inherent in oral narrative can reveal status, interpersonal relationships, and perceptions of language, self and the world (p. 44).

The primary social groups, then, potentially define different discourses which correspond to different understandings of self and role and identity. Each group identity presents itself as a location, “a sutured zone where there is a reciprocal articulation and mutual merging of the public and the private, of social structures and self, of the social and the psychological, of the universal and the singular” (Ferrarotti, 1981, p. 24). Finding what the relevant primary social groups are entails extensive discourse analysis, beginning with what would seem to be promising contrasts and using the data to determine what continues to be interesting.

Primary discourse groups have been found in a variety of studies based on factors such as gender (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982), race and gender (Etter-Lewis, 1991; Casey, 1993), religion (Casey, 1993), and age (Elder, 1981). While it is true that all of these primary groups, as well as others, have been found to bound discourses in certain situations, there is no guarantee that they would form the boundaries for defining the role of principal in this study. Preconceived notions of fruitfulness are foolhardy; it is the data itself that must guide simultaneous analysis and theory development (Strauss, 1987).

Research as a Dialogical Process: Putting Theory into Practice

The power of these ideas to explore construction of self-as-principal was confirmed when my use of them contributed to the identification of contrasting discourses. Using these ideas to guide my discourse analysis of the descriptions of self-as-principal-in-action given by retired Virginia school principals interviewed as part of the Oral History of the
Principalship project did indeed generate interesting insight into some socio-cultural and contextual influences on construction of identity of self-as-principal.

But I was still puzzled about what it actually meant that this avenue of exploration was successful. What did it mean that narrative was a fruitful entry for exploring construction of self? How could I simultaneously explain the common and individualized definitions of self-as-principal revealed in these transcripts? The more I thought about the theory I had so carefully postulated, the more I wanted to better understand the potential implications of that theory for myself as a person and as an educator. Meanwhile, I began to analyze the transcripts using the tools I had predicted would be useful and wrote my analytical summaries complete with these nagging unresolved questions about what it all might mean beyond the specific discourse features I was uncovering.

In the process, I realized that the theory I was exploring was larger than what I had first supposed. For if, as I found evidence for, language used by individuals is inextricably connected to larger frames and if, as my findings indicate, self-construction can be explored through narrative, then there are some very intriguing possibilities taking place in the process of constructing self in narrative. Two points in particular began to make me think further about the implications of educators having many selves: 1) The overlapping in some narratives of what seemed to be aspects of personal and professional selves; and, 2) the realization that it was self-as-narrator that the interviewee was constructing a past self-as-principal during the interview.

I returned to Mead’s and Dewey’s ideas about transactional realism and multiple selves and I read Garrison’s and Cherryholmes’ applications of these ideas to education. An understanding of what I saw in the transcripts as illustrative of persons as a collective of selves emerged. Mead’s ideas about the “I” and the “Me” of each self possessed by a person seemed to help explain what I was reading in the transcripts and why the tools I was using to explore and discover contrasting discourses were working. In the case of self-as-principal, the “Me” of self-as-principal is self-in-role as externally defined. The “I” of self-as-principal is how that role is enacted and transacted given the interaction between biological factors, socio-cultural factors, experiences of other selves and the moral imagination of the “I”. Taken together, this theory explains both reasons for the common discourse features I found and the presence of individual definition of role. As I worked on my analysis of the transcripts, I realized that they could be examples of a larger theory of self-construction beyond the premises outlined here in Chapter 2. This quest for the theory beyond the theory occurred simultaneously with the data analysis and informed my vision and understanding of the project. I discuss this in much more detail in Chapter 6.

I used the tools mentioned here in Chapter 2 throughout the project. They proved fruitful indeed, though sometimes in ways not initially anticipated. I thought explicit and implicit metaphors would reveal more patterns but they did not. I had to “get the hang” of finding structural metaphors; they are not so immediately obvious to see and must be parsed out from the material. Multiple abortive attempts to trace them were rewarded only by triumphant discovery when a promising lead was rechecked against the transcripts in a cohort and a match was found. The features of the professional knowledge landscape which figured prominently in the transcripts could not be predicted ahead of time, nor could it be predicted how they would affect the discourse or make patterns with cohorts determined by any of a variety of factors.
Moral imagination, which I initially predicted would be a valuable indicator of identity of self-as-principal turned out to be both the crux of the matter in terms of creating an agentive-self-as-principal, and the most elusive idea to actually use as an analytical tool. It was obvious that certain individuals had much more moral imagination as principals than others as evidenced by comparison of their descriptions of self-as-principal. But I was not desiring to judge or evaluate the quality of moral imagination present or lacking in a given transcript. Among the elementary principals, it did seem that certain socio-cultural cohorts, as groups of individuals sharing gender and race, seemed to have more moral imagination than did other cohorts. It seemed that the further one was from the dominant White male discourses of educational administration, the more moral imagination a cohort seemed to have. Perhaps this is a result of having to know the dominant paradigms in order to succeed coupled with the experience of having been an Other as a result of not being a White male. This might lead those who are not White males to be in a better position to envision alternatives to what has traditionally been the case.

I examined the data for patterns across many different cohorts, allowing the data to suggest avenues of study. Contrasting discourses emerged from analysis of cohorts based on gender, but were even more sharply defined when both race and gender were taken into account. Structural metaphors fell along lines defined by race and gender, and, within the White male cohort, by level (elementary, middle, high school). Holding race and gender constant, the case of White males, yielded some contrasts in the descriptions of self-as-principal-in-action by level. It was interesting to realize that the overlapping features of these discourses used by the retired White male principals taken as a group, such as images of leadership drawn from the military and sports, as well as a concern with power and autonomy, mirrored the traditional discourses about educational leadership and the principalship found in the mainstream literature regarding educational administration.

Another discovery was the pervasiveness of religious metaphors and references articulated in the narratives cut across gender, race and location and emerged as a general feature of retired Virginia school principals’ discourses about identity of self-as-principal. This attested to the power of cultural institutional discourses to shape and frame and be used for expression about divergent identities across contexts. Features of the professional knowledge landscape that impacted discourses about identity of self-as-principal included such educational mandates and trends as special education, desegregation and open schools, and some contextual factors such as school size and the culture of a particular school division. Several other avenues of potential contrast were explored but did not seem to contribute to contrasting discourses.

Each of the next three chapters provides an analysis summary of discourse features by cohort about self-as-principal. The analysis begins with Chapter 3 where I examine the discourse features found in the interviews with White male principals and then look at how the discourses within the White male cohort are distinguished by level. I start with the White male discourse because I found, after analyzing it, that it replicated and reinforced the traditional conceptions of educational leadership found in the literature. By looking at what is taken to be conventional wisdom and looking at who generates that conceptualization of how things are, a background is provided against which contrasting understandings can be cast. Examination by level cohort provides some insight into the ways that the overlay of the contextual factor of level influenced identity construction for principals sharing primary race and gender identities.
As discussed earlier, primary identities such as race and gender and religion did emerge in my study as significant influences on discourses about identity of self-as-principal. A descriptive analysis of these is found in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, I look at the discourses about self-as-principal of White female elementary principals, Black male elementary principals and Black female elementary principals contrasting these with each other and with the discourses of the White male principals.

In Chapter 5, I describe contextual features and features of the professional educational landscape that these interviewees spoke about as having a large impact on self-as-principal. These included school size, open space schools, special education and desegregation, location and the administrative cultures of some school divisions. In some cases, these features existed across level, gender, race and across the state; contrasts by interview cohort are presented where applicable. I also examine how religious references are used in these interviews by many of the principals from across all of the cohorts examined. I conclude Chapter 5 by presenting the case of one county as it is constructed in the narratives as an example of how location and administrative culture can impact definition of self-as-principal as revealed in these retrospective narratives.

Finally, in Chapter 6 I integrate these findings with the realization that this study exemplifies a particular understanding of self, identity and role. I expand on the theory of self-construction begun in this chapter, discuss the study as an example of social pragmatic constructivism and critical pragmatism, and review what I think are the resulting implications. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

**Conclusion**

Cherryholmes (1988) points out that since speech is action, “all discourse is material.”

The intertextuality of discourses and practices constitute and structure our social and educational worlds. (p. 8)

This is an important understanding to give meaning to the analysis that follows. Not only must it be understood relative to the data but also relative to my analysis and presentation of the data. The texts against and within which I continue to negotiate my identity of self-as-researcher are as irrevocably as part of this work as those engaged by these interviewees and interviewers. My various identities as a Jewish female faculty member, writer, teacher, dancer, partner, mother, daughter, sister, friend, storyteller and doctoral candidate in my mid-thirties connect me and position me in various ways to this study. An analysis of my reference list alerts the wary reader from what texts I draw, with whom I am in dialogue through this work, to whom I have been listening, and where my interests lie. I share this because I sincerely believe in its relevance to you, the reader.

In Chapter 1 to his book **Power and Criticism**, Cherryholmes (1988) makes the following point:

The idea that meanings flow back and forth from what is said to what is done, from ourselves to the world, is integral to what follows. (p. 9)
In that spirit, knowing that you as reader have already experienced and transacted meaning with what I have said thus far and that the interpretation of what I found flies far beyond me with the writing of these words, I acknowledge the larger conversations and all of our parts within them, past, present and future.
Chapter 3

Traditional Conceptions of the Role of the Principal: Common and Contrasting Discourses in White Male Elementary, Middle School, and Secondary Principals’ Narratives About Role and Identity of Self-as-Principal

Introduction

My goal with this and each of the other analysis chapters is to describe what I discovered to be discourse contrasts and commonalities through my analysis of the discourses used by retired school principals in Virginia to describe identity of self-as-principal during oral history interviews conducted as part of the Oral History of the Principalship database. My unit of analysis is a cohort of interviewees sharing primary group identities in common, not the narratives of individual principals. My intention is not to evaluate, psycho-analyze, justify or privilege any of these principals or their responses. Instead, I want to summarize key discourse features found when looked upon through the particular socio-cultural or contextual lens I am using at a particular time. I attempt to locate discourses-practices (cf. Cherryholmes, 1988) in larger contexts, to illuminate their connection to self-construction, and to juxtapose commonalities and contrasts in ways that allow them to both be seen and to be traced by group identities held in common by interviewees of particular cohorts. As much as possible, I have included excerpts from the transcripts so that you can see the data upon which I base my conclusions and can decide for yourself the merits of the case being made.

This chapter describes the result of applying the methodology of socio-cultural discourse analysis derived from the theory presented in Chapter 2 to the discourses used by White male principals to discuss identity of self-as-principal. First, common discourse features across White male elementary, middle school and high school principals are described and identified as being both reflective and formative of the traditionally dominant discourses about educational leadership found in the mainstream literature about educational administration. Then, contrasting discourse features are presented by level cohorts, exhibiting the influence of context on construction of self-as-principal as found in these oral history interviews.

The traditional literature about the principalship seldom differentiates the role of the principal with respect to level. “Level” here refers to the students, (i.e., elementary, middle school or high school), not administrative position, (i.e., assistant principal, associate principal). While there have been some textbooks since the 1940s which specifically address the preparation of elementary or secondary principals, many textbooks used in educational administration courses focus on the general entity called “the principalship,” or, even more generally, “educational administration” (Glass, 1986). Indeed, in the course of a career in educational administration, a White male, in particular, can expect to serve at several levels.

It is therefore not surprising that common aspects appear within the discourse about the principalship used by White male administrators across levels. An analysis of 44 narratives about self-as-principal of retired elementary, middle school and high school
principals revealed several prominent discourse features which generally match the discourse about the principalship found in the educational administration literature.

At the same time, each of these interviewees did not perceive his role the same way, or that he even did the same things when performing as a principal at different levels. This latter point is corroborated by the occupational analyses of the elementary principalship, the middle school principalship, and the senior high school principalship conducted by National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Institute of Education (NIE), and others (see, for example, Baehr, 1975; Becker, 1971; Byrne, Hines & McCleary, 1978; Hemphill, Richards, & Peterson, 1965; Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelly, & McCleary, 1988; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe, 1981; Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe & Melton, 1993).

From the interviews used in this study, it is clear that the role is experienced and defined differently by level. Explicit, often unsolicited, comments differentiating the principal’s actions and understanding of the role by level are made by interviewees who served as principal at more than one level. Patterns emerge in how White male principals at each level speak similarly about being a principal at that level. Part of this might be a function of the size of the school involved since consolidated high schools are often much larger than elementary schools. But these differences are noted by principals retired from elementary and high schools of the same size, as well as middle schools and high schools of the same size, or where the “lower” level schools are larger than the “upper” level schools being talked about.

The next section describes my process of analysis, how I found what I report here. Presentation of product can so easily obfuscate key points of process informing that product. Therefore, I want to emphasize three points. This was not the first cohort I analyzed; I happened to begin with the White female elementary principals’ cohort and I developed an understanding of the White male elementary principals’ cohort by contrasting it with what I found in the first cohort, rather than the other way around as it is presented here. I did not begin with the notion that the White male principals’ discourses would mirror the traditionally dominant discourses in the literature regarding educational leadership—although in retrospect it makes a lot of sense. (After all, the overwhelming majority of the people in the field of educational administration have been White males.) Rather I “discovered” the similarities as I listened to each interviewee in the cohort inform me about his identity of self-as-principal, and heard echoes of much of the reading I had done in this area. I also did not intend initially to compare levels within a race and gender cohort, and I did not originally plan to include middle school as a cohort level of analysis at all. These were all directions suggested by the data. I say this to ward off the notion that I began with an agenda to contrast everyone against the White males. When I realized the reiteration of the mainstream discourses occurring in the narratives of the White male principals, this seemed a way to show how discourses-practices become dominant and reinforce themselves. I also felt that by placing the White male discourse first, I could best show the contrasting discourses found by analyzing the interview transcripts of the other cohorts.

**Methods for Cohort Selection and Analysis**

For the material in this chapter, I analyzed transcripts from 20 interviews with retired elementary principals, 7 interviews with retired long-term middle school principals, and 17
interviews with retired high school principals. The criteria for selection was 5 or more years of service at a particular level and strong identification as a principal at that level. Interviews of White males who served as principal at more than one level were only included if remarks were either focused on one level or were clearly demarcated by the interviewee as to what position he was talking about. The interviews represent urban, suburban and rural principals, interviewees with a variety of career paths to the principalship, and interviewees from a variety of counties in Virginia.

In exploring characteristics of the discourses about self-as-principal, I focused on metaphors, frequently used phrases to describe self-as-principal and expectations of self and others in performance of the role. I looked at descriptions of Others (i.e., teachers, assistant principals, parents, students, the superintendent, other central office personnel, the community, and the school board) and of interactions of self-with-other. I noted stories of action, statements and opinions, kinds of examples given, and language used to describe leadership. I paid particular attention to what the interviewees say they missed and did not miss since retirement, how they described a typical day as a principal, and what they described as key influences on their understanding of the role of principal and actions as principal (e.g., mentors, classes, conferences, teachers, superintendent, military, coaching experience, church, family values, previous experience as a teacher).

This cohort of interviews followed typical patterns for educational administrators serving as principals from the 1960s through the 1980s (Kempner, 1991). As a generation of principals, the majority had some type of military service. About half of them entered teaching purposively, while others went in and out of teaching, or started teaching after several years of doing other things. They typically had some classroom teaching, although the majority had less than five years before going into administration, and most had coaching experience. Most were eager to enter administration; they had planned to do this or needed to do this financially or felt they had leadership qualities and could make more of a difference at the administrative level.

The most typical career pattern was teacher/coach at the high school level, assistant principal at the high school level or junior high level, and then principal at one of the three levels. Relatively few went from an elementary principalship to a high school or junior high school principalship although elementary principals were transferred among elementary schools about half the time, with a larger school being seen as a promotion. Similarly, it was considered a promotion, by central administration if not by the principal, to go from a junior high school principalship to a high school principalship. Going “down” a level or returning to a former level was described as a purposeful move by some of the principals who had “succeeded” at the “ultimate” post of senior high school principalship and rewarded themselves by “going back” to the “easier” post of middle school or elementary school principalship.

When you went from the high school to the intermediate, was there a lot of difference?

It was like semi-retirement. I was getting older, had blood pressure. And at Ft. Hunt, six years at Ft. Hunt during those times it was definitely. Yes I think, I didn't really answer your question. I think we did a lot down there. I tell you how I know. I know from the reports of the staff that I know, and I know some of them socially even today, after I left. And there was a lot of genuine feeling. I left at almost this time of year and Bryant was opening up.
I went to [the superintendent] and said, “I need a break.” I didn't know about Bryant at the time. He said, “I can offer you two things. You can be...there's going to be the associate principal job at Hayfield...” I said, “The trouble with that is once you’re captain of the ship, you never like to be first mate again.” So he told me about the Bryant job. I said I'd really enjoy that as a different kind of instructional program. It’s a bridging kind of thing between the elementary school and the high school. And I had one fantastic guidance director who really trained me in six months how to prepare myself for the intermediate school. I felt I did a good job there. I capped my educational career with a real fun job. And I was truly an instructional leader at the time. We had a great staff at Bryant. And, of course, it was back in that old building, you know, where I started.

Okay. So you've had experience as a principal at elementary and secondary?

Yes. I’ve been principal at Cave Spring High School, and the two elementary schools, twice at one elementary school. I think being twice at one elementary school, having left to go to the high school and come back to it, is really something of a rarity for a lot of people because in actualities, that just doesn't happen, I don't think, too often. The other thing is, for an elementary school principal to take over a high school principalship is also sort of rare, I think. I went to school with 189 students for a high school with 1,890 students, so that was kind of a fun thing for me.

In order to highlight differences, it is first necessary to create a backdrop against which these differences occur. In the next sections, I discuss why the mainstream educational administration literature is congruent with the discourses about self-as-principal of White male principals. I then summarize the similarities of the discourse found in the transcripts of White male administrators regardless of level and discuss why these similarities might exist.

The Mainstream Discourse of Educational Administration IS the Discourse of White Males

Characteristic of the traditional educational administration literature is its focus on “the acquisition of the skills, techniques and socialization that the keepers of the castle of educational administration deem appropriate for entry” (Kempner, 1991, p. 105). Kempner draws a parallel between Geertz’ understanding of culture as composed of “webs of meaning humans spin about themselves”:

These webs are the beliefs individuals hold about their physical and social world and provide the connections that link individuals to each other and to the larger community. Similarly, educational administrators are connected to one another by webs of significance that define what it is to be an administrator in schools. These webs provide explanations for administrators on how they should behave and the beliefs they should hold as members of a culture of educational administration. Unfortunately, when the beliefs individuals hold that give meaning to their culture are based upon
unsubstantiated or erroneous evidence, they are myths. Myths offer explanations for the unknown and provide appropriate group behavior for group members who confront such situations. As Geertz explains, the totality of these myths and beliefs provides the substance of culture which, in turn, dictates behavior of individuals to each other and to the outside world. (Kempner 1991, 105-6)

Many authors have looked at the ways that language is used by the professions to control knowledge and access and to enhance and secure authority and prestige (see, for example, Bredeson, 1995; Cherryholmes, 1988). In educational administration, as in other professions, entry and advancement requirements, claims and jurisdiction of authority and sphere of influence, and occupational jargon and rhetoric have been established. The result of such professionalism “has enabled educational administration to define and control certain types of knowledge of school operation, as well as providing an avenue of mobility and level of prestige for its ‘experts’ who have constructed this view of education for society” (Kempner, 1991, p. 107-108). Kempner (1991) says that in Geertz’ terminology “we can understand that educational administrators spin their own webs of significance to give meaning to their cultural identity based on the service they provide to schools and the community” (p. 106). Most of this view in the United States has been constructed, advocated, and maintained by educational administrators who were (are) White males.

The multiple roles of the school principal as defined in the literature has subtly and not so subtly shifted from the 1950s to the 1990s (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Glass, 1986). At the same time, the cacophony of calls for what the principal should be and do is filled with contradictory and ambiguous directives and terms (Becker, 1971; Greenfield, 1987b). Beck and Murphy (1993) in their review of metaphorical themes from the 1920s to the 1990s discuss the dialectical nature of definition of the principalship over time. They see metaphors used in descriptions of the role of the principal forming patterns “wherein concepts seem to reflect a synthesis and extension of images of preceding eras.” To Beck and Murphy, this suggests that “the principalship is a role that is influenced not only by contemporary forces within and, especially, outside education, but also by earlier conceptions of the role itself” (p. 205-206). Glass (1986) makes a similar observation when he notes that newer conceptualizations and more comprehensive theories about educational administration did not replace but were added on top of earlier descriptions. New terms and new definitions of terms already in place both appear. Terms such as “manager”, “instructional leader”, “effective” and “evaluation” are accompanied by a wide variety of often conflicting instructions, examples and advice to the aspiring or experienced educational administrator (see, for example, Greenfield, 1987b). As many veteran teachers and administrators attest, trends come and go in a fairly predictable cycle. As one interviewee said, “Well, in public education those sorts of things repeat themselves about every twenty-five years” SWM244. Added to this is the fact that the expectations for principals continued to get more complex. The reality is that as the literature, and central office, recommends new roles or new emphases concerning old responsibilities, principals perceive that localities (parents, teachers and communities) seldom allow principals to drop easily older expectations without negative consequences (i.e., Becker, 1971).

It is against/within this ambiguity and enormity of role and expectations that a principal dialogically defines him/herself as principal. It makes sense that in describing oneself-as-principal one would use the languages of discourse most readily available and significant for him or her. Discourses, as Weedon (1987) states, are
more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the “nature” of the body, unconscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meanings outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (Weedon, p. 108, in Grogan, 1996, p. 35)

The professional discourse is permeated with the idea of leadership as “taking charge” and with embedded references to coaching and the military as exemplars of leadership. For White male educational administrators, the synergy created by having that language and those expectations about leadership match one’s own experiences is very powerful. Fostered by the literature, and reinforced by the expectations and examples of other White males in educational administration, it is no wonder that a common vision and discourse about the principalship emerges. This is evident in the consistency of the discourses they use to talk about self-as-principal which exist across level and local context. The next section details some of the ways this reveals itself.

**Common Discourses About Self-As-Principal of Retired White Male Principals**

Throughout these interviews, White male principals at all levels repeatedly talked about “common sense” as one of the critical characteristics of an effective principal. But, as Grogan (1996) points out, “common sense is expected to inform our thoughts and guide our behavior. Often it is interpreted as wisdom derived from the collective experience of generations of human beings in a neutral, value-free sense”:

Yet expressions such as “everybody knows that” or “it’s just the way things are” are warning signals. Who knows that? Why are things that way. “Common” sense surely refers to knowledge shared by those whose values and beliefs are the same, and whose view of the world dominates by virtue of this sameness. Securely placed within the discourses by virtue of their widespread and often unquestioned acceptance, ideas that are described as common sense can be good clues as to who is thought common to which group. (Grogan, 1996, p. 39-40)

When examining these transcripts, I found that the common sense emphasized by them was contained in some very particular language and images representative of their collective experience as White males in our society. It is not surprising that my findings parallel Kempner’s (1991) in the following way. Kempner notes that in interviews with White male school administrators in Oregon, the interviewees expressed that “the predominantly male experiences (for this age cohort) of coaching, the military and even Boy Scouts were central to the background most administrators either had or expected of their colleagues” (p. 108) and that military and sports metaphors and experiences were frequently used to describe leadership or to explain actions taken as principal. The following excerpts from the transcripts I examined vividly reflect this. Sports metaphors are found sporadically throughout these transcripts but are more prevalent in the narratives of retired high school principals:

I never felt like it was important that I get the acknowledgment or credit or any of that stuff, but what I felt was important, was that we had a mission
and we needed to get this thing done, and we needed it to be all in there together and my job was to facilitate that. And if I could get that with some of the kids showing the way, we would do it that way. And a lot of that came from coaching football. If you didn't have a guy throw the ball, run the damn thing. You know, and if you didn't have big people to move people out of the way, then flank them. Do that kind of stuff. SWM339

I tried to think of that kind of thing. Really, I met with cafeteria staff regularly, I met with school bus drivers. I'd get on the school bus and we would meet regularly and go with some things and get their input and they seemed to enjoy it. I would meet the cafeteria workers early and keep letting them know that your job is here to help these students and teachers, not create problems for them, to help them, do what you can to help them. With the cafeteria staff, I took pride in what we did. They really felt that they were contributing a lot to those student's education, and they were. The custodians would not charge graduation night, for any work they did. They said, no sir, they were doing that for the kids. The cafeteria staff was the same way. They were part of the organization. If you go back, the school is a team, I guess coming, maybe not necessarily, from coaching. You have a team, and everybody does their part. If one person does not do their part, then it breaks down, and you have a success as a team, not as an individual. So, if you have that team, you have to constantly go around and be working with that team. It cannot come falsely. It has to be genuine. SWM348

In contrast, military metaphors and experiences used to describe self-as-principal were liberally sprinkled throughout the interviews of White male interviewees regardless of level. In many cases, interviewees used military images to describe how they viewed themselves as principals.

You also are the "captain of the ship." This is something that I learned when I was in the Navy. And you have to make many decisions that are not popular. But as long as you keep in mind that whatever you're trying to do is for the good of the school, the students and the faculty, then you can't go wrong. I've done a number of things in my career where I stuck my neck out and I knew that, if I were wrong, it could be very fatal to my career. But I felt that as captain of the ship that the decision had to be made and luckily I made a good decision or there were people there who supported me. SWM144F

...plus the fact that I always wanted to be the captain. Always wanted to run the thing, and I used to think a lot about the schools being they were much like the marines in the sense that, uh, my classes—marines rifle platoon had forty-three people in it, and the classes had forty to forty-five people in it. And they would have one platoon leader and there would be one teacher. I used to think about grade levels as rifle companies. Uh, the elementary schools were the battalions, the junior highs were the regiments, and the high schools were the division, and we were on the front line and that is were I wanted to be. I never wanted to be in an administration building, ever. SWM339
See, after being in the war, what the hell did I have to be afraid of? I got
decorated twice, got shot at, and all that stuff. Then I came back here and I'm
supposed to get upset?...When Martin Luther King got killed, [the
superintendent] dispatched Jim...to come down and help me. And Jim said,
Do you have a plan?” I said, “You're damn right I've got a plan, Jim. You see
this Bible? I'm going right out there under that flagpole. The first crowd that
shows up, we're going to pray for Martin Luther King, and I'm going to lead
the prayer.” ...Then along comes the police with their helmets on and their
shotguns. I made every kid watch that program through and through and
they got so sick of it that they asked permission to come out and go home.
To be real honest with you, Donna, where I learned this, of all places was in
the Marine Corps. If you've ever been in a...attack, where the Japs are
coming at you, them son's-of-a-gun are going to kill you if you don't keep a
cool head...you'll luck out anyway with a cool head. And I remembered that.

Kempner (1991) found, as I did, that the concept of “taking charge” was repeated
by many of these White male administrators who talked comfortably about educational
administration using the traditional leadership philosophies espoused by coaching, business
or the military. I found that Kempner's description of some of the implications of this
particularly fits the discourse of the high school principals in my study.

I think coaching...now a lot of people really “pooh pooh” the idea that half
the principals were coaches at one time, saying that that's very good
background for it. The thing that is there, organizational and leadership,
leading people in all kinds of your emotional situations...when you're high,
when you're low, when you're frustrated, when you've got family
problems...if you are successful when working with that you're developing
skills that are necessary as an administrator. Because it takes so many of the
same kinds of skills, I don't think you have to be a coach to be a very
successful administrator, because you can get them in other ways. But it is
one of the ways, and for me, I think one of the things that helped prepare me
to deal with, compassionately, with the problems that people, young people,
were facing...to honestly look at them and recognize that they are young
people who are having some serious problems. I got close enough to them
and knew them well enough as a coach to know that if these people are
having problems, others are having them too, and recognizing how...gave me
a way of recognizing there were problems that I ought to be dealing with and
working with those youngsters.

I always handled assistant principals the way I would have done if I had
been in the Navy. I delegated authority but not responsibility. The
responsibility for the total operation of the school was mine.

This androcentric notion of leadership is commented upon by many looking at differences
between male and female leaders as school administrators (see, for example, Dunlap &
Schmuck, 1995; Grogan, 1996; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1986). Kempner sums
up the androcentric understanding of leadership found in the literature and its consequences
for educational leadership when enacted:
“Making things happen” and a “can-do attitude” are coaching and military terms, where the leader has singular responsibility for moving the team, platoon or organization forward. The philosophical and moral questions of what is fair and democratic are typically not considered under such “can-do attitudes.” Orders are taken from higher authority without question...[Similarly] business operations, management, and leadership are often used by administrators and scholars in education as models of success. (Kempner, 1991, p. 109)

Any possible dissonance caused by application of military, coaching or business leadership models to educational administration was rarely mentioned by either the interviewees in my cohort or those in Kempner’s study. Indeed, the principals in my study often recommended military service as the best preparation for the principalship or talked about how useful their military experience had been to helping them define self-as-principal.

I think the fact that I was head of the gunnery department in the Navy gave me a good chance of working with people, putting people in certain positions, certain places, and that enhanced me a lot as far as my personal philosophy of management. EWM327

The Marine Corps I really feel did more for me then any other training that I ever had and, uh, as far as leadership and uh, accepting responsibility and sticking to a task until it was finished, and all that sort of thing...The Marine Corps had already taught me how to handle people... SWM339

Well, you know, people always think of their own experiences. And rather than someone else's. I always felt that a principal would be better able to handle his job if he had done some other kind of work in an executive capacity rather than in totally education. That's probably because, having been a Marine, I felt that I had a lot of managerial experience that I didn't have to find out because I had already experienced means and methods for managing. SWM199

Some even went so far as to recommend requiring military service before “taking on” the principalship:

I would like to see a principal who has served in the service or somewhere, who has been disciplined and then take that and modify. I'm not convinced that you can get this type discipline outside of service. I would like to see everybody have a couple years of service in one of the branches, and get that discipline early, and then get their training. EWM279

Describe the ideal requirements for principal certification, or if you were to sit on the board making certification requirements what areas would you like to emphasize?

O. K...I would want that person to be able to have been under fire. I would want that person to ahh, having an experience in the military I don’t think would be bad at all. I think that they would need to have experienced some, ahh, negative types of things in order to have strengthened them. I think they have to be relatively bright, they don’t have to be an Einstein, but I think they
have to have a good grasp of the curriculum, of management skills ahh, but they need to be a good person. I just keep coming keep on coming back to they have to be a good person and that they have got a love of kids, they want to do what is best for kids. And what is best for kids is sometimes saying no and disciplining them and taking things away from them and denying them things. But that is love, I mean all of that comes into play. But, I think I would want someone that ahh, is involved with, with human nature and is as humanistic in making those types of decisions. SWM350

Others talked about the path of coach to educational administrator as one that was perfectly logical:

I would guess that 75% of the principals in this country are former coaches. The reason is probably because coaching is excellent training ground for administration. It was also a political base. Coaches were normally the most popular people in their community. If you were a successful football coach and you wanted to go into administration, you would have a lot of people to support you. SWM147F

By that I again, think that coaches make good administrators because, you know, they have had to make tough decisions. They have won ball games, they have lost ball games, they have had parents on their backs. They have had to deal with all kinds of adverse situations and they, they dealt with successful situations. SWM350

I also had some very excellent—and this is very ironic—so often you hear people talk about jocks taking principalships and administrative positions, but football coaches and basketball coaches that I’ve known... really molded somewhat my public relations image, as I went through education. I felt this to be a tremendous asset for me...[Names two people] were tremendous sources of strength and energy and ability to deal with the public in both good times and bad times. [They helped me learn] how to work with people when they were upset and how to work with people when they were on such a high that you had to bring them back sometimes. EWM315

Kempner (1991) points out why this makes sense:

The majority of male administrators simply hoped to follow in the foot steps of those who had preceded them. Their goal was to be socialized into the culture of professionalism that had served well their senior colleagues. In this manner, discipline and the metaphors of the military and sports served as the “true and right” path to follow. (p.113-114)

Kempner found that the male administrators interviewed in Oregon generally “adhered to the myth of a science of administrative control”:

Their perspective of leadership is one based on power, control, and domination as reflected in the militaristic and athletic metaphors used by many of the men. Advocates of such a perspective of leadership see administrative style as a product to be acquired or a style to be affected, rather than an interactive form of leadership developed in concern with the moral beliefs of the organization. (Kempner, 1991, p. 113)
This succinctly summarizes the general view of leadership and actions-as-principal described in this cohort of interview transcripts held by principals at all three levels. Moreover, it supports the instrumental approach to leadership as discussed in the interviews with these retired White male principals.

This instrumental approach to leadership is also gender-based (Helgesen, 1990), and reflects much of the dominant paradigms in the literature. The interviewees discussed “know-how,” tended to share stories related to events and the technical aspects of the role, and described acting towards others in exchange for what they then will do or not do. White male principals said repeatedly that they did not want to be seen as dictators, as “bosses” but that they wanted to be seen as “leaders.” The way they talked about how they led parallels a strong exchange/bargain philosophy of leadership; that is, leading by persuasion rather than by direct commands, and doing things because of what will result and not because they are important in and of themselves. They talked about doing things to avoid larger problems later, not because they thought people should be treated that way, (e.g., if you praise teachers, they will work harder for you; if you involve parents early on, it won’t come back to haunt you later). Although this is a feature of the general discourse of White males regardless of level, it is particularly explicit in the narratives of the retired elementary White male principals:

I’ve always felt I could lead better than I could drive, and I always tried to use that philosophy and work with my teachers and with my school staff. I feel that people work better under maybe a little pressure but not under fear. I do not like to work under fear, and I did not like to subject my teachers to work under fear. I think they work better in an atmosphere where you can have mutual respect for each other and perhaps a give-and-take situation in which you say “Well, this is the way I’d like for it to be, but now let’s discuss it and see if this is the way it should be.” I’ve always felt that by working together with people I can accomplish more than saying, “I’m the boss and you do what I say do.” EWM269

I’ll tell you one thing—teachers are not 100 percent behind something, you’re in trouble because they can do more to destroy a program than you can to build it up. And so you need to get support. You must have support. In order to do that you treat, you treat teachers like they’re human beings, like they’re people and like they’re professionals, like they have an education, like they’re smart—which they are—and you treat them like that and then, then, they’ll, they’ll go along with you on stuff, and they’ll help you with it. EWM346

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1 Some in the field of educational administration may wonder why I do not explicitly identify this feature of the discourse as transactional leadership. It is my understanding that transactional leadership refers to transacting agreements by a leader with subordinates in service of an organizational goal. It is not clear to me from the transcripts that this exchange/bargain approach was used largely in this context. I mention it here as a common element of descriptions of dealing with others because it is in contrast to the way the White female elementary principals described their interactions with others. Thus, it is meant to be illustrative of how Others are dealt with, not as representative of a particular leadership style.
I always felt that it was better for me, that, if I could get my teachers happy in what they’re doing, they would be happier in doing for the children and so that much more would be carried over to the children that way in a more meaningful way. EWM315

I personally do not like surprises. I do not like for things to develop and get to the point where people feel they have to come to me. I think that a lot of these things can be treated as minor problems and be addressed before they become major problems. I don't think it’s fair for a teacher to leave a principal in the dark about things that are going on in the school, their relationship with students and parents and then wait until it all falls apart then come find the principal, I think that's wrong. So the principal expects them to communicate with him, talk and in turn he should be open-minded. The principal ought to listen and they ought to talk. They should have input, we should listen to what they say and their suggestions because [they] can come up with good suggestions they have splendid solutions to problems. Communication is a big, big thing. EWM279

Power and autonomy issues are prominently featured in these interviews and point to the political nature of the role as defined by these retired principals. Many White male interviewees talked about “needing space to run their school.”

If they perceived they had that autonomy, they talked about feeling supported.

I mentioned Mr. B-, and we've had some very good superintendents... I've worked under some very good superintendents; Mr. B- particularly had a relationship with his board that was very very good in the sense that they left the operation of the school to him and his administration. Mr. B- in turn gave a great deal of responsibility to administrators. Under these general kinds of guidelines, they weren't all in writing, but he let you know what he believed about education, and he kept us well informed and turned over the operation of the schools to the principals. And backed us in the support with the school board and any other necessary backing that we had a need for. SWM218

I've always been fortunate that I had superintendents who had the attitude, “You make the decisions, and I'll back you up.” And I like that, I like that...Mmm, and you know, not every decision you make is a popular one. But as long as you've got the superintendent saying, “He knows what's best for the school” or “She knows what's best for the school,” and would be willing to stand behind you in whatever decision that you make...I've enjoyed that kind of relationship, ah, with my superintendents. I never had one that I didn't like. MWM337

I did exactly what I had wanted to do during my years as principal. I think we set our own priorities and agendas. I worked under six superintendents and a number of principals and teachers, and no one ever prevented me from doing what I wanted to do. EWM200

...when I first started out I guess it was because the administration at the time, the elementary supervisor, it was more rigid, it seemed like, and you
were expected to adhere to the philosophy of the school [system], but then I guess as they got to know me, I was left alone somewhat, 'cause they knew I would do what was supposed to be done... EWM344

And I don't know what they expect now, because they are doing a thing here in Virginia Beach now with site-based management which I felt is what we always did because I ran the damn building. SWM339

If they did not perceive themselves as autonomous, they expressed frustration because clearly they believed they should have been.

Well, I thought that when you are given an objective to accomplish and then were told what to do to accomplish the objective, then that's the wrong way of handling it. And I think that principals should be left alone once they're given a job to do so that they can either make it or not make it. SWM199

Well, I have always thought that the principal of a school needs to have authority within the guidelines of the central office administration. Whether it is discipline, curriculum, instructional program, working with teachers, don't put me in charge of something if you are not going to give me the authority to make it work. Don't give me something to do and then tell me you are not going to let me do it. SWM244

At the time when a principal could handle the program and you could do your own buying and save the school money—for example, it was—it turned out to be a time where you could go down to Woolco and buy your school supplies cheaper that what they are charging...your budget in a school system. And those natural cheapskate and I saw those things as really not being economically sound operations and once it got to that point, I got disillusioned with some of those things. If I were able to do things myself so I know I could get the best for the money that was involved in the school system, I certainly would. But I think that's why I brought up the point of bureaucracy because I think that is what bureaucracy has done to us. Of course without the bureaucracy, we would have a heck of a unemployment problem in the county. SWM221F

Leadership to me is uh is just getting people to work together in a good way, in a friendly way, and in a happy way. And if you can do that then you're going to have success in some of your programs, most of your programs. Unfortunately, you've got administrators and you've got, you've got higher officials like superintendents...let’s say you’ve got superintendents and central office staff that expect you to do certain things while you’re trying to do that and sometimes it’s an interference because they don’t give the freedom to really work with the programs and parents like you should. They have their ideas of what education should be and this is the way you’re going to do it. And most superintendents and quite a few of them are very demanding and “This is what you’re going to do and you’re going to do it today and this is the way you’re going to do it.” EWM346

I would say occasionally center office sets policies that do hinder. Sometimes they attach more importance to some of their things than we
think they should. We think we have a bigger job to do. Generally you can accommodate that. I think in order to carry out their policies you don't have to do it yourself you can delegate it to somebody to handle that. But I would not say more often than not in some instances it depends on whose in the center office and how they perceive their job. How they think you ought to accommodate them. I don't think the tail should wag the dog. I think the school is the dog.

This desire for “room to run the school” is mirrored in the space principals said they gave teachers.

I want room to work. If I'm going to work for you, I want room to work. And I don't want you down my neck all day long. You tell me what you want me to do and give me room to do it. And I follow that same concept with teachers. I told them what I thought I wanted them to do, and that I would be there to help them, and that I would have an assistant there to help them, I would monitor what they are doing, but they would have the room to do.

I had an outstanding staff. I gave them a lot of freedom. The same kind of freedom the superintendent gave me. I gave them as much as I possibly could, and encouraged them and supported them. If they had an idea, I would say, “Go with it!” as the superintendent did to me. “Go with that idea, I want to hear it. Make sure that it is sound.” And if I felt it had a chance of flying and thinking of how enthusiastic the teacher was to try this. And if it was reasonably compatible with what our goals were, I said, “Go do it.” I monitored it and asked for a system of reporting and controlling it so that we knew whether or not we wanted to continue with it or not. I think that was the kind of freedom that I had from the superintendent that I enjoyed and I wanted to give the same kind of freedom to my teachers. I think that's a successful environment to work in; it was for me.

Thus, this issue of power/autonomy is a good example of how definition of role leads to actions of self-as-principal.

Two related issues are found in the discourse. One has to do with the comfort with the hierarchy of school organizations. Teachers are treated as subordinates, as are assistant principals, while central office personnel are seen as “superiors.” This unconscious acceptance of the hierarchy caused all of the interviewees to accept the position of the role as reflected in the advice several give to aspiring principals without reference to the limits this placed on them in terms of acting as principal.

I think whatever position you find yourself in, you should always have high regard for the people you work with and those who work for you. You should be honest with the people that you interact with on the job. In the school situations, you have to realize that you are working within an organization that has policies, rules and regulations to follow.

So it’s just something you have to handle, whether you like that or not, that chain of command, because normally you can get a little defensive about that,
“Well, why didn’t Miss So-and-So call me instead of you?” But some of them would rather go to the top. And then the top will filter down to you. But you want to be informed. It’s very important that the superintendent keep you informed of those kinds of issues. SWM271

The second issue has to do with a perception of sharing power. These principals saw themselves as the leaders and, by extension, all others in the school as followers. They all talked about decision-making as a key component of their role. Yet, they all espoused the idea that one should listen to subordinates. This also seems to be important to communicate as part of one’s self-concept as a principal. Several recognized that staff/teachers wanted some say in decisions that affected them. Interviewees told about how they met with people and listened to them. Other principals explicitly explained that they did not want to be seen as a “dictator,” that they listened to others’ ideas, gave credit to others, or solicited input when they thought it was appropriate. This was told as if it was positive but also as if it was “beyond the call of duty.”

I encouraged my teachers to bring new ideas to me, just as working with the students, the student government, or the senior class. Have you got some new ideas, let’s take a look at them. I was always one to say, if something looks good we’ll try it. If it doesn’t work, we’ll drop it. SWM244

Well, if you believe in the philosophy of “This is our program and we’re going to work it up,” and if you really, truly believe in that, then you’re never really taking full credit for any of that stuff. You share it with your fellow teachers and so, if you really feel that way, then you’re not looking for the limelight or anything, you’re just, uh, working with your teachers and you’re giving them the credit for it and they deserve the credit for it because they were instrumental in the program going good for you. EWM346

Spelman (1988) explicates the relationship between tolerance and privilege:

If one is in a position to allow someone else to do something, one is also in a position to keep that person from doing it. To tolerate your speaking is to refrain from exercising the power I have to keep you from speaking. In tolerating you I have done nothing to change the fact that I have more power and authority than you do. And, of course, I don’t have to listen to what you say. (p. 182)

Here again, examining the discourse reinforces how these interviewees saw the role of principal as privileged.

In terms of these interviews, the White male principals at all levels tended to speak in patterns that have been identified with male speech patterns (see, for example, Shakeshaft, 1986). They tended to make statements or opinions followed by examples, describe their career in a linear fashion, focus on events rather than people. They tended to quantitate and use percentages to describe (e.g., “100% of the time”; “I’d estimate 75% building manager and 25% instructional leader”; “I’d say it was 50/50”; “the job demands more than 100%”), to use names of other administrators and characters in the educational landscape where they were principals, and to cite “proof” of the rightness of their opinion or action as told to the interviewer. They tended to use mottoes and slogans to describe their educational philosophy or to give advice to future administrators (e.g., “POSDCORB”)
children are not made for schools; schools are made for children” SWM218; “fair, friendly and firm” SWM108; “firm, fair, friendly, forgiving” SWM191F; “Three words...firm, positive, and considerate” EWM209). Slang and curse words (e.g., “damn”, “hell”) were found throughout the transcripts of interviews with White males regardless of level but were much more prevalent in the narratives of the retired middle school and high school principals. Interviewees at all three levels tended to use an impersonal second or third person voice to generalize their experience to what others should do (i.e., “you’ve got to...” ; “you have to...”). Often this revealed itself in a distinctive reflexive I/YOU/HE pronoun usage within the same piece of narrative.

[when asked why he chose to become a principal] I think because you had more control of what was going on–you had more input into the situation–you had a better overall perspective of what was going on and I think that this mainly was the reason. Because I think you could see better from the principalship what needed to be done. EWM158

[when talking about teacher evaluation] But I think it’s important the teachers know what’s included within the particular evaluation tool, whatever you’re going to use. These are the things you’re going to be evaluated on. Obviously the most important is the instructional program. And therefore the principal needs to get into the classroom often. Now that’s hard to do, but you just have to do it...The principal cannot be an expert in every subject you can think of, but I think a principal can recognize good teaching. I’m convinced of that. If you have that feeling that a teacher has the students, they are all with her or him and you know that you have the feeling that learning is going on and good teaching is taking place. SWM271

I point these out because they are in direct contrast to the way the female interviewees, and in some cases, the Black male interviewees, used language in their narratives. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Summary

Examining the discourses used by White male administrators elucidates a culture of power and points to a position of privilege held in educational administration, as in other spheres, at least in part by gender and race. Understanding the bases of tradition in educational administration, as elsewhere, reveals who has been in a position to define and to include/exclude on the basis of those definitions (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995). In general, the discursive field of educational administration has been generated and disseminated by White males. These dominant discourses have both reinforced and been reinforced by the establishment and maintenance of organizational school cultures with recognized norms, beliefs, and assumptions that guide interactions and relationships. For principals entering this organizational socialization, the most frequent result is the replication of existing practice and patterns of school leadership (Hart, 1995). Therefore, it makes sense that White male principals over space and time would share their thoughts relative to identity as a principal using common discourses that reflect their gendered and race-specific experiences and socialization.

The general assumptions of the literature in the area of educational administration typically differentiate the roles of school principals only on the basis of task analysis (e.g.,
Baehr, 1975). By comparison, I found some interesting discursive contrasts based on levels both in terms of how roles and actions were described and how various common words and phrases were used. These are discussed in the next section.

**Differences In Discourses About Self-As-Principal By Level Cohort**

I found that although athletic and military terms, metaphors, and descriptions of the helpfulness of coaching and military experience to the principalship were sprinkled liberally throughout the interviews of all three level cohorts, these were far more prevalent at the secondary than the elementary level. This was also true of the use of slang and curse words in the narratives.

Contrary to Kempner’s (1991) assertion that his White male interviewees did not talk about ethical issues, I found that, particularly among retired elementary and middle school principal interviewees, there were frequent strong, but general, statements of concern that children had different needs and that it was responsibility of the school to meet those needs. At all three levels, “fairness” was discussed as treating everyone the same way and applying the same rules to everyone. However, stories and examples of “fairness” by elementary principals lent credence to the notion that they felt, in fact, that you have to treat different people differently, that people have different needs.

Similarly, certain words, upon closer examination, seem to be defined differently, although used in common, by principals at different levels. One example is how principals of different levels discuss “listening.” Elementary principals talked about how they listened to teachers because teachers often had good ideas or because they needed someone to talk to about personal problems. Middle school and high school principals described themselves as listening to teachers, parents, and students to get their side of the story or to allow them to feel “listened to” before the principal made his decision. It was a pro forma exchange act as described by several of the secondary principals.
One feature of the White male administrative discourse is “management by walking around”\(^2\) and the importance of being visible. Yet this idea of “visibility” varies by level as well. Elementary principals seemed to equate being visible with knowing and being known. Middle school principals spoke of being visible as a way to manage and gather information; high school principals talked about visibility as a deterrent and as a monitoring strategy.

Prediction of the frequency of the use of terms such as “leader,” “team,” and “in charge” is made in the literature without regard to school level. Instead, I found that use of these terms varied considerably by level cohort. Secondary principals used these terms far more frequently than their elementary or middle school peers.

The structural metaphor of PRINCIPAL as PROVIDER is seen in all three level cohorts. These retired principals state explicitly that they thought teachers expected principals to provide for them and that they saw their role/identity as a provider. For this age cohort of White males, this was a powerful societal role expectation as well. But what each level cohort saw itself as responsible for providing was somewhat different. Elementary principals said that they were there to provide resources and a confidential ear; middle school principals said they were there to provide access and program support; and, high school principals said that they were there to provide leadership and direction.

The cohorts by level also spoke distinctly differently in some cases about Others. How they talked about parents is one example of this. And they discussed priorities of the role of principal and of the goal of education differently depending upon whether they were elementary, middle school, or high school principals. Certain temporal issues, such as the mandate of special education and court ordered desegregation, the social strife of the 1960s and 1970s, and the open school concept affected level cohorts differently as well.

\(^2\) Readers with a background in educational administration may wonder why I do not identify this as MBWA—Management By Wandering Around. It is my understanding that this phrase originated at Hewlett Packard and was popularized in management circles as an effective strategy by Peters and Waterman (1982). Lewis’ (1986) says that MBWA “entails a dedication by top management to have frequent informal sessions with employees at all levels in the company” (p.52); he describes it as purposeful, short on-site check-ins and identifies it in a school district as what a superintendent does when s/he goes out to each school and plans to meet with personnel. Again, I am not sure this is what these retired principals meant during these interviews. Lewis describes three techniques of visible management used at the best-run companies: “management by wandering around, management by walking around and management by socializing” (ibid.). What is described by these White male principals, although principals of different levels of schools indicated different reasons for being visible by cohort, corresponds most closely with what Lewis identifies as “management by walking around” (see Lewis, 1986, p.54). Furthermore, it is unlikely that most of these interviewees, given the years of their tenure as principals, would use a specific management term popularized after 1982; it is more likely that they would choose this term as descriptive of their actions.
One confounding factor in the analysis of these cohorts was that the definitions of levels were not consistent. An elementary school might encompass grades K-5, 1-8, or 4-5, for example, while a “high school” might include grades 7-12, 8-12 or 9-12. Therefore, the discourses are not as distinct as I think they might have been had level definitions been more consistent. Still, some of the contrasts are very interesting.

Three dominant structural metaphors emerged when analyzing the interviews by level cohorts. Retired elementary principals talked in ways that indicated that they saw self/role “PRINCIPAL as FATHER.” Retired middle school principals talked about “PRINCIPAL as MANAGER.” For retired high school principals, the dominant structural metaphor emerging from their discussions of identity of self-as-principal is “PRINCIPAL as THE ONE IN CHARGE.” “PRINCIPAL as PROVIDER” was talked about by interviewees as a part of all of these.

Although these principals came from similar backgrounds and were generally socialized into a similar administrative culture, there were striking differences in how they talked about themselves as principals according to what level of principal they were. Each of the following sections describes distinctive discourse characteristics by level cohort.

**PRINCIPAL as FATHER: Retired Elementary Principals’ Descriptions of Self-as-Principal**

**Introduction**

The underlying metaphor revealed by the interview transcripts of elementary White male principals is “PRINCIPAL as FATHER.” These interviewees talked about themselves as provider, protector, decision-maker and confidante. They use the word “love” and “enjoy” to both describe their work and how they felt about children. They use the words “listen” and “fair” and “help” to describe their demeanor toward “their” teachers. They use the word “responsible” to describe their role. Schools should be like a “family.” The goal of teachers and principals should be to create a school where children are “happy.”

These principal talked about being fair and friendly, supportive, dependable, and considerate. Like elementary White female principals interviewed in this study, elementary White male principals stressed the need to like people, to be fair, to be direct, to listen, to support teachers. They, too, stressed the “human side” and cited concerns about the messages given to kids through testing, grouping and disciplining. One difference is that many of the elementary White males saw being “fair” as treating everyone the same way as opposed to giving everyone what they need to succeed.

Elementary White male principals’ comments revealed that they saw themselves with more power than teachers; that they, as administrators, were the ones who could get things done. They discussed the importance of being “visible”; of walking around, in order

3 Based on analysis of the following 20 transcripts from interviews from the Oral History of the Principalship project: 109, 156F, 158, 169, 176, 183, 185, 188, 190F, 200, 202F, 209, 267, 269, 279, 315, 327, 338, 344, 346
to get to know and to be known by the teachers and the students. Although they expressed frustration about technical difficulties, parents, or lack of autonomy, they did not talk about the role of principal as difficult and they usually concluded their comments by saying how much they “enjoyed” or “loved” being a principal, or how much “fun” they had.

These interviewees talked about themselves as having needed to take care of teachers and students. The tone of these principals’ description of self-as-principal is thus one of friendly paternalism.

Unlike the elementary female principals, the elementary White male principals rarely cited mentors (only two mentioned particular principals whom they saw as role models). They also rarely directly mentioned their own experience as teachers as affecting actions in the principalship (one emphasizes this; two mention it). They saw “being good in the classroom” as a prerequisite for the principalship, but, unlike the elementary White female principals, few specified that this should be at the elementary level.

Also unlike the elementary White female interviewees, these principals did not portray themselves as life-long learners. Most did not mention coursework unless specifically asked. Only four mentioned reading or professional development activities. If they talked about themselves as learners, it was within the context of needing to learn about/understand elementary schools.

**Trained By Teachers**

When elementary White male principals were asked about their preparation for the principalship, they often mentioned that they were “trained” by teachers. Fifteen out of the twenty had no elementary teaching experience prior to becoming principal. These interviewees talked about “learning the ropes” from the teachers, and “using” teachers to get input and suggestions. Among the principals in this cohort there was consensus that they would not have survived without the insight, advice, and guidance of veteran teachers, to whom they stated their indebtedness throughout the transcripts:

I had the good fortune of having a wonderful staff who guided me in most cases during the very first years. I had told them that if they would help me out as I went into this profession that certainly I should be in a position later on to help them out when I learned something about it. I had no pretense whatsoever with my teachers. I was very honest and very straightforward, and I found out this approach was far better than if I had gone in there and acted like I really knew so much more about those things, which in reality I didn't. EWM315

The advantages to me were a lot of veteran teachers there who taught me an awful lot. EWM209

In order to learn about elementary teaching I did a lot of observing in the first grade classrooms. One of the first grade teachers at Clearbrook School was an outstanding teacher, and I learned from her about elementary education...I think the greatest asset I had was learning about teaching in the elementary schools from some outstanding teachers. I was fortunate to have
these people on my staff and they made contributions to the school and community. EWM267

I felt when I [was] first as a principal I didn't have any pressures only that I was learning, it was more of a learning process for me, and I felt I had a good background, not that my background but the teachers that were there who had the experiences that I could go to and help me in my first years as principal. I talked with them and I consulted with them on what things should be done and how it should be done, how to handle this and how to handle that and they were a big help to me and I enjoyed it very much and those things I used as I went on in my years. EWM176

This is a clear example of how career track can affect discourses about self-as-principal.

**Being Visible**

Elementary White male principals spoke about themselves as a role model for teachers and students. They said that the principal sets the tone by letting teachers and students know what is expected, by setting a positive example and by having professional dress and manners.

On a personal level, I think that your appearance is important. I think the way you look, the way you dress, the way you act, your manners, your feelings toward teachers, your mannerisms, just your general attitude should be on a very, very positive nature. I don't think that a principal should be one who would project a negative image, and at the same time I think you should be even keeled. I don't think you should come in very moody one day and go into the office and slam the door and never see anyone, and then the next day you're Mr. Jolly and you're throughout the building. I think you should be consistent with your manners and with your attitude. EWM269

Elementary White male principals stressed the importance of showing interest in what kids and teachers are doing. They saw “being visible” as essential to their role of getting to know teachers and students and being known by them, and as a primary motivational strategy.

During the day, I spent much time going around classes to see what teachers and other support personnel were doing. I was very much concerned and involved in what was going on in the school building. When everyone in the school recognized this pattern, the entire staff began to express interest in having me visit their areas. Any principal who wants to create an effective school should make him or herself seen around the building very often during the day. EWM200

I feel you need to build trust in your staff, with the students, and with parents. The principal should be visible in the school for everyone to see. Let the people know you're interested in them. EWM267

I spent a lot of time just walking around and looking in. The children would get to know me, and the teacher would get to know me and we would talk...I
think one of the things that helped me was becoming sincerely interested and concerned with the individual. EWM209

Like the other elementary principals interviewed, elementary White male principals echoed the theme of the importance of having schools small enough so that they could know the teachers and children and so they could be known by them. They said this was especially important in the elementary school. Their insistence on the importance of visibility seems directly connected to this.

Relationships With Teachers
Elementary White male principals said that teachers expected them to provide help, leadership, support, and material resources. The metaphor here is “PRINCIPAL as FATHER as PROVIDER.”

I think really teachers expect principals to be able to do everything. And I mean that in a good sense also. I think teachers expect principals to be up-to-date on what's happening with instructional techniques. I think they expect you to be up-to-date on how to handle students, discipline problems, how to talk with parents, and I think they expect you to support them. And sometimes you're supporting them by just letting the teachers know that you're there, that you're available to come to their assistance if needed. EWM269

Teachers expect the principal to be fair. I think they expect an openness, to be fair, not to discuss their personal shortcomings with others. They expect you to be direct, friendly but direct, they expect your support in discipline matters, they expect your support in relationship with parents, that is very important and generally they expect your support in supplying their physical needs, their equipment, to help out in matters like that and they expect you to be the school leader. EWM279

I think that the teachers expect principals to be...to be their in-between buffer...between themselves and the outside world...Either the parental world or the hierarchy of the school system itself. And I think there has to be a comradeship between principals and teachers that makes the teachers feel like the principal is with them in what they are doing. I think, once again, the principal has to be as firm with the teachers as he does with the child. If she is doing something, or he is doing something, that is wrong, I think you need to call them in and you need to sit down and talk to them and say...“You know, I think this is wrong. I think what you are doing is wrong. What do you think about it? Tell me why it's right then.” EWM158

They spoke about a pride in their ability to “relate well”; most stated that they felt they got along and had good rapport with staff and students.

I managed to get along with the staff, we had a good relationship. I liked them and they liked me and that's good when you can get along with people. I guess that was one of my strengths, my ability to get along with people. Whether they were rich or poor, whether the custodian, bus driver, no matter
who they were. I enjoyed the respect of my teachers, I tried to help them whenever I could. I guess that was my strength. EWM279

I had a good rapport with my staff, and I liked them and they liked me. I was supportive, and that is what they wanted. I was caring, empathetic, sensitive and I was available. I realized that when I was a teacher, these were the kind of things that I wanted in a principal and I tried to be those kinds of things. EWM202F

Well, you would have to have a good relationship between pupils and teachers. A good relationship between the principal and teachers as well. A principal can be a real influence in the school but he needs to have the goodwill of the pupils on the whole as well as the teachers. And he needs to feel the same way about them. EWM109

According to these elementary White male principals, good teachers motivate kids and are well prepared and are good disciplinarians and they care about kids. Good teachers are not necessarily the smartest teachers but they are enthusiastic and dedicated. Good teachers are professionals who should not require much supervision.

If you have a good teacher, they get in there and do the job. You don't have to come down and sit beside them and tell them what to do everyday. If they can't do that, they don't belong. EWM183

A good teacher will have everything prepared in such a way that when you walk into that classroom you’ll see a model plan of operation going on in that classroom and you don’t have to worry about those teachers. The teacher that does a good job will not need much supervision and I had a number of those great teachers. EWM327

Elementary White male principals said that it is the role of the principal to get rid of incompetent teachers, even though it is a very unpleasant task. An important aspect of the role for all of these principals was counseling teachers out of the profession if they felt the teacher was not going to be successful as a teacher. They provided many examples of this throughout the transcripts, emphasizing that they were admired for this, liked to do this, or were “still friends with some of those people.”

I've probably have let as many teachers go, maybe a few more then most people in the county, but I've never let a teacher go out of bitterness. The people I've let go, I've sat down with them and said, these are the factors we were going to do to start out with...you haven't been able to do them. But you do have some other qualities that might make you an excellent, maybe shoe salesman, or dress maker, or something. EWM158

Let me preface this by saying that one of the teachers that I worked with at Robinson and Senseny Road for a total of fifteen years said one time about me, “He doesn't or didn't fire very many teachers but he was awful good at easing them out.” I thought that was one of the best compliments that was ever paid to me. I don't think that you have to fire very many people. I think that the tenure law, tenure policy, is desirable. It is a good thing, and I support it, and I continue to support it. You have an obligation not to let the
poorly prepared or poorly operational-type become a tenured teacher. EWM169

I think that's one of the hardest, most difficult things that a principal has to do. Because I don't think there's anything worse than telling a person “Your job, your performance is unsatisfactory.” And, I had very few cases in which you actually had to dismiss a teacher. I don't think there is any pleasant way to do that. Even at its very best, it is bad. I think the best thing you can do is try to talk to the teacher and say, “Listen, everyone was not cut out to be a teacher. Maybe you should look at yourself and see if there's not another job that would best suit your needs other than teaching.” And in some cases the teacher would say, “Well, that's exactly right. I really hate teaching.” And in some cases the teachers themselves have looked at themselves and said I need to get another job, and they did. And that's the best way to handle it but you can't always do it that way. Some of the least effective teachers feel they are doing a great job and that's where you have the biggest problem, and that's where you have to talk with them and work out an outline of how they can improve their job performance, and that is one of the most difficult things you'll have to do...Probably the toughest one would be to advise a teacher that you felt that perhaps she should enter another profession. And that would probably be one of the toughest things I ever had to do. But if I had to do it over I would do the same thing again. EWM269

Evaluations were generally perceived to be a waste of time. According to these interviewees, teacher evaluations could be done from the hallway; there was no real reason to observe because you can tell what’s going on from the work that is up on the walls or from what the students, parents and other teachers say. Evaluations were thus based at least in part on hearsay. Principals “knew” who their best teachers were even if they couldn’t always justify their answers.

I was never much for formal observation and writing up a report. I felt then, and I feel now, you can ask most any principal to name some of his good teachers and he can tell you who he thinks are good teachers. If you ask him to justify or ask him “why” he probably has some problems. EWM169

**Relationships With Parents**

Unlike the other cohorts of elementary principals who felt strongly about the desirability of parent involvement, elementary White principals were divided as to how important they felt it was to educate the community about the school, how important it was to have and be active in the PTO, or how much involvement parents should have in curriculum development. Principals who tended to put an emphasis on educating and communicating with parents talked about parents in more positive terms than did those who did not. Parents were often described as a “problem” and as more difficult than in the past by principals who did not consider public relations to be a priority. This principal’s remarks were typical:

Parents have become more sophisticated than they were in those days. Now they know a lot about teaching too, and they feel like they could do about as
good a job as some of the teachers do. So everything the teacher sets out to
do is sometimes questioned by parents. So it’s harder to deal, as an
administrator, it’s harder to deal with today’s parents than it would be in
those days ago when we had a little bit more leeway...

Basically the pressures that you have has to do with central office and what
their demands are, and uh parent confrontations. You’re going to have them.
I don’t care how great an administrator you think you are, you’re going to
have plenty of parent problems. And it has to do with the child and the
correction thereof and how you’re going to handle things. EWM34

Some elementary White male principals talked about encouraging parent involvement. This
was almost always as a means of cutting down discipline problems or getting parents “off
our back” by letting them see what was going on, as opposed to wanting to share the school
with the community or feeling themselves to be in a partnership with the parents.

**Building Manager or Instructional Leader**

Most elementary White male principals said that the building manager/instructional
leader split should be about even; that you have to do both.

I don’t think you can separate the two. I think you can be a good father and a
good husband at the same time. I don’t think you have to say you’re either a
good husband or you’re a good father. I think both are important and both
are necessary. and you have to be master of both if you’re going to be a
successful principal. EWM209

But when they talked about being an instructional leader, they described “managing” the
instructional program or personnel.

I think he must be a good instructional leader and also a good manager and
here again it's a balancing act. As an instructional leader he must realize that
not every teacher will use the same instructional method that he does. I don't
think the administer wants to develop clones for that particular method of
instruction, because all his teachers are different. If he can lead them to
develop their own style then I think that what he should do, not try to make
them teach things the same way, because they don't and they won't and he
can not do that so he has to encourage them to develop their own style. But
he or she must be the instructional leader and if he see that they are getting
out of hand then through conferences and talking and measuring results and
so forth he can effect changes. EWM279

Several of the interviewees in this cohort spoke of the inevitability of the building manager
role and it is clear from their remarks that this was not a problem for them; that they took
pride in managing well even while aware of the rhetoric proclaiming the centrality of the
instructional leader role. Others talked about not liking or not feeling comfortable with the
role of instructional leader and/or teacher evaluator.

I really got a good feel for people working with me going in and out in that
respect. The teachers were more comfortable with me doing it that way.

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Sometimes it is hard to find the time to do that. It takes some self discipline to make you go in there. When there is maybe something else that you would rather do. EWM344

I guess basically you're supposed to be an instructional leader, but it boiled down to about seventy-five percent management and twenty-five percent instruction when you got the whole thing summed up.

**Do you feel it should have been different—that you should have had more time for instruction?**

I feel like it should have been, but I was glad it wasn't. I was better on the managerial side than I was on the instructional side. EWM183

I never liked to evaluate teachers to a certain extent. I think you can walk by a room and look, walk by a room and look in the glass and see how the classroom is going. You know, teachers are all different just the same as kids. Some teachers can have a little what you would call chaos going in the room and yet they're learning. Some kids could be in that room and the teacher could get along just fine with kids who are getting up and down out of their seat whereas in another room that teacher has so much command that you'd better not get up out of that seat, you'd better raise your hand before you speak out yet in another room kids could speak out and things of this sort and the teacher still has control and their learning. So, you've got to recognize those things and you've got to realize which teacher is doing that. If you don't, why you're going to evaluate them wrong. EWM176

In the interview transcripts, most stories of actions interviewees described doing as principal had to do with management issues, (e.g., transportation, the cafeteria, ordering supplies, playing doctor).

The bus, the school bus problem. I think there’s a reason for that. The reason is the children are on the bus, and you do not have any adult other than the driver and the children are, well, they're so use to having parents tell them what to do, and in the school, having the teachers tell them what to do, when they get on the bus they don't have anyone to tell them what to do, and they take full advantage of this. So your biggest problem, your biggest headache would be the bus. EWM269

[My days] were varied, when you have a good time you don't remember what you did. I would come in speak to the teachers, see the buses got off all right. Stay by the phone, see if we have bus problems. Get everything settled down and then you could go to work. We had milk breaks in the middle of the morning. I had to pick up the milk, at the creamery, put it in the back of my car. I picked up three or four teachers and go to Falling Springs. I get out the milk. At noon I give out the milk again because they ate lunch in their rooms. Then they got ice cream and then went to the playground. I was a teacher in the afternoon. When I finished I went out to watch the buses. When all the buses were gone we could leave. It was a pleasant working day. Oh I was the doctor too. I had to pull teeth. I'm sure they don't do that today. But the first graders would come in with a tooth dangling and I would have
to pull it. I gave hair cuts. I patched up head wounds. It was interesting. We did things then that we would not dream of doing today because of the liability. EWM279

A few said they should have been in the classrooms more but most said that there is no need to do that; that teachers needed space to teach and that they didn’t want to overcrowd them.

There is very little talk of pedagogy or curriculum development or specific programs in these interviews. There is also not a lot of talk about children, except to repeat general remarks that “it’s all for the children” or that “you have to love children.” Stories about interactions with people mostly have to do with firing people or with encounters with the superintendent.

Other Features of the Discourse

Most of the elementary White male principals talked about having been fortunate not to have had the troubles others had. This idea that others may have had difficulty or that “today there are more problems but when I was principal, we didn’t have those problems” showed up frequently throughout these interviews.

The impact of era on the role of the elementary principalship is consistent across the elementary principal cohort as a whole. As do the other elementary principals who dealt with these issues, these interviewees talked about how the role was impacted by greater paperwork demands, gain or loss of the power to hire, the requirements of special education, the addition of kindergarten, or the open school concept. There was a general consensus that the role was more complex now and that “you could do a lot of things twenty years ago you can’t get away with now” EWM169.

Many elementary White male principals said that testing was generally positive and they exhibited pride in student achievement as reflected through test scores. Although they did express concern about how test scores were used, test scores were talked about in the interviews as proof of their effectiveness as a principal.

We had basic solid educational programs and we took a great deal of pride in the results we obtained from standardized tests, from reading tests that accompanied the basic tests we adopted, from the progress that our students made when they went on to middle schools. EWM169

I guess testing for the standards involved at the elementary level was very good. I thought that was...that helped a whole lot...You had, you had to have testing so you could see where you’d come to and what you started out to do. You get some goals for yourself. That is basically what you’re trying to do, um, measure how well you’ve reached those goals. EWM346

Elementary White male principals talked much less about what didn’t work than did the other elementary cohorts. They said that they grew more collaborative and less directive. They rarely mentioned specific programs of which they were proud. Only two made references to building aesthetics.
Elementary White male principals seemed very concerned with moral issues. They spoke of manners and discipline and order and the breakdown of the family. They spoke of wanting to create a “good wholesome atmosphere” or have a “good wholesome activity.” They spoke of not being able to paddle kids now with more regret than did the elementary White female principals.

Like the elementary White female principals, elementary White male principals spoke of “enjoying” and “loving” their job. But they generally concurred that the principalship is more complex and difficult now, that there is less autonomy, and several were not sure that they would “do it again.”

**PRINCIPAL as MANAGER: Retired Middle School Principals’ Descriptions of Self-as-Principal**

**Introduction**

All of the White male principals in this cohort served as middle school/intermediate school principals for 15 or more years, and none served as high school principals (although 5 out of 7 were assistant principals at the high school level and 6 of the 7 originally were high school teachers). Half had experience as guidance counselors. Several started off thinking about medicine or law, got into teaching, and then stayed in education.

Perhaps as a result of being responsible for more people than elementary colleagues, middle school White male principals talked about their role as “manager of a large show.” They talked about events more than people, citing specific people most when mentioning other administrators. They also made strong statements using YOU about how to handle a wide variety of situations (e.g., how to treat a child who has hurt another child, how to deal with a crisis).

Middle school White male principals enjoyed people and enjoyed “kids.” They were concerned that children learn and have their needs met. They liked being out and about where the kids were and liked to have some kind of regular contact with them. Some of these principals occasionally taught classes. Several mentioned their identity as a teacher as being important.

I’ve always liked working with people. Teaching means working with people. As a principal you still work with people. I was concerned whether I would work this close with students. That was I think my biggest concern. Because I like kids, and I did not want to get myself too far away. And I felt I would still be working with kids, both good and bad. So this is why I went ahead and tried it. And then I like it although I would not admit it. If you would ask what's the number one thing I enjoyed most, I would have to say teaching. But if asked if I would rather have taught all the time and not been an administrator, I would have to say "No," because I enjoyed my years as an administrator equally as well basically as I did teaching. MWM133F

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4 Based on analysis of the following 7 transcripts of interviews from the Oral History of the Principalship project: 133F, 154, 210F, 212F, 256F, 283, 337.
Middle school White male principals talked about needing to listen and to “not fly off the handle” as key to their success.

Having time available to listen to people: students, teachers, and parents.
Being able to sit down and work with them, listen, not get all excited because a problem came up. MWM133F

Being a good listener, knowing when to listen and when to button it up.
(both laugh) Having time for folks; making time for people; if I couldn't meet with them during the school day, I'd meet with them at night. Had a parent that says, “I just can't come.” I said, “How about Saturday, do you work on Saturday?” “No.” “Well, I'll meet you here Saturday morning.” And be willing to do that. If you have a problem that you really need to address, be willing to be flexible. And I don't know how many folks do that now, but I thought it was important. MWM337

They saw themselves as decision-makers, but only after allowing everyone their say. These interviewees described more of a participatory style of decision-making as a group than did either their elementary or high school peers.

And, I guess one of the things that I always tried to develop and encourage was openness among the staff, and a feeling of freedom to express themselves. Whether they agreed with me didn't make a whole lot of difference, as long as they would say what they felt and why they felt that way. They also understood that they had that opportunity if I said this is basically—I just can't agree with you—you'll never convince me—this is the way we'll do it. Then they would expect that this is the way we will do it. I guess that's a benign dictator. I did not operate democratically, but at the same time I wasn't that autocratic. We worked it out together, and had an opportunity to make changes at any time. They could discuss anything they wanted to. MWM133F

I realized early on that any major decisions with respect to instructional programs or anything that's gonna impact on teachers, you better have some ownership, ah, in that decision other than just the principal. So I relied pretty heavily on staff, and, you know, after I got going in the middle school business, ah, to include the staff in major decision-making. MWM337

Middle school White male principals talked about stress; they described stressful situations they faced as principals and how they coped. Their biggest dilemmas usually dealt with crises management and firing teachers. Middle school White male principals did not talk about not having enough time. They talked about being involved in the community so that people would see them outside the school.

I felt that was probably my biggest position community relations. It was up to me to interpret the school to the community. I attended many different meetings for that purpose. First of all the PTA was organized with involvement of the parents as much as we possibly could. We would have curriculum committees, we would have all kinds of meetings, we would have them during the day and in the evening for those parents who wanted particular meetings held in the evening. We tried to make the PTA programs
where they would see what was going on in the school...I made myself available to every situation. I was involved with the church and parents knew I was involved in church. I didn't like to be out of my building much, which meant I couldn't be in the Lions' Club or things like that because of dinner meetings. But I would be invited by a number of churches to come and speak and I lived in the general community. MWM133F

As far as the involvement in community activities, ah, the community has done much for me. I think the community has been as responsible for any successes, ah, that I've had as any effort that I've put forth. And I kind of feel like you need to put something back into the community. We had a superintendent that one time referred to it as putting back in the well. Well, I tried to do that with participation in civic activities, you know, serving on the United Way, ah, board, ah, participation in ah, Kiwanis. And I've been a member of the Kiwanis Club for over twenty-five years now; was just inducted into their Legion of Honor, now which I'm very proud of that, and served as president of the Kiwanis, and I'm presently serving on the board of directors of the Kiwanis. Um, the Isaac Walton League, which is a conservation group. I participate in their activities. I'm president of the Chamber of Commerce this year. So it seems like, ah, my, my responsibilities for civic activities just...it, it's never-ending. In fact, I'm, I'm accused several times by my family as “Don't you know how to say no?” Well, the community has done a lot for me so if...if I'm asked to serve, I usually try to. I served on the, the commission for the New River Valley Detention Home. That was an experience, and one that I enjoyed. Ah, I serve on the board of directors of the New River Valley Workshop which provides employment for young people, or, or for adults rather, ah, with handicaps. And, that's a rewarding experience. So, I'm involved in community activities, and I think that's important. I think it's important for principals to realize that they have to be a part of the community, and participation in community activities is important. [Yes ] And you know it's not just important for principals, but for teachers as well. They need to be seen outside of school. MWM337

Another distinctive discourse feature of narratives about self-as-principal of these interviewees was the lengths they described having taken to get parents to come to the school, unlike their elementary and high school counterparts. (The other place where this was a feature of the discourse was in the narratives of the elementary White female principals.)

We used to have our, ah, conferences, we'd have teachers and, um, counselors and principals in the building at night and we all had a schedule, so anyone who wanted to walk in on Tuesday, Thursday night, didn't have to call for an appointment. Come in for any reason they wanted. MWM154

Inviting parents to come for small group discussions, to encourage them to come and visit although I find that the more comfortable the community is with the school, the less likely they are to respond to those and we have to come up with more innovative ways to get them to there...But we went to small groups with special invitations, for example, the students in the learning disabilities program, or the students in the speech therapy classes,
or the students in the gifted and talented sector program. These parents felt they had vested a built-in interest because of the special needs of their students so we could have a little coffee in the morning with some of those teachers present and we always tried to have the time cover these two class periods so we could get teachers in their planning periods. We would have a counselor and one or two of the administrators and as many of the teachers as possible in an informal coffee with these parents and with school people doing maybe only ten minutes of talking and then basing the rest of the flow of the program on what the parents brought up. MWM210F

I encouraged ah, parental involvement though I didn't always succeed. We tried to have coffee hour, and we'd send out maybe a hundred invitations, just pull them at random, and invite parents to come and have a cup of coffee and a donut and, just chat with the principal about anything they wanted to talk about, with respect, ah, to the school. And we had some very interesting discussions, ah, with those meetings. The only problem is if you have them during the day, you don't get too many parents because if you, if you'll survey, you'll find that most parents, both are working. [Right.] to come to an activity like that, they have to get off from work. So then we tried to schedule a few of those in the evening as well, with dessert (both laugh) and, it was successful for the most part, but the parents that came were the parents who usually came to all the other activities. And the parent who didn't come, who didn't accept the invitation was the parent you just couldn't get there for anything else either. [Yes.] But parental involvement is so important; I wish, I wish that parents could just understand that once a child leaves elementary school, the child still needs the parent involvement. And with many kids, once they hit middle-age (laugh) middle-school, and high school age, they don't want their parents there, they don't...they don't. Yeah, it's difficult to get them to take notices home. (laugh) [Yes.] But I wish parents could understand that it's so important to follow the child all the way through school and to be totally involved in the, in the educational process, and be involved in their activities; not just attending a ball game where the child may be playing ball, but to attend other activities at the school as well. [Right.]

MWM337

Middle school White male principals were more likely to use HE or SHE when referring to other administrators than their elementary or high school peers who tended to use only HE. They use a larger variety of words to refer to students: “students”, “kids” “child[ren].” As a group, middle school White male principals talked more than the elementary principals about networks of people they knew by name. Lots of “old boy network” references are sprinkled throughout the transcripts, especially in the narratives of the retired middle school principals from Fairfax. (Note: Several of these principals are retired from Fairfax because Fairfax was the first school system in Virginia to implement the middle school concept, opening eight middle schools in 1960.)
Mission

These middle school White male principals saw themselves as part of a mission, part of a cause—that of educating all kids who come to them.

[To be an effective principal] I think it takes the disposition of some kind of mission, you must really like what you're doing, and you must really have a good thought that you're on very important things and that you can have some influence. Whether it's a youngster that's going to be a football player or doctor or preacher or mechanic...Somewhere bring out in that youngster some qualities he possesses, that when he goes out there in the years to come, that he's going to be a better person because he's passed through your school. I believe that from the bottom of my heart and I hope that it will always remain that way. And it has some difficulties, some powerful difficulties. MWM212F

Middle school White male principals saw themselves as advocates for all students to get a good education regardless of race. They often made strong impassioned statements to this effect during the interviews.

Well, my basic feeling is that, uh, America, the United States' schools have a responsibility, in our democracy to provide a total education for all of its citizens. And I felt at the time that that this might be, uh, politically and philosophically of the country we believed in, but was not a fact. There were severe inequalities; there were groups of people, whether by race or by economics, ah, had not, ah, been given full advantage of all of the services that a democracy has to provide for its citizens. And my feeling was that if I were ever in a position, I would do my best to help correct this injustice. MWM154

They talked about the importance of meeting all children's needs. They talked about the particular developmental requirements of middle schoolers and the need to match the curriculum to student interests. They all mentioned how there are many different kinds of students and learning styles.

The entire curriculum is based on the social, the emotional, the psychological needs of, ah, middle-school children, and I'm real pleased that I was part of the development of that curriculum and the development of a program to meet the needs of that particular group of young people... in the, in the school business, and you have to treat all children as individuals, you can't just have a...a set attitude or a set philosophy that's gonna apply to every child, and teachers at the middle school level particularly have to be flexible; you have to stay two steps in front of...of the young people all the time, at all times, ah, their interests change, ah, kids want to experience a variety of learning experiences. Ah, they will be real excited about one thing one day, they'll drop it and they'll pick up the next thing that comes along. So teachers have to be on their toes and have to stay two steps ahead of, of kids, particularly at that level, it takes a lot of planning. MWM337

We had to have a philosophy, but I can't tell you exactly what it was at this point. Mainly it was that we were there to serve the interest of the children
and the community and that was to be done by educating the kids, providing experiences which were valid and progressive, try to emphasize the fact that we had students of different abilities, and that we were to provide experiences appropriate to each of those objectives for the kids. And to do this, we worked on tracking—not complete tracking, but it was...we had different sections for the better students and we did not do the best on the bottom. We did average and above average and average and below average. So that you never had a group of students all at the very bottom. That was not the most conducive for learning. That seemed to work pretty well.

MWM154

Middle school White male principals saw special education as a gift, a way to really meet different student needs, rather than the burden which elementary principals perceived it to be (see Chapter 5). Many cited pride in their special education program and contrasted it with what existed before. In the words of these interviewees, having the ability to meet the special needs of students was as essential component of an effective school.

[Effective] schools basically provide positive programs for its students. They have things going on. They are effective in as much as the students aren't all “A” students, but the students are all making some sort of progress within the area. In most schools you have learning impaired, retarded, etc., they have to have programs to allow them to progress at the rate they are able to. At the same time you have kids with high ability—they ought to be challenged so that they are working to the highest note they can possibly get. MWM133F

When I first became a principal the only special program was remedial reading and it was a good program and it helped a lot of youngsters but we had many youngsters with other problems. We were beginning to get speech working with students but it was limited and then all of a sudden, we found that we needed special education programs for students who mentally or educationally weren't keeping up with the group and it was sort of like water rolling downhill, as it got going, we saw that, no, you couldn't group all these students together. You had to have students who were mentally handicapped, emotionally handicapped, learning skills handicapped, the learning disabilities program which is one of the newer of the special programs really took a lot of youngsters and suddenly said, here are youngsters who do reversals and can't spell—never will be able to spell—and we can't educate those and a matter of fact, they can go on to college and be successful. Then, of course the last was the gifted and talented program and we said here are youngsters who are very, very bright. I wonder how far they can go if they are challenged and challenged they were to the point these youngsters are doing college level work and many of them early in high school. A beautiful job, but not at the expense of saying they can't grow up as a normal youngster. I think that is very important to have the opportunity to play in sports and do the other things that everybody else gets to do...Any youngster in that role needs to be part of the group and this is what we have done also with special ed. in most cases—we have tried to keep the youngsters in as normal as school setting as possible, provide them with special help they need to function. The laws says the least constrained environment and that is very, very important. MWM210F
Now we have teachers in every...I don't know how many special ed. teachers we have now in the county. I'm sure that it has to be about 20% of our work force, our special education teachers, or at least that's what I've been told. And every program imaginable to meet the needs of young people, not only with, ah, handicapping conditions, but every other condition whether it be emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, um, attention-deficit disorders. Ah, we're getting more and more of young people who meet the criteria for special populations. And we have the programs to meet those needs. We have made so much, much progress in that area, there, there is no need for a child to come through our school system whose need isn't met either by special education, or on the other end of the spectrum, with gifted programs. MWM337

Middle school White male principals presented themselves as effective at getting along with diverse groups. They cited the importance of being accessible to parents and of being available to people by having an open door policy. They all talked of setting up meetings with different groups and making it possible for everyone to participate in the agenda setting for the school.

And, ah, I felt at the time that it was absolutely necessary, in order to evolve any kind of policy, any kind of direction, any kind of philosophies for the school that you had to have all of the people participating, in, who represented as many of the segments of the, of the communities possible. So you had to bring in a completely diverse group of people—people who were very suspicious of each other, did not accept each other's values, and yet had children in the schools. So the school, the school only reflects the homes in the community in which—the school is nothing more than a conglomerate body of homes and alleyways and street corners and pizza parlors and everything else you have—that's what a school represents—everything that is in the community. So in order to develop any kind of direction, you had to get some commonality...And so, ah, I would bring in, ah, the PTA, the teacher study groups, the parents, students and teachers, and together you have enormous kinds of groups, depending on the purpose of the meeting. And if you wanted to talk about curriculum, you had teachers and, ah, staff people and, ah, parents and kids. Ah, if you wanted to organize the PTA, you brought in parents who represented as much of the community as you could. And so it depends on the purpose of each group. I mean, we had enormous groups working at the same time, trying to establish some basic goals for the school. MWM154

They saw themselves as “navigators of the ships” taking the community where it wanted to go, as peacekeepers of the school community, and as communicators of the school to the larger community. They also frequently mentioned the diversity of their student bodies and of the parents with whom they dealt, much more so than either the elementary or high school principals. These particular discourse features may actually have to do more with era than with the middle school level. Most of these principals served during the 1960s and 1970s, times of rapid growth, implementation of the federal mandate to desegregate the schools, as well as the beginning of the middle school movement recognizing 11-14 year olds as having distinctive developmental needs.
Instructional Leadership

Middle school White male principals recommended being a generalist in terms of subject area knowledge. They talked about not being able to know all of the content but being able to tell if teaching is effective and if learning is going on. For these interviewees, being an instructional leader specifically meant being a supervisor and evaluator and recognizer of good instruction or corrector of bad instruction. The ability to assess good teaching was a source of pride.

I felt the principal was to be an instructional leader. We managed the building because it was part of our job, but my idea was to see that the instruction was there. That was done basically by telling the teachers “this is what I expect,” but not telling them what to have...just to have instruction that I could identify as good. I felt teachers were hired to do this job, and if they didn't do it, then I was on them. MWM133F

Teachers expect...teachers expect principals to be the instructional leader in the school. And teachers expect the principal to be visible; and to be in the classroom periodically. I think teachers want, ah, the principal, or the administration of the school to see what's going on in the classroom: They want to show off instructional techniques. I never had a problem with a teacher that would be nervous or upset because of a visitation by the principal, and so many of my observations were just walk-throughs, maybe fifteen minutes. I could tell instruction is taking place or instruction isn't taking place, And I would encourage teachers to let me know if something special was going on so that I could stop by and at least be a part of it. And many teachers would, and they'd be very disappointed when I couldn't be there, because if they'd planned something exciting that they want to share, certainly they want the principal to be a part of that. MWM337

Most, like their elementary White male counterparts, talked about their role as one of providing resources and managing the environment so that teachers can teach and so that the instructional program was supported.

In other words, a principal has to be aware of all the needs of the school and manage the resources that he has to make sure that the physical needs are subservient always to the instructional needs of the school...I think teachers first expect principals to respect them, respect their, their selves as individuals and as professionals. Number two, teachers expect principals to serve them. I don't mean to be subordinate to them, but to serve their needs, to provide the where with all for them to be able to teach in an orderly fashion in the classroom. Number three, they expect principals to support them, if they're carrying out the policies of the school. MWM154

Most seemed to have a largely “keep off their backs unless there is a problem” approach to their teachers.

I tried to get across to teachers that I was there to help them, and I tried to use a leadership role, but at the same time leadership in terms of encouraging each one of them to do everything they could. I did not say you have to do this, this, and this. Tried to do as little of that as possible except for basic
organization...Basically, I would tell teachers that I expected them to be in charge of their classroom and that I did not intend to tell them how to run it or how to teach. I had felt that they had gone to school in order to learn how to teach and there was no point in me trying to tell them how to teach. If they wanted help from me, I would do what I could to help. I would try to get around and visit the teachers at the beginning to make sure things were going OK and throughout the year go back to check. MWM133F

And that was my philosophy with not just with teachers, but cafeteria employees, ah, maintenance people, custodians. They know their job, and if they're doing their job and doing it effectively, they don't need the principal breathing down their neck constantly, but when there was a problem we would work as a team to resolve it. MWM337

Teachers were generally talked about as a group and students were talked about at more of a distance, than was the case in the elementary White male principals’ narratives.

Management of Personnel and Programs

Middle school White male principals talked about the importance of using personnel most effectively and how important a talent for finding good people is as well as the knack, which they claim to have had, of placing them in the right situation for success.

All good principals are still classroom teachers, though. They all wish they could be both, stay in the classroom and yet still be a principal and generally speaking, most principals realize that they probably are principals because they think they can do a good job organizing, picking people, putting people where they are best suited, matching some students to some teachers, and using the talents of other people. I think Eisenhower was classified as one of the best presidents because he knew how to use the talents of other people very effectively. He was a good administrator in using talents of people to get the jobs done and I think that what we sometimes as principals feel. I know how to pick a good counselor from working with seniors and I know how to pick a good English teacher to be a department chairman and get the work done. MWM210F

The first important job is hiring qualified good people. The second thing is how you work and developed with those people. MWM256F

They talked about everyone’s job in the school as being very important and how they are all there to support what happens in the classroom.

Well, I think that the school exists for the opportunity to broaden the experiences and broaden the understandings of our student population, regardless of the level, and that the whole system should function strictly for making that experience more beneficial, whether it's the food service, the custodial support, the bus system, it's all to make that classroom teacher and that student in the classrooms time more effective and increasingly more available. MWM210F
I would think I was a kind of a manager. And I don't like that word, because I think the primary purpose is that there is some instruction and learning going on. MWM212F

I always felt my job as principal was not only to provide the best instructional program at the school and to provide support for the teachers, but also to make sure that problems relating to, to my area of supervision or my building, that those problems did not become a problem at central office or for the school board. MWM337

Disruptions in the lunchroom or bus schedule were seen as having repercussions throughout the day and were to be avoided if at all possible.

They told example after example of how they handled various crises around integration, problems with teachers, community crises. Dealing with buses and cafeteria management loomed large here. Middle school White male principals indicated great awareness of the litigious atmosphere around hiring and firing and personnel issues.

They said that they tried to make great use of their schools, often putting extra demands on staff to support extra-curricular activities and to make facilities available to the parents. Like elementary White female principals, middle school White male principals talked about specific programs they felt were very successful (e.g., Open Houses, Award Ceremonies).

As a group, middle school White male principals were much more concerned about climate and aesthetics than elementary White male principals as revealed by what they said. They talked about the importance of students having pride in their school and of having an attractive positive learning environment. They talked about programs they implemented to get students and parents to have greater ownership in the school.

Middle school White male principals talked about the need to be visible and the ways that they did this. Unlike the elementary White male principals, these principals equated being visible with making visible to them what is going on and having their presence indicate interest and awareness. Management by walking the halls is popular in these transcripts.

When students began to come in–I believed in high visibility–I would be in the hall and different parts of the building. I knew what was going on, talking to students and teachers. During lunch, I would be in at least one of the lunch periods... Sometimes all three lunch blocks. Again, these were opportunities to meet with kids and teachers...I was always around the building, in classrooms, to know what was going on. MWM133F

My job was to get there always be available to talk to any teacher or any parent. I had a rule that the child had the high priority, and that the parent had that, and I would walk the halls and see face-to-face the whole time I was there, and rarely was there any exception...of the teacher, the bus drivers, or the youngsters knew I was on the grounds. MWM212F
The middle school White male principals generally said that they felt honored to have been involved with serving middle school children and that they have no regrets and that they enjoyed being a middle school principal.

There is a certain element of being associated with this...this job of administration, that you may, you may feel lonely at times. You may feel that you've, you've got the whole weight of the world on your shoulders. But then there's that little something that will take place somewhere during the year that you say, “It was worth it. All the worry, the anxiety and the stress is worth it.” Ah, that’s job satisfaction, knowing you've helped a young person, or you've, you've even helped a teacher that may have been struggling. Ah, I don’t know what else I could tell you about school administration other than if I had it to do over again I would do the very same thing. MWM337

If I had it to do over again, yes. And the fact still remains, I’d consider it a blessing that I lucked upon the opportunity to be a principal, and that's the God’s truth. MWM212F

PRINCIPAL as THE ONE IN CHARGE: Retired High School Principals’ Descriptions of Self-as-Principal

Introduction
Retired high school White male principals in this study tended to describe events. People and actions tended to be described in connection with events (e.g., descriptions of actions during an event, descriptions of others in the context of an event). These interviewees tended to use the possessive when referring to people with whom they worked (e.g., MY assistant principal, MY teachers, MY football coach, MY custodians). The pronoun WE was used infrequently and seemed to generally refer to themselves and their assistant principal[s].

Almost invariably high school White male principals used the word “youngsters” to refer to high school students. Over and over again, these high school principals used the words “leader”, “important”, “in charge”, “visible”, “goals”, and the phrases “the buck stops here” and “walk the halls.” The phrases “instructional leader” and “team” were also used frequently but their meanings from context varied widely, failing to provide a coherent feature of the discourse.

Almost all of the high school White male principals talked about how “if you have good people, you’ll have a good program.” They talked about how they “used” MY assistant principals or MY teachers and the importance of putting the right staff people in the right places. Extrapolating from these interviews, to be a high school principal, you have to be willing to make the “hard” or “tough” decisions.

These interviewees said that they felt that it was important to be available to parents and teachers; they did this by walking the halls, being around at lunchtime and attending school events. When they explained what they mean about having a team, they seemed to mean that it is important to let everyone know where you as principal “are coming from” and get them to “buy in.” “Having everyone have input” translated to having a teacher or student representative on a committee or meeting with department chairs and assistant principals who were there to serve as conduits in both directions or having a committee come up with something and having everyone take a vote or sign it. When making decisions, “the buck stops here.” They got input and then made the decision.

A “good” high school program for these principals was a “comprehensive program” and many extensively described starting football teams, band programs, and elective courses. These principals stressed the importance of extra-curricular activities to educating the “whole person.” Most of these principals explicitly talked about the negative impact of having high schools get too large. They spoke about the way expansion changed the role of the principal and forced one to redefine the role, and the negative impact a too large school had on students. According to these retired high school principals, the ideal high school size ranges from 800-1600 students.

Most of the stories about entering educational administration for this cohort were purposive; in almost all case financial considerations were a factor, because of an expanding family, and in several cases high school White male principals explicitly stated they wanted to go into administration to be “in charge”:

Well I felt that I like, that I wanted to be in a position where I could do things in [the] course of [being] principal. You’re in a position in the specific school where you are, you’re in charge, you can, the sky’s the limit as long as it’s within the school board policies, and, uh, I like that kind of thing. I like the leadership positions, I had many leadership positions along the way, and I felt like I wanted to do that kind of thing. Uh, I enjoyed the classroom, but I really felt that my niche was probably in administration, supervision, guidance, that sort of thing. SWM271

I always was in a position of leadership and I liked to be a mover and a shaker. I liked to be where I could use my influence and to get other people to work with me and I just never thought about anything else than being a school administrator. SWM144F

Except in Fairfax, most of these high school principals did not apply for the job but were offered the job of assistant principal and promoted from there.

Most of these principals did not mention particular mentors in educational administration. Some, when asked directly, talked about former principals they served under and from whom they learned bits and pieces but they were careful to distinguish themselves as principals from the styles of principals in whose schools they had taught. Some talked about family members or friends. A “mentor” seemed to be interpreted as someone whom you would imitate and who guided you. Clearly many of these former high school principals were promoted through “the ranks” but these benefactors were not seen as “mentors.”

Most of the principals said they left because it was a good time to leave. They didn’t want to stay if they were burned out, they noticed they weren’t having as much fun, they had the right amount of years to retire, or they wanted to do other things. A few mentioned health issues (e.g.,
heart attack, high blood pressure). Several of these interviewees explicitly stated that “I could have stayed on” but chose to leave, (i.e., no one was forcing them out). Most interviewees in this sample were principal at only one high school; five served as principal at multiple schools. After retiring, they said that they missed the association with people, especially with the students and the teachers, but that they did not miss the long hours, headaches, meetings, paperwork, or confrontations with parents.

These principals talked about the school being there “for the kids”, “to help the kids.” They saw their role as one of PROVIDER because they were the one in charge; they were there to provide the atmosphere so that teachers could carry out the instructional program. They were there to see that everything was running smoothly, to take care of the technical side, to provide support, to mediate in disputes, to make decisions, to provide materials, to make the master schedule, to be visible, to be the leader.

Generally, these interviewees saw themselves as “fortunate” to have been high school principals, to have worked with good people, to have gotten the opportunities they did. They talk about their career tracks as serendipitous or as God’s will. It is as if it all happened to them and they were just “fortunate,” “blessed,” or “lucky” that it all worked out the way it did.

**What a Good High School Principal Is and Does**

These retired White male high school principals talked about themselves as the one in charge, the leader, and they emphasized the fact that there can really only be one leader.

Well, the principal of course, is in charge of the school, and I think the teachers want to know who's in charge. SWM271

The principal sets the tone for the school. Uh, I think that says it in itself. the principal is the leader in the school since he is the ultimate authority in the building. SWM187F

I feel that my training in school, as a high school president of the student body and college president of the student body and my various areas of responsibility in the Navy and so forth, all gave me a yearning to be a leader and to be in charge. And you are certainly in charge, and you have to be a leader if you are a principal. SWM144F

I attempted to share responsibility but at the same time I never wanted there to be any doubt in the students' mind, in the faculty's mind, or in the assistant principals' mind, as to who was in charge and who would make the final decision. PERIOD. SWM191F

They saw the role as a public role dealing with people, one which carried with it great responsibility and which required a good decision-maker who is not afraid to make unpopular decisions; someone who is well-organized and who is willing to be visible to students teachers, parents, and the community. A good high school principal, according to these principals, knows what’s going on, knows what he is doing, attends most school events, is visible out in the halls, lets students and teachers know that he is interested in them and that he wants input, but the bottom line is that the decisions are his to make.
A good high school principal “makes things happen”, is a “catalyst.” These interviewees saw the principal as the hub of the school; the school reflected his personality. High school White male principals talked about programs they started (football, electives, band), approaches they took to problems (e.g., changing staff attitudes, starting a newsletter, leading pep rallies, working with students in trouble), and how they handled issues that were difficult (e.g., being held hostage at gunpoint, having no water in the school, canceling a play with explicit sexual content, dealing with racism, vandalism, or improper conduct between teachers and students).

According to these principals, a good high school principal is a leader by example. He recognizes teachers’ accomplishments and makes them feel important. He is interested in his teachers and students. He is organized and plans each day, although it is rare that he gets to carry out his plans due to the nature of the job. A good principal has confidence in his decisions. Good high school principals talk with other principals about their solutions to similar problems. A good high school principal attends conferences and is interested in professional development so that he can get new ideas (with the exception of those principals in the Fairfax cohort where this is not discussed).

Several of these interviewees mentioned that a high school principal has to be intelligent in order to do a good job. According to these transcripts, the best preparation for a high school principalship was coaching or the military; one should also have had classroom experience, volunteered for administrative duties, done an internship or been an assistant principal to best prepare oneself for the role. These high school principals recommended a broad range of life experiences and a broad academic background as strengths.

For these high school principals the purpose of high school was to help all students to reach their goals and to prepare them to function in society. Extra-curricular activities were talked about as key to this mission. Positive athletic and activity group reputations were seen as important (e.g., winning football teams, first place debate teams, being known for having an excellent drama or music program) as were vocational programs.

In contrast to their middle school colleagues, only a few of these interviewees saw leadership roles in the community as important to their success as principal. Most did not specifically relate these and those listed were generally fairly limited (e.g., church, Rotary Club). The following statement is typical.

Well, of course I was a member of numerous clubs like the Ruritans, the Chamber of Commerce, and active in church work. SWM199

**Attendance at School Events**

These high school principals saw attending all school events as their primary community leadership role and talking with parents at these events was how they said people got to know them. They talked about the need to be at as many events as possible, and about how, as principal, they felt that they, not a subordinate, were expected to be there. Most talked about being out several evenings a week. They were particularly careful to make certain that aspiring high school principals knew that this would be the case:

Well, I think one thing they would have to be prepared and should be to attend practically all activities. Which means they're not going to be home very often and because the mere presence indicates that they're in control and
also indicates that they're interested. The fact that they're interested means that other people are interested and it sort of carries down the line. SWM199

Because of the centrality of attendance at school events, these interviewees talked about the high school principalship as very time consuming.

The principalship has no hours. Sure I guess you’re supposed to stay there from 8 to 5 or something but really there are no hours. It’s a 24-hour job. You’ve got numerous activities if you’re secondary school principal. Every night there is something going on, whether it’s choral, or band, forensic, athletics, there is always something going on, the building is being used...That’s probably one of the biggest headaches a principal has, is to make sure that whenever that activity is terminated that night that everything is secure. SWM271

Well, I think a person should have enough experience in the school system to prepare him for the sacrifices he will make as principal. I think he should be selected for his ability to schedule not only his time for the students, and to attend functions out of the school. It is a 24-hour job, sometimes you even get calls at home during the holidays. And the principal is the hub of the school. Again, he is the leader of team effort that I spoke about. SWM108

The high school, particularly with all the activities that I tried to get to as many as I could personally, like the band when they would go on an exchange trip at least once a year. I would go to the plays, go to the games, athletics and various activities and so on. Quite a bit of time. SWM221F

Several discussed the importance of having had a supportive family and they seem to want to be explicit about the amount of time the job will take to those thinking about becoming a high school principal.

But they also talk about the principalship as enjoyable and as “where the action is.”

I always enjoyed being in the middle of things, where decisions were being made. I wanted to be where the action was. SWM244

**Parents**

Parents were often mentioned as problems. Parents and specific communities where the schools were located were labeled as “supportive,” “difficult,” “changing,” “demanding.” Little was specifically talked about in terms of how to address these issues, except in Fairfax where specific mention was made of keeping the community informed or having the media keep the public informed. Parent involvement was seldom mentioned. Occasionally, it was cited as a weakness. In general, parent support was seen by these principals as having dwindled. Parent-Teacher Associations were talked about rarely; where they were, it was often stated as a contrast, (i.e., “unlike other high schools...”). How to get parents “on their side” is an issue brought up but usually in the context of not knowing how to do it.
Power/autonomy issues come up in almost all of the interviews. Those who had autonomy in hiring talked about this as “key” to their success and felt more “in charge.”

And you see, I had the right to pick all those people myself. And that to me...you get the right people in the jobs and you have very few of them that you are going to have to fire, or have real problems with. SWM218

Those who had a lot of central office interference were resentful of conflicting orders, excessive paperwork, and lack of authority.

*Did you feel that central office policies prevented you from accomplishing goals you felt you otherwise could have accomplished?*

I felt that there were times when the central office imposed on the responsibilities of the principal.

*Could you elaborate on that?*

Well, I thought that when you are given an objective to accomplish and then were told what to do to accomplish the objective, then that's the wrong way of handling it. And I think that principals should be left alone once they're given a job to do so that they can either make it or not make it. SWM199

Well, I have always thought that the principal of a school needs to have authority within the guidelines of the central office administration. Whether it is discipline, curriculum, instructional program, working with teachers, don't put me in charge of something if you are not going to give me the authority to make it work. Don't give me something to do and then tell me you are not going to let me do it. SWM244

Making an independent decision when one’s “superiors” were not available became a harrowing experience, one which was resented. These principals talked about parents going over their heads to the central office and the superintendent, and how a good relationship with the superintendent depended on keeping HIM informed or heading off potential conflict before it reached the central office. These interviewees stated several times that “everything comes back to the principal.” Therefore, those who were involved in it were very positive about moves toward site-based management, while others saw it as what they had been doing all along.

I feel like the movement towards school-based management is one of the things that I feel like has a whole lot of potential. I feel like I would have enjoyed that and I had a very short experience with that in the school division that I retired from. SWM320

And I don't know what they expect now, because they are doing a thing here in Virginia Beach now with site-basedd management which I felt is what we always did because I ran the damn building. SWM339
Many of these high school principals talked about themselves-as-principals as about always “being in the middle” and “trying to balance” needs and agendas and the best interests of individuals versus those of the whole student body.

I think the greatest pressures were trying to balance the problems that were generated between the students and the teachers and the parents and the school board and the superintendent. In other words, the principal is conducting a round robin game. He has to balance issues to maintain some semblance of harmony. At the same time, he has to be able to take a stand. So you're constantly, as a principal, going from one to the other, balancing. SWM199

Some teachers, especially in the high school, are in a position to be more visible—coaches, activity sponsors, unofficial line of command, that kind of thing. The behind-the-scenes power structure that develops in any organization. I have always been told, and I firmly believe it, and the superintendent and principal I started with, the balance was a good responsibility of the principal, to maintain balance in the schools. Don't let one department or one teacher or one phase of the school get out of balance of the other, just because they have a winning football team does not mean that person is the best teacher or does the best job, or should command the most resources directed toward that end. However, if that is what the community wants, that is what the school board wants, then that is what will be, I guess, but the principal's role is to try to maintain the balance and not let one get too far in control and completely out-of-control. Keep the balance. That is why you are constantly building. There is always something in the school that needs to be built up. You don't tear down an organization, you just maintain the balance. SWM348

So people in administration are walking a tightrope, that's what I'm trying to say. You're trying to satisfy the parents of the students of the community on one end. You have to conform to the requirements of the State on the other. SWM319

They spoke about “never being right” and always having to take everything into consideration. They often mentioned that there were one or two other principals with whom they would talk over tough situations to get feedback.

Several of these interviewees talked about initially being more on the side of the teachers, or more concerned with getting everyone’s input, or more sensitive to people’s feelings. They said, however, that they soon realized that they had to be the one to make the decisions, that they were in charge and that “you just had to get used to the fact that you weren’t going to please everybody.” This tale of socialization into the role is repeated in many of the transcripts.

**In Charge to Maintain the Status Quo**

Most of these principals saw themselves as inheriting their school. Department structures were described similarly throughout the transcripts. These principals described their schools as “having the usual programs.” The few innovative programs discussed are in addition to this. In almost all cases, the curriculum was seen as externally prescribed, either by inheritance, the county
or the state. This seemed to be true even for those who opened a school, a common circumstance for these principals because of the growth occurring in Virginia during their careers, as well as for those who came to a school under a specific mandate to improve the school in some way. Improvements or stewardship was typically mentioned in terms of physical plant maintenance, aesthetics, or facilities.

**Working With Teachers**

Most of these principals described their involvement with teachers as fairly limited. It seems as though these principals interacted with teachers when conducting evaluations or when there was a problem or if a teacher had a particular request. Otherwise, contact with teachers was restricted to regular meetings with department heads or chairs.

These interviewees said that teachers expected principals to support them and give them freedom and solve problems. Teachers, they asserted, want to know where the principal stands on things and want the principal to act like a leader. They want someone they can go to and someone who is fair. They expect the principal “to be knowledgeable and know what’s going on,” to be visible, to visit classrooms, and to take an interest in what the teachers are doing. All of these interviewees contended that teachers expect the principal to provide a positive teaching and learning environment.

Several of these principals talked about the importance of having expectations spelled out and rules and regulations clear, as well as having roles and responsibilities well defined.

The one thing I did at Fort Hunt was that I defined roles: my roles, the role of assistants, the role of staff. I wish I had a copy of my handbook but I think I pitched it out. But I put in writing everything we had to live by. It helped to establish, I guess, a management role for me. In other words, it was in place. You have to have that. Very explicit detail on everything including the role of the teacher in terms of discipline, what they could and couldn’t do. That was always something you could go back to. It avoided getting into these complicated situations where you weren’t operating from something. Of course, the County has very well-defined regulations. You know, the Blue Book is monstrous. SWM175F

This was important regarding evaluations of teachers as well.

I think these formalized programs that are thoroughly researched and thought out and they say to the teacher, “Here’s the list. Here’s what you’re supposed to be doing. Here’s what we expect you to do. Now are you doing these things? If you aren’t, let us help you overcome some of your weaknesses.” SWM187F

Getting into the classrooms was generally talked about as desirable but as very difficult to do because of other competing responsibilities. Short visits were universally preferred to the scheduled longer visits mandated by the formal evaluation procedures. Most said they resented the more formal evaluations required more recently, seeing these reports as trite and useless. Only a few of these retired high school principals talked about evaluation as connected to improvement of teaching performance. Evaluation in general was seen as a professional obligation of the school.
administrators. Like their middle school counterparts, being able to recognize good teaching was seen as both important and as something these interviewees did well when they were principals.

According to these high school White male principals, good teachers are those who do not have problems with control and this is because they can relate to kids. Weak teachers have control problems either because they do not relate well to kids or because they do not have good organizational skills. Generally, outsiders were brought in to help weak teachers or assistant principals were assigned to work with them. These high school principals tried to encourage weak teachers out of the profession. Weak teachers were seen as a problem with which to be dealt.

Visibility and Technical Aspects of the Role

When describing their actions and how their time was spent as principal, technical concerns such as making up the master schedule, budgeting, discipline, writing reports, attendance at meetings, and management and personnel issues loomed large. But the largest aspect of the role of high school principal, in terms of what was mentioned again and again as most important, was about being visible: “walking the halls” and attending student events (e.g., games, science fairs).

O.K., but I always felt that the best thing to run one of these buildings was to be up and down the hall. And I felt like if I was really doing my job then the kids would be so used to me that when I walked into a classroom they wouldn't look up, they would keep on doing what they were doing, because we were in and out of the classroom, and we didn't cause a problem when we did. SWM339

Paperwork and the number of meetings are both complained about frequently. Required paperwork in general was not highly regarded. It was talked about as excessive, necessary, phony, and, generally, of little value. This principal’s comment reflects the opinions expressed by many in this cohort:

But, it did make for a long school day, to take care of the paperwork. And paperwork and organization, is, is, some of it is necessary. The thing I detested were those things that I felt were going to land in a file somewhere just because some bureaucratic system needed another piece of paper to fall back on if they needed it, needed one piece in ten years, that kind of thing. SWM320

These interviewees talked about always working on some report or another. According to what they said, these principals spent little time on curriculum and instruction.

Impact of Era on Role/Identity

Most of these high school principals defined their role/identity in a time of rapid expansion and this resulted for many in their role encompassing planning new buildings, keeping up with educational trends and new legislation, opening schools, hiring, etc. When growth slowed, this also influenced their role as principal in terms of it being harder to convince weak teachers to leave teaching, and, in some cases, having less authority over hiring, budgets and curriculum.
The era of the 1960s and 1970s caused many of these retired high school principals to redefine their roles and to have to deal much more directly with society's problems than they felt they were prepared to do. Drugs, discipline, challenges to authority, mandatory attendance laws, rapid growth, the Vietnam War, the Beatles—all caused concern and impacted the role of the principal, as evidenced by the strong, largely unprompted statements appearing throughout the transcripts. The following excerpts are typical:

We had a strong problem with the drug culture, creating many visions, rumors, and so forth, that the public felt, at the state level, and I served as a chairman of the principals in this area, and we met in Richmond, and the state department and legislature, the people thought drugs in 1962 was a ghetto problem. That was not in our mainstream communities. Pardon the expression, the principal of Charlottesville and I said, “The hell it is! It is right in the midst of our universities and it is right in the university communities.” We said we as principals needed some in-service to know how to recognize and handle these problems with these students. We know how to deal with alcohol; we have dealt with it. We had seen that sort of thing. We recognize it. We know how to deal with it, and drugs, we don't know. We don't know the behavior or students. It took awhile before we generated anything. It just came about because others saw the same thing in our community. SWM348

There were many things that happened at Annandale. When I became principal in 1966 the school wasn't very much different from what it was when it opened in 1954. The principal was law. The principal would say, after some thought and so forth, he would say no and the students would grumble and go on about their business, but nothing really occurred. But then times began to change, and they shifted so quickly that it was almost impossible to stay up with them. I think the three biggest challenges that I had while I was at Annandale occurred first with the Vietnam situation. When the Vietnam situation hit us, and it hit us primarily in the early 70's, we were nothing more than a mirror of the community. Whatever happened out in the community reoccurred in the schools. And there wasn't anything that we could do about it. We tried to stay out of it, but it was strictly impossible. I remember having a near riot on our campus. I wasn't there that day. But I remember that the students were very upset over the Kent State Affair. And some of them came, particularly from the outside, and demanded that we lower the flag. We had no authority to do this. And they reacted. And then some of our other students, who were more of the conservative type, counteracted. And they ran these students off. And then it hit the news, and then one thing led to another. And I had a very difficult time in dealing with this because, in the first place, I wasn't there on the day that it occurred. And secondly, anything that I said was being taken out of context by the newspapers and being printed as was happening all over the country. And I remember one time I made the statement that many of the students that I had that were dissident, who were objecting to all these things, objected to anything. That many of them couldn't spell Cambodia and they didn't even know where it was. The community reacted to this, some in a positive way and some in a negative way. And it was just a statement I shouldn't have made, but I made it anyway. In addition to the Vietnam situation, along came the drugs. And no one was ready for the drugs. The drugs came first as
marijuana, then cocaine, and LSD, and everything else. And students were getting drugs and we were trying to keep the drugs out of the schools. Parents were most anxious to do something, those that cared, and most of them did. They were searching around for answers and they were also searching around for people to blame. And quite often they blamed the school. They said the school was the place where drugs were readily available. Certainly, they were readily available in the schools, as they were on the street corners, in the movie theaters, and everywhere else. And they were trying to find scapegoats and I think that the schools took an unfair amount of blame at a time when this was not justified. But I think one reason why we were able to turn the drug situation around was because that there were enough people in the school area who really cared, and we began trying to get people in who could educate the students and who took a real tough line.

The stated concerns of these retired high school principals centered around safety, discipline, balancing individual and community needs, and having a complete instructional program that helped all kids reach their goals. The reward was to see youngsters go on and do well and contribute to society.

**Concluding Comments**

What emerges from an examination of discourses about identity of self-as-principal by level cohort is that these men, while nominally occupying the same role, that of “school principal”, really described themselves and their roles very differently from one another depending on whether they were a retired elementary, middle school, or high school principal. Thus, one aspect of context, age of the children in one’s school, obviously impacts on definition of self and role as principal.

It is also interesting to realize that many of these contrasts are “riffs” on the theme of the general White male educational administration professional discourse. By elucidating what that looks and sounds like, we set the stage for listening to the contrasts presented in the narratives of those who are not described by the adjectives “White male” and who are also speaking about self and role as principal.
Chapter 4

How Who We Are and Where We Are Located Influences How We Describe Roles and Identities of Self-as-Principal: A Socio-Cultural Discourse Analysis of Three Cohorts of Elementary Principals

Introduction

Stating that who we are influences how we describe roles and identities might seem to be a solipsism, but it addresses two things not often considered: 1) that the expectations of the role might be framed by others having entirely different frames of reference, and 2) that although roles and identities are negotiated by individuals in particular places and times, there might be patterns as to how this is done that are influenced by socio-cultural factors. The meta-narratives against which and within which narratives about self are constructed, while dominant, are not necessarily either predictive or determinant, especially when they are discordant with aspects of one’s cultural identity.

Anderson and Page (1995) point out that “educational practitioners also live within a set of narratives that serve as invisible frames for the way they think about their practice and the actions they take” (p. 125). But as Cherryholmes (1988), Ikpa (1995), Shakeshaft (1986, 1995), and others point out, the meta-narratives are often predicated on the assumptions of the traditional literature, which is, in effect, the White male discourse about educational administration. “These metanarratives produce recurrent themes that characterize educational discourses and practices” (Anderson & Page, 1995, p. 125).

The substructures of many [themes] that are dominant emphasize order, accountability, structure, systematization, rationalization, expertise, specialization, linear development and control. (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 9)

As seen in Chapter 3, these themes were faithfully reproduced in the narratives of the retired White male principals in my study. The themes have been those of the general educational administration discourse against/within principals have needed to construct roles and identities. This is the case regardless of the gender or race of the educational administrator.

As I argued in Chapter 3, when this meta-narrative reinforces and reproduces by example the narratives of identity influenced by gender and race, a synergy is created wherein those individuals feel “right and true.” What happens to the narratives about self-as-principal when those who are not White males construct their identities within/against the dominant discourses? Is this an entirely individualistic project or do patterns of different discourses emerge if looked at in cohort groups sorted for race and gender?

Certainly, as Ikpa (1995) claims, “In their quest for an appropriate knowledge base, reformers have failed to consider the impact of fundamental beliefs of women and minorities upon the conceptualization of educational administration paradigms” (p.177). Listening to the words of retired White female, Black male and Black female elementary principals gives some insight into what those beliefs might be, how they are different, in
some cases, from traditional conceptualizations of the principalship, what similarities are found across discourses, and what we might learn from them.

To investigate the presence of contrasting discourses by race and gender, I first went through the entire sample of transcripts and sorted the interviews that matched in level and race, and level and gender into cohorts. I thought initially that I would look for male and female, and then African-American and Caucasian contrasts, should there be any. I began analyzing the cohort of elementary female principals and noticed that while the interviews of retired Black and White female elementary principals had some similarities, there seemed also to be differences. I then focused solely on the interviews with retired White female principals. After twenty elementary White female interviews, the discourse patterns discussed below emerged and were reconfirmed several times over, producing the “saturation” Moustakas (1990) discusses. I decided not to use the additional interviews with retired White elementary female principals; there was no new discourse patterns developing from the transcripts. But I was not sure if what I found as common discourse features were common to 

I then explored the transcripts of the interviews with the retired Black principals anticipating that they would provide mere variations on the themes already established, if there were differences at all. The transcripts told me otherwise; that there were central features I would miss if I did not consider both race and gender. Although there were more than enough interviews with retired White elementary principals, I had a very limited number of interviews with either retired Black male or Black female elementary principals. Initially, although promising contrasts seemed to be present, I doubted whether or not I would find anything that could be classified as a discourse feature of each of these cohorts because of the small number of interviews. Seven, however, seemed to be a minimum of sorts. The clear discourse features for each cohort that emerged are presented in the rest of this chapter.

When I wanted to extend this exploration into different levels (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school), continuing to consider race and gender, I ran into difficulty. Although the numbers were good when the transcripts were only collapsed into cohort by race and then by gender and then by level, when all three were considered, as was clearly indicated by the results of analyzing the elementary principals’ interviews, I discovered I had too few interviews in certain cohorts from which to discern discourse patterns. For example, I only had five interviews with retired middle school and high school White female principals from Virginia. I had similar constraints with interviews of retired middle school and high school Black principals. So I am only able to present discourse contrasts found by juxtaposing cohorts of retired elementary school principals in Virginia sorted by race and gender; contrasts beyond these await other researchers to be uncovered.

The following three sections of this chapter each focus on a different cohort of retired elementary principals retrospective narratives about self-as-principal. For each cohort, a contrasting structural metaphor emerged as I analyzed the discourses about identity of self-as-principal.
PRINCIPAL as FACILITATOR: Retired White Female Elementary Principals’ Descriptions About Self-as-Principal¹

Introduction: The Relational Quality of Female Leadership

When eavesdropping on the conversations of these retired elementary White female principals, I found, as did Hurty (1995) in her study of seventeen female principals, that “while they were unique individuals with differing stories, their ways of describing their world of work and their approaches to it contained remarkable similarities” (p. 383). The narratives describing self-as-principal were heavily peopled, not necessarily with names but with descriptions of relationships and activities done with others. Those studying women managers in other fields (i.e., Helgesen, 1990), as well as those studying female educational administrators have noted the relational quality of women’s approaches to leadership (Grogan, 1996; Hurty, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1986). This cohort of interview transcripts is permeated with examples of how WE responded to and took care of what needed to be done.

And I found that because I really seriously took every little complaint as something sincere, my staff finally understood that if there was a problem, it was our problem not her problem, or my problem, but our problem and then we worked from that view. Also, I suppose it will be a question later on, but perhaps leading into what you’re going to say; what was my philosophy of leadership? That right there was it. Whatever bothered a teacher bothered me and it became a we not me, or he or me and she, but we and so. EWF105

The portrait of the principal that emerges from these women’s words is one of being in the center of this relational web from where she could constantly reach out (Helgesen, 1990), as opposed to being situated hierarchically above her staff and needing to reach down. These women spoke about being everywhere, being connected, being a part of the team of which they were the leader.

Uh, leading doesn't mean that you know everything. You know, it means that you get in there with somebody else or with others and let them know that you’re willing to do it and you need someone to come along with you. EWF105

It was a small faculty, you see, but there were various and sundry personalities, naturally, and each one had strengths and weaknesses—and I certainly did myself—but we had a real working group. I leaned on the teachers because I needed them, you see, to help me make it a good school, and they had a lot to offer, believe me. EWF119

And I would never ask anyone to do anything that that I wasn't willing to do myself. And I think being confident in your field, to be knowledgeable and

confident in your field, so that they respected you and they knew what you were talking about. That you knew what you were asking them to do and the reason for it. I think I asked my teachers to do a lot of things that I don't think they would have done in another situation. But there was...it's hard to have a camaraderie and yet to maintain a leadership also. It's...you can't be palsy-walsy, but you can't be austere and apart. And there has to be a feeling of support, that they trust you. EWF197F

Certainly these women's descriptions of self-as-principal encompassed a range of leadership styles but their common stated aim was to build a team in the service of educating “the whole child.”

The narratives focus on relationships. Stories center upon relationships, as do examples and responses to questions about effective schools, roles of the principal, and typical day. The importance of seeing and treating children and teachers and parents as individuals, as trying to understand and be supportive of their needs, as trying to work together for the good of the children resounded loudly through ALL of the interviews in one way or another. The difficulties vis-à-vis teachers and the community when you move from teacher to principal in the same school, move to a new place and have to develop relationships with teachers and parents when you are embedded in a community, and when you are a newcomer are all described in terms of relationships. Interviewees talked, among other things, about professional jealousy, impact on teacher friends, having to develop trust with a new faculty, and how it feels to be connected to others through a multitude of associations.

**Power to Lead as a Team Concept**

Like Hurty's (1995) principals, the principals in this cohort discussed power as “the ability to get the job done”, a concept of “power with” rather than “power over.”

And there's something about the power that goes with making something happen that is worth the discomfort, the nights that you roll and toss, the extra hours that you put in, that the ...the agony that you go through birthing it to make it happen, the care that you take in ensuring that nothing go wrong. And then there's that satisfaction: it worked! It's good. You know, it's good. EWF197F

The term “team” was used frequently and was initially puzzling because it was the same word the men used and, yet, seemed somehow different. Soon it emerged as a coherent concept.

Then we would get back as a staff and talk about were we going in the direction of achieving the school's goals and what was helping us in our particular classroom that was helping us to achieve that goal. How we were personally working toward that...But, I think also that uh, uh, to be an effective principal you've got to see the response of your staff members and the other people with whom you work. You've got to see that their attitude is one of enjoyment and one of a seriousness. I'm not...If you see too many long faces and too many gripes then there's something that you need to look again to see that, what is. . .you know...I am the one that sets the stage and I
prepared this stage and if my cast are not playing their roles very well, then I need to see if my directorship is effective. And I feel like it's a team effort and that's how we have to go with it if we are going to be effective. EWF105

My teachers knew that I had this focus, that we had to have love and support for each other, and that we had to work together as teams and one big team, that I was part of the team, not the big boss up here, you know. That had to be a focus, and that was communicated uh, and that continued to be communicated to the very last day that I was there. But, uhm, I think the school climate is just vital. You know, you can walk into a school, and you don't have to be there long until you feel the tension or the lack of tension or the love or whatever. It's just there. You can feel it uh, you know, I was always it was validated when people would come to my school and they would tell me it felt good in there, that they could feel the good things going on. EWF351

But, you know, it was a close-knit group up here. And certainly, everybody felt they could get in to see me at anytime, or - or to send a child down to get me, you know, so we were very open and above board on everything...We worked as a team, even our janitorial staff, and our cooks. EWF262

Shakeshaft (1986) explains:

Women define a team player as someone who cooperates toward the achievement of group goals. Women see the “support of group action and the achievement of group satisfaction” as the primary descriptors of a team player (Gips, Navin, Branch & Nutter, 1984, p. 7). Men, on the other hand, more often define a team player as one who has a job to do and who is responsible for one piece of the action. Women more often stress cooperation and collaboration, whereas men tend to stress autonomy (p. 207).

Like the women principals in Hurty’s (1995) study, all of the retired elementary White female principals in my cohort described themselves-as-principals in classically feminine ways, defined by Noddings (1984) as rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. These principals described many instances of how they provided care and nurturance to teachers, students, staff, parents and others. This relational web within which White female principals positioned themselves as principals was markedly different from the network of power used by White male principals to identify and contextualize themselves-as-principals. This focus was also evident in the ways they described exemplary programs:

At the time we had projects for Southern Association—I don't know whether they still do or not, but we did—and one of the best projects we had was a mathematics one. This was chosen by this faculty because they felt it was a weakness, see. A lot of them said, “I'm afraid of math,” you know. And we used our math supervisor in the system, we used all kinds of things. We wrote a guide, and right today I have people say to me—certain ones who are left—“I'm still using it. I have it.” It was one of the best things that we ever did, and in doing that, we learned a lot about each other. See, that, I think, is what you have to accomplish in working with people. EWF119
We made dulcimers. We got parents and students involved. We had a firm that provided the raw materials and the instruction and it was a marvelous thing for children to learn to play an instrument. I still have mine, and there are still people I know that have their dulcimers that they made. That was one. It was a valuable project. As I said, I had, we had so many things going.

The years I spent in Falls Mills as principal were really wonder years. In this small rural school, parents were just incredibly supportive. I came into the school and turned the instructional program upside down, and no one criticized it in any way. We had one really memorable experience there. We did a Parents’ Day once. The school board gave us one day that we could use in any way we wanted to for public relations, and we did an all day activity day. We had about 1,000 people come to school with less than 200 hundred students in it. The second year I was at Falls Mills, my superintendent talked with me about leaving the school and going into instructional supervision. But I felt that I had made so many changes in the school and that the parents and the teachers had cooperated with me, and we had the instructional program going our way, I decided not to do this.

Comparisons With Shakeshaft’s Findings

Many of the elementary White female principals said that they really enjoyed spending time with the children and found a wide variety of ways to do this, making it a substantive part of their role (i.e., eating lunch with the children, teaching small groups, getting into the classrooms, going on camping trips, doing bus duty). They also talked extensively about meetings with teachers and parents. This “being with” was a strong element of the role of the principal according to this interview cohort.

The discourses used by these interviewees to discuss themselves as principals strongly correspond to Shakeshaft’s (1986) findings about women educational administrators. Below, I present three of Shakeshaft’s primary findings followed by excerpts from the interviews with retired elementary White female principals in this cohort:

1) Relationships with Others are Central to All Actions of Women Administrators. Women spend more time with people, communicate more, care more about individual differences, are concerned more with teachers and marginal students, and motivate more...This focus on relationships and connections echoes Gilligan’s (1982) ethic of care. (Shakeshaft, 1986, p. 197)

I think that it's important that you have visibility, people see you, and that's what I tried to do every day. I had a lot of sessions with parents, not just about children, but on PTA projects and this kind of thing. I very much felt that the PTA was certainly an integral part of the school and that it was up to the principal to be there. You don't steer it, exactly, but your very presence lends them the feeling of stability for your school, and you, and the teachers. And you learn a lot. They also learn a lot from you, because that's what you're hired for. So I usually tried, I'd say about three days out of every
week we had some type of group meeting. And we had study groups for parents during the day. I ate with the children and teachers. I felt that was what you should do. EWF119

I guess when I went to work in the morning I tried to sort of put myself in a mood whereby as the teachers came in the door they would see me in a happy mood no matter what mood they were in and I tried to leave most of my troubles at home which is what I think you have to do when you're on the job. But I always tried to be in the office available as the teachers came in in the morning just to say hello how are you. And a lot of times you would or I would know maybe they had gone out the night before or they had a child that was sick or an animal that was sick or something had happened and could comment on that. So I tried to get them in a mood in which they could start their day off in a good frame of mind...what I have missed most I guess, is the children and being around the children during the day, because to me, that was the happiest time of the day, greeting the children and telling them good-by everyday and just sort of being there with them in the middle of the day. And I always wanted children to feel like they could come to my office any time they wanted to, to discuss anything and not just because they were in trouble. So, that's what I miss. EWF182F

I think the way that we would set the tone, the principal would through cooperation, with the teachers and understanding of the teacher, the parents, and all of the staff, the secretaries, the cafeteria people, special teachers, custodians, all of the aides, all of the people who keep the school running and going and supervisors. If we could remember that understanding each other's point of view, trying to understand, is one of the most important things. My prayer is very simple: Grant me great teacher eyes to see, ears quick and keen, strong and tender hands, and lips that laugh, but more than all a heart that loves and understands. And I think that in all of our relationships in school and out of school as parents that is a big help. EWF220F

Any advice for a rookie principal?

I would say it’s very important to build a rapport with your teachers, children and parents. EWF165

I always took bus duty in the afternoon, so I could see how the children were coming out of my building. And I could tell by the way they were coming out, whether or not they had a good day...Plus, I could say “John, I really liked the way you answered your history questions today in class. You really did a good job. Susy, I really liked the way, I was really impressed with the way you did so-and-so.” You were trying to get to know them by name. Right. By name, oh, yes. That's six hundred. You can do it. It can be done. And it is important. And this will in the end save you a lot of headaches and parents will know you have a good, efficient school. Because if you have twenty, ah, I always told the teachers, “If you have twenty-four children in your classroom, you have twenty-four newspapers going home every night. Be sure it is a good report.” EWF248F
2) Teaching and Learning are the Major Foci of Women Administrators. Women administrators are more instrumental in instructional learning than men and they exhibit greater knowledge of teaching methods and techniques. Women administrators not only emphasize achievement, they coordinate instructional programs and evaluate student progress...Women are more likely to help new teachers and to supervise all teachers directly. Women also create a school climate more conducive to learning...(Shakeshaft, 1986, p. 197)

We were constantly looking for better ways to do something and we watched our reading scores very closely. And, I was always working with teachers trying to find better ways to reach all the children I guess. We spent a lot of time with curriculum. EWF145

First of all, I think a principal has to be able to listen. I think that is a key characteristic of a good principal. I think you have to be able to listen, ah, you don't always have to agree but I think you have to listen to parents, to listen to students, and you have to listen to teachers. Second, I think that a principal does have to be well organized in order to manage the school. But, I think the most important characteristic of an effective principal is to know instruction. I think this is—this is a weakness throughout the country in principals is that so many principals have gotten into the principalship without really knowing instruction. And I think a principal has to know instructional strategies, they have to know, ah, how to teach reading, they have to know, ah, how to sequence skills, they have to know about learning styles and diagnosing learning styles, they have to know about adapting instruction. If they don't know this, then the teacher knows more than they do; therefore, they cannot be an instructional leader. EWF261

Well, I feel like (pause) that my administrative style in terms of focusing first of all primarily on my teachers so that I could help them grow into very professional highly trained educators was the key to my success in terms of being a leader in the school. The other thing is the instructional strategies that I was able to share with my teachers and to instill in them an understanding of how children learn and how vital it is to do things a certain way. And then from that, they became just eager to know, uh, more and more, more than I could ever tell them about learning styles and doing things in, in ways that would help the children learn. EWF351

In the earlier years of being an administrator, I felt that my early success in the classroom carried over and there was some sort of awareness on the part of the staff and parents that I really knew what I was talking about because I had experienced success in the classroom. So, I think believability has to be there. I think an instructional leader needs to be able to roll up his or her sleeves and demonstrate what you are talking about. And you can do that by actually getting in and teaching classes. EWF352

I stayed in the classrooms a lot. I personally liked to tackle those youngsters who seemed not to have love of learning and let them be my very special challenges and so therefore, I had free and easy access into all the
classrooms because that teacher wanted help with that little guy who didn't want to do his work, or didn't want to learn and so I had a group in every classroom that really were given to me more or less as “Let's see what you can do with him because we can't or I can't.” and it became very important to me to try to work with these children and so all day long I had teaching duties all day, throughout the day. EWF105

3) Building Community is an Essential Part of a Woman Administrator’s Style. From speech patterns to decision-making styles, women exhibit a more democratic participatory style that encourages inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness in schools. Women involve themselves more with staff and students, ask for and get higher participation, and maintain more closely knit organizations...(Shakeshaft, 1986, p. 197)

I think that perhaps the fact that I have tried to be invitational has maybe contributed somewhat to any success that I might have had. That I am participatory in decision making processes, that I try to give other people a voice and that I work very hard to listen to what other people have to say. I ask them for their opinions, and I learn from what they have to offer. I try to encourage participation, I want to share power and I work very hard to enhance the self-worth of others because that I function best when I feel that my self-worth has been enhanced. I try to be a cheerleader and get other people excited about what it is they’re doing. EWF345

We were a close-knit faculty. The most I think I ever had on the staff, counting all the helping teachers, and all, was about 36. And we still get together as a group occasionally. I mean some of us, you know. And I always had open house around Christmas or into January somewhere, for all my staff and their families, and their spouses. And I think this is good to do. EWF180F

I have always thought that all teachers and anybody that work with children have got to love children and they had to get along with children and I just felt like that maybe working with and caring for people and especially the teachers. Not only teachers, you got your other people in the building you got your cafeteria you got your janitors, you got your bus drivers, you got to take interest in them, and if you take interest in them then they take interest in you and they help you with your job. EWF330

The school was a central, a focal point for the community. It was a new school, all the parents were interested in their children as they were in other schools. But the difference was a matter of walking a few blocks to the school to confer with the teacher or the principal if necessary. It was easy for it to be done and even the fathers could come in an hour late, getting to work or half an hour, and come by to speak with me...that was kind of an ideal set-up because the community was large enough to support, to take care, to be taken care of by our school. Mothers could walk up to the school. Fathers could take a, be late, take a little time off to come for a conference. And many of the fathers would come to confer with the teachers in the afternoon. They would get off from work early enough to come for a
conference with the teachers and if it was necessary to have a conference with the principal...I remember that they were, the community, wanted to establish a library and I think that's called the William Byrd Library. When they were getting organized and getting going on that project, the Friends of the Library met in our school. The Women's Club would meet in Crestwood. And, of course, after school the Cub Scouts and the Brownies. And then on Sundays at least one church I can remember that had church and Sunday school at Crestwood while their school was being built.

EWF220F

Another pervasive theme among White female interviewees in my study was the emphasis on supporting the self-esteem of children and teachers.

I think that one of the important things is to keep a child's self-respect. It is something that I think that can be lost and to no one's fault, but it can happen. I think that we, for instance, every child that comes to school expects to read. That's the important. I'm going to first grade, or whatever, learn to read. Not all children learn to read at the same rate and at the same time. And even in grade some children can feel an utter failure because they have not achieved this goal. I think that the grading system can affect children in this way. That we require them by law to come to school, and then we label them failures. So I think keeping children's self-respect, I think keeping teachers' self-respect, is one of the priorities. I don't think anyone operates well under a feeling of failure.

EWF197F

I think my personal philosophy of education would start with building the self-esteem of the child, and for the teachers. I think that the school is a community of learners, that we need to look at everybody as a learner. We need to make every child feel that they are special, that they are loved and to try to create a real warm creative environment that makes the learning come alive, make the learning experience a motivational experience. I think that if you have positive climate and children are excited about what it is you are doing then the learning will come. And I do think that you must have high expectations. If you make the learning interesting and you have high expectations and then you consider the learning modality of each child then I think you’re going to reach most of the children. Whole learning is very important for most children. I think that monotonous worksheets, skill and drill kinds of things that are repetitious over and over for most children are not nearly as effective as a more holistic approach. I also think that you need to make the tasks age appropriate. You need to have high expectations, but I think you need to make the expectations appropriate for the age of the child.

EWF345

And, uhm, involving [the teachers] in the planning, and though they had to stay and have meetings, I communicated to them that their knowledge was so vital to what we were doing, and I needed their input, and they were so willing and it was so satisfying. Then, when we would design a plan, they had been involved in the process so they, you know, made sure it was going to work, and things just worked beautifully. But, I think, you know, giving them the strokes they needed, was just vital, just like it is with children. You
tell children you think they're great. You've got to tell your teachers you think they're great too. They need to hear that too. EWF351

These women gave many examples of how they worried about how to best handle situations and not hurt others’ feelings. They did not want others to “feel bad.”

But I do think that you—after you’ve made an observation, you must go back and sit down alone and put down your thoughts. Then I think, you see, the teacher expects you—you've been in that room—to tell her—what is it that you saw? Always find something good—and there's always something good there. For heaven's sakes don't be, you know, pessimistic and critical. I have seen supervisors like this—I've had them and they are shattering to teachers. Just ruins a teacher. A teacher has to know that—“Look,” you say, “Well, now look, this was fine, but now what about so-and-so? Don't you think we could do this?” And give some help. Where can she go to get it? Or how can she do it? And you might have to go in there and teach a little lesson. I did that—if—I don't say that I did it a great many times because I didn't have to, but I did participate in the classes, and I think that you should. EWF119

So, while I was away at this conference, this helping teacher in music, had asked every teacher if I had asked them. And she was taking her own poll, and she wanted to stay in the school. Well, this bothered me to no end. So, I called in a person from the area office, and we sat down and talked to her. And he told her that she had no right to do that, that as long as I was principal in the school that I could make the decision, and I could do it by a poll, or I could do it like I wanted to. And, that she would not be back at that school under any circumstances. And, that did bother me because I like to have good personal relationships with people. And, it did bother me to have that happen. EWF180F

Uh, if I had to call a student in, and get pretty rough with a student during the day, before we left that afternoon, I tried to find time, and a way, to get to that student and be able to put my arm around his shoulder, and pat it on the back, and tell him that I was real proud of him for something - for something that they had done that day, because I didn't want any child to go home feeling hard at me. You know, I didn't want them to go home hating me, and I wanted them to leave here with a good taste in their mouth. EWF262

The speech patterns revealed in the transcripts conform generally to those identified as typically female by Shakeshaft (1986). These interviewees, unlike the White male principals, do not tend to generalize their experiences to others, use more I and WE as opposed to YOU and THEY as pronouns, talk about emotions, use intensifiers, use qualifiers, use superlatives/diminutives and generally talk in an open, self-revealing way.

The elementary White female principals tended to begin statements with I THINK or I BELIEVE or I GUESS before stating a strong opinion during these interviews. The transcripts reveal that they were typically quite candid. Most detailed, even when not explicitly asked, things that they thought they didn’t do very well (e.g., handling replacement of a cafeteria manager, dealing with the incompetence of a superintendent’s wife, involving others in more of the decision-making, giving too much of the disciplinary
responsibilities to assistant principals). They also told about programs and ways of doing things of which they were proud (e.g., a May Day Health Program, developing an evaluation model used by others, an overnight camping trip, getting test scores up). Statements were often followed by examples which sometimes were then followed by stories. This was a typical pattern in the narratives. Points and themes were often repeated, sometimes without reference to what had been said earlier. Interviews of older women who had been retired longer were more rambling and general about role. However, all of the elementary White female principals recalled very specific incidents with children, teachers, events or superintendents and all of the transcripts included at least one such recollection.

**Taking Care Of Business By Taking Care Of People**

These interviewees talked about the way to gaining respect as respecting others’ individual needs—be they a child’s, a teacher’s or a parent’s—and treating others in ways that maintained their dignity.

You know a lot of people say, “Well, you should treat everybody just alike.” You can't treat everybody just alike because everybody is unique in their needs and in their behaviors. I think you just treat everybody fairly. I think that was the key to my success plus my interest and my love for children and my love just for teaching—education. EWF261

But first of all, they want their children to feel that they are cared about. And they expect the principal to make sure that that happens and that their child has a teacher and works with staff members who are going to feel that way about them, have kind, loving, supporting demeanors so that they can enjoy being in the school. And teachers who will value each child’s uniqueness and try to meet that child’s individual needs, not just treat them all as, as you know, a mass, but treat them as individual children. EWF345

They were clear about seeing children developmentally, at least within the context of their program. They were concerned about children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children who were struggling in school, and child abuse, whether in rural or urban settings. Equity was also of concern; sometimes this was the argument for or against tracking at the elementary level. Again, there is a distinct contrast with the elementary White male principals who talked about how one needs to treat people in certain ways in order that they would then be helpful to you. In these transcripts, the principals put an emphasis on treating people well because that is the way they thought people want to be and should be treated. If that helped things go more smoothly, so much the better.

Enjoying people, whether they be little people or big people, or parents or teachers. I love working with people, and I have spent my whole life in some capacity, doing it, and it's very gratifying. And I think that really helped because I know there were situations, with the county people, when you're trying to get snow removed or furnace repaired or things like that. The fact that I was willing to have coffee ready on those early mornings when they came to remove the snow or things like that, that seem very small, but it just a fact that I liked them, and they were, and they realized it, and I got things done. I think it's a necessary quality if you're going to be working with people, and I really enjoyed them. EWF168F
This echoes Helgesen’s (1990) findings about the differences in the orientation toward people of male versus female managers.

This is a fascinating aspect about eavesdropping on these conversations, one which supports the discernment of discourse by gender and race. These women could have presented themselves-as-principals using typical male definitions of power, leadership and success. Instead, their words painted a very different view of the principalship and of how they wanted to present themselves as principals, one which is very definitely gender-based and one which identified nurturing and connection as central to a White female elementary principal’s concept of self-in-role. Greenberg (1985) described this “female school world”:

Whatever its failures, it is more cooperative than competitive, it is more experiential than abstract, it takes a broad view of the curriculum and has always addressed “the whole child.” (p.4 as quoted in Shakeshaft, 1986, p. 198)

Elementary White female principals seem to have been guided in their decision making by common sense, and by personal experience. Several mentioned other educational administrators as role models or mentors whose style they, at least in part, emulated as a principal. This is in stark contrast to most of the elementary male principals who denied having mentors or role models.

Elementary White female principals talked about mandates from the state or central office as what they had to comply with but not as central to providing a good education for all the children. When they latched onto an idea with enthusiasm, they went with it and tried to get everyone aboard (e.g., open concept school, multi-age grouping, swimming lessons). Inherent in their stories are constant tensions between competing needs (i.e., building manager vs. instructional leader, personal educational philosophy vs. county mandates regarding special education or testing, the need to be present, accessible, and visible for teachers and children and also be present, accessible, and visible to parents and the community). Overall, there was the expressed explicit and implicit need “to do right by” the teachers and children; that no matter what was required, it must be done with caring concern and allow the principal to maintain her integrity as a person. Many of these interviewees stressed that to be successful, you had to genuinely like people, implying that this was the central aspect of the role. This ethic of care pervaded the interview transcripts.

Talking About Teachers and Students

Regarding teachers, these retired elementary White female principals talked about being there to support, to help, to model, to teach, and to provide resources. Regarding children, these principals were most concerned about having a good instructional program and not failing them; “giving them what they need,” whatever that is perceived to be. These principals emphasized the importance of seeing children and teachers as individuals with individual needs. There was an expressed need to know and understand all of the teachers and the children in the building so that they could figure out how to best support them and connect with them. This was talked about in many ways, including an evident absorption with “placing” students with the teachers who had the best personalities to suit them.
I will have to say, this was one of my most pleasant tasks. Was to place students. I felt that a student going through elementary school needed to be exposed to different kinds of personalities, and yet there were some children at particular times needed special types of teachers. And this was a nice experience. EWF180F

Well, I guess I feel in an elementary school, the most important person in that school is the child, and I guess I feel you have to have the child with the teacher that is going to make the child move, or grow is a better word, grow to the fullest potential that that particular child can grow. If you don't have the factors there, I feel, that make for that learning environment for that child, the whole point of education is lost or missing for that particular child. So, I think you have to look at how the child is going to learn and if the teacher, if that particular teacher whose room that child is going to be put teaches the strategies that that particular child is going to pick up whether it be from the visual, the kinesthetic, whatever method that child is going to learn best within and you've got to have supportive teachers that care about children and are going to be able to take and mold that child into what that child needs to become. EWF182F

These interviewees said that the role of principal toward teachers was to support them and help them in every way possible to do their job well. Principals had to be able to model for teachers, use evaluation as a growth tool, provide needed resources, listen. An “open-door” policy was cited again and again. The importance of having teachers have a say, of defending teachers against parents, of helping teachers who were having difficulty. Teachers doing good things should get positive feedback from the principal. However, if these elementary White female principals felt that after doing everything possible a teacher was a menace to children, they said that they then assembled the documentation necessary to get rid of the teacher. They agonized over the decision but their primary goal was to serve the best interests of the children. The following excerpt captures the tone of most of the discussion in the transcripts about firing teachers:

Well, it was the most difficult thing I ever did in my life. Of course, any firing is. But, this was more difficult than the others. Mainly, because she was alone. I knew that she lived alone. I think her parents were dead. And I felt, “How will she survive?” You know? I really felt sorry for her. I took her around to observe other teachers, hoping this would help. I think I did more for this teacher than any other, because I felt so sorry for her. But I had to keep thinking. I had to talk to myself and say, “Look, your number one priority is those children. And I had to keep that in mind. That is the only thing that kept me going. Because I really felt so sorry for this young girl. She was a young girl. Very young. And really, just had no place to go. That is difficult to do. Very difficult...I spent many sleepless nights agonizing over this. I was so concerned. Of course, I was concerned about the children, but, I was also, concerned about her as an individual. And what would happen. That was the most difficult situation, I think, that I had in my entire principalship. EWF248F
Parents Must Be Kept Informed

Regarding parents, elementary White female principals said that they primarily saw themselves in public relations roles.

Because I think, education, you have to advertise it unfortunately. To make people realize that you are in there doing good things in your schools, and give them an opportunity, too, to come in and invite them. Let them feel free to come in and observe what's happening in the school. So that they feel that it is a community activity, and good things are happening. EWF168F

I always had a message to the parents. And any special occasion I always sent out memos to the parents. And then I worked closely with the PTA. I always went to the executive board meetings, you know, all of that. And we had a very active PTA, very supportive PTA. EWF180F

I think the principal has to set the rules that are necessary for the school operation when they wonder about having to sign in, we need to explain to them that it's for the safety of their children. And when we make this explanation, then they understand and they will work us and they will cooperate. I like to explain my expectations to all new groups of parents whether it be kindergarten parents or parents of children in other grades that are coming in to the school. Because if they have an understanding of what the expectations are, then they will be much more cooperative. EWF345

These principals did not talk about themselves as there to serve the parents, although several referred to parents as "patrons." Vis-à-vis parents, the role was to keep parents informed about school activities and why the school was doing whatever it did, to recruit parents to be volunteers, to provide resources (i.e., fund raise) for the school, and to consult with them on discipline matters involving their child. There was a constant attempt to "get parents on their side." Interviewees stated a repeated desire to communicate with parents and the community via newsletters and school newspapers, programs, narrative reports about children's progress. There was a stated priority to be available to talk with parents when there was a problem. Again, this is different from the White male principals who characterized their relationships with parents as largely adversarial or difficult, and the African-American principals who, as you will read later, described themselves as partners with parents.

Focus on the Present

Generally these principals did not talk about themselves specifically as change agents. None mentioned large sweeping changes (beyond better pay for teachers) needed in the educational system and none of the twenty used the word "feminist." In contrast to the African-American elementary principals, these principals were focused on the present, (i.e., what needs to be provided now to meet children’s needs), as opposed to future oriented, (i.e., what we are preparing children to be able to do). Many included brief descriptions of or references to gender issues as influencing, contextualizing or determining their role as principal (i.e., there were few other women administrators, they went into education because of limited career options for women, they were excluded from the “good ol’ boy” network, people doubting their authority because of their gender). A few targeted their advice for administrators as if they were talking specifically to their female interviewer. But most did
not. Some, despite their being women, used a masculine pronoun to refer to principals in general.

The general feeling toward central office was that part of their (i.e., the principal’s) job was to carry out the orders from their “superiors.” This was regarded as a given. They spoke about the central office as supportive, willing to help when called upon or at least willing to allow them to make the kinds of minor changes they wanted to within the established structures. This matches Greenfield and Beam’s (1980) study of women who made it into educational administration during the same years as these interviewees.

In the Greenfield and Beam (1980) study, female administrators were also “pushed into” educational administration and were perceived to have a collaborative and cooperative style.

Their notion of change, however, dealt with revising programs (testing procedures, curriculum guides scheduling, communications, tutorial programs) necessary for the maintenance of any school district. They did not exhibit any passionate drives to innovate education based on philosophical stands to which they were committed. They did not find fault with the educational structure of the educational institution for which they worked. They were quietly competent without any loud protests over the incompetency they found around them...If she wishes to act as a change agent, she must develop strategies that will permit her to express innovative ideas without overtly condemning the status quo and those who maintain it. She must never lose her network of good relations with colleagues (p. 51-52).

In contrast to recent studies of female aspirants to educational administrative positions (e.g., Edson, 1995; Grogan, 1996), these are the women who made it into educational administration during the 1950s through the 1980s. Most of them did not aspire to the principalship. Although generally well qualified to be principals, (i.e., had advanced coursework or a master’s in educational administration), these principals typically made statements to the effect that they were perfectly happy being a teacher and/or never thought about being a principal. Some of this must be what they perceived to be socially acceptable because if they had taken coursework in educational administration, they must have at least thought about going into the principalship! But this is routinely denied or glossed over in the transcripts.

Many of these interviewees were elementary principals for a long time (typically 7-15 years). When asked about the “keys” to their success, they often express uncertainty about their effectiveness, perhaps so as not to seem boastful.

Well, I’m not sure. (laughs) I’m not sure (laughs) if I was an effective principal and I think that I was and I think that some of the things we did were effective. EWF105

Well, I think, ah, maybe there were times that I was unsuccessful simply because of my, ah, personality maybe being a little too laid back and sometimes I feel that people really take advantage of you. EWF261

*What does it take to be an effective principal?*
You're assuming that I was one. EWF197F

Nonetheless, several pointed to awards, letters or remarks made by others, or descriptions of programs they considered to be successful, to evidence competence in the role of principal.

**Identity as a Principal Built Directly On Identity as a Teacher**

As in the case of the White elementary male principals, career track seems to influence the discourse about identity of self-as-principal. Most of these women went straight from the elementary classroom to the principalship or had a short stint as assistant principal of an elementary school before being appointed to be principal. Very few had other or lengthy administrative experience. They based their identities as administrators in their identities as a teacher explicitly describing how their experiences as a teacher influenced their actions as an administrator. Thus, what they liked or disliked as a teacher, their wanting to feel as part of the team with the teachers, their understanding of what it was like to be a teacher, their need to help teachers and make it possible for them to do their job heavily influenced both what they did and how they saw themselves as principals. Many examples of this can be found throughout the interview transcripts.

I guess that was my biggest concern, is that, I'm just like you, I was a teacher before I was a principal and I've been where you are and for goodness sake give me the courtesy to let me know that you have a problem and if I can't help you we can get you some help. So I guess that was really my biggest concern for teachers. EWF105

And I think that they—that our teachers finally didn't pay any attention to me in the classroom, which was very good. The relationship that we had—they trusted me. And when we sat down to do evaluations, it was not a shocker because I had—at that time I kept a spiral notebook, which I did not write on in the classroom I was observing. I did not take notes—I don't believe in that. I had a principal who did that to me one time, and it very much rattled me, so I did not take notes while they were in action. EWF119

I combined lots of things that happened to me through my years of teaching. And, as time went on, you remembered the things you liked about a situation you worked in, and then you also had the “don't,” the list of things that you say, “I would never do that to a person.” EWF168F

I suppose all of us who are teachers would really like to feel that the last experience we would have would be in a classroom; but that was not to be, and gradually over the years, I began to perceive myself as a teacher of teachers rather than a teacher of children. When I first went into the principalship I dallied around with letting the children read to me and teaching little math classes and one thing and another. Then, gradually learned that was not my job. My job was to teach teachers, and I do feel this is what I did last years I was in the principalship. I worked with teachers on an individual basis, modeled for them, had conferences with them, and worked with them on what they perceived as their problems and their weaknesses. EWF347
Instructional Leaders Who Also Have to Manage Buildings

These retired elementary White female principals saw the role of principal as encompassing both instructional leadership and building management with a strong emphasis on the former, although there were several references made to the fact that the latter was what was expected. The consensus was that the building must be well managed in order to support the instructional program—that they are not separate.

You know, if I'm going to be a teacher and I don't have anyone else to look to give me some advice or to give me at least some guidance of where to go to fulfill my needs then I've lost out if the principal isn't both the administrator to take care of all those little mundane kinds of things out there, somebody has to lead...I had to do certain management kinds of activities in order to get the building, see that it was kept up to a certain level of performance and offer the tenants as comfortable a background as possible so you are a manager whether you want to be or not. You are also a manager of people and your scheduling, this sort of thing. But this also can also be a cooperative effort through everyone else that works there and I would rather say, I feel that my instructional leadership was more prevalent, more prominent, more visible than was my managerial aspects. EWF105

Were you a manager of a building, or were you an instructional leader, or both?

I felt that I was both. There were times when, if you remember when our cafeteria staff walked out on us, I was in. there slinging hash that day, for several days, so that, and if we had a custodian out, I was unlocking buildings. So on that side, I was a building manager, and seeing that supplies were there and all those good things. But I like to think of myself more as an instructional leader. That was the thing that was dearest to my heart. The others were necessary evils in order that we could have a school that was running, and we could have the instruction. You have to have the other side of it. You have to have a building provided with the necessities in order to have a good instructional program. So you have to do both. There's no one to “pass the buck to.” EWF168F

I just didn't feel like that I could do the job as well as I needed, as I personally needed to do it, and spend less time at school. It's a big school. There is just no way. I was totally involved in instruction. I was totally involved with my faculty. And I could not withdraw that support. I could not withdraw that time. It was either do it right or not do it at all. And there's so much more to being a principal than just being a manager. If you want to just manage a school, then you can go in there and make sure that the custodian is dumping the trash, cleaning the bathroom, and the building's locked at night, and that the light bulbs are all in place, and the commodes all function, you can do that, and leave at four o'clock. But if you're truly involved with your staff, with your parents and your children, and the instruction going on, there's no way you can do it in less time, ten hour a day (laughter). So I knew I couldn't do that. I just had to-I had to make that-that break. And it was a hard decision to make. EWF351
The physical plant was not these women’s favorite part of the job and was seen as an obstacle to doing what they considered to be their real job, working with students and teachers.

I think that probably my biggest headache was the physical plant. I always felt that my time would have been better spent all on instruction and working with children, teachers, and parents. But you know sometimes the furnace would go off, and the roof would leak, and even though it was a new building we had a lot of kinks in it, and that did occupy some of my time that I regretted. EWF119

I think that [an assistant principal] could really take a lot of burden off the principal by dealing with the area of custodians, the cafeteria, the food service workers, and the main office area, as far as secretarial time and when they are going to work, and this type of thing, taking some of those little day to day chores away from you, I think sometimes, helps. The fact that you can then deal with the moving into the classroom each day, evaluating teachers and maybe dealing with parents when necessary. EWF182F

Management to these principals included management of records, finances, program administration, overseeing volunteers, personnel management, and scheduling. Dealing with discipline, dealing with parents, doing public relations, supporting teachers, and doing observations were all talked about as part of the instructional leader role.

Again and again these retired elementary White female principals emphasized the importance for a principal to have classroom teaching experience at the elementary level. This is in contrast to the White male elementary principals who felt that classroom experience at any level, as well as coaching and military service were essential prerequisites. This perhaps reflects a belief that one’s own experience is best (i.e., for White males the military and coaching make the best preparation for the elementary principalship because that is what they experienced, whereas for the White female elementary principals, elementary teaching is essential preparation for the elementary principalship because that is what they did). It also reflects the different career tracks to the elementary principalship generally taken by the White males and females in this study.

**The Importance of Aesthetics**

These White female elementary principals emphasized repeatedly how important it is for a school to be clean and attractive. They saw a main part of the principal’s role as providing a pleasant environment for learning and they saw aesthetics as reflective of their personal philosophy about how people should be treated.

My little office was small. I painted it. I painted my desk myself. I painted it green—I antiqued it. I set up a big peacock chair, you know, one of these old chairs. I put a pink cushion in it. I had children's art, rotating different art. I had frames that would automatically take the size generally of the children’s art. But it was...I had plants in the windows. But it was a place where a parent could come in and sit down, and feel special. I remembered “always take another chair.” I never had a desk between me and whoever was sitting in that chair, whether it be a parent or a teacher or whatever. EWF197F
And a little later on, in the spring, once we got into the building, and we had open house on a Sunday afternoon, up here. We needed some shrubbery; we didn't have money for shrubbery...There wasn't money in the funds to buy shrubbery, so we felt that we certainly needed something to beautify the outside; so I went down and bought a few rhododendron plants, and I think we even bought some tree seedlings, also. And [the assistant principal] bought some shrubbery. We fixed up the area out here between the buildings, this outside place here and around the front. EWF262

If you would walk through my school, Oak Grove Elementary School, you would see a 1950s building. It was on a small plot of land and parking was all around it. Its very crammed and jammed. But, when you walk in the front door, there are flowers on each side of the entry. The Garden Club even gave us an award for having the most attractive school in the area. When you walk into the front foyer, the plants and comfortable seating would be found right there in the foyer, the 3-D story characters in the cafeteria which is directly beyond the foyer. There are seasonal mobiles hanging from the ceiling. There’s a fish tank in the front foyer. We tried to make a real warm, invitational kind of setting. There’s a picture directory of all the staff members as you enter the office door so that people will know who the teachers are, and all staff members are, and would be able to recognize or call them by name if they were looking for a particular person and didn’t know the people. The colorful halls are filled with children’s work, writing, creations, art, all kinds of things. There’s a herb garden in the courtyard which is in the center of the school and students use that for learning. EWF345

**Principal as Life-Long Learner**

These elementary White female principals unswervingly painted themselves as life-long learners, seeing this as part of their own identity as well as a part of the identity of any good principal.

I think I went to school my whole life. I don’t remember doing anything else. EWF145

And I kept taking classes, going to school. EWF180F

You know this would be something I would tell somebody who was going into administration, if you're not excited about learning, and don't want to be reading, and studying, and taking classes, and going to conferences, and learning from now until death, don't go into it because there's so much. You think that, you know, you could never be prepared...We-my school board was very supportive when I would go to national conferences, ASCB and AER and those kinds of things. I enjoyed that. They would pay part of it which helped. I just had the opportunity to do a lot of things so that I could be knowledgeable. That's the key, having the knowledge. It's a horrible feeling to be confronted with a situation when you don't know what to do because you don't know anything about the situation, you don't have the knowledge base. And that takes time. Even if you read fast (laughter) it takes
time to keep up with all the different issues that you're confronted with in education. EWF351

Many had advanced degrees; some described multiple majors. In contrast with their White male peers, it was typical for the interviewees of this cohort to talk about coursework far beyond what was required, the need to keep up with all the new trends, the importance of conferences and professional development, familiarity with the research and professional reading. They mentioned learning languages, various hobbies, and traveling. Comments about the unevenness of educational coursework came up several times with the names of particularly good professors mentioned by name. Many rigorously pursued education despite the difficulties of doing so and several describe the difficulties with studying while being a principal and having a family. Most held leadership roles in education and/or in their local communities and/or churches. Most described themselves as having been “a very good student.”

The elementary White female principals unanimously felt that working with a mentor would be positive preparation for the principalship. Several talked about role models they had. Others talked about the pleasure they got from mentoring others, (i.e., interns, teachers with leadership potential, assistant principals). They all stressed the value of having a variety of administrative and classroom experiences and of seeing the ways that things are done at other schools.

**How to Succeed as a (Elementary White Female) Principal**

These elementary White female principals repeatedly cited the following characteristics as essential for either effective principals in general or to their own success: open-mindedness, fairness, willingness to listen, knowledge of the curriculum and instruction, a willingness to work very hard, a love of people, a love of children. The need for good communication skills is stressed again and again, often in conjunction with its function of maintaining good relationships.

I think communication is probably the thing that is the most basic to having a good relationship with teachers. If you can't communicate with each other then you are going to have problems. I guess communication is one of the—and I think teachers have to know that you care about them having what they need to do the job and that you care about providing an atmosphere in which they can work. EWF145

I felt that I should be available for staff at any time because there are a lot of things that affect the teaching climate that have nothing to do with academics. When your staff, that you're working closely with, have problems, whether they be personal or professional, they need some support or a “pat” on the back or whatever, you should be available, and I think it makes for a more relaxed atmosphere, and also trying to be available to parents who have concerns and to “head off” problems before they became big ones. Good communication is the name of the game. EWF168F

I think I’ve mentioned before that I think it’s necessary to have a vision and be sure that you’re communicating that vision. It’s not something that you just have inside yourself, but it’s a unified kind of approach that you and
your teachers are sharing that same vision and taking the community with you and communicating it to them. Not every fad, not everything that comes down the pike, but solid ideas that are crucial to improving the educational process. EWF345

Many of these women were asked to open new schools. Often these were open concept schools. This may in some way be gender-related or it may just be a factor of the time frame; these women were all principals through tremendous growth times and through the time of consolidation. Often an interviewee specifically discussed how she coped with opening a new school and/or how she felt about the open concept school in terms of how it influenced her understanding of role and identity as principal. Like their Black male counterparts, there was a lot of pride in the schools they talk about as “theirs.”

For a small rural school such as this one was, we had our balance, a good balance of the arts, a good balance of Physical Education and certainly we brought in the outside world in many ways, even before television. So I feel that it was a school that was interested in each person as an individual and that had been carried on there and particularly many of the teachers in this school were home grown and had come back to teach in this school by desire and that it seemed to be quite an arrival if you could teach in this school. EWF105

We had the best group of teachers in town and they were proud to be a part of us. EWF119.

I had an outstanding school, outstanding, and I am very proud of it, but it was all done with the Lord guiding me to do it. I’m proud of what we built and the relationship I had with my staff was wonderful. Not every principal can say that. But I was there twenty-two years so I got to work on it a long time. (laughter) That makes a difference. Some people like to be, you know, move around, but I didn’t. I wanted to remain there so I could grow things. I wanted to grow there. EWF351

Elementary White female principals cited programs they did that were exemplary, and indicated ways that others told them what they were doing was excellent. Some stressed the idea of the school as a community center. The need to maintain high standards and integrity was clearly important.

Now, if we, if we have that standard and that's the only one we go for, well for heavens sake, when we reach a standard let's set it up a little bit higher and go and reach higher and higher. EWF105

Teachers or schools need to set high standards and we need to let those pupils know what those standards are and try to help them measure up to their very best which is not easy but I still think we ought to work toward that. So I guess my instructional philosophy would be that the schools have a program which will enable each child to develop as far as they can go. EWF277

Money, although occasionally mentioned, did not seem to be the primary motivating factor for most of these women in taking the position of principal, despite the fact that
several were either single or supporting ill spouses. Several mentioned that they felt that for what the job of teaching and administration entailed, the pay should be much higher.

The favored method of organization was list-making. Many of these principals told about the lists they would make the day before so as to be prepared for the next day. They mentioned long hours and taking paperwork home repeatedly because they were unwilling to give up time with people to doing paperwork.

I'd say working with staff and children was the biggest thing the last few years, even though there was a great deal of paper. I was not willing to give up the hours during the day to do it, so I ended up working late after school was closed or bringing it home rather than having it take away from the every day contact I had with the children. EWF168F

There was a consensus about the need to be both organized and flexible.

One coping mechanism talked about repeatedly throughout the transcripts was the need to “keep a sense of humor.” Clearly these women’s expectations of themselves as principals was very high and several talk about pressures and stress. Laughter was the antidote of choice.

I try to maintain a sense of humor. I think that’s very, very important in this field and sometimes you get so caught up in the task that you forget about some of the little things that get people to relax and feel good about what it is that they’re doing. I try to be enthusiastic about what the teachers are accomplishing and about what the children are achieving. EWF345

I laughed a lot! I guess I always felt that if a day went by in which you didn’t have laughter or something in the building that it was so wrong, so I think you do have to have some levity in the building and you sort of have to not make light of a situation but turn it around to the positive rather than to the negative all the time. Try to approach things that way, but you do have to have some humor in there. EWF182F

I think this is true not just of the principalship and teaching, but it certainly does help. A sense of humor...I think everyday you should have something to laugh about. And certainly, in every classroom there should be something to laugh about every day. Now this is from my point of view. EWF248F

Elementary White female principals repeatedly stressed the need to have good relationships with everyone. There was a need to get teachers and parents on their side in the best interests of children. They overwhelmingly saw themselves as operating in the school with a team approach and gave extensive examples of how they maintained positive relationships. They saw themselves as people who could reach “tough” kids, who could make a difference. That feeling was worth all the hard work.

In Retrospect

In these interviews, the job of elementary principal as these women defined it was seen repeatedly as overwhelming. By the same token, they said that they would do it again if
given the opportunity. They spoke of the heartaches and the challenges and the pressures alongside with the joy and the fun and the love they had for the role. Words like LOVE, JOY, FULFILLING, ENTHUSIASM, FUN were used frequently. At the end of many of the interviews, most of the elementary White female principals specifically stated that they were fortunate to have had wonderful teachers and/or administrators with whom to work.

The descriptions these elementary White female principals gave of effective schools succinctly captured their priorities and visions of self-as-principal.

Well, I think it should be a happy place, and by that I don't mean that I think you ought to walk in and see people hanging from the ceiling, and throwing around things, and jumping up and down and screaming and laughing. I don't mean that. I mean when you walk into a building you usually anyway can feel the—I've always said it reflects the principal's personality, and I think it does. You must feel that it's a safe place for children and that it is—by happy I mean the right kind of learning environment—a pleasant place, with pleasant people. I think that it should have a faculty who works together and not pulls apart, and I think the principal certainly is a part of this staff effort and must set the tone. I think it should certainly by all means be professional in every sense of the word, and I think it should offer every instructional possibility that there is for children to learn.

The people in the school make the difference, the staff that's empathetic to children and willing to cooperate with the parents to "go the extra mile" to try to help with the problems that might come up. They're aware when there is a problem in the family, when there's a death or something of that kind, and they help that child through things of that sort, through the trying times. And then, of course, the other side is you keep the educational standards up, and try to meet the needs of the youngsters, regardless of the school population you might have.

I believe that we did have a successful climate for learning. But, I believe that any principal really sets the tone for learning. First of all, by being visible in the building, by ah, meeting the children in the morning with a smile on your face because really you never know what those children have gone through that night. So, I think if they come to school that morning and the principal is standing there greeting them with a smile - ah - making them welcome - making them feel like that this is a good place to be, then I think the principal sets the tone for learning. In addition to that, I think the facility itself has to be clean and attractive and I also think that is the principal's responsibility. I think if we - ah - make children - ah - feel that they are successful and make - we must create success for children, they must feel successful and if we do that, then we have set the tone for learning in the building. The characteristics that are associated with the most effective - with the most effective schools, ah, include a principal that's an instructional leader, a pleasant school climate that is conducive to learning, all of the teachers are on task, ah, going about the duties of instruction - of instructing children. The, ah, if you walk into the facility, the whole building reflects this is a place for learning because you'll see students' work up and this kind of thing.
Whether they enacted these visions or not is beyond the purview of this research. What their descriptions reveal is a coherent sense of how they wanted to be viewed and what they say they strived for and understood as their goals as principal. Order, positive emotional climate, providing an excellent instructional program, providing a pleasant learning environment, communicating to parents, enjoying people, supporting teachers, and developing and maintaining good relationships with everyone—these seemed central to these principals’ views of identity of self-as-principal.
PRINCIPAL as a CONFLICTED ROLE: Retired Elementary Black Male Principals’ Descriptions of Self-as-Principal

Introduction

After reading the transcripts of the interviews with retired elementary Black male principals and outlining and preparing summary notes for analysis, I felt in despair. These transcripts were full of role conflict and didn’t seem to paint any kind of coherent discourse at all. I read and reread the transcripts, pausing, noting, listening. Parts of the discourse about self-as-principal seemed to overlap with that of the elementary White females, parts with the White males, parts with the Black female interviewees. Perhaps there were not enough transcripts to generate any coherent discourse patterns. The transcripts were full of contradictions. Seeking perspective, I went back to the literature.

Hunter and Davis (1994) explain why these contradictions may exist in the discourses of Black males around self and identity:

Black men move between majority and minority cultures and must negotiate the racism and discrimination that accompany caste-like minority status...Black men are expected to conform to dominant gender role expectations (e.g., to be successful, competitive, aggressive) as well as meeting culturally specific requirements (e.g., cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group) of the Black community, which often conflict. (p. 24)

I realized that perhaps this conflict itself formed the character of the discourse about self-as-principal and I read the transcripts again. Through the lens of role conflict, coherence began to emerge. I realized that perhaps it was the way this discourse cohort DID overlap with the others in specific and sometimes contradictory ways that was itself significant. Perhaps the seeming contradictions were ways to describe in narrative form this deeper set of conflicts about self and identity.

I think there is a possibility that the narratives are, as Bruner (1993) predicted, a very clear way to understand socio-cultural construction of self. The fused personal and professional identity of principal as talked about by these principals, as well as the parallels these principals perceived between being head of an elementary school and the head of a family, helped to permeate these narratives with evidence of the greater conflicts Black male principals have in negotiated role and identity as principal. Mead’s (1934) comments about the “I” and the “ME” are of relevance here (see Chapter 6). For Black male principals, a coherent self-as-principal must be forged from three distinct ME’s, each struggling to define itself against/within the social expectations of gender, race and the role of elementary principal. The resulting narrative of self-as-principal thus highlights the cracks where these selves are welded together to create this professional and personal identity.

Based on analysis of the following 9 transcripts of interviews from the Oral History of the Principalship project: 106, 114, 117, 139, 196, 317, 324, 333, 349.
Hunter and Davis (1992, 1994) explored the conceptualization of manhood held by Black men. Using Hunter and Davis’ (1992, 1994) findings as a frame, I discuss in the next section prominent discourse features of these retired Black male principals’ narratives about self-as-principal.

**A Discourse of Contradiction**

Influences of the currency of race and gender are evident throughout the transcripts of this interview cohort. Elementary Black male principals told many more stories than elementary White male principals, perhaps reflecting the oral tradition in African-American culture (Givens, 1997). They often cited how they were flattered to be asked to be a principal or that people thought well of them, perhaps reflective of an initial lack of self-esteem or comfort in the role of principal. Many elementary Black male principals mentioned that they were honored to be interviewed, not taking for granted that their words were of worth as the White male interviewees seemed to do. There are frequent references to how grateful they are to God for having given them opportunities or for guiding them in difficult times, not surprising because of the importance of the church and religion in the African-American community (e.g., Hunter & Davis, 1992). They also tended to mention how helpful and supportive their family members were, reflecting perhaps how family provides context for male identity for African-Americans (Hunter & Davis, 1992, 1994).

These interviewees referred to principals as HE and teachers as HE or SHE but mostly as SHE, and children generally as HE. They used a lot of possessives, (i.e., MY school, MY teachers). When talking about the school, there were frequent shifts between I and WE. Like the elementary White male principals, elementary Black male principals tended to quantify and use percentages throughout the interviews (e.g., “we had 38% low income”; “52% White and 48% Black”; “supported you 100%”; “I’m 100% in favor of”; “attendance was well above 95%”).

Unlike elementary White male interviewees, these principals tended to talk a lot about feeling, emotion, qualities, and attitudes. They talked about the need to love children. Their comments tended to show awareness and empathy with the struggles of women teachers to raise families and teach.

Like elementary White male principals, elementary Black male principals seemed to struggle with the dichotomy between being in charge and having total responsibility but not wanting to be perceived as top-down or as “the Boss.” Whereas elementary White principals tended to resolve that struggle by presenting themselves as benevolent dictators or lenient, laid-back bosses, elementary Black male principals presented a much more unresolved identity that incorporated tensions between wanting and operating with a team approach and seeing themselves as the fulcrum around which the school turned. One principal said that “the leadership should be liberal but structured and informative” EBM139. Another described himself as saying “I believe I am more of one of those of power with, but peppered with a little power over” EBM106.

There are frequent examples of this throughout the transcripts. Elementary Black male interviewees often talked about the need to have teacher input and then followed up by saying that, of course, they were the ones that had to make the decision. They talked of sharing successes with the teachers and community but being responsible for the bottom line. They talked about needing to give teachers space and freedom to be creative and also
talked about freedom of speech as long as it didn’t contradict the school’s philosophy. They talked about developing the philosophy of the school together with the teachers and then would talk about the principal’s expectations and philosophy as being the determiner of the school’s climate and character. They talked about wanting teachers to have autonomy but thinking it was only fair to tell them what they were to be evaluated on, and that it was important to treat all teachers the same way.

Hunter and Davis (1992) found similar contradictions when their Black male interviewees talked about family as a central context for male identity. This suggests a possible parallel with the structural metaphor of PRINCIPAL as FATHER expressed in the elementary White male interviews. Several times, the idea of the school as a family and the principal as father was either implied or explicitly mentioned. For example:

But everybody realizes that we’re all in this together for the good of the children. This is where I think the family thing comes in. EBM349

Effective schools are schools where teachers love to come to, children love to come to, and parents love to participate in. The school which represents the family type situation is an effective school. EBM117

In the case of Black males, however, this metaphorical understanding of role/identity of self-as-principal-as-FATHER led to contradiction. This parallels the pattern of contradiction Hunter and Davis (1992) found in the discourses of their interviewees when talking about role in the context of family.

Central in men’s conceptions of their role in the context of family are themes of man as patriarch (“provides leadership”, “makes decisions for family”, “headship of family”) and as partner (“instills equality in family”, “not dominated by a woman”). The apparent contradiction in these philosophies is suggestive of the potential negotiations and tensions that men may face when attempting to balance family role expectations grounded in patriarchy and the comparatively egalitarian work and family roles in Afro-American families. (p. 472)

**A Desire to Serve**

Like the other elementary school principals, these retired elementary Black male principals talked about loving their work, loving children, and having enjoyed their time as principal. Their entry into the principalship was in contrast to both the elementary White female and elementary White male cohorts. Elementary Black male principals might or might not mention financial considerations but if they did, it was in addition to stating that they felt that they could make more of a positive impact on more children’s lives through the principalship. Their taking an administrative position was described as purposeful. They cited a desire to serve in any capacity possible, recalled being honored to have been asked to serve as principal, and talked about educational administration as a place where they could make more of a difference.

There are many factors that helped me in making the decision to become a principal. I cannot say that money was not one, because principals were paid a higher salary than a classroom teacher. Another factor is my own make-up.
I've always wanted to be a person who makes the decisions rather than just carry them out. I've always wanted to be that person that is giving the most to his community and to the lives of many, many young people and I felt by being a principal I could do much more for the community and especially for the boys and girls that were passing through our school. EBM106

In administrative work you have a world of opportunity to do good for a lot of people, including students. EBM324

In fact if I had to do it over again, in retrospect, I would have gone elementary all the way. I would have majored in elementary education. I would have worked in elementary administration right from the git-go because there is where I feel that I can make a difference. I know that I have made a difference with some children at elementary. EBM114

As a group, these interviewees talked about themselves as principal as wanting to make a difference, wanting to be needed, wanting to do an excellent job, wanting to have a good educational program. Unlike their White counterparts but like the Black female principals in this study, they saw education in terms of what it would give children for the future. Their stated goal was to give children the best chance at the maximum number of opportunities later on and they took this mission very seriously.

The elementary school philosophy was, I guess as most school's philosophies are, that you want to develop young people who go on and become great young men and women. Now certainly our philosophy was to develop that young person civically to be an outstanding citizen, to want to be an outstanding citizen. But basically with the elementary school we wanted to develop those basic principles and study habits and skills that would aid that person to go on and be successful in high school and then beyond. EBM106

Like the elementary White male principals, it seemed very important for them to communicate that they left the principalship by choice (i.e., because of health problems, because they wanted to do other things) rather than risk the impression of the interviewer that they were asked to leave.

### Integration as Crucible

These elementary Black principals presented examples and stories of the integration process that were fairly direct and also somewhat more carefully presented than other parts of the interviews. The accounts and examples of inequity presented are vivid and the principals generally seemed glad for the opportunity to tell of their experiences. They told stories about how integration affected their job opportunities, career tracks, teachers at their schools, relationships with superintendents, and parent response.

Now integration at Henrico Central Elementary School was pretty rough. I remember coming to my school one morning taking the KKK signs off from the doors and lightposts leading to the school, those types of things. We had what was called “Freedom of Choice” that did not work. It, as a result of “Freedom of Choice” caused the enrollment to diminish and left
the one school, the Black school that I was the principal of, with a very small
enrollment. That took place throughout the entire county...That’s “Freedom
of Choice”—the Black children go to the White schools but not the White
children come to to the Black; so until the federal government decided that
that was not a good practice, it was not working. The schools were not
becoming integrated as they wanted them to be. We still had schools
segregated, so as a result, they closed all of the Black schools in Henrico
County. The principals of the Black schools in Henrico County became
assistant principals of the integrated schools. EBM196

Integration, I had a lot of apprehension when I learned that schools would be
integrated. And I don't think that I was alone. I think some of the others
shared the same feeling that I had. But I think one of the things that we tried
to do and I think it was real important was to set the mission tone ...that was
important. I was paired with Dan River Elementary School and Dan River
was just about three blocks from where my school was located. So what we
did, I took the primary grades, grades K-3 and the school I was paired with
had 4-7. So we each had four grades. And teachers had to be shifted. In
other words, the upper grade teachers had to go to the elementary school and
the primary teachers from Dan River came to me. We had no particular
problem, no real problem. But I didn't find out about the apprehension that
the teachers had about coming to Kentuck until about two or three years
later, a couple of years later. As you would realize, our children, the children
that we had, the Black children, were used to Black teachers. And naturally,
the White children that were coming to us were used to White teachers. So,
we paired the teachers. I put a Black and a White together. Our building was
situated so that in changing rooms you just go right across the hall from one
room to another. And I thought that was good to start with. You know, to
start integration. The White teacher would keep them a half a day and the
Black teacher would keep them a half day. That worked out I thought real
well. We didn't have any problem with the children, didn't have any problem
with parents. You know that's another thing...you know your community.
You've got to respect their feelings whether they're right or wrong, you've got
to respect it and then plan your activity accordingly because you want things
to go smoothly. So that was the arrangement that we made in integrating the
schools. EBM324

Identity as Principal Directly Based on Identity as Teacher
Like the elementary White female principals, most of the elementary Black
principals tended to identify themselves as teachers first (with the exception of one who has
a strong identity as a high school coach).

I consider myself as an instructional leader and number one a teacher first of
all. I can recall that on many days, especially rainy days, I found my greatest
love while serving as a principal was to go into K and first grade rooms to
read stories and share with little people, my greatest reward. EBM106

Many talked about a real love of teaching and some translated the role of principal as a
teacher of teachers. Unlike most of the elementary White males, most of the elementary
Black males had elementary teaching experience and their career tracks resembled those of the elementary White females more than those of the elementary White male principals in the study. This may explain why, like their female counterparts, these principals also tended to talk about how prior personal experience influenced their actions as a principal.

Like the elementary White female principals, these principals talked about the importance of taking courses on an on-going basis. Many talked with pride about having gotten a college education or advanced degree and spoke about how education was stressed in their families of origin. Unlike most of the elementary White male principals, elementary Black male principals tended to talk about educational qualifications as important to being a successful principal.

The structural metaphors that are most common through the transcripts are PRINCIPAL as PROBLEM-SOLVER, PRINCIPAL as COACH, PRINCIPAL as COMMUNICATOR, PRINCIPAL as DECISION-MAKER, PRINCIPAL as COUNSELOR. This collage of role definitions expresses both the scope of the vision of these retired elementary Black male principals and the inherent contradictions they struggled to encompass in their perspectives on themselves as principals.

**Vision**

The elementary Black male principals in this cohort stated clearly that their role as a principal was to take responsibility for creating an environment where all children can learn. In this way, their discourse is most like that of the middle school White male principals talked about in Chapter 3.

I guess early on I felt that all children could learn. Maybe not the way that we really wanted them to learn, but over time that they could learn. And that all of them should have an opportunity to learn. It may take some a little bit longer, but if we give them the love and care, the tools, the patience and not be so restrictive as adults to be impatient, that they could have success. EBM349

But as I grew into the field, my philosophy was to try to help children to learn. Basically, I was concerned with all children. We had, in my first teaching position, many children who, in my opinion at that time, didn't have a goal and they had been neglected by their teachers. I was very much concerned and thereon, I said if I ever became a principal, I would make certain that all children have a chance to learn. EBM117

That to me is the important thing, to provide the climate for the child to learn. If you can do that and do it successfully then you’ve done your job as an educator. EBM114

These principals wanted their school to be a place where every child is developed to his greatest potential. They saw education as a bridge to opportunity and shared a belief that education is a key to a better life for everyone in a democracy. They stated a commitment to give young children what they need to make good decisions and have good options and improve their lives.
I think, too, if society, if we're going to cure some of the ills within our society, I think we must do everything we can to provide and to teach and give our kids the best possible education we possibly can. EBM317

Life is a preponderance of opportunities. It's an abundance of opportunities, ties and if we are going to have the kind of school of the society that the world is calling for, it will take education to do it. So, the school sort out to help each child to develop to his fullest potential. Make for himself a beginning of a known philosophy of life. Now every person, whether you believe it or not, have a philosophy of life because you live it, live it, but you don't always understand why. We tried first to get these students to realize that they were devoted about having themselves a way of life that was suitable for the society in which we live in, which is democracy; affording everybody an opportunity to live a better life. EBM139

My personal philosophy of education to go back to what I said earlier—in the fact that having children to develop what is necessary to have each child to develop to his capacity, whatever that capacity might be, as far as learning is concerned. Overall in education, if you could reach that goal of just having a child to be all that child can be. We realize with some children that, that is not going to be very much and with other children it's going to be a great deal. So, I guess what I'm saying is that we need to deal with individual differences of children as best as we possibly can in education. EBM114

Elementary Black male principals might not have liked the idea that schools have to provide other than academic services but they stressed the need to feed children if they are hungry, make sure poor children get supplies, etc. Throughout, they emphasized the need for love and care and compassion and to think of others' feelings. The need to be tactful is discussed several times.

Several of these principals also explicitly emphasized that business was an inappropriate metaphor for education. Although several had military experience and/or coaching experience, in contrast to their White male counterparts they did not tend to use sports or military metaphors or experiences to describe self-as-principal or to characterize the nature of their actions as principal. They stressed that these were human beings who were being worked with here and that “the human factor” was the most important consideration.

Hunter and Davis (1994) found that the men in their study had similarly well developed philosophies about how people should be treated.

Men talked about equality among people and an approach to others that involves faith, caring, unselfishness and respect. Men who talked about manhood in those terms saw it as a model for living or as something toward which to strive. (p. 35)

The biggest frustration noted by elementary Black male principals was the frustration of not getting the children as far as they would have liked, especially in areas where the children were needy and the resources were scarce.
But my greatest headache, headache as a principal it seems that I was never able to get my children to where I wanted them to be. EBM106

The headache is you want me to do this terrific job with the children in our society. Yet, you do not give me the money, the supplies, all of the expertise that is needed to do this job. EBM114

Elementary Black male principals also spoke about the need to encourage creativity in teachers and students. They saw teachers as “very important” and children “as the reason for all of us to be here.” Several spoke of providing what was “needed” (e.g., art supplies for children, breakfast for children, transportation for parents, supplies for teachers). Their vision of their identity as principal and of education in general was thus a very mission oriented and moral one.

**Being a Role Model**

These elementary Black male principals universally saw themselves as role models for teachers and children and as responsible for all aspects of the school. Several times they stressed that the principal was the one who “created the climate” in a successful school. They emphasized the need to behave professionally at all times.

The principal is certainly going to exemplify, he is going to certain[ly] give to his school all that he is, if he believe strongly in something, the school is going to know it. So therefore he, he must have good strong morals, where he is going and his reason for going there. EBM106

[The principal] creates an atmosphere within the school situation where all persons and all personnel within the school feel confident, feel at home, and feel at ease to do their job. EBM117

If you’re in your office all the time and you’re never outside, you walk down and, “Who is that, who is that man?” They ought to know who you are. They ought to know what you are and what you’re about. And you ought to be the role model. Some of these kids don’t have anything to look up to. A good Principal, they, that’s why I don’t particularly care about wearing a shirt that’s open collar. I think you always look professional and set that example, and role model. I think we’ve gotten away from a lot of that...and I think it has caused us problems we’ve had. EBM317

These interviewees talked about “doing whatever is necessary to make the school go.” This encompassed both people and plant responsibilities. In a direct contrast to the elementary White male principals, but like their female counterparts, these interviewees spoke of the role as very time-consuming and complex.

But really a principal has a full day. He can't say, “Well, I will work six hours, or ten hours.” No, he has to work the number of hours required of him and sometimes they may be sixteen to eighteen hours in that day. EBM106

It’s a very complex job. It’s a never ending job. EBM349
They saw the role as encompassing being a good instructional leader AND a good manager and “you have to do a good job with both.” They talked about the need to model expectations for teachers; “you can’t just say it but have to do it.”

You cannot ask of teachers things that you don’t model as an administrator. You got to model behavior. As a teacher you got to model—a child doesn’t know how to add and subtract. You have to go to the board and model subtraction and addition the way that it should be done. So, I have to model the behavior that I would expect teachers to have. As an instructional leader, I figure that if I model the behavior—if I give all the support that I can give to teachers I have a better chance of most of the teachers doing a better job.

EBM114

These elementary Black principals said that they were scrupulous to maintain a reputation of fairness. They also discussed making mistakes and learning from mistakes. Although like elementary White males they rarely talked about specific mistakes made, they almost all spoke about the fact that humans make mistakes; you have to go with your best idea and that if you make a mistake, you need to address it. This seemed to be a strategy they explicitly linked to their success and one which they included in their advice to aspiring principals.

You know it is something that many of us enjoy, pressures and pressures bring out the best in us many times. Certainly you have pressures coming (from) from all sides. When I say from all sides, you have pressures from your community, you have pressures from your staff, yes, you have pressures from your students but you have to be able to deal with those pressures and in dealing you make the best decision and yes, sometimes you may blow one, but you make your best decision, stand on it and move on with your goal set. Now, if you make an error, certainly be man or woman enough to correct it. If you need to apologize, don’t feel that because you’re a principal you can not apologize. Now certainly many times I have had to say I was wrong or I’m sorry, I made a mistake, I blew that one, but at the same time I was saying I won’t do it again and I try to grow from those and all of us are going to have to do that. EBM106

You’re a professional. Be like the professional. Make professional decisions. You don’t make stupid decisions. There are going to be times when you might make a mistake. We, we, we’re human. But you learn from that mistake and you then you keep on going. EBM317

I think that when teachers and administrators realize this and really understand and trust each other, I think you have the makings for a good school climate, good educational outcomes and mutual respect. I think this rubs off to the parents and the community, also when they realize that if you make a mistake, I think you should admit it. People will respect you more and try to work with you in a positive manner. But if you take the attitude that you know it all, and you’re the only one that knows it all, even if you are right, it can make for strained relations. EBM349

I believe if you make a mistake you ought to try to correct it. I don’t believe you ought to try to force your mistake on somebody else. A principal's
human. He’s a human being. He can make a mistake. Now you shouldn’t, you better not make too many because that’s going to weaken your effectiveness as a leader. People won't have confidence in you. But once in a while if you make a mistake, just tell them, “Well, I'm sorry, I did it and I'm willing to change.” EBM324

This was not a prominent part of the discourse of any other cohort and raises interesting questions about whether being in a situation where one is forced to constantly negotiate one’s legitimacy as an African-American, as a man, and as a principal would lend one to make more “mistakes,” at least as how perceived by others.

**Sense of Agency and Self-Reliance**

Elementary Black male principals took a lot of ownership in the interviews referring to MY teachers, MY school throughout the transcripts. There was a frequent emphasis on wanting to be the best, beyond reproach. They talked of doing the best of which they were capable.

*Would you tell us the key to your success as a principal?*

You want to say luck. I think caring trying to be caring and trying to make my school the best instructional school that I possibly could make it. I tried to make it the cleanest school that we could. But I feel, gifted with good interpersonal relationships with people. I think this played a great role. As far as my education was concerned we, I had some real good classes in supervision administration. Also, this sounds a little weird I guess, but my experience in education and teaching vocational agriculture, working with farmers, and visiting the community. And of course, in vocational agriculture half of the instruction is done in the community, not in the schools. I think this helped me to realize and to have a feeling for the children that I had worked with, and with the people, the parents, knowing their backgrounds. The other things that I never would give anybody the impression that I was better than they were. All of us had problems, and all of us needed to work together...Being in a school working with children, I think is the most satisfying and most rewarding thing that I could have done. It made me feel, in fact it forced me to have the best school for those youngsters and those teachers. I always strived to make that a school that everybody wanted to attend, and every teacher wanted to work. We worked with teachers, not being authoritarian to those teachers, but making them want to do well. I think my professional leadership, I hope, caused peer pressure which encouraged them to do the work. Parents worked with us very strongly, and I think that was one of our strong points, working with parents. Children, in elementary school need to be happy. They can learn and be happy because this is only the fifth year of their lives, and we've looked at it that way. EBM333

Like the elementary White female principals, these interviewees frequently discussed exemplary programs from their tenure as principals. These often had to do with assemblies sponsored by each class where ALL children got to participate.
We would have an assembly program each week. The teacher that was in charge of the assembly program, this was required, that every child in that teacher’s room, they were required to be on the stage to do something on that stage during that program, and in that way, we could get every child an opportunity to create a feeling within themselves, rather than the teachers picking maybe eight or ten of the better students to give a better program. Now I thought that was quite successful. The teachers liked it, the students liked it, the parents liked it because we would have a lot of parents to come to the school for those assembly programs. EBM196

Each classroom would present some program educational in nature that would help show improvement in life and joy brought forth from some source. So, as I said, it was the responsibility of each classroom once a week to present such a program. That meant that seven weeks after the first graders entered school they where on stage performing and doing public speaking. Each child more or less got to know in a more personal way each other and to appreciate what each other had to offer. And that lends itself to honorable, good competition because each class tried to produce the most wholesome and entertaining and educational program they could each week. Now, some programs struck on holidays or within that period which gave to them a different taste. But in general, the experiences were wide and variable and the children profited by being not self conscious, but feeling an air of freedom. EBM139

The fact that we always had weekly assemblies, gave the children a good chance to participate in programs, within the schools. EBM117

Like the elementary Black female principals, these interviewees tended to talk about difficulties as “challenges” or pressures that just had to be dealt with. In contrast to their White male counterparts, almost all of these elementary Black male principals spoke about stress in conjunction with being an elementary principal. The contrast may be explained by the fact that many of the anecdotes told dealt with race-related issues or tensions. That there would be these tensions was recognized as a “given,” indicating the atmosphere within which these principals operated after integration of the schools.

When we first started desegregation, we had several that resented coming to the school and this was natural to expect and I felt that after they were there a time they would fall right in line. They soon considered our school to be one of the better schools in the city. but it did take some time for them to establish confidence in me as a leader. EBM114

One of the central metaphors that emerge in these transcripts is the highly agentive one of problem-solver. These principals said that they expected that there would be problems and that it was their job as principal to resolve them. In the words of one principal:

First of all, you have to be a terrific problem-solver. Be very adept at solving problems and foresee problems before they occur. I mean try to look into the future and think if we do this, this is going to occur and it's going to create a problem. If you can foresee that then you can delay some of the things that are going to happen. Because let me tell you something, it has been my experience, long experience, if we come into a school year and we
sit down with our teachers and we do this thing scientifically by survey or whatever and determine that this is the biggest problem that we have in this school. We work together on how to solve this problem. We do everything with our means to work on that problem, collectively. I'm not talking about me as administrator. We're working on this together. We solve that problem. What do you think is going to happen? The next day we're going to have another problem that is the biggest problem we ever had in this school and you solve it. The next day we have another problem that is the biggest problem that we ever had in the school and problem solving—if you're adept at problem solving or adept at dealing with problems you're going to be pretty successful because teachers are going to say that you can always depend on Mr. Kane because when you have a problem he's going to be there to help you. They don't realize that they're going to have a problem of some type. EBM114

The transcripts were filled with specific solutions that these principals recounted of how they solved specific problems.

If the parent—I had many parents who did not have transportation—I would find some way to get the parent there. I'd tell the school bus [driver], “Could you stop by and pick them up?” or I would have someone. ...or sometimes I would go and pick them up myself to make sure that they're there...Or even go into my little general fund that we keep to give them money to catch the bus if I couldn't find them a ride. “Here's some money, catch the bus.” I had to do that. EBM114

And certainly above all, even his smallest child, the kindergarten child can have a problem such as the loss of a pencil which to many of us adults would be only a trivial matter, but to that child that lost pencil is a big problem. So the principal has to help him to solve that problem, not necessarily just give him another pencil but help him to find his. EBM106

Shifting teachers from one school to the other. We had about 24 teachers. And the superintendent told me I could only keep nine. The others had to go to other...most of them went around the corner about three blocks from where I was. But then there were others that had to go a little bit further. Furthest person had to go about 10 miles from ...that was the farthest. None of the teachers wanted to go and I didn't want to send any of them and I was hoping the superintendent would do it. I think he wisely chose not to do it himself. He told us that we had to do it. Because to have 250 teachers angry/mad with him I don't know if that would be so pleasant even for the superintendent. He probably wouldn't want. So that was one of the toughest decisions that I had to make and I thought over that thing, prayed over it. Because one thing that was about it was you see I had a neighbor and a friend that was involved and would be involved in the transfer. And made it extremely tough. Because I've always emphasized to my faculty and other people being fair ...you know treat everybody with respect and being fair to everybody. And I heard through the grapevine that my neighbor was one person who was going to stay and she wasn't going to be transferred. But our rooms were numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on down—numerically. And I decided that I was going to keep all teachers from room 1 to 9. And all of
those by the way were on one wing - they were the primary teachers. Everybody else had to go. So I lost a friend. But I feel I was fair. I feel good about it even now. I think if I had that to do all over again, I lost a friend for 10 years and a neighbor too and I hated that so bad but I had to do it.

Perhaps this is related to what Hunter and Davis (1994) found vis-à-vis “the challenge of manhood”:

Although it was often recognized that there were unique challenges to being a Black man, the central challenge of manhood was defined in terms of what they expected of themselves. And what men expected of themselves was framed not only by family role expectations but by their perspective on identity and the development of self, connections to family and community, and spirituality and worldview. (p. 29)

It is clear that these principals expected themselves to make a difference. That was repeated as their purpose as an administrator. In the words of one principal:

I feel that if we can take what we have as a student, or as a teacher, or employee, and move them to their greatest heights, so that they’re satisfied, and that satisfaction will carry on with their life. It may not be instant measure of success, but if down the line, if there’s been a difference made, then I think an administrator could say that they were proud to have been part of it.

**Leadership Roles in the Community**

Like their Black female counterparts, these elementary Black male principals talk about their role including strong community leadership roles, mostly in the areas of scouting, coaching, Parent-Teacher Organization, and church. This was in contrast with their White colleagues’ community involvement which was generally limited to the church and adult civic organizations, and matches Monteiro’s (1977) findings that minority principals generally felt more strongly about the importance of principals taking leadership roles in community organizations.

Well, I liked to be in the teaching profession, and whatever community I resided, I had to be a participant in community affairs. One thing that I think helped me a great deal was, I became connected with the Scouts and during the time, I was associated with the scouts, our director left us for 2-3 years, and I became the district manager of the scout group and remained that way until we got a director and that within was a community effort in which I was very proud of. I was associated with the YMCA as a board member. Our faculty PTA, a very responsible group whereby we got a chance to exchange ideas that existed in communities and in schools. Naturally, the church was our old standby. I’ve always been connected with the church because of the philosophy of my parents and I’m still connected. I, also at the present time, am working with the STOP Organization, and have been doing that for the last 10-12 years, the Urban League and several other social groups.
As a Board of Director, coach, umpire, concession, anything you name with Little League, I've done. I was on the Board of Directors when they got the grant to get the Gene Dixon Park going. Special Olympics...the superintendent at that time, had gone up to Lynchburg and came back, he said, “Well, I think you coach Little League, would you mind working with Special Olympics?” I guess that was twenty-plus years. I worked with that very actively. EBM349

These interviewees said they felt a duty and responsibility to be visible and to represent their school 24 hours a day. They said that they felt that their conduct had to be beyond reproach, a feeling shared by their Black female colleagues, and that their identity as school principal was a respected one in the community.

The principal is the...person number one for his school, the parents of the community they look to the principal, the other people who live in the community they look to the principal. The principal must set that pattern. He must set that atmosphere. He must set that tone, even with his dress. He has to dress properly for the proper occasions. He has to be involved with the community, with the industrial aspects of the community, with the church, with all other parts of the community because he must depend upon the community, the community, for its strength and growth of his school and certainly he has to represent that school well at all times. He must be involved, he must know the community, he must know parents, he must know his children, not in the school building but throughout their day. In other words, he is the principal for 24 hours and they are his children for that length of time each day 365 days a year. EBM106

Elementary Black male principals talked about how important it was to “know” the community, to understand the community in order to have an effective school..

I think one thing you've got to know is your community and respect its views. You know, your community can either make you or break you. So, it's very important to know the community and at least respect the views of the community. I don't think you ought to let the community run the school, but you are the principal and you've got to understand what their views are and respect those. EBM324

They spoke about how grateful they were for their particular community’s support.

First, I thank God for giving me so many blessings and so many opportunities then secondly, I thank the community for accepting me as a principal, then I am so grateful that I have so many good teachers to share and to work with me. I'm so grateful also to so many parents and above all to so many wonderful boys and girls. Without the support of these people and certainly without, without God’s great grace none of these things would have been possible and as, as I look back and think about the days that we shared as principal. I wouldn't trade anything for them. EBM106

I had the respect of the community. And I think that was one of the things that was most important and critical. They supported me. We were more of a family at Henry to be honest with you. EBM317
Aesthetics as a Motivational Tool

Like the elementary White female principals, these elementary Black male principals were typically concerned with the aesthetics of the school. They were especially concerned that the school be very clean. While the elementary White female principals wanted to create a pleasant environment for children to learn which the teachers and parents would find pleasant and inviting, the elementary Black male principals wanted even more. They wanted to make sure that their buildings were “clean as a pin.” They saw clean attractive surroundings as motivational tools for teachers and students to do their best, as tangible evidence of the principal’s care for his staff, and as a direct reflection on their performance as a principal.

First of all, as I spoke in the beginning of the environmental factors of the school, the physical inequities and what have you and how they changed, when the children saw that change, that gave them a stronger liking for where they were coming. The teachers on seeing that there was someone that seemed like to care and also showing this kind of development, they moved into their individual classrooms with the zeal and the zest that could not be outdone by anyone because they said I am going to make these surroundings say YES! That is by posters and room decorations, learning decorations, not just posters up there to be looked at, but with learning posters and pleasant surroundings. The child would be anxious to get to his classroom because it became a beautiful spot for him. EBM139

Alright, when you drive up to our school, and I'm going to talk about the school I spent more time in, there is a front porch and the doors we painted the whole top blue. I had one of the school workers to paint it to make it attractive, and of course principals, often will place a sign on them-please report to the office. And of course my secretary was taught to smile when a stranger came in and to recognize a stranger. Don't keep your head down doing something else, stop right then and if the stranger wants to see the principal, find out the business. To be cheerful, then of course we would go down to the primary wing I guess first. Again, the school, the floors are clean the bathrooms are clean and this is something we insisted that the janitor would do. You had to clean the bathroom and check the bathroom every hour on the hour. And the halls have to be swept every hour on the hour. We spent extra funds to keep above and beyond what school board gave us to keep that building attractive and neat because, when a person walks into a school, the first thing they see leaves a lasting impression. EBM333
To Be an Effective Principal

There was a consensus on many aspects of an effective principal: HE must be fair, listen, have an “open door policy”, love children, be considerate, respectful, compassionate and tactful, he must know the teachers and the children and be known by them. This insistence on the importance of knowing and being known, found in the other sets of interviews, is particularly striking here. Like other elementary principals, elementary Black male principals cited the need for small elementary schools (i.e., < 600 students) for these reasons.

The advice these principals gave to prospective educational administrators presumably reflected their priorities when enacting the role. This principal’s advice represents the tenor of the cohort:

Learn the job thoroughly. Always put the kids first. And their interests, which means simply a good educational program. Develop a good relationship with your staff. Be fair. And underline the word, Be fair. Always walk down the middle of the road. Respect yourself first and people respect you. Mean what you say. Say what you mean. And be compassionate. I think you need the compassionate part, also. I just don't think you can walk into a situation unless you can be a person who could feel for people. You’ve got to have a feel for people. You have to be a person who can sense some of it as you talk to people. And there are times when you need to back up.

Working with Teachers

Like the elementary White male interviewees, these principals saw their role toward teachers in somewhat paternalistic terms. They saw themselves as “in charge” and “the leader” for the purpose of encouraging and helping teachers to have what they needed in order to teach. They said they felt the teachers looked toward them to “provide.” This need to encourage, provide, be available, listen, and make decisions seems to be a core understanding of the role of these principals toward teachers, echoing the discourse of their White male counterparts.

Teachers many times expect principals to be miracle workers. No, in all sincerity teachers do expect principals to be their leaders. They are looking and expecting the principal to be the one to set the tone. They look to the principal to see that their needs are met within the classroom. It may be even the heat or the cooling of that classroom, they still look to the principal for it. They look to the principal to be the person to see that they have the necessary equipment or tools or books or whatever to do a job and, yes, these are his responsibilities. He should see and make every effort to see that his teachers and his students have the supplies and the things that they need for their performance. There are times he needs to serve as the counselor for teachers. Many times teachers too being human, they need someone to be able to confide in even sometimes they can be very personal things but that principal should be there to lend an ear.

Teachers expect principals first to be educational leaders. They expect principals to support them in their work. Teachers expect principals to
provide the necessary tools to work with; to contact the necessary resource people to come in and to help them. Teachers expect principals, and that's one part you have to do but you don't like to, to be disciplinarians. They want us to assist them with discipline and to assist them with parent conferences. Teachers expect principals to really be teachers, a teacher of teachers. They expect principals to support them, and I think when you do all the things that you can, you have a good school, a happy school, and teachers with high morales. EBM333

I think they want the principal who is fair; a principal who is not partial; a principal who is qualified; a principal who has a sense of humor; a principal who allows for freedom of atmosphere in the classroom and within the school, and basically, a principal they can trust. EBM117

Elementary Black male principals, like other elementary principals, talked about their role toward teachers as one of a personal and professional counselor when necessary but they said that they were very careful about giving advice that might be misconstrued. Unlike the elementary White male principals who stated that they actively counseled incompetent teachers out of the profession and saw themselves as gatekeepers, these elementary Black male principals are much more reluctant to recommend that teachers be dismissed. They said that they preferred to communicate clear expectations to teachers and to make it visible to a teacher when he or she is not meeting those expectations. Although these elementary Black male principals recognized the need at times to have teachers be removed from the classroom, they described this as a last resort after doing everything possible to work with that teacher.

Yes, I guess one of the toughest things that a principal has to do is to terminate a teacher but sometimes that has to be done. Everyone who enters the teaching profession will not become a teacher. He or she may have a desire to be a teacher but somehow just never develop into...as I was stating, everyone who desires to be a teacher may not develop into one, and this is where the principal...has to make a decision. Certainly the decision is made after involving many others. He has done all that he can do to develop this teacher. He has used all the resources available to him and he is not able to develop this individual so he has to make the decision and to terminate, but in...making this decision in terminating this individual he needs to be fair, honest, and yes, firm. EBM106

So that when you've done everything that you can within that probation period and you still feel that you have not accomplished what you've set out to do in terms of making and helping that teacher, then I think you have to make a decision in terms of whether or not you want to renew at that point. There have been situations, and I've had situations where you have worked with that teacher, and you are, you see that that teacher has moved from a negative or mediocre to a situation where it showed promise and you moved beyond the probation period, then all of a sudden you find yourself, “Now, wait a minute now. Did I do the right thing?” So I think at that point the documentation process began. That's that instrument that you use then to sort of correct the decision, or to follow on through with what you've already determined, whether it's dismissal or whatever. EBM317
These interviewees said that it is the principal’s responsibility to go to great lengths to try to give teachers support and time to develop. They also said that it is important that people know what is expected of them. Thus, they felt themselves responsible for “guiding” teachers and supporting them to be the kind of teachers they wanted them to be.

But as an administrator, though, I think I have every responsibility and use every means that I have at my disposal to help that teacher become a good teacher, a productive member of our staff, both not only in the school but outside of the school at times, in the community which we serve. EBM317

If you know what is expected of you, if you are person who wants to do that, then you're going to do everything that you can do. There are going to be times when you're not going to be successful and I think that that's when the manager has to step in and support that person, especially when they see that effort there, but it's just a little thing that's blocking that outcome. I think it has to be noted that improvement is needed, but I don't think the managers need to come down on those people, as if they're hardened criminals, because the effort is there. Sometimes the decision early on gradually works and sometimes some of the best decisions are the decisions that aren't made. Sometimes you need to buy time and then when that change comes around for the positive, then you go to that person, they feel relieved too. They say I'm glad you didn't give up on me. EBM349

I tried to develop within the teachers a strong sense of responsibility such that they would do the best within their power in teaching their children to grow responsibly. That is, I mean, teaching them to feel the necessity of them acquiring answers to life's problems and with the teachers also feeling the strong responsibility of seeing that they have offered to their children the best that would encourage the children to develop their emotional, spiritual and sometimes religious characteristics for the sake of growing. EBM139

These interviewees pointed out that teaching should be joyful and that if a teacher or a principal is having lots of difficulty and is not enjoying their work, maybe they shouldn’t be doing that work, but they wanted it to be the decision of that individual, as opposed to the principal’s decision.

These elementary Black male principals stressed the need for a principal to be able to work with all kinds of people. They talked about soliciting teacher input and giving teachers decision-making power about things that affected them.

I was a firm believer of teachers having freedom in the classroom. One of my main reasons is because of the fact that I first started teaching. At one of the systems in which I taught, teachers did not seem to love to teach because of the pressure being brought from the administrative office, I decided from there with that timely experience if I ever became a principal, I would make certain that the teacher would have input in whatever we do in a school situation, particularly in faculty meetings. The faculty meetings were made up of committee groups, where teachers were given the opportunity to decide on the types of problems we should discuss, rather than giving all the problems to the administrative office. EBM117
I would advise them to involve the teachers as much as possible in decision making. I know there are some decisions that you have to make alone as principal. But as much as possible involve your faculty, because even when a decision is made, if the faculty had a part in making it I think they are much more receptive to remain cool even when things don't go the way that they thought they ought to go, when hardships come...Well, that's what I'm saying - even if there is a mistake, by you involving the teachers they are part of the mistake and they are going to have to accept that. And they are not going to be as critical. People don't criticize themselves as much as they criticize somebody else. You make the decision and it doesn't work out, they can be oh, so critical of you. But if they are involved in the decision they are not going to come down too hard on themselves. EBM324

Anything that you develop in school you develop in concert with the teachers...You don't go in and say that this is the way that I feel things should be done, so forth and so on. It's got to be done in concert with teachers...EBM114

These interviewees seemed to waffle between asking teachers for their input because they felt it was the right thing to do, like the female principals of both races, and seeing it, like many of the elementary White male principals, as going beyond the call of duty or as a specific strategy to avoid difficulties “down the line.”

And, these principals felt that teachers should have as much freedom as possible. Several talked about wanting to enhance teacher creativity. This might, at first, be at odds with the idea of being very explicit about expectations but is reflective of the contradictions inherent in the discourse. As one interviewee put it, apparently without irony,

This is where we said previously, we tried to allow freedom of expression, freedom to develop, and freedom to speak your mind as long as that freedom of speech is within the realm of the philosophy of the school. EBM139

Like the elementary Black female principals, these interviewees seemed very sensitive to avoiding the appearance of bias of any kind. The need to be very fair, very professional and very tactful was stressed in advice to new principals. This interviewee’s advice was typical:

Another thing I think is working with your teachers you ought to be fair-minded. That is very important. I know nothing that will interrupt a faculty more than being partial one teacher toward another. Also, you should also be professional in your dealings with teachers, pupils and certain parents. Always be tactful. Tactful I think is very important. Respect the feelings of other people. You know, all of us have feelings. There is an old saying that it's not always what you say but the way that you say it. EBM324

**Autonomy**

Like elementary White male principals, elementary Black male principals talked about overwhelming paperwork and the invasiveness of federal and county mandates. They felt that “a good central office will give you room to run your school” and agreed with the
elementary White male principals that the central office should exist to support principals to do their job.

About decision-making, however, the tone was in contrast to that of their White male counterparts. Instead of the “take charge/can do” attitude expressed by the elementary White male principals, these interviewees advised caution in decision-making.

I would say don’t make radical decisions. Give some thought to decisions you make. Don’t make radical changes. And especially, and I’m assuming that this might be an established school like mine was out at Kentuck—you don’t go in changing everything. There’s an old saying, if it ain’t broke don’t try to fix it. If it’s working alright, you go along with it. EBM324

Like I say, sometimes the best decisions are the decisions not made. EBM349

There is no consensus on the usefulness of evaluation; about half saw it as a tool for teacher improvement and feedback whereas others viewed it as a form that changed frequently and was basically a waste of time, or, with suspicion, a vehicle that could be used against teachers (in race issues or with unfair superintendents). Elementary Black principals shared with others the feeling that the principal needed to be very visible. Except where they were teaching principals3, all talked, much like the elementary White female principals, about enjoying getting in the classrooms and being with the kids.

**In Partnership With Parents**

Elementary Black male principals stated that parents are essential partners in the educational process.

As the principal of the building my position was to bring the parents of the children whom we were serving to understand what we were doing or attempting to do in education toward developing their children and hoping that they would become partners of education with the teachers and the school. Because any child will not develop to his highest potential unless there is a joining together of the features of the home, the things that the school is trying to help him develop, and what is occurring in the community. In other words, the home in conjunction with the working of the school makes the community. EBM139

This view of a partnership with parents is strikingly different from the role of the principal toward parents described by both of the White elementary interview cohorts and is similar to that expressed by the elementary Black female principals. Elementary Black male principals stated that it is necessary to get parents involved because a child won’t have

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3 In Virginia’s more rural areas, the position of “teaching principal”, that is, a principal with half-day or full-day teaching responsibilities, continued up until the 1970s. In the 1930s and 1940s most of the principalships in Virginia were teaching principalships; that changed with the consolidation of school districts in the 1950s and 1960s.
educational success unless everyone is working together in his or her best interest. This was the feeling of the minority principals in Monteiro's (1977) study as well.

These interviewees felt that a central part of the principal’s role is to invite parent participation and to communicate the aims and goals of the school to the parents. To this end, they cited examples of how they communicated about the school program, actively solicited parent participation and feedback, and gave good news as well as bad.

**Self-as-Principal**

The thirty-two Black men in Hunter and Davis’ study (1994) spoke about manhood and identity and self in ways that echoed this study’s elementary Black male principals’ discourse about self-as-principal. According to Hunter and Davis,

Men talked about having vision, a strong mind, and flexibility, and of the importance of being able to hold one’s head high with dignity. But with freedom comes responsibility. Being totally accountable for personal actions and able to rectify bad situations one has created were articulated as the cornerstone of maturity...Closely related is men’s recognition of the importance of perseverance, meeting challenges, and rolling with the punches...[There is a] focus on the importance of forming and having a sturdy self, that is, having and getting oneself together and standing by what one has done, believes and is...To work toward improving and developing beyond where one is, and having a sense of pride in self. (1994, p. 31)

This is reassuring in that it both verifies what I thought I heard in these words and casts it against/within a larger context of the discourse about self and identity of African-American men. Once again, the idea that who one is greatly influences the way one will carry out whatever roles or responsibilities one has is reinforced.

Like the other elementary cohorts, these Black male interviewees expressed a great deal of satisfaction with their careers as elementary principals. This comment is typical:

Did I enjoy the principalship? Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I enjoy working with the children. I enjoy working with people. I enjoyed making an impact on children's lives. I enjoyed taking a kid, excuse me, a student who comes from a home and start programming into him things that he's going to need as he grows into an adult and becomes a citizen. EBM317

In his study of three African-American principals identified by others as effective, Lamotey (1989) concluded that

African-American principals in more successful African-American elementary schools hold three qualities in common with each other:

a. a strong commitment to the education of African-American children

b. a deep compassion for, and understanding of, their students and of the communities in which they work
c. a sincere confidence in the ability of all African-American children to learn. (p.150)

The words of the retired elementary Black male and Black female principals in this study reflect these commitments as well. However, they talked about them as extended to all children, regardless of race. I do not know which of those interviewed for the Oral History of the Principalship project would have been considered effective by Lamotey’s criteria. His findings, however, seem to mirror features of the overlapping discourse about self-as-principal for the elementary Black male and the elementary Black female cohorts in my study.

What Lamotey’s findings do not capture is the richness of the contrasting discourses between African-American male and female principals. As will become obvious after reading the next section, a lot more about how gender and race interact to contribute to construction of self-as-principal can be learned if we take both into account. The next section is based on an analysis of transcripts of interviews with the retired elementary Black female principals from Virginia who participated in the Oral History of the Principalship project.
**PRINCIPAL as MOTHER: Retired Black Female Elementary Principals’ Descriptions of Self-as-Principal**

**Introduction**

As with the other cohorts, I let each interviewee’s words tell me what being a principal meant for her. I was doubtful that anything coherent would emerge; after all, I only had seven interviews in the cohort and the cohort of African-American male interviewees had yielded up its conflicted themes only after reading and rereading all nine interviews several times. But it was immediately evident that the voices of these African-American women were strong and clear; the stories they told were vivid, the mission they told of was deeply felt, and their understanding of the role of the principal was remarkably synchronized across space and time. Eavesdropping on these conversations was a rich experience that gifted me with some understanding of how these women saw themselves-as-principals and the milieus within and against which they dialogically defined themselves.

As a group, these were extremely articulate interviews, full of detailed narratives of specific incidents, vivid examples, and strong opinions that flowed into one another. Several of the interviewees seemed to be thinking aloud, which led to some realizations during the interview which hadn’t occurred to them before.

Retired elementary Black female principals used two distinctive rhetorical devices in these interviews: they told stories mixed with opinions and examples with no clear sequential patterns and they often repeated the question that had been asked before answering it. Opinions tended to be strongly stated and then give steam to ensuing examples or stories or telling a story would give rise to some strong statement of opinion. At several points, elementary Black female principals clarified remarks made, referred to earlier remarks explicitly or objected to or replaced the wording of a question (e.g., “handling”, “leadership”) with some phrasing more to their liking or more explicitly representative of what they wanted to say. They seemed comfortable in the interview situation, wanting to state things clearly and not to be misrepresented, yet generally unsure of whether or not their remarks would be of value.

All of the entry stories tell of being “tapped” by others to enter administration.

*Why did you decide to become a principal?*

Why did I decide to become a principal? Well, really I was tapped to be a principal by, um, the elementary supervisor at that time, and she encouraged me to go into administration supervision or administration and that’s how. I became influenced by an elementary supervisor. EBF112

But I got a call. I had a principal who inspired me, who was my mentor. He came to me and said, “You take sabbatical leave next year because you need to be a principal.” I took sabbatical leave and went to school full time that

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4 Based on analysis of the following 7 interviews from the Oral History of the Principalship project: 112, 132, 137, 140, 224, 249, 343.
year and got my Masters. In the spring of that year, I got a call from the Superintendent congratulating me because the School Board had appointed me. EBF249

This mirrors the literature on the importance of mentoring for Black women in professional roles (Givens, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1986; Talley-Ross, 1995).

None of these women set out to be principals. Almost all were assistant principals at elementary schools before they were principals. (Interestingly, once they became principals, several did not have assistant principals themselves for schools of 600+ students.) After becoming an administrator, the seven are split between citing a strong identity as a teacher and therefore as a reluctant administrator, and clear enjoyment of their position in administration. Five out of the seven talked about challenges that they faced in negotiating identity as a principal because of their base identities as teachers and all seven talked about the ways that their identities as teachers influenced their actions and orientation as principal.

Well, I think, in my case, I never got away from being a teacher, or the feeling of being a teacher. So if you translate that into your actions, with your fellow workers, then it’s going to come across mutually satisfying. EBF343

Actually, to be very honest with you, Amanda, I did not decide to become a principal. The school administration decided that they’d like me to assume the role of a principal. I was very fond of teaching. I had a very deep commitment to the children. Therefore, I was completely happy serving as a teacher. However, when the superintendent approached me and informed me that he had appointed me as a principal and hoped that I would not disappoint him by saying, “no”; I found that I said, “yes.” EBF132

If they think you are good, you get kicked upstairs instead of into where you want to be. That’s what was happening, I was studying guidance and doing a lot to help the principals in every way I could. When all of these different shifts came along, they needed someone to be acting principal and the truth of it is, it wasn’t a matter of my deciding. From what I gather, they didn't really want me to be principal. They really wanted a man, but they didn't have anyone qualified and I was. Accidently qualified, because I was constantly seeking ways to work with children and to be better. I wound up being qualified to be principal. EBF137

Well I don't know if I decided or not. I think some people are born great, some achieve it, and some have it thrust on them. It was thrust on me as assistant principal and then I moved up. But I did like the administration, I decided the classroom wasn't for me. I enjoyed it immensely, but unfortunately I was teaching social studies—specifically history. I love history and geography. Most of my students did not. And I got rather discouraged, so I went into guidance; I got my Master's in Personnel and Guidance. And, I decided I would rather work overall, and that's the biggest reason. EBF224

As a group, these elementary Black female principals were very qualified; all had master’s degrees before they were principals and most did considerable study beyond the
master’s level. This, too, mirrors the literature which tells generally of how Black females
must be more qualified to achieve administrative or managerial ranks (Doughty, 1980;
Edson, 1988; Guthrie-Jordan, 1990). Like the elementary White female principals, these
principals presented themselves as life-long learners and cited needing to be up to date with
educational trends and research as part of their job. Exit stories were mostly moves to
central office or to positions at the college/university. Two cited health reasons.

Elementary Black female principals used metaphors casually throughout their
interviews when referring to what happened during their tenure as principals but these form
no particular patterns. PRINCIPAL as HELPER, PRINCIPAL as LISTENER,
PRINCIPAL as TEAM LEADER, PRINCIPAL as KEEPER OF THE AGENDA,
PRINCIPAL as COMMUNICATOR, and PRINCIPAL as PROBLEM SOLVER are
some of the structural metaphors that emerged. I sensed there was a common underlying
theme here but until I explored the literature rather extensively, I did not understand what I
was looking at.

It soon became clear that what I was seeing corresponded closely to a role held by
many strong African-American women in church and civic organizations in their
communities. These women seemed to be extending this identity or using the discourse of
this identity as applicable to themselves-as-principals; that is, PRINCIPAL as MOTHER.
This role of Mother in the Black community is very distinctive. Eugene (1989) defines it as
an “an Afro-American ethic of care as liberation which is regularly embodied and practiced
by Black women” (p. 45). In the rest of this section, I use the words of these retired Black
female principals to illustrate how they told of themselves-as-principals as embodying this
metaphor.

Principal as Mother

These narratives about self-as-principal differ from those of both the elementary
White male principals and elementary Black male principals in one significant respect: these
stories are not about power over or gaining power or even power with. They are stories of
advocacy on behalf of students and teachers and parents. These principals defined their role
as working with parents and teachers and the community to develop the potential of the
teachers and children in their schools. Anything that interfered with that was a problem or a
nuisance. Mentors are mentioned as significant. But relationships with superintendents and
“higher ups” are a matter of meeting expectations and pacifying demands so that they can
going on with the business of running a school and what is best for children.

While not ostensibly concerned with power, these are nevertheless powerful
narratives. Givens (1997) says that power in the African-American community is gained
through working hard, being a part of the community, and helping others. Power comes
from giving back and encouraging others’ success. The portrayals of self-as-principal in
this interview cohort are filled with strong statements about the value and need to do this as
well as concrete examples of how these women as principals contributed to the communities
they served and how this was a strongly fused personal and professional identity for them.
The examples of the narratives match Givens’ (1997) conclusions that the three most
significant themes for African American women educators are activism, community ties, and
mentoring. These themes resonate through the following discussion of the interview
transcripts.
Elementary Black female principals see themselves, like elementary Black male principals, as responsible for every aspect of the school, much like a parent. However, they do not seem to have the same conflicts about this as did the elementary Black male principals in the study. For elementary Black female principals, the role of principal is talked about as extending to all spheres this responsibility touched; it included, but was not limited to, the teachers with whom they worked, the children who attended their school(s), the staff who worked with them, care of the building itself, communication with the central office and the larger community, initiating and maintaining partnerships with parents, supporting children, teachers and parents outside of their school roles and being up-to-date with the larger educational world in order to bring back what is best to their realm.

For these elementary Black female principals, the core pieces to self-as-principal seemed to be the dual role of PROVIDER and NURTURER from a position of behind or supporting from beneath, as opposed to above or central to, the network of relationships that set the context for their work. The paradox here is that because of their role as principal, there is an unavoidable separateness from Others because of their sense of mission, need to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the community and the self-imposed demand to always be professional and above reproach in their actions and interactions. This may in part be due to the pressures of working in integrated (as opposed to segregated) settings where the role of Mother is not universally understood or perceived as the central responsibility of the role of elementary principal. Consequently, as these narratives reveal, these principals tell of themselves in ways that illustrate how they were carrying and acting out a double set of personal and professional expectations.

According to Eugene,

it is the self-initiated and communitywide respected vocation of those who are called “Mother” to care for those in need and to make a way where there is no way—a way of justice, a way of equity, a way which may serve as a highway of righteousness for everyone who wants to walk with integrity. (1989, p. 47)

At the same time as this is a fused personal and professional identity for these elementary Black female principals, they must negotiate the community’s and the school division’s expectations. Doughty (1980) points out that “whereas Black women generally have a strong self-perception, that perception is challenged daily in the administrative arena” (p. 173). The following analysis looks at how these women tell of their experience of juxtaposing these identities and expectations in service of justice, equity, and an ethic of care. What emerges is a picture of servant leadership described by Eugene (1980) as inspired by a Black feminist theology shared by those who enact the identity of Mother in secular and church organizations.

**Making Sure It All Gets Done**

Elementary Black female principals, when describing themselves as principals, talked about themselves as team leaders or head teachers with additional responsibilities. Frustration at not being able to carry out all of one’s internally perceived and externally defined responsibilities was repeatedly lain at one culprit’s door: lack of TIME.
Well, really, the elementary teachers expect all things. I used to tell the teachers I worked with, a lot of times, that they have so many characteristics that are similar to the children they teach. And I guess it all comes under the caption of “leadership.” But in that process, they want someone to, that will listen to them, number one. They want someone who will support them in what they are trying to do because after all the teacher is where the action is and the teacher’s what’s important. And I personally always felt that my main role was being a Teacher’s Helper. that my mission was to be there to help teachers to do the job that they were trying to do and in that capacity I tried to do all things but there certainly are restraints as far as time goes. But then teachers, at the same time they want leadership, they also want a good team player. They want to be a part of things. All in all, they expect you to provide the materials, the environment, for the best learning situation possible. And you do what you can to get that done. That involves planning, coordinating, directing, and providing materials. And some of these things get beyond your realm but you do what you can. And then one thing that I think that’s really important: they want the principal to be accessible.

EBF343

Well, I guess if I wanted to say my biggest headache, after I’d worked as hard as I could possibly work, I never felt that the day was long enough for me to get all that I wanted done in one day. And, I never got to the point where I was complacent enough to say, “This is all I’m going to do today, so I'm going to make myself satisfied.” There were always things that I wanted to do more of, and it was really not a headache. I guess it was a personal concern on my part. I wanted to squeeze in more and get more...get the best from the better. And, sometimes there just was not time to do it. EBF132

Without hesitation, these principals repeatedly identified themselves as “instructional leaders.” These elementary Black female principals stressed that their priorities were the instructional program, doing the best by the children, and being accessible to parents and teachers. But these competed with having the building to take care of, paperwork to do, teacher evaluations to carry out, and the significant community roles they saw as essential to play. They stated their biggest concern as worrying about whether the children were getting what they needed, and their biggest frustration, lack of time. Since most refused to let paperwork and administrative tasks get in the way of their priorities, they talked about very long days (like their White female counterparts). They talked about not doing paperwork during the school day. They said that in order to feel satisfied that they were doing what was necessary they regularly got there very early, worked very late, took work home, and worked on weekends.

I actually spent most of my time up and down the halls, in the cafeteria, in the classrooms...I did spend a large percentage of my time in and out the classrooms, and for that reason, I spent long hours in my office before school and after school in order to get my personal administrative tasks done. I just let those kind of things go during the day...in order to be an effective principal, you must be willing to give of your time and your talents in trying to help others to get the job done, and you're going to have to spend an awful lot of extra hours early in the morning or later in the afternoon. And, I never did like to bring work home. So, I’d go early and come home late, and I felt happy, because I felt that I had accomplished what I should
have accomplished as a principal by doing that. In other words, I would not compromise the children's learning and supervising the other people in the building for my personal time. EBF132

But the day was full and I never felt that I was a good time manager. But maybe there just wasn’t enough time. But all of my paper work, checking lesson plans, general planning, reading the literature, opening the mail—all of that was beyond the school day. I always felt fortunate that I lived very close to the school, not five minutes away, as a matter of fact I could see the building well in the winter time so therefore I didn’t carry materials home with me, I came back to the materials. I spent at least a couple of nights a week, because adult basic was in the class in the school at night from Tuesdays to Thursdays. Those were my regular working hours and on weekends most Sunday evenings I was there. But it made me feel good to have spent that time going through the mail, going through the paperwork, lesson plans signed and desk clean on Monday morning. But that was about it for the clean desk time. Monday morning—clean desk.

*And then it was down hill from there?*

Down hill from there. Because at the same time with that number of students, and especially with the advent of special education classes and all of the requirements there as far as the meetings and the IEP’s to be signed and of course you must sit in on those meetings and you need to sit in on those meetings. But the school day was just a full day. Full days are great days, though, if you can compensate in some manner for what you weren’t able to do during the day. EBF343

Like the elementary White female principals in the study, taking care of the physical plant was talked about by these interviewees as their least favorite aspect of the job. Like the other elementary principals interviewed, elementary Black female principals talked about the rarity and value of good custodial help.

In a school when you have to be the manager of cafeteria services, custodial services, building security, as well as the instructional programs can be sometimes managing supportive services can be a little taxonal sometimes, especially in maintenance, you don't always get the type of workers that you need and sometimes you don't always get the number of people that you need to run the school, which I can have no control over, especially in maintenance and building care you have to accept the people that were sent to you, I think the maintenance would be the most headache to me and building security, and so forth. EBF112

But I think the things that frustrated me most with all the else I had to do was building maintenance...I always felt “Now, this is not the thing that’s most important. This ought to be taken care of in some other manner.” And during those years, the school I was in as well as all the rest of them in the county, had these old dirty broken-down furnaces, and even at best the heat was uneven, someone was roasting and someone was cold...And then, for a couple of years I did not have really good custodial, dependable custodial help. And now that was just really really frustrating. I have shoveled coal, I
have stoked them...I thought it was my job to be sure it was done. It was my responsibility to make sure it was done and so did teachers, when they sent their little notes up “It’s cold in my room!” But I really feel even today that it should not be an instructional supervisor...if the principal is the instructional leader, then that should be somebody else’s responsibility...schools that have a good custodian are really really really fortunate. And when I did get good custodial help, that was a tremendous relief. You know, you can say, “Well, what does that have to do with instruction?”...It had much to do with instruction because it relieved me to be able to devote my time to something else. EBF343

**Educating for the Future**

Elementary Black female principals repeatedly stated their belief that all children can learn. Like elementary Black male principals, elementary Black female principals see the purpose of education in terms of the future empowerment it will provide children.

My philosophy of education is to help every child to want to learn, develop all of his skills to his fullest potential, I don't care if it's only a pint, and live a full and happy life. This, I don't mean in terms of money, but in terms of quality. It is an on going process. To prepare the child to live and continue to live, but to continue to live a full happy life. EBF137

My philosophy of education. I think it goes back to what we said in the beginning, we believe that all individuals can learn and it's up to us as educators to find their strengths, their weaknesses, build up on their strengths and try to correct their weaknesses by giving them the skills necessary to function as successful individuals. EBF112

These principals uniformly stressed the importance of high expectations for students and teachers. They attributed success to high expectations and clear, consistent rules that they were responsible for communicating to everyone in the school community. Several attributed this combination of high expectations, consistent and clear rules and consistent follow-through as reasons for how they “turned around” schools in “tough shape.”

**Effective Schools**

Like elementary Black male principals, elementary Black female principals put a lot of emphasis on having CLEAN, attractive schools and several included this on their list of what makes a school “effective.”

Well, you pop into a classroom and you see children eagerly participating in the activities, anxious to respond, there is a nice interaction which is not teacher dominated, but is teacher led. You find an attractive, comfortable building. When you see that humane, warm situation, then you know that it is a good situation. One that has enough equipment for all children, a clean attractive, well staffed cafeteria. Those are some characteristics of a good school. EBF137
If you go into a school that is attractive and clean and inviting, and inviting to me is seeing student work in the corridors, when you go in the building, being able to see student work. I think it's the most interesting thing, reading what little children have written. Parent involvement would be a good criteria for certainly assessing schools because parent involvement is certainly going to enhance the processes of getting done what the school wants to do. Is there evidence of collaborative planning among the staff and between staff members, that is at grade level or intergrades…EBF343

They talk about how it is necessary to have a vision, to get others to buy into that vision and to communicate the goals to everyone in the school community so that everyone is on board and working toward the same goal.

**Being the Consummate Professional**

Like elementary Black male principals, elementary Black female principals stressed the need to be professional at all times. They felt that parents and teachers needed to see the principal of the school as a competent professional. Like the elementary White female principals in the study, they talked about how their being the principal impacted their relationships with others, especially teacher colleagues. They stressed that they always represented their schools, that one must remain “calm, cool and collected” and that one must always be fair. They spoke of turning personnel decisions over in their heads to make sure they were fair.

Like their Black male counterparts, the elementary Black female interviewees spoke of never wanting to appear biased and of having to have clear reasons for all of their decisions in case they were challenged. Most talked about falling back on written rules and regulations and knowledge of the law to negotiate decision-making through the integration process.

I always kept very close to my desk, the school philosophy book, the big red book, and the School Board policy. I kept the school law book right at my fingertip and any other legal pamphlet or anything I had around that had anything to do with legal aspects of school administration, and I was very well versed on those. And, there were times when people would try to put pressure on me to give children their shots if they were diabetic or to give children certain kinds of medicines and what have you, and I would just tell them I could not do it, and I'd always pull this little document out and read it to them. So by talking and listening to them, many times they would understand, and say, “Well, I can see your hands are tied; I'll have to go to another source.” EBF132

They did not shy away from making the decisions but they said it was very important that those decisions be seen as fair and that others be able to hear their reasoning and acknowledge its fairness.

Elementary Black female principals did not see parents and teachers taking grievances to the superintendent as threats to their authority.
Just remember you’re just a good helper. If you don’t become self-centered, you can eliminate so many disappointments. I can recall some principals would get so upset if a parent went to the school board office for something that they had addressed already. And that happened to me a number of times. The person taking the issue at the central office would call and would say “Nadine, So and So is here and thus and so happened and so on and on and on” and I would say “Yeah” and came to me and we did thus and so and this happened and generally the superintendent would say “Well why did they come down here?” and I would say, “Because people do not feel that they have done a problem justice until they have been to the top, and you are IT.” And you know, and I believe that, so it was never offensive to me. It, you know, it was just what people do. And, you don’t get offended by it. You don’t think that they’re belittling you. You don’t take things personally.

When asked, they said that they just told their reasoning, confident that they were right, and the cases were usually dropped. They talked about not taking things personally, and about having to learn that. In the words of one elementary Black female principal, “You have to be sensitive to everyone else’s needs but you have to shove your own feelings in your pocket.” Elementary Black female principals stressed following the Golden Rule and not gossiping. They felt that, like elementary Black male principals, they needed to be above reproach.

But I’m of the old school, I think the way you carry yourself at all times is very important. See, I have a middle-class "Black bourgeois," "Christian," "Lady," attitude towards ethics. As my daughter told me it's nice to be a lady, Mama, but people don't, you don't use the term “lady” anymore. But in my code of ethics is that you carry yourself in such a way that you respect other people and they definitely will respect you.

We recognized that we were professionals and that we always try to keep professionalism in our work and with one another as co-workers, students, parents, and the community and that we were always, we would always have to set an example that means that we had a certain expectation of how we dressed, how we carried on our personal life, how we carry on inside the school and outside the school, how we related to our public, parents and people who were related to school and that we were there to serve the public. We are a public service and that we should have enough to know how to meet the public, we would always carry this professionalism in everything we did...

Their expectations of themselves were very high and they did not tolerate mistakes easily. Loneliness was part of the role of being principal. Again, like the elementary Black male principals, the elementary Black female principals talk about “difficulties” as “challenges.” Many mentioned at one point or another how they needed to gain credibility as a woman principal and as a Black woman principal. They talked about challenges to their authority and needing to show peers and communities that as a Black woman principal they can succeed. They cited patience and perseverance as key to any success they had.

We had faced a lot of pressures people tell you what this person used to do or that person. And then by being the first Black principal, in 4 out of the
five schools I served as principal, it was a pressure on me as a Black woman to show that I could succeed. And it would be very interesting, some of it even with all the foolishness, some of it was very interesting. I was at Lee School that was at one time had been the school for all downtown Alexandria, the White school for downtown Alexandria, Old Town, and I was there, and this person came in, they wanted to see the principal. Well both the secretaries were White. So I guess they expected the principal to be White. So the young lady said, “Are you the principal?” “Oh no,” [she] said, “I’ll go get Mrs. V-, she's the principal.” And so the person kept looking over my head when I did come out there, still waiting for the principal. And so she said, “This is Mrs. V-.” And the person just flushed very vivid. Pink, red, whatever you want to call it. The point is they just weren’t accustomed. But once they got to know me I didn’t have any problems there. Other pressures are trying to do what the predecessors had done. But I told them whenever I came to school to my stamp and my monogram is NSV, and it took the NSV standard. So most of them began to understand that. EBF224

**Being Instructional Team Leader**

Elementary Black female principals stressed the need to see and treat teachers like professionals. Teachers were talked about as teammates and colleagues rather than subordinates or underlings. According to these elementary Black female principals, teachers have to feel a part of the decision-making and have to have a real voice, (i.e., feel able to disagree without fear of punishment). Teachers also deserve to hear the principal’s thinking about a decision that is made. All of the elementary Black female principals described collaborative meetings and planning sessions with teachers. A philosophy and definition of teamwork emerges from their words.

[re: personal leadership philosophy] Well, it is not lassez faire, it's not fraternalism, it's a cooperative one, where we work as a team, we come together, share and plan together, and try to solve problems or get a job done, that's my philosophy. I don't have to be king pin as long as we get the job done. EBF137

We only had faculty meetings when they were necessary. This particular afternoon, we had people who stayed in this meeting until 5:30, still brainstorming about how we can solve the problems in our building. I was so overwhelmingly pleased, and we listened to everything that everybody had to say. The next morning I arranged to have coffee and donuts and juice for everybody, because they had exhibited to me that they were concerned about what was going on in that school. That they cared enough about the school, and that they had enough confidence in me to come to me and discuss a problem that was getting ready to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And, as a result we were able to work that problem out within two months. That school was like a different school. We communicated with our parents through the school newspaper and everything. And, because we had the team working as a team that was an example of how we worked together as a team, and it worked. EBF132

137
Like their White female colleagues, these elementary Black female principals defined part of their responsibility as principal to encourage the ongoing learning of their teachers.

I considered myself responsible for the growth of teachers, as well as for the growth of students. We had a superintendent at that time who would always say the principal was the captain of the ship. And as the captain of the ship, I felt that it was my duty to see that teachers moved up in her thinking and her teaching techniques...EBF140

They saw it as a personal mission to work with teachers constantly to improve instruction and they said they made it a priority to be available to do that.

I worked with teachers. I pointed out the areas of difficulty. I demonstrated for them. I let them see other teachers-visit other teachers. I did everything. I called in specialists. I did everything I could to help them. EBF249

These principals said they also made it a priority to listen to teachers and to represent their concerns to the central office, again describing an advocacy role.

Whenever a teacher or teachers were given responsibilities, I always found time to be available to assist them if they needed my assistance. And, there were times when they were given responsibilities and sometimes I did not agree with some of their expectations, and I would in turn go to the administration building and let my thoughts be known among the central administration personnel. However, when I went I always went prepared. I never talked off the cuff. So, there were some changes that did come about concerning things that went on in the schools, because we did...I did take the time to listen to what the teachers had to say about it, and to go up there and talk with the superintendent and some of the people who were in charge of instruction, and they listened. They did not always agree, but there were times when we did see some positive changes in teacher expectations, because we did things like that. EBF132

They described struggling to find the best ways to work with all kinds of different people, often refusing to identify one leadership style and insisting that one had to work with different teachers differently, much like you had to work with children. Working with teachers was compared several times to working with children. Yet, as mentioned earlier, treating teachers like professionals was also stressed. Acknowledging that there were a lot of different ways to teach effectively was also repeated. They said that they took their role of instructional mentors very seriously, conscious that one never knew who might be watching.

All of the elementary Black female principals struggled to get their teachers to work together as a team, to get consistency in curriculum, expectations and discipline within and across grades, and to develop common goals together. They put forth initial ideas and they wanted to hear other ideas and input. The idea was that they were all in there together for the good of the children, and it was the responsibility of the principal to keep them all on track and on the task of improving instruction.

When asked what teachers expect from a principal, many of the elementary Black female principals laughed and initially, like some of the elementary White female principals,
made colorful responses: “Move mountains! Leap tall buildings!” EBF343, “Superman, Superwoman, all things to all people which you can be” EBF137, and “Be Santa Claus and God all rolled into one” EBF224. They uniformly followed these statements by saying that teachers want support, help, to be listened to and have their concerns taken seriously, to be dealt with fairly and with compassion, and to have involvement in decisions that affect them.

Elementary Black female principals had a mixed response to teacher evaluation as formal procedures. Although they all saw themselves as there to help the teacher do her best, and as an instructional leader, they viewed formal evaluation procedures with a lot of skepticism. Observing and meeting with teachers, problem-solving with teachers, demonstrating for teachers, and providing teachers with opportunities to observe others, take courses, or get training were common to all of these elementary Black female principals. Formal evaluation was viewed by some with suspicion and by others as antithetical either to their philosophy of education or as putting into print things that could later be used against a teacher at whim. Here, again, their remarks echoed the comments of their Black male colleagues.

Most of these principals said that their relentless emphasis on improving instruction was largely successful, even with initially reluctant or weak teachers. Some said that they did reluctantly recommend that teachers or staff be let go for not performing well or not putting in effort. Most also described what they saw as the effectiveness of frequent “pop” or informal unannounced classroom visits and the emphasis they put on getting positive feedback to teachers quickly if they liked something they saw. They spoke of writing notes or calling teachers out for a minute to talk about what they saw that they liked and why they thought it was effective.

Elementary Black female principals talked about how they do not see how principals can be effective instructional leaders unless they themselves were very good classroom teachers. Whether or not their entry into the principalship was reluctant, they all emphasized that one has not only to have been a teacher, but must have been a GOOD teacher in order to be a model and be able to help improve instruction. Other qualities agreed upon for effectiveness as a principal were the need to listen, be accessible to parents, teachers and students, have taken courses in administration, have been an assistant principal or have other administrative experience, not take things personally, have empathy and treat people humanely, be fair, be open-minded and be willing to work very hard.

Elementary Black female principals said that to be effective, a principal has to be in it “for the right reasons”, (i.e. to make a positive difference for kids). Poor principals are into it for the “wrong reasons”, (i.e., those who just wanted to get out of the classroom or to make more money or people who had power complexes), could “destroy” people or “kill” a school. Poor principals made decisions based on personal preferences or biases rather than according to the rules or policies or “in a fair way.” This was the legacy they often felt they followed as a new principal. By contrast, these principals talked about needing to bend rules, if necessary, to support everybody to do their best. Understanding, empathy, and fairness were essential; favoritism and bias were to be strenuously avoided.

In resolving disputes, elementary Black female principals emphasized needing to hear everyone’s perspective: the teacher’s, the parent’s and the child’s. They found that by doing this, many disputes were resolved and the real problems were revealed; then the problems could be addressed. This insistence on listening was seen by many elementary
Black female principals as a key to their success and to their gaining credibility with teachers, parents, and students.

I think you learn a lot...when you take the time to deal completely...I want you to know that I would get every possible person involved and I would hear everything they would have to say...Well, often then parents would tell other parents that if you go in there she’s going to investigate and she’s going to listen. They would realize that you weren’t just going to pass it off. After a while parents, students, teachers, crossing guards, neighbors, everybody knew that I was going to listen and that I was going to deal with these incidents and we were not going to accept the behavior that was beneath them. And that’s the way I would approach them, [that] I couldn’t accept that from you. You’re too bright, too good. EBF249

Like the elementary White female principals in the study, these elementary Black female principals explicitly presented themselves as life-long learners.

I would probably do more of what I did before, I would do a little bit more research, you know, active research, more study, when I say study I don’t mean studying in the books I mean to study teachers and how to get involved in the segments of the learning process, maybe help, how children can achieve finding ways of which we can assure achievement to students and improving the teaching the learning process and how we can get children to, you know, where we want them, the how to, and come up with things to get some results which we know are just as effective that we can get some results, by using it I would really get into any programs, I would do the studying necessary and I would do the research necessary to do the job. EBF112

They talked about the need to be up to date on the research and to constantly be taking courses and reading and going to conferences to improve their own professional abilities and that of their teachers. In order to be a legitimate leader, they said that they must be informed and knowledgeable.

I think in order to be a good leader, the first thing you must be is to be informed. If you're going to lead someone, you need to try to stay at least a step ahead of the people with whom you're leading; which means a continuous education for you, after you've gotten that degree. In education there are going to be changes, and in order for you to keep abreast of what’s going on, you, as an administrator, need to continue to take courses. Now, in our building, I found it very heart warming to take the courses that were offered to the teachers through our school system. And, whenever courses were taught I took all the courses that I could possibly take that the teachers were taking. EBF132

Well, a leader has to be a person who knows where he or she wants to go, and having a set of directions to where you want to go. You have to equip yourself with the skills and knowledge necessary to go in that direction and it would be a constant quest for improving. You just don't get to the place where you know it all, there is always a better way to do something and you are always seeking to improve to get better so you know that you can be
more effective in working with people and doing the job that you were assigned to do. EBF112

Elementary Black female principals also talked about themselves as the leader of the school community. As such, they talked about feeling a mandate to include every staff member and to make them feel a part of the school. This emphasis on inclusiveness was insisted upon by all of the elementary Black female principals, and is captured by one principal’s boat metaphor below:

People in a boat. If a person is in a boat, the person is less likely to cause problems while he's in that boat, to help tilt it. So, that was my philosophy. That people were less likely to cause problems if they were allowed to help row the boat. In other words, the people were involved in whatever went on in the building. Therefore, I thought the involvement, if they had a piece of the pie or help make the pie, that they were a little bit more willing to want that pie to turn out just fine. So, they were less likely to rock the boat if they were in the boat. EBF132

Elementary Black female principals resented time away from their building and time in their school away from students and teachers. Again and again they said, “The teacher is where the action is.” They emphasized getting into classrooms regularly as a point of pride. They also emphasized not relying on central office to solve their problems. There did not seem to be much faith that help would be forthcoming or particularly productive if it were.

I truly believed that it was my responsibility to oversee and to take care of the school I was in. I did not believe that personnel in the central office could solve my problems. Now, I wanted their support. I wanted advice, from anybody you can get at times and help, but I felt that many of their solutions would not be a solution that I would make so as a result I did not call down and ask for solutions because I felt like if you give, if you tell me what to do, and after all, you’re my superior, if you tell me what to do and I don’t do it...

Then you’re in trouble!

Right. And if it backfires, I don’t have any recourse. But if I use my best judgment and I do it, if there is a problem later, then you may help me to solve it. EBF343

In Partnership With Parents

Like their elementary Black male counterparts, these elementary Black female principals stressed the need to work in partnership with parents. They saw themselves as responsible for communicating the instructional program and school goals to parents, and for communicating the rules to parents and then asking their help in enforcing them. Elementary Black female principals stress that parents must be allies. They told stories of how they succeeded in this.

Well, I consider myself the instructional leader, the school leader, and the friend to the students and the parents. And I made parents feel that they were very important. That they were welcome, in fact I would tell them, I said
these are your schools. You are paying taxes and you are sending your greatest gift you can give us, you know would be your children. So I always built that up that how important the parent was to this whole school system. I tried to learn my parents names and try to be sure I get them associated with the right children. And learned about the brothers and sisters. And luckily by being in Alexandria and it turned out I knew half the parents, and it made it very good. And we found out that they knew me and they could come in. I would stay after school, our office always was open until about 5:00 o'clock—we were supposed to be closed at 4:00 or 4:30. So that if you, and most of the time I was even there after 5:00, and they knew that if they wanted they could come in and I'd try to make schedules for them. Most of my parents were working parents. And so they could come in. And we had parents in later years; after integration had parents from the city government, and so forth. But I tried to be as fair and to everybody—not get excited about titles. EBF224

I've always felt that parents are part of us in this whole process of education and if we can keep them informed and if we can keep them involved and involved I mean to get them to school to explain the program to encourage them to visit, encourage them to participate you know, with school programs that affect their children, and keep them knowledgeable and encourage them to be constantly looking at what the children are doing in the school at home and if they have any questions about that they have an open door where they can come in and really be a part of it. I think the more they know about what's going on in school then the more they fully cooperate with the school the better the chances are for a good instructional program. EBF112

I was very much interested in the community because of my background. From the school point of view, I continued to encourage PTA involvement. Personally, I was very active in the church, political activities, and other community organizations. This kept me mixing with the people to let them know I was approachable and made it easier to relate to parents. Easier for parents, anyway because I never had a problem relating to parents. EBF132

**Supporting Children**

Elementary Black female principals stressed that schools exist to serve all children as well as is humanly possible. Children deserved the best of the educational professionals who serve them; teachers do not work for the principal but work with the principal for the children. Children come to school with individual needs and abilities and it is the school’s responsibility to develop each child’s potential. In order to do this, teachers must constantly improve their ability to reach all kinds of learners, to take them where they are and help them make progress and get the basic skills they need. The principal’s role is to support this.

Elementary Black female principals saw their involvement in community leadership positions as an extension of their job description. Elementary Black female principals talked about taking many leadership roles in the community. Like elementary Black male principals these mostly had to do with children, (i.e., Scouts or sports or Boys and Girls’ Clubs), or church.
Each time I had an opportunity to go out into the community and serve as a speaker, sometimes judging little contests that the children had, writing contests and things like that. Getting involved with the Girls' Club or the scouts. Every time I had an opportunity to go out and maybe spend the week-end with the Scouts or go by and read or share some of my experiences with the Girls’ Club or the Boys’ Club or anything like that, whenever I was called on to come into the community, I would as much as possible go. I also would visit within the churches of the people in the office. I’d go to church with my secretary sometimes, and I did not try going to church with all my teachers, because it was too varied. But, I did show up in churches with the people in the office. And, of course, they were different denominations, and many times different races. EBF132

This emphasis on supporting children as individuals was repeated in the insistence that one hear the child’s side of the story. Moreover, several of these principals contended that children should have a say in school policies that affect them, an attitude not stressed by the other interview cohorts. This may be explained by the tendency of the Black female administrator to see all of the students in her school as “her children” (Doughty, 1980).

Elementary Black female principals also differed in their explicit references indicating sensitivity and awareness of diversity: they specifically mentioned needing to be open to people of different races, levels and religions, awareness of the biculturalism faced by many of their students, and the need to visit and be seen at churches of various denominations attended by the students and staff of their schools (one says she “even went to the Bethel synagogue”).

**Inspired Activism**

As a group, elementary Black female principals also talked specifically about their church involvement, working with churches in the community, and about the importance of prayer. This echoes the importance of the church and religion as a support system found in another study of Black professional women (Talley-Ross, 1995). Eugene (1989) explains that this would be the case because “Afro-American culture and religion have generated alternative inter-related notions of womanhood different from those of mainstream American economics, society and theology”; and that “these alternative experiences, visions and images of womanhood have been forged out of a moral value system endemic to the Black church” (p. 51).

Elementary Black female principals exhibited in their descriptions of themselves as principals a strong set of ethics for which they were willing to fight. Many stories were told about “sticking my neck” out.

For example, the way that the teaching staff was integrated was to take the best Black teachers out of the schools that had been previously all Black and put them in schools that were mostly all White. Then take the brand new people who were just hired, who were White teachers, and put them in the previously all Black schools. These were the tactics that were used. I just openly said “No, you will not.” I did that. Now I can tell you that I didn’t get to the top of the list that way but I said “No, you cannot take my best teachers out of my school.” I said, “No, you don’t. You have orders that
you must integrate but this is not the way to do it. I will just absolutely have a fit. If you think you’re going to take them, I’m going to make a big public scene. This thing is not going to happen.” And they didn’t do it. They really didn’t do it. But after I left they did it. EBF249

Now if I found it wasn’t going to work I wasn’t hesitant in speaking up and saying I didn’t particularly like that. So I have a very good friend now who still considers me a friend. I just saw him last week and he's an official in Alexandria, and he told my friends that he remembered me because he made some statements—some very glib statements—that he thought were right. He was comparing the public schools with private schools and he made a statement about homework. And I told him that, especially weekends, homework, my policy at my school incidentally, was that we did not give children a lot of homework on the weekends because in this area where we live we have a lot of people who have a lot of programs and things. The children go away, they go to places and if they’ve got to be dragging books it’s hard on parents and their children. So we always made a policy of having homework from Monday to Thursday. And then even the teachers went home when the children went home and that was not the policy in Alexandria but in my school it was the policy. As soon as they cleared their room and the security room as they were suppose to do, they could leave when the children left after the buses were gone. And so we did those things. This man was very good, he wrote me the most beautiful letter when I retired that he had learned so much from me because nobody wanted to question him when he made his statement about homework. So especially when he said the weekend homework. The children had nothing to do, and I asked him what were the parents supposed to be doing? I said don’t tell me we’re supposed to be going beyond the school week now and going into the homes and taking over the parents’ job. Now how come parents can’t get some programs themselves for the weekend? So of course he looked and so a letter from him made me feel he really appreciated it. And I think by being the way I am, I just went in because I don’t seem to be, I don’t get intimidated by too many people. And so, it was very interesting. EBF224

Often this was done in expectation that the principal would lose her job. Instead, she was often lauded or promoted or got whatever was being agitated for. The portraits painted were of women with strong moral imaginations about what is best for children and clear ideas of justice guiding their treatment of everyone with whom they dealt. This activist stance permeates the transcripts in this cohort.

Elementary Black female principals specifically described coping mechanisms about dealing with prejudice and other pressures of the job.

You don’t take things personally. That was the number one thing that I worked on myself for when I was asked to become principal. It was during an era that I felt there would be a lot of resentment toward me and maybe nasty things, I had been warned that people could be nasty. I decided no one was going to ever insult me personally because I would not hear it. And you know they didn’t. Now I don’t what they said! (laugh) But they didn’t attack me because I didn’t hear it! EBF343
I’ve not mentioned this before, in order to be a good administrator, you really need a good sense of humor, because when you can laugh through the trying times you can make it. EBF132

For a long time there was hostility towards me and different things that indicated pressure, there was pressure, stressful.

_How did you handle them?_

How did I handle them? I prayed. I would sit down and review my action, to see if there was a better way that I could have done something, a better way for the next time. I would seek advice from my other colleagues to see if they had similar problems and how they might have handled them. Also let them review what I had done and get their advice on what I should have done or should not have done so that in the future I could listen to that if I so choose. Most of the time I was introspective, I would study, and I would also go to school. Sometimes I would sit down and get depressed about it, and I would find myself and I would break myself of how they felt about me, their response to me in general. When I'd get through I'd say that you can't win them all, you are not so bad, I'd have more pluses than minuses by names. EBF137

They told stories and give clear examples in an unemphasized voice of problems encountered during desegregation.

_How did you handle the civil rights issue, the busing issues, the NCEE Reports, etc.?_

I prayed, I prayed, Oh, I prayed and took it one day at a time, because it was rough. You couldn’t do anything right. I often said, many times, I wish that I was an Albino, no color, neither White nor Black. So, if the Whites were accusing me of being prejudiced, the Blacks were accusing me of being prejudiced. You didn't stand much of a chance. You had to cut it down the line and do what you knew to be right, and cut it straight down the middle. That's all you could do. Take the rules, apply them as fairly and squarely as possible and let the chips fall where they may. It worked for me because they found they couldn’t shift me in either direction, but I couldn’t sit up there and worry about who was prejudiced or who wasn’t because if you look [for] it, you find it and I didn’t have time for that kind of thing. Those people who came in and were willing to be supportive and help, I welcomed their support and we went on from there. Those who were anti and what not, I listened to their screams and squeaks, smiled, thanked them for coming and went on about my business. EBF137

I think the Martin Luther King assassination was almost, was a catastrophe in this area. Because the children came to school the day after the assassination, and we began to have problems in the secondary schools more so than the elementary schools. And in one particular one was in the inner city was the George Washington High School in Alexandria. And it seems that the Black students had asked that the flag be lowered to half staff, and the administrator had not been given any orders from the city administration.
to do that. And it caused confusion. Well then several people did come over. Some of the ministers in this city, some of the people that were staffers in Alexandria's administration came and talked. We did, it filtered down to the elementary school because there were parents who had children in secondary and they heard about it and they came over. But a number of the parents came, and they were sympathetic, they understood. In fact some of the parents began to apologize for the person that shot Martin Luther King and said they were ashamed. And I told them that that was one White man and I know most intelligent Blacks were not going to blame the entire White race for what had happened. And we hoped that later they'll realize that when one Black man or Black woman does something that it isn't the whole race. And so it was an adversity for us, but it taught us that one person is not a race. And therefore you shouldn't extend your hatred or dislike to the whole group for what one person had done—and likewise we felt that a lot of the people who they should not do that with even our race. They should not say that one Black man or Black woman that has done something wrong, that the whole race is to blame.

One of the issues at that time was the reading scores of children. There was a great deal of comparison in the literature and what not in talking about integrating the schools. There was a great deal of comparison between the scores of Blacks and the scores of Whites. Some books came out saying we were inheritably inferior, Blacks were, and that the children just could not measure up, and I think that this interested all of our teachers in proving that this was not true, that every teacher, every student could learn, and they agreed that every teacher would teach reading, regardless of what they were teaching. If they were teaching music, if they were teaching art, science, literature, homemaking, whatever, each subject area had its own vocabulary, and teachers were teaching the children how to read in that particular area.

**Did you all see a significant growth in the reading?**

Yes, we did. I, as principal, and our head counselor in the junior high school visited a junior high school in New York. I think this high school was sponsoring the Higher Horizon Program, and [a professor] from Norfolk State University, came over and worked with our faculty in making some replications of that Higher Horizon Program in New York. And there is an article about this in the Spring 1963 issue of the General Negro Foundation. It also came out in another journal from the Atlanta Georgia Education Association, I believe. In this study, we identified the weaknesses of children entering seventh grade, and we did some of the same things that they did in New York to raise the reading level and the arithmetic level, and we saw a very significant growth in our children's ability to read and to participate effectively in arithmetic.

Despite the sense of their working under besieged conditions (i.e., more than 600 students and no assistant principal; a new building and no books or materials; no one telling them that they were responsible for negotiating snow removal contracts; parents showing up with guns), only one elementary Black female principal stated that she did not enjoy her role nor would she do it again.
A Commitment to Success

Generally, these principals gave upbeat descriptions of their work and seem proud of what they accomplished with children and teachers. Despite their difficulties, and despite protestations that they were not sure that they were effective (like their White female colleagues), they talked about having enjoyed their work/role/identity as principal, having loved being a principal. They talk about things having generally gone well, even when they have described in detail difficult conditions or pressures faced. Like the elementary White male principals, they said they were not sure whether it went as well for other principals as it did for them. They shared pride with other elementary principals of seeing former students grown up and doing well as a significant reward.

Thus, one can see how the discourses about self-as-principal shared by these elementary Black female principals match Eugene’s (1989) model of Mother:

Black womanist ethics of liberational care insure action on behalf of justice as a constitutive element in the nurturance of those who are without any other viable means of support, concern or protection. To heed the call and to respond by exercising this ethic of care...means “to take care of business” instead of “doing business as usual.” The status quo structures of the social order are intended to be shaken and shifted by those designated as Mothers and invested with authority and leadership on behalf of those in need. Those who are able to recognize this distinctive role and responsibility as it emanates out of the Afro-American community, and who utilize a methodology of personal risk for the sake of transformational results in society, are most welcome to participate and to extend a long-standing ethical tradition of efficacious care. (p. 61)

This is a powerful and distinctive discourse as applied to self-as-principal and as revealed in these transcripts. It is a hidden discourse in the literature where the more visible cohorts are race or gender, instead of race and gender. We should take heed. It is perhaps an important set of meanings for all of us to better understand and more fully integrate into our own work as educators.

Concluding Comments

Obviously who one is has a great deal to do with how one constructs one’s identity of self-as-principal. This chapter reported discourse contrasts that seemed to be generated by differences in race and gender. It is one thing to say, as many others have, that these factors might influence role definition but it is only through this kind of discourse analysis that I think we might truly begin to understand how those influences might play out. While we cannot know how these principals’ actions as principals match their perceptions of their selves-as-principals, we can gain understanding about how someone’s race and gender contribute to contrasting conceptualizations of self and role.
Chapter 5

When and Where Matters: How Contextual Factors Contribute to Contrasting Discourses About Role and Identity of Self-as-Principal

Introduction

The etymology of the word context is contexere which means “to weave together, to connect” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed.). Webster’s Dictionary (1981) defines context as “the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.” Mead’s and Dewey’s notions of evolutionary self and transactional realism, require that, in order to understand self, one must have some sense of the parameters of the environment within which one is transacting one’s identity. Most of the studies in the field of educational administration which deal with context focus on immediate environmental factors such as school size, minority enrollment, and location. When I analyzed the discourses, I found that there were a compendium of factors beyond the walls of a particular school that were described as comprising intimate context for these principals as they negotiated identity of self-as-principal. So, in contrast to the literature, context here will be defined as features of the local and professional knowledge landscapes within/against which these principals describe as influential to development of identity of self-as-principal (cf. Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

As discussed in the previous two chapters, my analysis revealed that discourses about self-as-principal differed by gender, race and level cohorts. In the first part of this chapter I describe how contextual factors (i.e., school size), temporal factors (i.e., era), educational trends (i.e., open schools), and features of the professional landscape (i.e., federal and state mandates regarding desegregation and special education) entered the discourses of these retired school principals about themselves-as-principals in the state of Virginia. The second part of the chapter looks at how religion was used in discourses about identity of self-as-principal, thereby existing as a significant part of the context within/against which these retired Virginia principals defined self and role. In the last part of this chapter, I use the cohort of principals from one particular county in Virginia as a case example to look at how time, space, location and administrative culture influence the discourses about self-as-principal. The state of Virginia itself, as a geographic and political entity, exists as a backdrop within/against which all of these contextual factors operate.

Context as a potential or actual influence on the role and priorities of the principalship is often mentioned in the literature but is rarely explored. Many statistical studies attempt to assess the impact of contextual factors and personal characteristics on principal priorities and actions. Researchers have generally found that factors such as school size, career track, level and gender significantly influence behavior and perceptions of role of principals (see, for example, Baehr, 1975; Ortiz, 1982; Zheng, 1996). Although it is recognized that context influences educational leadership, less is known about how these contextual factors shape role definition by principals.

In addition to local contexts there are features of the professional knowledge landscape (e.g., state and federal mandates, educational trends, published reports) which get funneled into one’s actions and identity as an educator (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).
These affect educators differently depending upon their particular location in time and space and the particular local contexts wherein they work. I will elaborate further in each section, but here is an overview of the contextual factors that seemed to consistently influence these narratives about identity of self-as-principal.

In this study, I found “open space schools” to be talked about in ways that obviously impacted self-as-principal across levels and gender. The era of the 60’s and 70s affected the retired high school principals’ narratives about self-as-principal much more than it did the middle school or elementary principals of the same period. Special education mandates were responded to very differently by retired elementary school principals than by middle school principals. Desegregation was described very differently in the discourses as analyzed by race cohort. Religion entered the narratives of retired African-American and Caucasian principals of both genders across the state of Virginia.

There are several contextual factors which showed some evidence of influencing role definition but which were not as strong as those focused on in this chapter. I mention them here because it is possible that they indicate future rich areas of investigation into construction of identity of self-as-principal. In my study there was some evidence that identity of self-as-principal was influenced if one came from the town where one was principal. These principals tended to describe their relationships with the community as very smooth and they attributed this to being from that area, being known and/or knowing everyone. This naturally tended to be more the case in rural areas. Some evidence indicated that later elementary principals saw the increasing demands of paperwork as constraining their ability to define the role as they would wish. They often related this to special education (see discussion of special education in this chapter). I was not able to get a sense of clarity about discourse changes by era. I believe that the tenures of the principals who were interviewed overlapped too much. I did not have enough information to really create rural/urban cohorts. Several principals served in more than one setting. This factor helped delineate the discourse features about the influence of school size on role/identity as principal but masked any features present by region. I found the administrative culture of particular school divisions to be stronger than area of the state in terms of influences on discourse about self-as-principal.

Little attention is given in the literature about the effects of a district’s administrative culture as a context within/against which identity as a principal is negotiated (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Although I had several interviewees from each of particular counties, only in the case of a few school divisions did the county’s persona become a common construction by interviewees from that area. In those cases all of the principals in that district took space in their narratives about self-as-principal to describe and explain the administrative culture of the county for which they worked and to refer to it as an influence on their understandings and actions as principal. In the case of one county, it was an absence of support that emerged as an influential factor for these principals who said that they felt very isolated and “on their own.” In the case of another county, racial tensions and differential treatment of Black and White principals emerged through their descriptions of how the district mandated that certain issues be handled and how the principals perceived the district’s policies. In two other counties, the administrative culture was very strong; principal after principal, regardless of level or gender, referred to the district as an entity which must be explained in order for the interviewer to understand his or her former identity and actions as a principal.
The cohort of 22 interviews with retired principals from one of these counties includes 9 high school principals (7 White male, 1 White female and 1 Black male), 4 middle school White male principals, 6 elementary White female principals, and 3 elementary White male principals. Through analyzing the transcripts from the interviews with these principals, I explored how a particular county’s persona was constructed in the narratives of retired principals from that county across level, gender and race.

In reading the following chapter, please remember that this is a descriptive study, a report on findings of a discourse analysis. It is not an attempt to discover or theorize about underlying observations or to render judgment on the opinions of those interviewed. I cannot say, beyond mere speculation, why certain opinions are held by particular individuals. My goal is to describe what I found, not to “explain” it.

**Context as a Discourse Feature of Narratives about Self-as-Principal**

**School Size**

School size is typically discussed in the literature in one of three ways. School size has been linked with differences in instructional management behavior in several studies (e.g., Baehr, 1975; Gross & Herriott, 1965; Zheng, 1996). School size is associated in the traditional educational administration literature with promotion (i.e., being moved from a smaller school to principalship of a larger school is seen as a positive career move). Finally, school size is discussed in conjunction with or as a substitute for level (i.e., high schools are usually larger than elementary schools and are more complex to administer and thus the high school principalship is a more sophisticated and highly regarded position).

Scant attention, however, is paid to how school size affects definition of role as principal. In this study, interviewees across the entire sample remarked on the ways they defined their principalship differently in connection with the size of the school where they were principal. Their remarks give a sense of just how profound an influence school size is on role definition.

Principals described in the interviews how they perceived their role changed as a function of school size. School size was discussed in conjunction with loss of intimacy, changes in priorities, impact on quality of instructional leadership, the need to delegate more, changes in administrative structure, and changes in the types and quality of relationships possible with parents and the community-at-large.

One of the primary effects described when a school increased in size was a loss of intimacy.

When I started out as an administrator I started out in a school with 240 students and I knew all the kids by first and last name. I knew the name of their pets, I knew the...first and last name of the staff members, their husbands, and their grandparents, and all their children. I knew the names of most parents that came into the building by first or last name. And as it grew from 240 kids in that old building to this building here which at one time—I moved to this building where we had 800 kids which was more than some of our intermediate schools in...opportunities with either the kids, the staff, or the community. 800 it is impossible to know all the kids by first and last
name let alone their pets, You know. It’s impossible to know all the personal problems of the staff that, you know, with 240 you’re a staff of only 12. You know, to know most of the parents that come into the building. It is almost next to impossible. EWM190F

Speaking of the high school, I think the optimum size of a high school would be five hundred.

*Could you tell your reasons behind that?*

Well, you would know every student. In the four year time, you would know all of them. In four years you’d know every senior personally and with five hundred, you’d pert-near know every student in the school. Plus you’d get a real personal knowledge of your teachers, cause you’d maybe only have twenty-five. And you can have really nice control and rapport with that small a school. SWM199

The interviewees saw size as directly connected to their ability to be an instructional leader. For high school principals, rapid population growth leading to larger schools was associated in Virginia with the era of the 1960s and 1970s. High school principals mentioned that they found the combination of the a quickly growing school population in combination with social strife difficult to handle. The following words of one principal captures the tone of others.

Growing from this school of three hundred twenty-five students to one of two thousand two hundred fifty students...just the things that take place as you are physically going from one building to another building or planning to organize into a two shifts a day...a school of two shifts a day, that’s a lot of planning and organization. Those are the kinds of issues... if you are in a little community, the school...about the same size every year...you know you wouldn’t have those things to deal with, but in a growing, rapidly growing, and in a time when society was being strained by individual rights, and I’m for individual rights, but by being strained those issues...because we were emerging from a time when the emphasis upon society’s rights changed to the individual rights. You think, well, what does that have to do with a principalship? You had to learn to deal with those issues. You have to become knowledgeable of the law and what the changing law is, and how it effects the school, and what rights and responsibilities the students have as well as what administrators and school boards have. All of those things took a lot of time away from the day to day instruction. I just kind of longed for the kind of school that I started out with, two schools prior to coming to Prince William County. Those were small communities, three hundred...four hundred high school students, and today the schools are about the same size, and the problems there, they have their problems too, but it is such a different kind of environment where the merging and growing environment that we were in at this time distracted us from our major goal-our major purpose-that is, the administrating of the school as an instructional leader. That distracted from...and perhaps that is one of the reasons I left administration...No my biggest concern I guess was how do you find time in dealing with all of the crisis issues, to really become an instructional leader in your school. That, I guess was the biggest concern I ever had. My energy
level, I thought, was pretty good at that time, but I was absolutely and totally exhausted. We had, remember, one year toward the latter part of my ten years of principal, we had one hundred sixty-eight activities of the school. My philosophy was, they always expect the principal to be there. And I tried to be there...from the gymnastics to whatever...the debate team. I got to the the point where I could not cover all of them and it bothered me. I guess one of the frustrations that I have...and I know there is a question that will come up, perhaps, as the optimum size of the school. I thought that the school was so large, not so trouble oriented, but so issues oriented. Issues that had to be dealt with that were not necessarily things to do with instruction at all. In a school of that size, discipline for example, instead of increasing as the enrollment increased on a straight line ratio, discipline in the school where you have more and more people together...twenty four or twenty five hundred students is on a progression of more rapid increase, not a simple ration. That study after study has proven that to be true. So there is the size of the school, and I know that for me personally, and this is not from just strictly from an educational point of view but as an administrator of a school, I functioned very well and was very comfortable with from twelve hundred to sixteen hundred students. Beyond that point I became...it’s like operating a city. The building was housing a hundred and twenty some teachers and I don’t know how many custodians and cafeteria workers and all the other support people that go along with it. In fact we had more youngsters in the school than we had in the city of Manassas at that time. So it was like operating something almost like a city...Part of the time I really felt I was an instructional leader. And that’s when we were smaller, but when we became larger, and the problems that I alluded to earlier became...I mean...problems for this whole society, the lack of respect for authority, the things that were associated with Kent State, Vietnam, Watergate. There was a period of time of underground newspapers, there was a period of time in there that was probably the most difficult time to address instructional issues because you were constantly addressing those other kinds of issues and it was taking up so much time. I think back on it now and no wonder Johnny couldn’t read. Because so many other things were distracting Johnny from reading.

Size also had a major impact on how directly principals were able to work with faculty. Size became the determiner of the necessity to delegate and to change the administrative structure of schools. This, in turn, changed the role of the principal.

When we started, again we were smaller, and so not just my direct involvement with my assistants and the chairs which I always, for my years made sure the chairman were under my direct supervision. But I interacted with them and with the staff. The thing I would guess that would be different about the sessions I had with both these groups, from what I know from other principals, is that we didn’t talk about managing a building...I tried early to meet with all the groups, but eventually it got away from me. It wasn’t meaningful because I could only do it once a year, at the most. But originally, people did a lot of teaming and believed in it. I led a lot of workshops on teaming. I did a lot of the Human Relations course and taught that at one time. So I guess I had to have ways to interact with the staff. Even though they had other direct supervisors, I really worked hard to make
myself available. I delegated and I’ve always been willing, I think, once I do that, to let someone else do it. In all the areas that I would call manager, I basically delegated those out. I would say, “That’s yours to do,” and some of the people who worked for me came to me. They weren’t used to...they were used to doing it, but they always had to get someone else, like the principal, to really do it. I mean why give it to someone to do it, if you’re going to spend all that time on it? So I think that built some real strengths in those people. And as a result, I never felt constrained by time. Because that was a priority. SWM177F

Here again the time factor is involved, but for the most part, I held weekly meetings with department chairmen of the various disciplines and to deal with matters with regard to the programs and to try to make it as much as possible, an open forum. And I would say this is where we did most of the planning for let’s say, next year’s course offerings—program offerings. Any additions to the program that we would want to try—those kinds of things and it was done for the most part through group department chairman and you can do that in a large high school. You have to do it in a large high school. I think, had I been in a smaller situation, I would have tried to do it with the entire staff, but it is almost impossible to deal with those with the entire staff. SWM221F

In a large school, those subschool principals are the one who do the jobs and you had better hire the best people you can find, because they are leaders. They are going to be the people who are going to be the next principals within this system. They have to have a team concept in that subschool organization because you must coordinate with guidance. You must coordinate with activities. You must coordinate schedules. You have to assist each other in dealing with student management because if you have kids from different grade levels, in a problem, the two of you need to find out what is going on and put your heads together and have equal treatment all the way along to resolve the issue. I really expected the subschool principals, in essence, to be principals of their subschools and to be good leaders. You have to balance that with what are their strengths? What are their backgrounds? What can they bring to this school that we need? I always tried to hire somebody who wanted my job. Those are the people who are going to work. They want to be principals. They want to lead. They don’t want to kill me. But, they want the experience and they are willing to work at this job to gain the experience to be principals on their own. In a subschool organization such as Hayfield, that gives them good experience. That is like being principal of a small high school. There are sometimes four or five hundred kids in one subschool. That is their school to run. But, it has got to be run within the framework of good communication and working together. SWF148F

The African-American principals in the study said that they refused to let size get in the way of their emphasis on parent involvement, but they noted that in smaller schools, their role in the community can be carried out differently:

Now, let’s, I want to be clear, I don’t recall what years but some of those years I had part-time, half-time, assistant principal. Well, it was a matter of
funding and none of the other elementary schools but, the partner, the school that we fed, had any assistants. But it was difficult to make any comparisons. I used to often wonder how wonderful it would be to place one of the less than two hundred enrollment schools on the site that mine was. That must’ve been heaven. To have a small school like that where you could interact with the teachers all you want and get into the classrooms and just stay there and do those things, It must’ve been wonderful. But with the parents, know each student by name, the community, but, that...that’s an interesting question. I do believe that they thought that the school was being taken care of, but there certainly could have been, you know, with time, you certainly could have done more things. Now the effectiveness of it I don’t know, but there were certainly things I wish I could have done more.

Such as?

More time in the classrooms. Probably initiate some additional aside programs, you know, involving community and activity and so forth. EBF343

You know, when I was at a smaller school when I first started teaching I could involve myself more because the community I worked in was smaller. I could get around and visit a lot of the homes and I did, I did a lot of home visitation when I was in the small schools. I also attended their churches. Occasionally I would be seen at the churches and I think that was expected of you especially back in the early part of my work. But as the area became larger and I had a larger school I was limited as to how much we could be involved. But even at Kentuck we organized a parent volunteer program, sent out letters and we had a form. This was very effective, we had a form where the parents could volunteer, fill out to let us know when they were available and what days they were available. And they would come and we would assign them as helpers in the classroom. EBM324

Still, the literature continues to make recommendations for principals to act as instructional leaders regardless of school size, and talks about the role of the principalship as if it were the same without respect to the size of the school where one is principal (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). As listening to these voices demonstrates, that really doesn’t make much sense. It is an impossibility. These principals obviously felt that larger schools meant that they had to redefine the role depending on the size of their school; that larger schools impacted relationships with students, teachers, and parents in mostly negative ways, that larger schools meant a redefinition of priorities in ways they might not have otherwise chosen, and that larger schools meant that they needed to develop, manage and otherwise participate in more complex bureaucratic structures than they either felt was good or for which they felt they had the necessary background.

Era

The literature demonstrates that rhetorical descriptions of the role of the principal and the metaphors used to describe the principalship have changed over time (Bredeson, 1985; Beck & Murphy, 1992, 1993; Glass, 1986). I did not find that structural or explicit metaphors varied temporally, although I did find significant patterns by level cohort (i.e.,
that era entered the discourses differently for elementary vs. high school principals). This may have been because all of the principals in the study served from the 1950s to the early 1990s and that there was too much overlap to create distinct temporal cohorts. But I did find evidence of a temporal influence on role definition and identity of self-as-principal.

In terms of era, I found that the 1960s and 1970s seemed to have had a profound effect on the role definition of retired high school principals in the sample. This came through in almost all of the interviews with high school principals whether explicitly asked about or not.

The following excerpts come from interviewees across the state. They reveal how the stress of the 1960s and 1970s forced them into roles as crisis managers, into alliances with authorities against students or with students against authorities.

The stretch would be the late 60s—the Vietnam thing—that was a tough go. It just was as a principal. We changed the dress code and loosened the rules, many of which needed changing. The adults got so upset because we were loosening rules. On the other hand, there were the kids who felt all life was collapsing on them. So there were some tough days. I think it’s when the student bodies became grouped into the cliques and almost became rivals. War isn’t the right word, but suddenly there were jocks and hippies. You had to deal with that constant issue. Any day could bring on something in school. The special events became hard to run, whether school assemblies, graduations, award assemblies. It almost got to where you’d dread it. Then we made changes. We’d back off and not get them together, only in a voluntary sense. A lot of that has stayed. Certainly, the student body eventually cycled back out of that. The last four or five years, from the kids standpoint, I don’t see it much different from when I first started teaching in ’49. SWM177F

There was a school board/teacher organization conflict and the students decided that they were going to support the teachers. I think the major reason for their support was that it appeared to them as a way of getting out of class. So they—a large group of students—just walked out of class. And were milling around in the front of the school and so I went out and told them I was going to give them—I think at that time—a half hour to get back in their classes and anybody that wasn’t back in that time was going to be suspended from school. I knew I was playing with fire because I wasn’t sure I was going to be able to get away with suspending a couple hundred students. I gave them that time and made it at the end of the next period, which actually gave them about the twice the amount of time that I had told them, I made a check of all the classrooms and got the absentees. Those that weren’t on the absentee list we got those names and got them separated and isolated the names of those who didn’t go back and then I called in all the secretaries in the school and had them check with the teachers to be sure that we did not, you know, get mixed up with somebody who may have been out because of illness or something. And then we had the secretaries—they were the ones who got the brunt of it—they called every parent to let them know what had happened—and to tell them that their child was suspended from school. As a result of it, we ended up suspending 95 kids in one day. And I only got three appeals out of the whole 95 and those appeals were upheld at
the area superintendent’s level. But it was a touchy thing to do because of that kind of numbers—in the first place, the kids were getting a big kick out of it because one of them had called the newspapers and of course, the story that the media put out was entirely off the mark, which is not unusual. But as it worked out, it was fine and I ended up with the support of the community; but for a while, it was, you know, it was touchy as to when you—when something happens—why, you always have to consider everything and every possibility and every segment of the community as to what their reaction are going to be before you do it. SWM221F

See, at this time I wrote this to the staff, there was a growing discontent; schools were having sit-ins and whatever. There was just a great deal of animosity between some teachers and their students and student behavior. It came from many different things. A lot of it was just simply, purely, mocking what was taking place on college campuses. It was also the Vietnam War. It was a whole lot of things. My statement was that there was a growing discontent between numbers of students, teachers, and parents. I said the success of education was going to depend on teaching the values of a democratic society. John Dewey envisioned a school as a democratic society in miniature. Fundamental to all such social organizations is a commitment to two principles; one, participation in the functions of the society by all its citizens; two, a relationship between the members of the society based on respect and dignity and humanity of each of the individuals. Both principles are characteristics of and necessary in the achievement of a democratic society. In other words, students have to be recognized as citizens of the school and efforts should be made to...include them in the planning of the instruction. In other words, students should have some part in planning what’s going to be taught. They need the involvement, to have a piece of it. Now, that’s hard to communicate to an algebra teacher. SWM175F

There is also a resentment on the part of some principals that they were not prepared for the challenges of the 1960s and 1970s. they were not trained/educated for it, had not bargained for it and were yet shaped by it.

But as I moved through my principalship, I faced such things as Vietnam, as drugs, and other things for which I had no preparation and there were no courses. Everybody was dealing as best they could with the situation. A lot of us were being second guessed. But no one really had any real answers. And we had to develop them ourselves. SWM144F

About that time we had the Vietnam War, we were into the emergence of a drug culture starting in this country. Those brought new and serious problems to the school...brought pressures to the principal. Funny as it may be now, the Beatles and the short...the long hair cuts and the mini-skirts and all of those things caused us to have to deal with problems that we hadn’t been dealing with before. So I think back on it, sometimes it just scares me and I wonder how much we really were able to address the curriculum issues. We thought we were doing it, but it was in an atmosphere that took so much from us to address things that had very little to do with what we had hoped we were all about in education. But those were issues that we had to
deal with and schools always have had to deal with the social issues of the
time, the community issues of the time...seems like the school becomes
the...bears the brunt of those problems. Those were the little...I don’t know
that I was prepared for all of that, and when I think back on it, I think it was
probably the things that drained my energy more than anything else. I spent
more time on those kinds of things than I should have been spending; as
such it took a great deal of the enthusiasm out of being a high school
administrator. It took a great deal of joy out of that because I had to deal
with so many problems that were really non school related, so often.

We had a strong problem with the drug culture, creating many visions,
rumors, and so forth, that the public felt, at the state level, and I served as a
chairman of the principals in this area, and we met in Richmond, and the
state department and legislature, the people thought drugs in 1962 was a
ghetto problem. That was not in our mainstream communities. Pardon the
expression, the principal of Charlottesville and I said, “The hell it is! It is
right in the midst of our universities and it is right in the university
communities.” We said we as principals needed some in-service to know
how to recognize and handle these problems with these students. We know
how to deal with alcohol, we have dealt with it. We had seen that sort of
thing. We recognize it. We know how to deal with it, and drugs, we don’t
know. We don’t know the behavior or students. It took awhile before we
generated anything. It just came about because others saw the same thing in
our community. The diversity of the university community, a lot of things
happen in the university. The major things in history have happened in
university towns.

One point several principals made is that they were not listened to during this time
by central office administration. The interviewees said that decisions were made by people
who did not have a good understanding of what was happening and that they were left to
deal with the consequences.

Well, a lot of the decisions that were made in the latter 60’s and early 70’s
were made by people who were not in schools and didn’t realize what was
going on in a school because no school is like it ever was in the latter 60’s
and 70’s. It was a real social thing and not totally negative by a long shot,
but the way to handle it—the decisions on how to handle it weren’t always
made by people in the schools.

The time is remembered as associated with great stress. Yet, the stories told about
self-as-principal at that time cast protagonist as hero and are painted with a strong sense of
agency. There is pride in having “risen to the occasion.”

The criticism we took from the President and the educational community a
few years ago, was that we had dropped academic standards. It was a
complete misunderstanding of what the mission of the school was in the
60’s and the 70’s, and that was to hold a society together that had come
totally unglued. I was not trained to that, nor were many teachers trained to
be social service people. Many things that twenty years ago were not in the
budget became part of the budget. We put a nurse in our buildings to take
care of the health needs of our children. Schools began to allocate money for books for special needs. We bought them track shoes or gave them uniforms so they could participate. Teachers spent lots of time outside of school as a social agent. The mission of the school became so all inclusive. We did a fantastic job. SWM147F

I felt like I could do the job, and, uh, so that’s when I committed myself to a major in education administration. It’s the kind of thing I enjoy doing. I like to be in a position where I could cause things to happen, and I felt like in education profession the principalship is the place where things happen. And of course, during the time I was in administration ’64-’78, it was probably the most, uh, critical time in American education. That’s when everything seemed to be breaking at the same time. The, uh, Vietnam war, drugs, protests, integration, discipline, everything else you could possible think of seemed to break about that same time. And it was a trying time, but it was interesting because on any given day you had your plans as to what you wanted to do, and hopefully you could fill those particular plans, those daily plans, but many many other things came up too that you had to handle. A very common thing was, well what’s going to happen today, you know, what’s going on today. So it was definitely your interesting time in the annals of American education. SWM271

We didn’t have the problems that we read about or heard about in other schools, but the feelings were there. Occasionally we would have tensions, high tensions. but as time went on it grew less and less. But we had an interesting time then. As you recall, the attitude of education ... authority versus students was confused. That’s one good way to put it. No one really knew how to turn because that was the Vietnam days, too. Students dressed any way they wanted to, rebelled at all things. So we tried some of the newer ideas. We had an open school, open classrooms, well I don’t mean physically. I mean from the standpoint of functioning. Students didn’t have to go to classes if they didn’t want to. If they missed school, there was no real impetus to retain them. It was a pretty free and open atmosphere. We even had a lounge for students similar to junior college and community college. SWM199

Please note that this issue was primarily part of the secondary school context; none of this was discussed in the interviews with elementary or middle school principals.

One impact of era that did come through the discourse of White male administrators across levels was a nostalgic sense that the principal had been a more respected and more powerful position in the past.

I think the school administrator is still respected to (uh), not to the degree that it once was, but I feel like that there was a time during the seventies that any position of leadership was somewhat questioned and I don’t think that the school administrator position has (uh) been revitalized as far as respect is concerned, to the degree that it once was SWM320

When I became principal in 1966 the school wasn’t very much different from what it was when it opened in 1954. The principal was law. The
principal would say, after some thought and so forth, he would say “no” and the students would grumble and go on about their business, but nothing really occurred. But then times began to change and they shifted so quickly that it was almost impossible to stay up with them. SWM144F

I remember a time when the principal was the sole authority in the school. He was it. He was The Man. He ran the school. He decided what was taught. He had his teachers. He had a chance to select his teachers. He interviewed for them and could pick them, do a lot of things. Most of those roles have been taken away from a principal. He takes what central office sends to him. And then the principal...I’m going to get some of these frustrations out! The principal is constantly trying to send memos, send in little studies and little things that the central office needs. All the time he’s doing this he’s into this paperwork so deep that he can’t administer to his school and to his programs. He can have some great ideas on what should be taught and how to do it and have the teachers to do it, but if he gets tied down and bogged down with all this administrative red tape and fiddle-de-dee then he can’t even do his job. So, as a consequence, that kind of holds him back. Um, so, the public school is evolving now to more and more directed from the central office and less and less from the principal in the school. The principal is becoming in a way, was becoming while I was still...you’re sort of a middle-man role and I don’t know that that’s too good. If you’re a principal and been trained for curriculum development and these things, then you should be allowed to do that. EWM346

When I first became a principal, I was THE PRINCIPAL. I was in charge of curriculum, the building, paying the telephone bill, hiring the cafeteria staff, buying the food for the cafeteria; the manager would do that and make out the menu, but I supervised that action. When we went into the book rental system, I had my own book rental. I had to charge enough to pay for the books, but it worked. Now, a couple of years ago for example, one of our parents filled out a little coupon at Roy Rogers, and it was drawn and our school won $100.00. I had to get three signatures in the school administration for our school to accept the $100.00. I can’t buy anything. I can’t. They’ve restricted the fund raising I spoke of before, so it’s all controlled up there. I put it this way. We have all the responsibility and no authority. EWM209

What I think is interesting to note is how this feature of the discourse about self-as-principal showed up differentially by level cohort, continuing to reinforce the primacy of contextual factors in role definition of self-as-principal as revealed by these narratives.
Patterns of trends are well established in the educational literature. Certainly during the decades from the 1950s to the 1990s, many educational trends came and went, some only to come around again. Some of these were alluded to in the transcripts (e.g., CAI, programmed instruction, Family Life education, educational technology, heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping). Only one such trend, however, seemed to have a serious influence upon role definition and identity of self-as-principal across the narratives: the open space school. Perhaps this attests to the controversy associated with this concept or the fact that in some cases principals were “thrown into it” and in other cases, principals spent much time preparing for it. But no matter where the open space concept came in contact with their tenure as principal (i.e., in the early, middle or later years), it seemed to have made enough of an impact for it to be discussed at length and referred to repeatedly in the transcripts. This was true of retired principals across the state and across levels, but was particularly true of elementary principals.

Principals during the seventies in Virginia were likely to come in contact with an open concept school and many were faced with being principal of such a school with little concept of what that meant. For some, “open concept school” described the physical layout of a building, while for others it was more of a complete educational approach. Each principal had to deal with a dialogical swirl of expectations, preparation, community and teacher attitudes, support or lack thereof from the central office and his or her own prior experience and background. Most saw the process as a challenge.

We had some conflict when we opened the open school (Apple Pie Ridge) about how it should be done. No one knew a great deal about it... everybody got a few books to read...there were a lot of different ideas. But in the end, we did it pretty much the way I wanted to do it. I’ve always been the type of person that...I’m going to it pretty much...pretty near the way I do it...unless you can convince me, not just tell me...now if you con show me, that’s fine...but just don’t tell me that we’re going to do it this way, without having any reason for it. EWM158

The other was the building was under construction. It was a chance to go down and visit with the building superintendent and just say, “Could we make this kind of change?” or “How much trouble would it be to do this instead of that?” Nothing amazing or extensive, but still that feeling that you were involved in putting it together physically as well as professionally was also a key part of that year. The other thing that probably I was able to do then that’s not as common now is that the superintendent provided a fair amount of travel, time, and money to go visit other places. The reason being the school was open, the school was large. We did a lot of teaming. That was in the original design. So there were lots of things that we had to work at. Not just me. But people on the staff did a fair amount of visiting of other schools in the country. SWM177F

For some, the concept provided an opportunity for professional development.

The elementary, of course the larger schools we have now, and by the way I haven’t said now the last four years I went up there and built a new school. I call it building. They gave me a hammer when I retired, physical plant, a
Meltzer

beautiful open type school. I had to sell myself on that concept, then I had to sell my teachers and the community and the children. We worked together as they were building two feet from the classrooms over on one side. Now that’s where leadership came in and I was proud of that. The last four years, the last two years or three years, really, working on this was the goal. Training, I went to down at Appalachian, they had a course there, a two weeks period. I went to Roanoke and visited all these different schools. I would bring back, I would send the teachers, of course this was working with Mr. S’, he was the supervisor, and work on that, and we got that program, that was my baby, that was Mr. S’ and my baby, getting that school organized…I learned so much, you see, I went all around this area on the open school and every time I got a chance that I knew someone that had this open concept to visit them and the county, I would go some days and maybe go over night. That was certainly a help for this new situation I was in. I think if you are coming into being a principal if you have had a principal that has been good, what we call good, a well managed school and one that was up, and then schools are so different, not only in this state, in this area, and I feel like a principal should go to other places and not just one day, but just go as exchange, maybe, into a school situation and just be with it enough to know what is the new technique. Techniques have failed. What is good? What do you judge as good? Well that wouldn’t work with my people. EWF280

Others resented the additional “inservicing” that central office required administrators to attend, ostensibly to better prepare for implementation of the open school concept and other educational trends.

You see, one of the things that we also were doing and I think even today we have a tendency to do that, and that is principals are often taken out of the school for…to the central office for staff development kinds of activities and administrative kinds of conferences and indoctrinations or whatever it might be, whatever the issue might be that they have to bring administrators in to do, particularly when you are going from an open class…from a closed classroom, a traditional classroom, as the classroom preparing principals how to provide leadership for that. When you are out of the school, you need to be preparing for your leadership and all of that, but it was taking you away from day to day leadership of the school. SWM218

Some principals talked about the demand of the open concept on teachers and the need to have better teachers to carry it out.

And of course that totally contrasted from Apple Pie Ridge, because Apple Pie Ridge was a totally open concept. We had one large room with five classes in it, and of course the building was specially built so that you could teach your children in your corner with a microphone, and outlets that spoke only to your group of children. And I thought it had a lot to offer, it was a good place for outstanding teachers…it was a poor place for poor teachers. One of the things that we instilled early in the teachers was that they would have to work with each other. And on many occasions, I met with a classroom pod of five groups, and I heard one or two teachers say to a couple of other teachers, “Our pod is pretty noisy. It doesn’t look as if
you’re carrying your end of the load in there today. It doesn’t look like very much was going on in your group today. The trouble, if there was a trouble with open concept, was you’re performing before other teachers all day long. And not many people can take that, because school teachers, just like everybody else, have a tendency every now-and-then, to want to close the classroom door, close the little window, give the kids a little extra something to do, or at least keep them quiet, and rest a little bit. That’s been one of the concepts of education since time began, and it still goes on today. But in the open classroom it’s impossible to do...you’ve got to go pretty much all day long. Now the only way you could do that would be to give teachers planning periods, and we could do some of that using Bible for one hour, and part phys. ed., and so forth, but we just never had the people to really give open education an opportunity to function. You can’t put a teacher in a classroom all day long with five classes...you can’t perform on the stage all day. But in an open classroom, if you and I are teaching in the same room, if you continue to let your class get out of control, and you’re yelling and shouting at them, you’re interrupting me, and pretty soon I’m going to tell you. I’m going to say, “Larry, couldn’t you do a little better than that?”

But, uhm, not everyone wants to teach in open space. Most people who choose to come to open space know its going to be a challenge, and know it’s going to be tough, so they already, you know, are ready to come in there and work, but it was an exciting place to be, and the teachers who worked for me for years found it exciting and they never got bored with what they were doing, and we had a wonderful time. And I expressed to them how great I thought they were. And I did things like stickers. Uh, I used to have a big pad of pink paper, and, uh, I would write notes on it. If I observed for five minutes, I’d write little notes and stick it on their desk, and they liked that, I always did a lot of notes.

It has to be skilled teachers and it has to be teachers who have had experience in that type of teaching before it occurs, and I assure that our discipline was the easiest that I experienced anywhere when we went into that new school. The first thing the teacher and pupils sat down and really analyzed the situation. They were more on their own; they had to consider their classmates and others that were working around, and if they worked and kept themselves in order, talking normally, that there would never be any problems. This has many fine features, but it takes a skilled teacher. I couldn’t have gone in that classroom and taught but I could tell them how and all. EWF280

Some related the open concept to how it impacted the principal’s ability to monitor what was going on.

I feel personally, that I kept a close eye on everything that was going on. My motive was not to ever catch somebody doing something wrong, but I needed to know what was going on. I could not be a good leader if I didn’t. Now open space is very conducive to this because you can walk through an
open space pod, go through five classrooms in less than five minutes, and you know what’s going on. It’s not like having to go down the hall, open the door, walk in, and stand there, with them wondering “Why is she in here?” See, so this was very conducive to my knowing what was going on. I could go through and sense whether somebody, a teacher was sad, not feeling well or whatever. I could stand at the bus door, which I did every morning, and look at the little faces...EWF351

Some talked about the impact the open school concept had on the public relations activities of the principal and how advocacy for the concept became a large part of the principal’s role.

We had to prove it to them that it would work. I think most people are skeptical of things that are new, a new concept. Although open space is not a new concept, it was a new concept to Hardy Road School community. So, it was a constant education. It was a constant, I guess what I’m trying to say, we were continually telling the people what we were trying to do. We were continually giving speeches and talks. We would bring in the parents during the day for our grade levels and say this is what we’re trying to do, and we did that throughout the time that I was principal there. You could not let it go for one single year. You had to continually tell the parents, this is what education is all about, and this is what we’re trying to do. But I think for the most part the community accepted it really, really well. EWM269

Then, too, there was a lot of opposition at the time that we established the new school, because we had carpet on the floors, which parents had never heard of. We were air-conditioned, we had no walls, very few windows, so it was all very new to the parents. And very soon after we began to learn who the parents were that felt a lot of skepticism about the school, we began approaching them, and made them a part of the planning process. And when we began to involve the parents, especially those vocal parents, we found out that what they really were saying, was, we don’t feel comfortable about something we don’t know now. And so we began to teach them, and to get them to learn and understand about what we were trying to do, and then we got some of our best supporters and really didn’t have much backlash, when we opened the school. And a year or so after, we opened, we were getting requests for students outside our school, to come to our attendance area, and they all felt like it was a good situation.

*What do you think caused feelings about the school that were negative before you were able to talk to them?*

Well, I think they felt not knowing was their biggest problem. They knew what a eggcrate school looked like. Where you had long hallways and doors and classrooms going up and down the hallways, and we didn’t have that. And they could see the school being built, and it was a large, open space. And when you have 50,000 square feet, that you kind of roam around in, they felt like that could be a real problem, and so they were worried about noise, and all this kind of thing. EWM338
So, when the school was first built and designed because of the type of school it was and we had carpeting and at that time other schools did not have carpeting, we had a very flexible type of program. For example, reading groups were not held in chairs as a rule, there might be a reading group might be a circle on the floor. Well, needless to say, parents did not understand maybe, this style of school, nor did we have grades, we had conferences. So you see that parents didn’t have grades coming home and they were wondering how their children were doing.

So right away we realized that there was a gap between what the parents knew about our program. So what we started was a volunteer program for parents. And we encouraged the parents to get involved and we started out with probably fifteen volunteers. At the end of my tenure we had over four hundred volunteers, about two hundred and thirty, came in on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. So what happened was once we got the parents into the school, we got them involved with what was going on. They came up with ideas of how they would help and how they could be supportive.

The open space concept became an integral part of the educational philosophy of some principals:

And we did this throughout the whole building. We multi-aged. In working at Looney’s Creek years ago, with the multi-aged grouping I had, I was sold that that’s the way our children should be educated. And I -I’m really for that now. If we can multi-age those students, if something they didn’t get one year, you know, if they’re sitting in that classroom and it’s introduced another year, then they pick up on it real quickly. And I, you know, I’m-I’m sold on that, I really am.

I am sold on a modified open school type, whereas a child is not restricted by walls, by curriculum but on his own. He can develop...I like that open school, that concept, not the building particularly, but that open concept where the curriculum can be developed for the child, with the child.

The open space concept was not talked about with universal acclaim. At times, it was talked about negatively or cynically as just another educational trend that came and went; something that had to be “dealt with” even when principals did not like or approve of the concept.

*Uh, so you were in an open school when you retired? Yes.*

*Did you like that arrangement better than the self contained? No.*

*Uh, any particular reasons?*

Well, I felt like that you had too much interference from too many people in too close a confined area. Basically was the problem as I saw it.

*How did the children react to the open situation?*
Well, the children, uh, I felt, I felt like the children were a little more restless than when they were in their own specific area would be my principle thinking.

*Do you think it affected their academic performance?*

I’d say in some areas yes, in other areas I’d say it improved. Say, for example, in art, music, physical education I thought it was fine; but when it came down to reading and writing and spelling and arithmetic why I felt like there was a lot of disturbances that was, that was not conducive to their best attention and to their best learning.

When I went there it was an open school. The school was built with four-room pods. The outside walls were two-room pods but they all had four room walls so they could be self-contained or open. When I went there it was open and the teachers were unhappy in the situation and I was not pleased with the situation so we decided to go to self-contained units but we could open walls at anytime we wanted to. It was a very flexible school that you could do things like that...I think a lot of things are going to be happening in education in the next few years. We come around in cycles. The open classroom—they went all out for it and had children running all over the buildings. When I went to the school I thought—well, they are like rabbits—so I went back to a more or less self-contained classroom and only opened the folding doors for certain group activities—and having children in their home base and not having children have to pick up all their materials and run there for math and crying because they forgot their books or something. Things go in cycles.

Having an open space school was associated in these narratives with a change in the focus of principals vis-à-vis teachers. The emphasis shifted to developing a team and improving human relations.

I, along with all the personnel selected that go to Bass Hoover, which is a modular semi-open construction type of classroom organization, had anxieties at first but we decided to ask for professional assistance so we had the University of Virginia and had one of the field agents at that time come and help us in-service ourselves. We really let our hair down and did things in personal communicative skills that got us in an attitude to go from a closed classroom to an open. I should point out though, that we had done a little tasting and testing of ourselves at Robinson. We had taken down some interior walls and had the first grade suite together where two teachers would work as a team and some volunteer parent aideship, so to speak there, in the Summer library program. So some of us, some of the teachers who chose, to go to the open concept, in particular, had seen what it could be but still we had to do a lot of in-servicing and letting your professional hair down so that we could be open enough to relate to one another. After all, openness is a concept, first of the mind and then educational philosophy.

My school was a very large open space school, and there were four or five teachers in each of the different learning areas. And you had to get along with each other. You had to have good interpersonal relations skills to uh to
be able to work together as a team and to affect the things you want to happen, you know, by virtue of the fact that we had that kind of set up, that I had to use certain kinds of skills to help people to get along. When I came there, the school had only been open two years. And, there was a lot of dissension, a lot of very strong personalities, a lot of people who had it seemed to-they seemed to have an insatiable need for recognition. Uhm, there was lots of bickering and quarreling. Uhm, and I felt very disturbed by this. Now, remember I’m just coming out of all of this guidance and counseling training. So naturally any kind of quarrel would be uh cause of disequilibrium with me, but I felt really driven to do something about that. So at the end of the first year that I was there, uh organized a retreat that summer for uhm the coordinator of each of my grade levels. Each this, open space school was designed with like five teaching areas in one pod. Each teaching area, uh one of the teachers would function as a coordinator for that pod, which is like a liaison between the teachers and the administration... And we focused on interpersonal relations skills and communications skills. And then when I came back, I had each of the coordinators then do little mini workshops for weeks. On Wednesday afternoons instead of faculty meetings, we would do these little workshops, and they would go to another grade level, not their own, but another grade level and work with the teachers on the skills that we covered. Then I had five people from mental health services who came I-I think it was four times uh throughout that year to do sessions with particular groups of teachers, some of them that were having some pretty serious problems, but, uh, that seemed to kind of start us on a real positive track. And then, from there it was we just continued with looking at you know, what works and what doesn’t these dynamics that are going to-to make people productive... EWF351

Well, I think that first of all we tried to inservice teachers, to get them to feel good about what they had to do. Get them to feel good about themselves and have them develop a personal style which they felt comfortable with. EWM338

In this study the “open school concept” is a clear example of how a feature of the professional knowledge landscape got funneled into local practice in ways that impacted construction of identity, in this case of self-as-principal.

**Federal Mandates**

Federal mandates are also features of the larger educational landscape which, after being made into law, are implemented locally by educators. In these transcripts, two mandates in particular are noted as having had impact on identity of self-as-principal, those having to do with Special Education and Desegregation. Comments about special education are generally restricted to the elementary and middle school cohorts which talk about the resultant impact on their role definition very differently. Comments about desegregation fall along race lines with integration being something to get through with a minimum of trouble for White principals and a very challenging time for Black principals as described in their narratives. (The mandate was for desegregation but the principals generally refer to this process as integration; the terms are used interchangeably in this chapter.)
The following examples from the transcripts were selected to give the reader a sense of the contrasts found in the narratives. The particular excerpts were chosen for their representativeness and are not meant to indicate the strength of a particular point of view.

**Special education.**

Special education was talked about quite differently by retired elementary and middle school principals. In addition to citing strong opinions, several commented specifically on the impact special education mandates had on their role definition.

Elementary principals generally cast the advent of special education in a fairly negative light. Some said they felt inadequate to deal with special education agendas. Others went to conferences to try to increase their knowledge base. It was clearly an area of discomfort for many of the interviewees.

We went through that era along with the development of special education programs. I do recall very specifically my first state elementary principals conference and one of the sections of the seminars I attended was special education. I was appalled to know that 2/3rds of the people there really didn’t know what special education was all about or what the need was. It was very mind boggling, to me. I saw that developing at our level, and I’m proud to say not just to blow the horn, but to say it was functional on our level. We had a handle on it when the stage came along to help fund it so we were in a better position to deal with the thing. EWM188

One thing I would like to have done differently is to have known more about LD kids, ED kids, EMR kids, average kids and gifted kids. I would want to be assured that my program is meeting all their needs. Therefore, if I had to do it all over again I’d spend more time doing problem analysis. That’s knowing ahead of time what some individual needs were and trying to get it to work. You need to have many alternatives for yourself and for the teachers. If a teacher comes up and says this kid won’t or I can’t get him to do something, you have to have some other ways that might work to choose from. I will say that I never had all of as long a list that I could have. EWM185

Elementary principals tended to talk about special education as something pushed on them rather than something that was beneficial for kids. Some principals did not feel that they had the knowledge or physical space required to install a good special education program. Several saw special education, at least initially, as a way to get disruptive children out of the classroom. Some felt, too, that there was resentment among teachers because special education teachers carried lighter loads.

I lived through the beginning of that. After the law that came into effect mandated these services to special groups. It was a pain in the neck. We were not set up to accommodate small groups but we have to make do. Sometimes they were in closets. Any space we could shove them into. That was inconvenient. It created problems, the teachers would come and have so few students that they were not carry the weight as far as work other teachers had to do. The special teachers had problems in their classes but they did not
have to grade papers, they did not have preparations to do and a lot of things
the other teachers had to do. They were looked on as an elite group. I think
we have come to understand that we have to provide these teachers but I
think they should be utilized a little more. Some of them had tremendous
loads and some had a type of class that at the end of the day they knew they
had been there. Our school was so small and we had one or two people in
these class and those teachers did not have to work hard. EWM279

Uh, when I first went to Central Elementary School, we set up the first
special education class, that we had in the county. I have to say, we did that,
not so much out of a desire to help those children who had special needs, but
it’s done out of a premise that felt like we needed to keep those special
students from interfering with the other students as they tried to do the level
of work they were in. So, you know, I’m not real proud to say that, but I
think that was true. Then, when we isolated one, we isolated those people in
special education classes, we begin to offer some materials and some
training that were a help to them. From there, you get into all the specialized
special ed. classes. Uh, I don’t know, you know, special ed. is something
that needs to be dealt with. I know that the students need to be in a least
restrictive environment, but I’m not too sure that all, that the idea of inclusion
in as many cases, as it has been practice today, is that good for those
students, nor is it that successful. So, you know, you have to look at the
money being provided, and this kind of thing, and I think that many times
inclusion is based on a situation where we can save money, but not provide
any special services for these children, so let’s put them back in the regular
classroom. And I think that does a disservice not only to special ed. kids, but
the regular kids too. EWM338

Many of the elementary principals talked about how much time and paperwork their special
education program required. There was also cynicism expressed about whether all of the
children being recommended for special education really needed services.

And if I could deal with some things in instruction—the other thing is that as
a result of having laws that have been passed in the area of special education
I spent virtually half of my time in the child study process. I’ve got child
study backed up—scheduled from before school starts in the morning until
after school is closed. How am I going to get into the classroom? It’s
impossible and the child study process is, I feel. One of these days that all
we’re going to need in education would be qualified special education
teachers—LD resource, LD self contained, EMR, TMR, and we’ll have a
good school system because, eventually every child is going to end up in that
process. I’ve seen it—it’s been a progressive thing from my entrance in
administration until I got out of it. That more and more time is spent in the
child study process determining if this child has a special need. EBM114

Special education, number one, is a headache, and I mean it’s mandated. I
think some pressures that the federal government put on us that are unfair to
the children, to the administrators, and to the teachers. I think that many
times children get referred to special education because someone wants to
get them out of a classroom. Sometimes a child has a discipline problem and
it’s not a special education problem. Many children are dumped into LD and
I mean the word dumped. You know, all of us are LD in one area or the other. I might not, I can’t type, so I’m LD as far as typing is concerned, and we as educators, are putting children, I think in my opinion, many children in LD who do not belong there. Then the second thing, parents are putting pressure, extreme pressure on schools and on children. I had one for instance that insisted that her child would go to a private school because we could not and (which was true) we couldn’t educate the child in the county. But the law says, that if the school system pays for the education of that child, then the school system selects the school as long as it is appropriate to put the child in. But this mother wanted her child to go to Virginia Beach to an exclusive school that cost a hundred thousand dollars. And of course, we had all kinds of problems there. We almost went to due process hearing on it. But special education is important. There are children who benefit from it. In many cases, special education and mainstreaming, special education part of the day and mainstreaming the other part, I believe the child should get back into the environment of the whole student body as quickly as he possible can. I think again that some areas we use it as a dumping ground, and I think committees that are set up to hear these children need to be a little more careful. And we say the doctors have to examine these children, but sometimes doctors will do what you want, say what you want them to say.

EBM333

There were a few elementary principals who talked about how a specific child benefited from being in the least restrictive environment; however, this was rare. Although many stated that all children had a right to be educated, several related real concerns about the amount of resources being used for special education students. This principal’s comments sum up the concerns and ambivalence expressed by many of the elementary principals interviewed:

I think that children who have special needs must have those needs met in all areas. I think there are many, many ways that those needs can be met whether it be children who are very bright and gifted, children who have disabilities, children with all kinds of abilities. I think that we must provide a free, appropriate education for all children. I firmly believe that. I also believe in inclusion when it’s done appropriately. I think there are situations where it is probably not best to include a child in a classroom if other children are having their learning disrupted and it is not in the best interest of the child who is being included then there are situations where I feel that maybe these children should not have inclusion. I think that all children’s needs must be met and, when this disruption is taking place, perhaps that is not the case. I think there are many different methods for meeting these children’s needs. And I realize that teachers have to spend enormous amounts of time individualizing to meet the needs of the children. And, and some, and teachers have limitations on their time as well. Many of our teachers were, are staying to six and seven o’clock at night, working up programs, meeting with IEPs, meeting parents, meeting team members, planning programs for these children and sometimes it is unrealistic to expect that teachers be able to give that amount of time because they have other demands on their time, grading papers, meeting with other parents of other children, taking care of their own families. And sometimes when I feel that inclusion is being done at the expense and total disruption of the classroom, then I have reservations about it. I think that we need to have support of specialists who can work
with the classroom teachers so that they can make the necessary modifications to meet the needs of these children who are in the inclusion programs. I think that we need to have multiple team planning sessions so that the various aspects of the disability are being met whether it’s occupational therapy, physical therapy, any kind of special assistance. I sometimes also have concerns about the dollars that are being spent from the educational budget to meet the needs of some of the special needs children. When we’re spending $40-$50,000 for one child and $5,000 to $6,000 for another child who doesn’t have special needs then, you know, I wonder a little bit about some of the equity there. When parents are sometimes demanding facilities and therapies or training that is not available in the locality. I went to some due process proceedings through special ed. for parents who were demanding hydrotherapy with pools and they wanted it during the school day. They wanted equestrian therapy, horseback riding, full-time instructional assistance, all the time for every need. Parents who want signing persons to come in and work with their child one-on-one all day in addition to a full-time instructional assistant. Some parents, sometimes have been asking, one parent wanted year round instruction, and I’m not talking just summer school, but I’m talking 260 days with all the therapies included every single day, transportation to and from these events, and then a tutor for homework because they said that their child was not being able to do the homework appropriately and they were not, the parent was not equipped to help the child. Sometimes I think that there is some unrealistic expectation. And I think that when we can get that ironed out, when we can make it more realistic then I am more receptive to inclusion. And when it is not totally disruptive and when we have the facilities and the personnel to make sure that the disruption does not take place for all children. I do believe that we need to meet needs, but I do think that there are limitations and, I’m not sure that the players buy into that at this point. I just feel that the other students have rights in lieu of the numbers of dollars that we have in the educational budget and that there are only so many ways you can slice that pie and I think you need to think about the ultimate benefit for all children. EWF345

When the retired middle school principals in this study talked about special education, it was, as noted in Chapter 3, seen as a positive service that their school offered to help meet the needs of all children. Special education programs were talked about as assets and were contrasted with what existed before. Middle school White male principals saw special education as a gift, a way to really meet different student needs, rather than the burden which elementary principals perceived it to be. In the words of these interviewees, having the ability to meet the special needs of students was as essential component of an effective school. (The quotes below are reproduced from Chapter 3 so that you can see the contrast.)

[Effective] schools basically provide positive programs for its students. They have things going on. They are effective in as much as the students aren’t all “A” students, but the students are all making some sort of progress within the area. In most schools you have learning impaired, retarded, etc., they have to have programs to allow them to progress at the rate they are able to. At the same time you have kids with high ability - they ought to be challenged so that they are working to the highest note they can possibly get. MWM133F
When I first became a principal the only special program was remedial reading and it was a good program and it helped a lot of youngsters but we had many youngsters with other problems. We were beginning to get speech working with students but it was limited and then all of a sudden, we found that we needed special education programs for students who mentally or educationally weren’t keeping up with the group and it was sort of like water rolling downhill, as it got going, we saw that, no, you couldn’t group all these students together. You had to have students who were mentally handicapped, emotionally handicapped, learning skills handicapped, the learning disabilities program which is one of the newer of the special programs really took a lot of youngsters and suddenly said, here are youngsters who do reversals and can’t spell—never will be able to spell—and we can’t educate those and a matter of fact, they can go on to college and be successful. Then, of course the last was the gifted and talented program and we said here are youngsters who are very, very bright. I wonder how far they can go if they are challenged and challenged they were to the point these youngsters are doing college level work and many of them early in high school. A beautiful job, but not at the expense of saying they can’t grow up as a normal youngster. I think that is very important to have the opportunity to play in sports and do the other things that everybody else gets to do... Any youngster in that role needs to be part of the group and this is what we have done also with special ed. in most cases—we have tried to keep the youngsters in as normal as school setting as possible, provide them with special help they need to function. The laws says the least constrained environment and that is very, very important. MWM210F

Now we have teachers in every... I don’t know how many special ed. teachers we have now in the county. I’m sure that it has to be about 20% of our work force; our special education teachers, or at least that’s what I’ve been told. And every program imaginable to meet the needs of young people, not only with, ah, handicapping conditions, but every other condition whether it be emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, um, attention-deficit disorders. Ah, we’re getting more and more of young people who meet the criteria for special populations. And we have the programs to meet those needs. We have made so much, much progress in that area, there, there is no need for a child to come through our school system whose need isn’t met either by special education, or on the other end of the spectrum, with gifted programs. MWM337

**Desegregation.**

The topic of integration forms a rubric of sorts in the transcripts which includes discussion of busing, civil rights, desegregation, stories of Others (Black or White), and stories of discrimination. Much of this is elicited by direct questions, the responses to which are seldom followed up on by additional questions. The discourse features dealing with integration fall along race lines.

In order to understand the narratives, it is necessary to understand that integration occurred differentially around the state. For some areas, it was not really an issue since there were few or no African-American students. In other areas, Virginia acquired the dubious
legacy of closing down public schools rather than integrating them. In some areas, until it was ruled unconstitutional, a system of “Free Choice” was implemented. Some counties integrated the schools voluntarily while others did so only under court mandate.

Almost all of the time, integration meant that Black students were then allowed to go to White schools. In a few counties, Black schools remained open and were integrated; typically, however, they were closed due to falling enrollment, county restructuring, or lack of upkeep. This had an adverse affect on the career tracks of many African-American principals who were often demoted to assistant principalships after having been principals of Black schools.

Desegregation typically meant that one or two of the best Black teachers were sent to White schools. This meant that historically Black schools lost many of their best teachers. It was a strategy seen by Whites as necessary to convince parents that their children would not lose out with Black teachers. Tales of the success of this strategy of using token exemplary Black assistant principals and classroom teachers are common in the narratives of the retired White principals.

Now, I think one of the biggest things, to be real honest with you, that during this integration program I was so blessed to have one of the finest human beings in the United States to be my assistant principal. And he was a Black assistant principal and he was the greatest guy I ever saw. He was able to relate better to the Blacks in the beginning than I was. We would sit down and discuss our philosophy, especially when we first came together. And our beliefs on how to run the school. We had a difficult time, that is if he had a difficult time with a White student, I’d support him and he’d do the same thing for me if I had a difficult problem with a Black student. And we agreed on the philosophy of “fair, friendly and firm” and it worked well in our school, I thought. We also presented a picture of unity to the student body and staff. When we went down the hall we’d say hello to each other and "How are you, Mr. Clark?" And "I’m fine, Mr. Brown, by golly, how’s everything?" You know, that kind of atmosphere and I think the staff and students were helped when we became integrated. We helped them in this particular situation, yeah. SWM108

In fact, my very first year as a Principal of Weyanoke Elementary School, was the first year of integration in Fairfax County. Ah, we had on staff there, one Black teacher. And, as I recall, we only had five Black students. How this was in a population of seven hundred students and around twenty-six teachers. So, it was really a minority number. I shall never forget the first day of school. Let me preface by saying that I had one excellent Black teacher, and we are still friends today, because of our experiences together. I thought, “Here I am, an inexperienced Principal. I had never been an Assistant Principal. I came out of a sixth grade classroom right into this building with nothing to back me up, so far as experience. And as far as calling another Principal, as working with the Civil, ah, the integration. No one had had experience in that area, I couldn’t call anyone either...This teacher and I sat down before the first day of school and we decided that we were going to be honest with each other. That was the only way we could survive this. Because we knew we would have problems. Because this community had never had a Black teacher...Their students, the White
students, had never gone to school with Black students. So, we knew there had to be some problems coming down the road. Sure enough, first day of school, at the end of the day, I had two parents in my office at the end of the day...I knew exactly why they were there. But I was determined that I would make them tell me exactly why they were there...Ah, they did not want to do this. They simply said, “I want my child moved from Mrs. So-and-So’s room.” My answer to that was,”This is only the first day of school. Why would you want your child out of that room when you don’t even know what’s going to happen...I said, “I must have a good educational reason to move a child. Finally after much talk, they hung their heads and said,”She’s Black.” I said, “This is not an educational reason. I will not move your child.” ...They said they would take it to the Superintendent. I gave them his telephone number. Ah, and told them, I certainly would think about that. And it would certainly work out and that I would keep an eye on everything as I would every child in that school and I tried to be, you know, though my answer seems cut and dried, I did try, in my southerly way, to convince them, you know, that the teacher would not have been hired, if she were not good. Not knowing that was true at all, but anyway, I was lucky. I did have a good teacher. I did tell the teacher. At the end of the day the teacher came down and said, “Were there any here?” I said, “Yes, two.” And I told what my reactions were. They did—one did call the Superintendent. The child was never moved. The next year, parents were asking for that teacher...So, yeah, I had a good teacher. It always helps. EWF248F

The level of racism against which all this occurred is minimized by the White principals. White principals talked about there being few or no “problems”, making general statements that were often followed by how they had no trouble relating to Blacks, stuck up for Black teachers, or “handled” situations that came up with Black children. The White principals tended to characterize their behavior as “fair”; what this seemed to mean was “colorblind”, and it seemed that many felt they went beyond the call of duty by sticking up for “their” African-American teachers. Several talked about having African-American friends, or supporting an African-American teacher as “proof” that they were not prejudiced. Yet, even in stories ostensibly meant to show their lack of prejudice, subtle and not-so-subtle negative images of African-Americans were sometimes used (e.g., “shucking and jiving type” when describing an African-American student; characterization of African-American boys and men as big; talking about Black colleagues and stressing how good they were, as if to say that was exceptional; fewer Blacks were equated with “less trouble”). While this tone was not in every interview with the retired White principals in Virginia, it is prevalent enough to certainly remark upon. In their insistence that there was not a problem with racism or prejudice, they often inadvertently made visible what some of the problems were.

And, of course Fairfax County, we had very little trouble, because there were so few Blacks. And, up until the last three years I was a principal, I had no Black students in my school. Then they added an apartment complex, and then I had Blacks. And, I welcomed it because I felt these children out in the world were going to have to deal with them and they needed to have the experience of being with them. And, of course, from the last few years, not from that complex, but some from that complex, some from the community, I had quite a few Oriental children. And I thought this was good. EWF168F
Well, if you want me to tell you the truth, I never had problems as far as relating to minority groups. In the late 40’s, it was almost impossible for a White person to associate openly with Blacks. When I wanted my Black friends to visit me, I would ask them to come to my house at night. Thank God today through the Civil Rights Act, I am able to invite my Black friends over to my place in broad daylight. In my school, we never had any problems in implementing any provisions of the Civil Rights Act. For one thing, those people who were minorities in my staff were always given the first chance to choose, if they had to, on any matter that involved personal decision-making by staff members. Personally, I never had any difficulties in relating to the Black teachers in my school. You should never let people feel uncomfortable to be around you.

I really feel like that we had the respect in the two schools that I was an administrator of in the county of the Black minority. Which was the only real minority culture that we had in the county, usually about 8 per cent which is a low percentage. I feel like that the early days of integration went very smooth which would have been probably 1962 and I feel like that the Black student was accepted and there were some of the national upheavals, and that kind of thing, that affected attitude of minorities from time to time. Which was rightfully so, it probably should have. I feel like that there was probably a fight between a Black and a White youngster that it was blown out of proportion as far as the racial connotation. If two, if two White youngsters, Caucasian youngsters, had a fight it was just a fight, it was, you know, that was the way it was looked at, but if there were some sides taken in regard to this with even the small percentage and there was some ill feeling, to some degree, among the races when a fight took place maybe because of how it turned out or the way it was handled by the administratively, or that kind of thing. And (uh), you were probably in that situation you were going to be wrong 50 percent, with 50 percent of the, of the 50 percent of the time you had to make a decision in regard to it.

For Whites, integration was something to be gotten through, preferably with a minimum of fuss. Standing up to parents was told as a point of pride.

I cannot recall any instances when such an issue played any significant part in our school community relations. Early on, we had Black parents who came to me experiencing concern over what they viewed as discriminatory practices by one of the teachers in the school, who gave to the Black students in her class special reading materials. The parents claimed these materials were different from what the White students were receiving. When I investigated the allegations, I found out that the teacher was doing that to help the Black students catch up with the rest of the class. When I explained this to the Black parents, they accepted my explanation and we never had any more complaints related to discrimination.

I did feel there was some injustice. I was actually appointed to Groveton Elementary School which was in an old community and when the County integrated they advised, especially the Black teachers, not to go into schools that were in the older communities in the County because there would probably be more bigotry in that type of school than some of the newer
schools with newer developments, which was true. And because of the racial overtones their racial patterns were almost set in some of those schools and I was appointed to Groveton Elementary at that particular time and I did have two Black teachers in the system and I could see how parents very often were unhappy because of the situation and I handled it the same way that that principal I worked under as a teacher first of all, you know, Just let me know where you want your child I won’t transfer your child out of that room. Just let me know if you’re pulling your child out of the school and sending him to a private school. EWM190F

Although they did not know what to expect and although they described it as a difficult time, the White principals talked about how “it wasn’t too bad,” how the problems, if there were any, came not from the kids but from parents and the community.

There was nothing that really created a problem that calls it to your attention. The teachers moved out to the other schools and it was just as if they were being transferred under any normal process. And the fact that our no one school received a disproportionate amount of minority groups moving in suddenly. It did not become a radical adjustment. There was some concern by parents of their students leaving newer facilities and moving into the old all Black high school which had now become an intermediate school—Luther Jackson. And there were the normal talks about facilities, about wash basins, toilet bowls, water fountains, and in the parent groups that we met with these people, the parents themselves took care of it. They said, “Well that’s old wives’ tales, what do you mean a water fountain? It is ceramic, it’s washed, it’s scrubbed, it’s sterilized, what difference does it make who drinks out of that water fountain?” So I think that people saw that some of their old wives’ tales, their old traditions and all were based on ignorance or superstition or lack of facts. I think the parent orientation, the human relations activities and the publicity given by our public relations office really served a good purpose there. MWM210F

For White principals, in general, integration did not seem to be a defining moment but just another in a series of potential crises to be navigated.

The exception to this was in the narratives of the White male middle school principals who generally told stories which indicated a real empathy for the minority students and told of how they defended students’ civil rights because they believed that was the right thing to do. Their narratives also admitted the difficulty of the time.

So the community was completely divided even not only among the Whites but among the Blacks, er, there were people in the Black community who felt they should retain their own school. They feared the loss of identify, the loss of control, and, ah, the dissipation of their cultural, ah, area, because, uh, at that time Johnson Hill, ah, where the Black Hoffman-Boston was, among the Blacks was, ah, thought of as the cultural Black center of Arlington, and they, ah, ah, had developed, um, many wonderful kinds of cultural organizations and, ah, history and so forth, so it was a very, a community filled with a great deal of pride. So even among, in the Black community there was divisiveness, there was uncertainty as which direction they ought to go. Added to at that time the Nazi, ah, group in Arlington was very strong and
very vociferous. So we used to have public hearings and at the public hearings the whole gamut went from the ultra, ultra liberal to the ultra conservative to the right wing including the Nazis. So we would have Nazis passing out hate literature as we walked into some of these meetings. So this is the kind of school Thomas Jefferson was in 1965 when we integrated.

Van Dijk (1993) makes the point that stories about minorities are routinely told to express and communicate personal experiences, much like those solicited in these interviews. After many of the White principals made a general point about how there was not much of a problem regarding integration in their school, they launched into more specific stories about encounters with individuals or other stories based on personal experience with students, parents or teachers. Van Dijk observes

Such stories usually have an argumentative or persuasive “point” rather than an entertaining function. Whereas large parts of conversations about minorities are generalizations about ethnic minority groups or ethnic relations, personal stories provide concrete information, which is used as supporting “evidence” for a more general argumentative conclusion. The weight of this evidence is epistemological. (Danto, 1985; Dipardo, 1990). It suggests that the events told about are a reliable source of knowledge, because they represent a lived personal experience. At the same time, it is suggested that the (negative) conclusion is not ethnically biased but is supported by the facts (1993, p. 126).

Van Dijk talks about two kinds of personal stories told by non-minorities about minorities. One uses evidence to “state the facts” so as not to be perceived as racist even though the point of the story supports racist norms. The other is what van Dijk calls a counterstory which is told precisely because it counters prevailing prejudices. Thus van Dijk contends that stories about minorities are not so much expressions of personal experiences as expressions of group experiences told as dominant group members.

Kempner (1991) in his discourse analysis of interviews with Oregon principals found another discourse feature around integration mirrored by the interviewees in my study. Kempner noted that the patterned response of “no problem” by White interviewees when issues of equity and diversity were raised was not matched by the perceptions of minority interviewees. This points out “how easy it Is for privileged perspectives to create blinders about diversity and equity” (p. 20).

Being an African-American principal during desegregation in Virginia was a far different story. The narratives are replete with stories indicating how difficult things were. They described integration as a process built on eggshells.

Well, I had been a principal for two years when schools were ordered to be integrated. The first thing that happened, being a Black principal, we heard from through the grape vine, and it was a pretty good reliable source, that Black principals lost their jobs when schools were integrated. And it did happen at a county adjourning our county. A group of principals, all Black principals, started to meet. We met in each others homes. We met in the schools. We met in lawyers offices. We discussed how we were going to handle the problems. So we decided to make an appointment with the
Superintendent, but he didn’t know he would meet with all of the Black principals. He thought he was meeting with one and then later on, we made an appointment with the Superintendent on Saturday morning. We went to his office, and we sat there and we discussed our problem. Of course, he didn’t like it because he had seven to eight principals rather than one. But he did talk to us, and we told him what our thoughts were. He said to us, “Suppose next Saturday the group of White principals came in and make certain demands.” And of course, we told him they didn’t have this situation. That they weren’t, their jobs weren’t in jeopardy because of integration. And, of course, he said, right then, “I have no plans to fire anybody.” So we left happy. We had workshops sponsored by the University of Virginia on integration. Professionals came in and all teachers, all administrators attended. We did many hours of work-shops preparing for integration. Just before school opens, every school had an open house so parents of both races could visit that school and meet the teachers and principals. And I’ll never forget it, on a Sunday, this man, a community leader came to see me. In fact, he ended up on the school board. Everybody in the community respected him. He had a son who was going to be in the second grade at our school. And he walked up to me and he said, I want to talk to you, and I said fine. In my office or in the halls? He said, “Let’s go in your office.” And so, we went in the office. He said, “You and I are going to make this thing work. We are not, this school is expected to blow sky high because of integration, and we’re going to make it work.” And that day I felt much better about the whole situation. It worked. We didn’t have the first racial problem with teachers nor students in that school.

The pain absent in the White principals’ narratives is very present in the Black principals’ stories, descriptions of the demands put on them, and in descriptions of the coping mechanisms they said they used to deal with difficult situations.

We met, I can remember meeting several times in the library of what is now the middle school discussing how to go about it. It was suggested by the Black group that the schools would be paired off—primary, elementary, just like it turned out to be, the only difference was as I can recall...was that Carter G. Woodson would be the high school, and Buckingham Central would be the middle school. The reasoning for that we felt that Carter G. Woodson was better equipped, the science lab and the gymnasium, but we felt that there would be opposition from the White side, if I might say that, to that. So like I say I wasn’t a big dog then, but I remember those discussions. Now what went before the school board I don’t know. Of course, everything came out the way we recommended it except the secondary high schools. That summer before integration I guess it was from UVA, I’m assuming it was from UVA, there was a workshop. Teachers participated I guess on what to expect what to do not to do. I was in grad school, so I wasn’t here, but when I came back, and school started in September or August whenever, I had a sixth grade class on the second floor of what is now the middle school. Nobody told me, nobody told me, but I felt that my class was stacked with special, with certain people’s children. I was supposedly a good teacher. Let me back up before that, but I don’t know if you remember but about two years before that you had freedom of choice, where some Black teachers were put in White schools and White teachers in Black schools.
My wife was one of them, she was moved from Washington Carver to Buckingham Primary, this was before integration, I think one year. She didn’t tell me at the time, but she said she cried and cried, because she didn’t want it, but after she got there and went through it, she was O.K. But anyhow we went outside and, I was on the second floor, and a Black boy and a White girl got in a scrap. So I had a habit of preaching anyhow, so to speak, you know, that’s my style. So after everybody went to the bathroom, they came on back, it was near the end of the day, I said, “Well, close the door. We’ve had a little problem.” I said you know what we had problems when we were separate and I said a boy and a girl got into it, a couple of licks were passed, nobody was hurt. I said the boy happened to be Black and the girl happened to be White. And I said I don’t want to hear anymore about it. I said I don’t want it to happen anymore.” I didn’t. EBM349

Integration, I had a lot of apprehension when I learned that schools would be integrated. And I don’t think that I was alone. I think some of the others shared the same feeling that I had. But I think one of the things that we tried to do and I think it was real important was to set the mission tone ...that was important. I was paired with Dan River Elementary School and Dan River was just about three blocks from where my school was located. So what we did, I took the primary grades, grades K-3 and the school I was paired with had 4-7. So we each had four grades. And teachers had to be shifted. In other words, the upper grade teachers had to go to the elementary school and the primary teachers from Dan River came to me. We had no particular problem, no real problem. But I didn’t find out about the apprehension that the teachers had about coming to Kentuck until about two or three years later, a couple of years later. As you would realize, our children, the children that we had, the Black children, were used to Black teachers. And naturally, the White children that were coming to us were used to White teachers. So, we paired the teachers. I put a Black and a White together. Our building was situated so that in changing rooms you just go right across the hall from one room to another. And I thought that was good to start with. You know, to start integration. The White teacher would keep them a half a day and the Black teacher would keep them a half day. That worked out I thought real well. We didn’t have any problem with the children, didn’t have any problem with parents. You know that’s another thing...you know your community. You’ve got to respect their feelings whether they’re right or wrong, you’ve got to respect it and then plan your activity accordingly because you want things to go smoothly. So that was the arrangement that we made in integrating the schools. EBM324

There are stories of trying to work under tremendous pressure. The contexts against/within which the Black principals and the White principals were negotiating their identities, while ostensibly the same, appear very different in the narratives depending on vantage point. Contrast the following accounts of similar places and times to those told by the White principals:

May I cite an example of the pressure I did have when we first had integration. I was told, as a Black principal, I could not fire or recommend suspension of my White teachers. But it did happen where I had to recommend suspension or recommend firing and it happened overnight. It
was a situation whereby we had worked with this particular teacher on several occasions and the supervisors had done the same thing. We had given certain instructions about this particular incident. The teacher had left the classroom, just before dismissal time and two children got into a fight, one Black and one White, and as a result of the fight, a tooth was knocked out of one of the children’s mouth and we had to recommend suspension on the spot. Strange as it may seem, to our surprise, the superintendent went along with our recommendation and that teacher was fired on the spot and that was the kind of pressure you may consider a bit outstanding. EBM117

Now integration at Henrico Central Elementary School was pretty rough. I remember coming to my school one morning taking the KKK signs off from the doors and lightposts leading to the school, those types of things. We had what was called “Freedom of Choice” that did not work. It, as a result of “Freedom of Choice” caused the enrollment to diminish and left the one school, the Black school that I was the principal of, with a very small enrollment. That took place throughout the entire county...That’s “Freedom of Choice”—the Black children go to the White schools but not the White children come to the Black; so until the federal government decided that that was not a good practice, it was not working. The schools were not becoming integrated as they wanted them to be. We still had schools segregated, so as a result, they closed all of the Black schools in Henrico County. The principals of the Black schools in Henrico County became assistant principals of the integrated schools. EBM196

For example, the way that the teaching staff was integrated was to take the best Black teachers out of the schools that had been previously all Black and put them in schools that were mostly all White. Then take the brand new people who were just hired, who were White teachers, and put them in the previously all Black schools. These were the tactics that were used. I just openly said “No, you will not.” I did that. Now I can tell you that I didn’t get to the top of the list that way but I said “No, you cannot take my best teachers out of my school.” I said, “No, you don’t. You have orders that you must integrate but this is not the way to do it. I will just absolutely have a fit. If you think you’re going to take them, I’m going to make a big public scene. This thing is not going to happen.” And they didn’t do it. They really didn’t do it. But after I left they did it. EBF249

I think the Martin Luther King assassination was almost, was a catastrophe in this area. Because the children came to school the day after the assassination, and we began to have problems in the secondary schools more so than the elementary schools. And in one particular one was in the inner city was the George Washington High School in Alexandria. And it seems that the Black students had asked that the flag be lowered to half staff, and the administrator had not been given any orders from the city administration to do that. And it caused confusion. Well then several people did come over. Some of the ministers in this city, some of the people that were staffers in Alexandria’s administration came and talked. We did, it filtered down to the elementary school because there were parents who had children in secondary and they heard about it and they came over. But a number of the parents came, and they were sympathetic, they understood. In fact some of them

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began to apologize for the Ray man that shot Martin Luther King and said they were ashamed. And I told them that that was one White man and I know most intelligent Blacks were not going to blame the entire White race for what had happened. And we hoped that later they’ll realize that when one Black man or Black woman does something that it isn’t the whole race. And so it was an adversity for us, but it taught us that one person is not a race. And therefore you shouldn’t extend your hatred or dislike to the whole group for what one person had done—and likewise we felt that a lot of the people who they should not do that with even our race. They should not say that one Black man or Black woman that has done something wrong, that the whole race is to blame. EBF224

These accounts are not stressed in the interview transcripts, but are told almost matter-of-factly, along with lists of coping strategies and how these retired African-American principals found strength from their religious background.

I prayed, I prayed, Oh, I prayed and took it one day at a time, because it was rough. You couldn’t do anything right. I often said, many times, I wish that I was an Albino, no color, neither White nor Black. So, if the Whites were accusing me of being prejudiced, the Blacks were accusing me of being prejudiced. You didn’t stand much of a chance. You had to cut it down the line and do what you knew to be right, and cut it straight down the middle. That’s all you could do. Take the rules, apply them as fairly and squarely as possible and let the chips fall where they may. It worked for me because they found they couldn’t shift me in either direction, but I couldn’t sit up there and worry about who was prejudiced or who wasn’t because if you look it, you find it and I didn’t have time for that kind of thing. Those people who came in and were willing to be supportive and help, I welcomed their support and we went on from there. Those who were anti and what not, I listened to their screams and squeaks, smiled, thanked them for coming and went on about my business. EBF137

You don’t take things personally. That was the number one thing that I worked on myself for when I was asked to become principal. It was during an era that I felt there would be a lot of resentment toward me and maybe nasty things, I had been warned that people could be nasty. I decided no one was going to ever insult me personally because I would not hear it. And you know they didn’t. Now I don’t what they said! (laugh) But they didn’t attack me because I didn’t hear it! EBF343

I’ve not mentioned this before, in order to be a good administrator, you really need a good sense of humor, because when you can laugh through the trying times you can make it. EBF132

These African-American principals felt they were “under the gun” to prove themselves as competent. In addition, they stated that they needed to bend backwards to appear as unbiased and fair as possible in order to avoid backlash from the district or the community-as-large.

I can think of one during the time of integration that was the toughest that I had to make. And that was shifting teachers. Shifting teachers from one
school to the other. We had about 24 teachers. And the superintendent told me I could only keep nine. The others had to go to other...most of them went around the corner about three blocks from where I was. But then there were others that had to go a little bit further. Furthest person had to go about 10 miles from...that was the farthest. None of the teachers wanted to go and I didn’t want to send any of them and I was hoping the superintendent would do it. I think he wisely chose not to do it himself. He told us that we had to do it. Because to have 250 teachers angry/mad with him I don’t know if that would be so pleasant even for the superintendent. He probably wouldn’t want. So that was one of the toughest decisions that I had to make and I thought over that thing, prayed over it. Because one thing that was about it was you see I had a neighbor and a friend that was involved and would be involved in the transfer. And made it extremely tough. Because I’ve always emphasized to my faculty and other people being fair...you know treat everybody with respect and being fair to everybody. And I heard through the grapevine that my neighbor was one person who was going to stay and she wasn’t going to be transferred. But our rooms were numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on down - numerically. And I decided that I was going to keep all teachers from room 1 to 9. And all of those by the way were on one wing - they were the primary teachers. Everybody else had to go. So I lost a friend. But I feel I was fair. I feel good about it even now. I think if I had that to do all over again, I lost a friend for 10 years and a neighbor too and I hated that so bad but I had to do it. I had one situation during the same period where one teacher put the NAACP on me. EBM324

As discussed in Chapter 4, African-African principals felt they needed to establish partnerships with parents in order to succeed in their mission to educate all the children in their schools. They spoke of the process of having to establish trust and a track record before developing positive relationships with parents and teachers.

I did have some dislikes among our faculty group when we first started, ah...When we first started desegregation, we had several that resented coming to the school and this was natural to expect and I felt that after they were there a time they would fall right in line. They soon considered our school to be one of the better schools in the city. But it did take some time for them to establish confidence in me as a leader. EBM117

We had faced a lot of pressures people tell you what this person used to do or that person. And then by being the first Black principal, in 4 out of the five schools I served as principal, it was a pressure on me as a Black woman to show that I could succeed. And it would be very interesting, some of it even with all the foolishness, some of it was very interesting. I was at Lee School that was at one time had been the school for all downtown Alexandria, the White school for downtown Alexandria, Olde Town, and I was there, and this person came in, they wanted to see the principal. Well both the secretaries were White. So I guess they expected the principal to be White. So the young lady said, “Are you the principal?” “Oh no,” said I’ll go get Mrs. V-, she’s the principal.” And so the person kept looking over my head when I did come out there still waiting for the principal. And so she said, “This is Mrs. V-.” And the person just flushed very vivid. Pink, red, whatever you want to call it. The point is they just weren’t accustomed.
But once they got to know me I didn’t have any problems there. Other pressures are trying to do what the predecessors had done. But I told them whenever I came to school to my stamp and my monogram is NSV, and it took the NSV standard. So most of them began to understand that.

One thing I told [the Superintendent] when I was interviewing with him that I don’t feel comfortable with an assistant. I feel comfortable in running a school by myself. I think sometime maybe it can be good if you got a good one, but sometimes I think it can also be...cause you more problems than they can-. And if I’m going to make, if I’m going to make a decision I don’t want anybody second guessing me. There are situations and I know of situations where, especially with a Black-White situation they have a tendency to have, you know, White people go to the White person, and see that’s not a good situation. And I think you can accomplish more in working with people because perception of people, of Black people, I think people have learned a lot of things. And I think dealing with my experience I tend to think people are, despite what they may have heard about Black people, I think when you get to that point where you have people going on from the community to the Superintendent saying, “Don’t move him.” Because that was rumor, there were rumors at one time...a shake-up. And we did have people petition, even the staff...going to the Superintendent and saying “Don’t move Mr. P-. Let him stay here with us.” And I think, you know, I’ve had a good experience. I really have, always good.

Both Black and White principals agreed that if everything had been left up to the children, it would have been fine. They said that it was the adults who had the problems, not the children.

When we first desegregated in 1971, I became head of desegregation affairs and I dealt with all of the problems that deal with both the Black and White communities. And I was right in the middle of them. There were so many false things that were said and done and got into the paper, and otherwise that did not have a factual basis. You know, exaggerated things like a Black and a White boy got into a fight on the second floor of Warwick High School and the Black boy threw the White boy out onto the street and broke his collar bone. You know, things like that. Or people would say they saw the fire truck—the ambulance going by Ferguson High School. They’re having a riot over there. The ambulance was on the way to somebody’s house, somebody had a heart attack. You know, those kinds of things. Running down to Ferguson saying, “What’s going on?” Nothing’s going on really. All kinds of false statements were made about what was going on. If it was left up to the children everything would have been fine. We had to stick adults in there and once we put them in there then they got their feelings into it, and then we got problems.

When I became principal of Hollin Meadows, that particular year, 1965-66, was the first year of integration in Fairfax County. Hollin Meadows drew from Gum Springs those of you who are listening to this and are familiar with the Gum Springs Community, we drew half of the children from the Gum Springs complex. Gum Springs children went to James Lee School which was a total, totally Black school and one of the Black schools in
Fairfax County and let me just say, that it was a difficult time period, I think, in Fairfax for teachers as well as parents. I think the children adjusted very well to the situation and I think some of the parents and teachers had a difficult time, I think, adjusting to the climate, at that point in time.

One aspect of the discourse about integration which was quite revealing was the level of ignorance both Blacks and Whites had about each other. Before integration, the counties that had Black and Whites schools ran them as two separate systems so Black and White principals and teachers rarely had the opportunity to work together. Both groups, according to these narratives, had developed inaccurate assumptions about the other that needed to be resolved.

It took a long time, and I give teachers and principals in the state of Virginia in those areas where they integrated a great deal of credit for helping to work through those early days of integration, because they really got none from the community, including the churches. It was strictly, the only thing that was integrated in the community was the school and maybe the jail. They’re the only people who had to deal with it. And I think it was really—my hat’s off to principals and students and teachers that got through those early days when they really didn’t know each other, they didn’t understand each other and know what to expect and what was upsetting to Black students and what didn’t. I remember the first time that the terminology of calling a Black young man a boy—that was something that we’d done all our lives—boys were boys and girls were girls. That was something that we found out the hard way. That was a terminology that somebody had told these students was degrading—it wasn’t in the eyes of people who used it, but in their eyes it was because that’s just the way they had been brought up. We were not taught that—you know to be careful with that. Some people would say well that’s ridiculous. They are boys. They’re fifteen and that’s what they are—and did not want to overcome that hurdle—or that sometimes you just don’t use words that are offensive to other people even though they’re not offensive to you. Things of that nature we had to find out the best way we could.

But I tell you one thing that the Whites were not aware of until integration, some of the White principals. We had enough of the deprived children to have these Title I programs. The Whites didn’t have that percentage. It was not high enough to qualify for Title 1. Of course we had the summer programs and we were responsible for organizing and supervising these programs along with the regular program that we had to work up for the coming year. And when we integrated they were talking about the Title I program that they were going to have and how much more money were they going to get. And we informed them, “Man, you’re not going to get any more money. You’ll get the same salary.” They thought that we were subsidized—our salary subsidized by the federal government because we had these Title I programs. We didn’t get a penny more. But as far as salary, you know White and Black, they were paid the same thing according to the number of teachers and the number of students that you had...I tell you there was one difference that we learned about after integration that we didn’t know about before; when we’d go to these state meetings, for the White
principals the superintendent paid their room and board. They’d turn it in and get reimbursed. We didn’t know about it. No one had told us so we didn’t turn it in and he didn’t tell us to turn it in. Because I think it was his responsibility to let us know because we didn’t know. Most all of us Blacks were paying our own room and board. I think we did get travel, but as far as the room and board we did not get that until after we integrated. You know you get with the other people and you learn a lot just in talking. Just like they thought we were getting paid for operating a Title I program and we weren’t and they didn’t know that when the schools were segregated. So we learned. EBM324

Desegregation as a discourse feature in terms of its impact on development of identity of self-as-principal was much stronger for African-American principals than for Caucasian principals. Once again, the primacy of socio-cultural factors in role definition of self-as-principal is reinforced.

Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995) image of how features of the professional knowledge landscape get funneled and implemented locally is aptly sketched by these narratives. Those dubious that what goes on “out there” impacts role definition on a local level have only to listen to the voices of these principals as they describe construction of identity of self-as-principal to realize that context extends way beyond the walls of a particular school.
Religion as a Discourse Feature of Narratives about Self-as-Principal

Some Thoughts as to the Prominence of Religion as a Discourse Feature

Discourses regarding God and religion are used to describe role/identity and to bridge the personal and the professional for many of these principals. This may be a Virginia phenomenon and may be connected to leadership discourses in Virginia in particular and the South in general with regard to Christian values. For example, the 1965 NASSP survey of the senior high principalship found that many more principals from the South than from other regions objected to the separation of church and state and prohibition of prayer in the public schools than did principals from other regions of the country, and that 69% of the Southern high school principals, as opposed to only 35% nationally, said that they had regular religious events (i.e., prayer, Bible study) at their schools (Hemphill et al., 1965). This may be part of what is reflected in these transcripts.

The prominence of religion as a discourse feature may be a reflection of the fact that in many people’s minds service and religion go together and for many education is a service profession. Or, the frequency with which religious references are made in these transcripts may be a direct result of historical metaphors connecting education with the ministry or the tradition of seeing education as a calling, a vocation.

Other possible explanations for the prominence of religion as a discourse feature include the definition of community involvement by many of these retired Virginia principals as involvement in church and civic organizations. This is somewhat problematic as it assumes that being active in one’s church somehow satisfies the requirement to be involved in the community-at-large, or can at least be the centerpiece of community involvement. The underlying assumptions here are that everybody goes to church and that being involved with one’s own church directly connects to larger community involvement. While in some rural Virginia communities this equation of community involvement with church involvement may be true for the most part, such remarks were made by principals from across the state. A few of the African-American female principals specifically mentioned attending a variety of churches (one even mentions visiting a synagogue). Perhaps one’s identification of oneself as a church goer is congruent with being a model citizen and thus is a part of the identity-as-principal these interviewees want to construct for the interviewers. This is likely, at least for those who emphasized the importance of being a role model.

Hermans and Kempen (1993) make the point that “the voices of groups or institutions may, more or less, dominate individual speech acts” (p. 77).

People, who are educated according to the faith and dogmas of a particular religion, may reflect in their individualized speech acts the words they have heard so often in the past (ibid.).

It is important to note that this is not a generalized discourse about religion and/or spirituality but an almost exclusively Protestant-Christian discourse. Perhaps this is connected to the fact that schools in the United States are historically premised and connected with White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Perhaps this is just a reflection of the dominant religious face of Virginia (Bradley, Green, Jones, Lynn & McNeil, 1992; Handy, 1984). A last interesting note: almost all of the epithets used
in the interviews are somehow God/religion related as in “Oh Lord!”, “hell,” and “damn.”

Religion as a discourse feature manifested itself in several ways across gender, race, time period and locality. As might be expected, proportionately more interviewees from Southwest Virginia exhibited this discourse feature and proportionately fewer interviews with retired principals from out-of-state or from Northern Virginia contained religious references. However, explicit religious references are found in over 40% of the 83 interviews analyzed for this study. This is despite the fact that no direct questions about religion are initiated by any of the interviewers. For many of these retired Virginia principals, religion and the Church seemed to provide a framework for understanding and presenting aspects of identity of self-as-principal.

Eight Ways that Religion Entered the Discourses About Identity of Self-as-Principal of Retired School Principals in Virginia

In these interviews of retired school principals in Virginia, religion entered the narratives about self-as-principal in eight distinct ways. I have summarized each patterned way that religion entered the discourse and have then listed several examples so that you can get a “feel” for this discourse feature. I have tried to present excerpts from interviews with Caucasian and African-American male and female principals at different levels across the state, and I have included the counties where principals served, so that you have a sense of how pervasive a feature of the general discourse of retired Virginia principals interviewed for the Oral History of the Principalship project this was. Obviously, there are many more examples than what are presented here.

The first way that religion entered the discourse was when the interviewee explicitly indicated that s/he had a general sense of being thankful, blessed, looked after (i.e., “I feel blessed to have been able to do this work”). These statements came at different points in the interviews (i.e., as part of a response about a particular issue, at the beginning, at the end). Some examples follow:

And I was always blessed with good secretaries. I don’t know why God, in his infinite wisdom, chose to arm me with five of best secretaries a man ever had, but I really—the managerial, general running of the office, et cetera, et cetera, was done by my secretaries. EWM315 (Roanoke)

I think I have been blessed by serving under two very, very fine administrators and I have learned a great deal from them. And the thing that I often found was that in a crisis situation we as human beings revert back to how we were taught or handled in a similar situation. I often give thanks that I had two very fine principals that I served under as their assistant principal. Those experiences carried me through a lot because immediately I’d have a flash back as to how it was handled. SWM191F (Fairfax)

First, I thank God for giving me so many blessings and so many opportunities then secondly, I thank the community for accepting me as a principal, then I am so grateful that I have so many good teachers to share and to work with me. I’m so grateful also to so many parents and above all to so many wonderful boys and girls. Without the support of these people
and certainly without, without God’s great grace none of these things would have been possible and as, as I look back and think about the days that we shared as principal. I wouldn’t trade anything for them. EBM106 (Norfolk)

If I had it to do over again, yes. And the fact still remains, I’d consider it a blessing that I lucked upon the opportunity to be a principal, and that’s the God’s truth. MWM212F (Wythe/Fairfax)

A second way that religion entered the discourse was when interviewees indicated a more direct sense of having been guided by God to do this work (i.e., to be a principal). This was more prevalent among retired principals from Southwest Virginia than from other regions of the state:

I really feel it was already mapped out for me. That I didn’t have a whole lot of choices in what I was doing. As opportunities presented themselves, I just followed God’s plan and I went from one thing to the next. And ended up where I ended up. If I had strengths along the way, I guess it was the belief that God was going to take me there. SWM350 (Shenandoah)

Uhm, but, as I reflect on-on my life and on my experience as an educator, I feel that-that God called me to do this. And he made those things happen that needed to happen for me to be in the position to be where I was at the time I you know was there. And to have the people that I worked with. And, I just feel like that-that I had a mission from God, and that every day of my life as an administrator, that I was fulfilling his wishes, and that I did. Too many wonderful things happened while I was an administrator. EWF351 (Roanoke)

I walked in and talked to them for a few minutes and that was it. They asked me about my background and all of that; they knew me. So I went in and then that was really the reason, and maybe this, some people won’t think this but I know it, my mother was praying that her child would become a principal, and if my mother prayed for something you might as well just shut up and turn it over to the Lord. So with much guidance and much love and support, my mother was back of me all the way in that. EWF280 (Allegheny)

Several of the interviewees made an explicit comparison of the principalship with the ministry, or talked about the influence of the ministry either as a calling for oneself or as the calling of a family member. These principals talked about feeling a mission to serve which could be fulfilled through the principalship:

I was a son of a minister and I felt I should perform some sort of public service. I thought about medicine, I thought about ministry, and I thought about education. I ruled the others out for one reason or another. I enjoyed being a student myself. I liked my teachers. I enjoyed the ambiance of the classroom and the school so I chose that. SWM187F (Fairfax)

I don’t see a lot of difference between being a school principal and being a minister in self-sacrifice. Just as you are willing to sacrifice for your family, a whole family sacrifices for a principal. You cannot dedicate yourself to a
position as principalship and have everything else in your life be the same. There has to be a willingness to give of yourself, to not take vacations when you think you deserve it, etc. The only way you can make a principalship easier is to sluff off somewhere. You actually become a shepherd to a flock and you have to be willing to do what ever is necessary to guide people in the best way possible. There are no short cuts. SWM147F (Fairfax)

I would just like to say that personally I have always said, and still believe, that a professional educator is parallel if not secondary, it’s parallel to the ministry of spiritual needs of an individual because you are dealing with the soul of a child at an important time of his life. I still believe that. That the education is really a profession that is on a par with the ministry And I would say then that in a broad sense, that while professions still have to contend with a lot of bureaucratic paperwork and documentation, look for the results of that in the molded life of an individual that you can see in a given year. EWM188 (Frederick)

Throughout a number of the interviews, questions about ethics prompted interviewees to name Christian values that these principals said guided their actions or decisions. Others made references at a number of points to how certain Christian values, or how being a Christian, strongly influenced how they thought things should be done in schools. Again, this tended to be more prevalent among principals from Southwest Virginia.

Maybe discuss your professional code of ethics and give some examples of how you applied it throughout your career.

I was a firm believer that I wasn’t going to ask a youngster to do anything that I wouldn’t do. If I was going to tell them that they shouldn’t drink and drive, then I wasn’t going to drink and drive. I was not even going to allow myself if I was a drinking person, which I am not, I wouldn’t go out in public drinking where a kid could see me. I just felt that I had to be a day to day living example of what I wanted them to be. I guess that is what I concentrated around. I tried to be a good Christian person and I would like for them to be the same. SWM350 (Shenandoah)

Well, I may not be the best Christian in the world, but I am a Christian. And I know that there’s a separation of church and state, as it should be, but there’s nothing in the separation of church and state that disallows me to follow the ten commandments of God in my church and in my everyday life, and even as an administrator of my school. As long as I don’t use it in an evangelical way of trying to impress or teach other people a doctrine or whatever. I’ve always felt the ten commandments of God were the basis if any decision I ever made in regards to fair play. If you take out the first commandment, the second commandment, all the commandments that relate to God, and use all the other commandments: thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, or any of those things that are in the ten commandments, there would be a pretty good code to live by.

You know, certainly you want to be honest, and the golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, certainly is a rule that used to be across the top of our schools. It edged my school in 1941, when I started school, and yet, we don’t have that anymore. And you know, I’ve been
noticing more and more a leaning in this country, certain groups and elements, to get morality back into our schools. Well, there are a lot of people who’ll tell you, “Oh gee, morality never left our schools.” But they did and they have in my opinion, because we have been denied the opportunity to teach values. EWM315 (Roanoke)

I just went on the values that I had learned from my parents and from the Bible and just kept those values before me and what is right and what is wrong and I just went on that philosophy to go ahead with education because I knew they were right, I felt they were right. There has to be right and wrong there can’t be just in between, there’s got to be the dark where the umbrella as well as the...it has to be in other words you’ve got to draw the line someplace and if you’ll stick with your values and values you learned the Bible and values you learned from your parents and that respect, it, it will uphold, it will hold out. EWM176 (Shenandoah)

Well, being a being a Christian, and feeling that God had led me to do this job, I approached every day wanting to do His will, whatever that I did. So I felt that whatever was going on at my school, was something that God needed me to be doing. If it were a mad parent sitting there, if it were an injured child, if it were uh a teacher that was upset, if it was (laughter) an unfinished report. Those things had to be dealt with. And, I just asked the Lord to always give me the patience, and the wisdom to be able to do whatever I needed to do. And, I feel like that, because of that, I did not let most of the problems bother me on a personal level. Uh, in understanding a lot about people’s behavior, if a parent came in angry, I didn’t take it personally. I tried to look at the situation to see how I could help that person be more comfortable, to resolve the issue so that they left there feeling that they had support, and they had some answers and some solution to the problem that they had. I felt like I was playing a vital role when I did that. Uhm, when a child was injured, you know, just always ask the Lord to help me to make the right decision so that we could get the proper medical attention or do the right thing for them. And, because of this, I never felt like I was doing it by myself. EWF351 (Roanoke)

A fifth way that religion entered the discourse was in statements interviewees made in reference to the mandated separation of church and state. Most of these discussed reactions to, rebellion towards or deliberate defiance of the mandate of separation of church and state. Interviewees also made explicit mention of how they felt this mandate affected what one was allowed to do/one should be able to do in the public schools. At points the statements were quite emphatic, making visible once again the fused personal and professional identities for some of these principals:

I think that schools are reflections of the community. I think schools are reflections of society. I think society is changing to some extent and it wouldn’t surprise me that even reading the Bible in the classroom might pass. I remember it didn’t even have a prayer to begin with. It might even be acceptable by a majority of people. It might even be acceptable. When I say that it means that there is more of a Christian atmosphere in the public schools. I am not talking about Christian atmosphere in terms of believing in being a Protestant or Catholic or any other religion. I’m talking about the
characteristics that are involved. That means a lot of love and openness. I think that communities demand that of us. We have to be more open with them and include them in our schools more than we ever had before. I don’t know if that’s an issue now but I think it will be one. EWM185 (Prince William)

Of course back then we could, you know, have a prayer or whatever and of course you know times have changed as you know.

So was that common to include a prayer?

It was then, up until I can not remember the time, maybe the mid 1980’s or whatever. We did that a lot. EWM344 (Pulaski)

Well, leadership, it was as I’ve indicated that it was the church played a big part in the church in the school life. You were checked on leadership. I was prominent in our Presbyterian Church...I felt like it was part of my privilege to develop those children’s spiritual development, that the child needed spiritual, or we call it now values. I encouraged the teachers to have some kind of devotional and they could use it as a way for children to take part in the Bible story reading. They, themselves, could do that - little stories and poems about values that developed. And I was teaching when Bible reading and prayer was taken out of the school. I remember saying, our minister was talking about it, and as I walked out the door of our church, I said to our minister, “I like vegetable soup best. You bring that down to the jail.” He looks at me real peculiarly. I said, “My school, I’ve already told my teachers, that they are to have the Bible reading if they wish to. I’m not saying you have to. And the prayers, if you want to pray individually or collectively, all right, I will back you up, and if they come and take you to jail I’ll go with you.” That was a joke, but I meant that—that I did not feel that my government should tell me what I was to teach the children in that line. They told me I was to teach the whole child, and to me the spiritual development is important in teaching that child, by example or by some words. Actions speak louder than words. EWF280 (Allegheny)

Being a Lutheran is why I said that. I guess I should keep that out, but there again, we used to have religious assemblies and of course they were religious, but they were predominantly Protestant. Why, I don’t know. It was just done. A lot of things were done in the name of religion, or in the name of public education that was in the role of religion. The strengths are the home, the school, and the church. I have always believed in that, and regardless if the school is private or public, the home, and nobody can refute that, I don’t think. You can embellish on it. SWM348 (Montgomery)

But I tell you when a youngster doesn’t, can’t even know God in the classroom, but yet he only knows it on Sunday morning, something is wrong. Because God just isn’t there on Sunday morning. If a youngster in science has to say, “Well teacher, all this is the scientific evolution of man. I thought God created man.” Is that teacher supposed to say, “Boy, I’m going to cut your tongue out, you can’t say that in this classroom.” You know, someone has to answer those kinds of things. And if I had to advise
administrators that are in it today, and I would be right with them, we need to
get answers to those questions. Why can’t we ask those questions? Why
can’t textbooks, I know in World History for years, I taught two theories.
The evolution of man, the biblical and the scientific. I would teach them both
and let the kid decide. But I think we are being so anti-Christ right now, that
we are making him out to be a villain in this thing. And I think it is
dangerous, really dangerous. By the “right” movement, I think that’s
dangerous too. I am not here to say that one is so much more right than the
other, but I am saying that a lot of things we were doing...weren’t doing in
public education. SWM350 (Shenandoah)

At my school some kids came to me one time and said they wanted to read
the Bible. I said, “Get a few of you together and I’ll be the sponsor. Now
listen, we’re stretching the rule here, brother. But now if you’re just trying to
con me, you and your Bible are going out that room.” We got along pretty
good down there. I let them go read it. I just checked so that they weren’t
riding the late bus...and you know why we had static? Some parents wanted
to know, “What are they doing over there?” and “Who is indoctrinating
who?” I called them in one day and said, “It’s all ...” and you know what
some kid said to me, “It’s my damn mother.” See, those are facts.
MWM212F (Wythe/Fairfax)

I know that a lot of scholars of the constitution, far greater than myself—I
have spent some time studying our constitution. I haven’t taught it for so
long, from when I was a teacher, but I do know and understand that the
fibers of our constitution, the forefathers who framed our constitution never,
in their wildest dreams ever thought to totally disallow our religious
heritages and our value heritages that we had developed as being true for the
very reason of our declaration of independence. Honesty and justice was the
most important thing, and we cannot have a society if we’re going to
disallow the teaching of honesty and if we’re going to disallow justice and
fair play. These are values, and they have to be taught. And to say that they
can’t be taught because people are going to object, people will always object,
but we’ve got to teach them. I don’t think we have teach them by cramming
them down somebody’s throats. If somebody doesn’t want to say the
pledge of allegiance, we’ve always allowed them to step outside in the hall.
We don’t do away with the pledge of allegiance because someone doesn’t—
some religious groups don’t, and I’m not saying that they’re right or wrong.
I’m just saying that I’ve always accepted that, that if someone’s religion and
something we were doing constituted a violation of their religion, I’ve always
allowed them the prerogative of leaving the room. But then, if you left the
prerogative of leaving the room, there’s someone who objected to having to
leave the room. See. Now, we’re on an entirely different subject, you see.
Eventually you whirl around everything to where nothing can be taught,
because someone somewhere at some time is going to disagree or object to
it. So that comes to the point where you have to use common sense, and
there are a lot of nice papers written about common sense. EWM315
(Roanoke)
Principals from across the state talked explicitly about the role of church work in the life of the principal. Interviewees discussed how they viewed involvement in the church as part of their identity of self-as-principal.

I think they need to be active in the community. Now, ahh, as far as taking myself as an example, ahh, I think that one needs to be very involved in their church. I think they have to have a church background in order to even start making a dent in any profession much more so the principalship because there is so much adversity and tough decisions to be made and I think you don’t have a God to follow back on I think you are really in trouble. You need that. SWM350 (Shenandoah)

The other thing that I think is important is the example. I think my example is going to be looked at far more carefully that what I say to those students. I may say that this is what we should do or shouldn’t do, but if I say “do this” and I go out and do something that is not reflective of that, they are going to say I don’t really mean what I say. I think that’s important. And that’s why I go to church. I go to church, and I’m not ashamed of it, and I don’t hesitate to tell kids. I don’t preach to them as far as that’s concerned, but I don’t shy away if they ask me. MWM133F (Arlington)

Yeah, the nights are controlled by the schedule and your willingness and feelings about how important things are. I always thought the involvement in those activities was crucial to your status with people. When you’re talking four nights a week at some stretches of the year, naturally something’s got to give. In my case, I lived with it, so certainly it would have been family needs, or some of my church activity meetings which I’d get in conflict with, but I think what happened to me more so is when I had an open night and had a responsibility that was important to me. I think church would be the best example because I’ve been pretty heavily with that in leadership roles and in choir, so I could have spent two nights a week at church. Well, then you get a Tuesday night meeting at school and then a church meeting. That probably wasn’t fair to the church meeting because I’d have to go to school. But, not too bad of frustration. SWM177F (Fairfax)

You know, when I was at a smaller school when I first started teaching I could involve myself more because the community I worked in was smaller. I could get around and visit a lot of the homes and I did, I did a lot of home visitation when I was in the small schools. I also attended their churches. Occasionally I would be seen at the churches and I think that was expected of you especially back in the early part of my work. But as the area became larger and I had a larger school I was limited as to how much we could be involved. EBM324 (Pittsylvania)

Well I used to go to about two or three Sundays a month I used to go to the different churches that the children attended and that was just like old home day. Of course, the church is a major institution in the community, I think, next to the school, so that was my thought that that was one way they could understand that we had the same standards of life. EWF278 (Roanoke)
Church was frequently mentioned in conjunction with other community and civic activities. For many, church activities and attendance were a cornerstone of their public relations activities.

*Please discuss your involvement with civic groups and other community organizations.*

I feel like principals have an obligation to be involved in their community and to let their children and their parents see them in a community setting outside of the school. I feel very strongly that parents need to serve as a role model. That they are held up to a higher standard of ethical behavior. And that they need to make their school community, their community. I know a lot of administrators do not feel that way, but I think it’s an old fashioned idea that one has some value in our system today. When we are trying to establish attitudes, and some standards, and I feel like that my belonging to churches in the community, and Jaycees, and city groups, and, uh, those kind of things. I think it was important to show that kind of community support.

EWM338 (Pulaski)

*What role did you play in public community relations?*

Each time I had an opportunity to go out into the community and serve as a speaker, sometimes judging little contests that the children had, writing contests and things like that. Getting involved with the Girls’ Club or the Scouts. Every time I had an opportunity to go out and maybe spend the week-end with the scouts or go by and read or share some of my experiences with the Girls’ Club or the Boys’ Club or anything like that, whenever I was called on to come into the community, I would as much as possible go. I also would visit within the churches of the people in the office. I’d go to church with my secretary sometimes, and I did not try going to church with all my teachers, because it was too varied. But, I did show up in churches with the people in the office. And, of course, they were different denominations, and many times different races.

EBF132 (Newport News)

With our community relations I’ve tried to go to activities in the community. The churches, I would go to programs if a child told me he was going to be singing, or if appropriate if I could I’d go...EBF224 (City of Alexandria)

And as an educator, you are called on quite frequently. You take charge in church activities, you are going to be involved in civic activities and some kind of civic club. Uh, recreational activities, but normally, when a person comes to a community as a teacher they are called on very frequently to assume leadership within the community, it’s just an expectation, and I think anybody involved in teaching, specifically administration, will find that out. I think it’s very important because it gives you an idea, an opportunity to get involved with the community, to meet the people, uh known experience, church activities, leadership and church activities, leadership and civic activities and other kinds of opportunities within the community you are in the opportunity to take a leadership position. And as a principal this is part of it, it’s an expectation, and it’s a good one. These people are interested in
the educational being of the community. And there are goals, whatever that they have within the community. When you assume an administrative position you know you will assume a leadership position within the community as far as civic, church and other opportunities. And it’s good. It’s good and I enjoyed them all. I think it helps with the principalship. People know you, and get to know you, and that’s important. SWM271 (Radford City)

The organization that I have spent the most time with is my church. In the role of a church member I have taught Sunday School and after I became an administrator, I taught adults, which was an interesting balance from what my early training was. Particularly, I have done a lot with training families in parenting and communication. I’ve even done money management, that sort of thing. I also have sung in the church choir for just about as long as I can remember. And uhm, the church that I attend, is in or near the school. where I taught or as an administrator. And what that has done is given people a chance to see me as an educator and then me in a volunteer role or in a service role. Through my work in the church, I also had other positions; such as I was the first woman member of the Pastor Staff Committee, I was the first chairman of the Finance Committee, and I was the first woman lay leader in our church and I have served as a result on some district and state committees. This has given me a broad overview to meet people on a variety of levels and lifestyles. It also helped me grow professionally. I’ve done some civic things basically that relate to the school; served on the local Mill Mountain Zoo committee, I’ve worked with the United Way, and have been a part of educational groups such as and Delta Kappa Gamma. But, primarily, my life has been spent in the school and the school committees. The PTA, I am very active in the PTA served on the county level. I have also served as President of the local Reading Association and served on the State Meeting Council and found that to be very rewarding. EWF352 (Roanoke)

What role did you play in public/community relations?

Well, there’s always PTA. I was active in PTA. And, of course, in my personal life I was actively involved in the church, Business Professional Women’s Club, DAR, many activities that enriched me, and, in turn, I could use to work with the people I was involved with. Because I think, education, you have to advertise it unfortunately. To make people realize that you are in there doing good things in your schools, and give them an opportunity, too, to come in and invite them. Let them feel free to come in and observe what’s happening in the school. So that they feel that it is a community activity, and good things are happening. EWF168F (Fairfax)

Several of the retired principals interviewed made explicit mention of prayer as a coping strategy for self or others. How personal religious beliefs guide and for a context for actions of self-as-principal is vividly portrayed by these examples:

Well, I am...I must be honest with you, I am a devout church member. And, I never went to school without walking through that door and asking for guidance during the day. I think you have to have inner strength. You do.
You have to have some inner strength. And I had good supervisors at the county level that I could always just pick up the phone and talk to.

EWF180F (Fairfax)

Sometimes you walk and talk to yourself—answer yourself. You know they talked about taking prayer out of the schools, and you can’t do this and that. I still contend that you can, maybe can’t do it loudly and openly, but many a day I walked down the hall humming. In one of those pictures, one of those teachers mention that she doesn’t know what I’m humming, but I am thinking something from a superior being. EBM349 (Buckingham)

But I always had the philosophy that the most important thing was to try to understand and I had a little prayer. That was before things got so that we weren’t supposed to have prayer in school. That’s how long ago that was! But I had a little prayer that went something like this; and the children appreciated it too. Grant me great teacher eyes to see, ears quick and keen, lips that laugh, strong and tender hands, but more than all, a heart that understands EWF220F (Prince William/Amherst/Fairfax)

How did you handle the civil rights issue, the busing issues, the NCEE Reports, etc.?

I prayed, I prayed, Oh, I prayed and took it one day at a time, because it was rough. You couldn’t do anything right. I often said, many times, I wish that I was an Albino, no color, neither White nor Black. So, if the Whites were accusing me of being prejudiced, the Blacks were accusing me of being prejudiced. You didn’t stand much of a chance. You had to cut it down the line and do what you knew to be right, and cut it straight down the middle. That’s all you could do. Take the rules, apply them as fairly and squarely as possible and let the chips fall where they may. It worked for me because they found they couldn’t shift me in either direction, but I couldn’t sit up there and worry about who was prejudiced or who wasn’t because if you look it, you find it and I didn’t have time for that kind of thing. Those people who came in and were willing to be supportive and help, I welcomed their support and we went on from there. Those who were anti and what not, I listened to their screams and squeaks, smiled, thanked them for coming and went on about my business. EBF137 (Newport News)

The last discrete way that religion entered the discourse of these retired school principals from Virginia was through the interviewees’ frequent use of religious metaphors or expressions. While these were as likely to be irreverent or not intending to be “religious” at all, the frequency of their occurrence supports the use made of institutional discourses and imagery (i.e., of the Church) available to use as speakers and how these frames are borrowed to describe many aspects of our lives.

That was pretty much my personal philosophy for education. I had a sign, John, under glass on my desk that I looked at every morning and probably was the last thing I looked at every night when I left. It was a picture of a young man and the caption on that picture said, "I know I am somebody, because God makes no junk.” That sums up my philosophy and I looked at
it every morning when I came in. So come hell or high water, I didn’t care how great the problem, when that young man or young lady came in, that picture was there in front of me and I always knew that there was some good in that young person in front of me, even though he may have done something I could have wrung his neck for and come down on him really hard. I just kept that in the back of my mind. SWM191F (Fairfax)

Back when I first became a principal there wasn’t this vast, big book of guidelines, rules, regulations, and everything that we have today. It’s like a Bible for doing what you are supposed to do. You are guided by these policies and regulations. The thing that brought that about of course was the teacher union. Those were all developed after that. SWM218 (Prince William)

And I do feel that I did help a great deal to make Haysi High School a better, a much better school when I left than it was when I came. I didn’t satisfy a lot of the people; Jesus Christ didn’t either, he got crucified. And if he was in Haysi, they’d have crucified him a lot quicker than he got crucified. But that’s another story. SWM319 (Dickenson)

That’s great. Now what do you think teachers expect principals to be?

Well, I think a lot of them think that we’re Santa Claus and God all rolled into one. EBF224 (City of Alexandria)

What does it take to be an effective principal?

The wisdom of Solomon. I think you have to have a lot of empathy for people. Really love people and children and enjoy working with both, and being willing to, many times forget your personal likes and dislikes and plans and when something comes up with them, you have to put it first, its not always pleasant to the rest of your family, but I feel, to me it was a twenty-four hour job because so many things you can’t resolve, and you bring them home and think and pray on them and go back the next day hoping you come up with the proper solution. EWF168F (Fairfax)

If you’d ask me what a principal was, I’d say a principal has to be about a cross between an apostle of Jesus Christ, a psychiatrist, a mule skinner, a coal miner, a fighter and a Baptist preacher. You know, he’s got to cover all of them. MWM212F (Wythe/Fairfax)

If you do have a personal problem, sometimes, if you trust this person as an administrator to be professional, which they should be, it does not hurt to say, “Look, I’ve got this—I want you to be aware of it because I don’t want it to affect my teaching.” I’ve had teachers do that, and I very much appreciate that. However, once it’s told to you as an administrator, it should be like between you and the priest—it should not go elsewhere. EWF119 (Portsmouth)

We were having this tremendous problem up here and we thought that school can’t open tomorrow unless everyone knows that you have a shirt on
and you have a belt and all these things. We spent one full day and night up there at Lee High school. So Melvin Landes broke the ice and said, If it will help you any, a kid came to me and said, “Mr. Landes, Jesus Christ wears sandals. What are you going to do tomorrow if Jesus Christ walks through that door with sandals on?” “Well,” he said, “If Jesus Christ comes through that door tomorrow, son, with sandals on, he’s not going to this school, just like you’re not.” Now that’s a fact. MWM212F (Wythe/Fairfax)

As these examples show, religion entered the narratives of retired Virginia school principals as they discussed identity of self-as-principal in a variety of ways. Without more information, it is hard to know the extent of the influence that these principals’ religious beliefs and convictions had on their work as principals. But this might be a fruitful avenue for further exploration should we want to better understand educators’ motivations and role definition.
**The Case of Fairfax County: How a County Persona is Constructed in Narratives about Self-as-Principal**

**Introduction**

The cohort of twenty-two interviews from Fairfax County is a good case in point of how the context of a certain administrative culture and a particular place converge in the narratives. The transcripts attest to the degree to which these principals felt being in Fairfax County influenced how they saw themselves and defined their role/identity as principals. Retired principals from Fairfax, whether Black or White, male or female, elementary middle school or high school, construct a county persona through their words. They dialogically defined themselves against/within this confluence of era/location/administrative culture which they reflexively created and were created by. Thus, the Fairfax County interviews, taken as a group, have a distinct flavor.

These retired Fairfax principals talk about Fairfax County as an entity, an environment in which to be an administrator, an exclusive club of which they were a member. Their narratives chronicle events with themselves as heroes set against the backdrop of social era, political events, rapid growth, and the demands of Fairfax parents and situated within a network of connective tissue of names of other principals and administrators who served with them. The larger-than-life personalities of Fairfax County superintendents and central office administrators (such as Woodson, Coffey, Davis, Ford, Torrice and Burkholder), punctuate the transcripts as interviewees describe interactions with these people and define themselves in conjunction with them. Technical descriptions of policy implementation are repeated again and again. It is almost as if these interviewees felt that it would be impossible to describe self-as-principal without making sure that the listener understood the persona of Fairfax. “Fairfax” is almost as important as themselves in their narratives about self-as-principal.

This makes sense given the strong presence of Fairfax County’s administrative culture. In general, statistical researchers have not found a strong link between district level authority and control and principal role definition at the school level (Crow, 1990). However, some qualitative researchers have found that principals perceived a variety of control mechanisms used by central office which influenced their actions and perceptions of their role (e.g., Crowson & Morris, 1984; Peterson, 1984).

These different control mechanisms, working together to channel and direct the work of subordinates, form a web of influence over a wide variety of decisions, behaviors and norms. (Peterson, 1987, p. 140)

Crow (1990) notes that “principals experience district centralization in terms of the mechanisms central office employs to control their behavior” (p. 1). So it would make sense that Fairfax, a highly centralized and bureaucratized school system would be

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perceived as a big influence in the narratives of identity of self-as-principal constructed by retired principals from that county.

But, principals do have some autonomy as to how they perceive and respond to central office demands (Crow, 1990; Morris et al., 1984). I found some of these differences in responses to be individual whereas others fell along gender or level lines. However, there is little doubt that a strong district level administrative culture can shape the leadership behavior of principals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987).

It is important to recognize that the making of a district’s administrative culture is not unidirectional. As in all other aspects of culture and identity, the emergence of persona is transactional and those who are shaped and influenced in part by culture in turn shape and reinforce that culture (cf. Dewey). Even acts of creative insubordination are defined by and rebound back to the object of rebellion. The interaction between a “district” and its principals is as much shaped by the principals as by the district, although this is not always immediately apparent.

**Fairfax County as Educational Leader**

The retired Fairfax principals in this study talked about their programs as innovative and their school division as a “leader” in educational trends.

I think there are a lot of eyes in the nation and school system that are watching Fairfax County very closely. Merit pay, of course, is not new, tried in a number of instances where it has been successful, where it has been less successful far out-numbers the successes. I think, Dr. Spillane and his particular program under the Skillful Teacher, I think it has merit and will work. I think there are some wrinkles that got to be ironed out, but I think it is like anything new, John, and when we try to attempt to implement in education by change, teachers, educators in particular, are reluctant to change, and I think anytime that we attempt to bring about change and move people out of what I call a degree of comfortability you heighten or increase anxiety. What we are experiencing now in the county is that influx or period of anxiety. This, too, shall pass. I’ve been in education long enough. I remember about twenty years ago when Fairfax County first implemented teaching by objectives a totally new concept. I remember the anxiety we all went through when that edict came down from on high. Gosh, within two years there was no other way to do it. We were so comfortable with it. Merit pay may take a little longer to implement and catch on but there is no doubt in my mind that it is the new way in the future, it is here to stay. If it takes merit pay to get teachers in the the ranks back into the ranks of the professional, at a professional level, receiving a professional pay, there I can’t do anything but endorse that because I have long believed them to be deserving. SWM191F

And when I first came to Fairfax County, well, in the District school system everything is pretty well organized. When I came in they gave two science books and a pack of names that they used for scheduling and that was it. You know, good luck, go to it. And now things, I have watched the escalation and the improvement of the school system and its growing really. Every
county if it has good leadership it has the potential of being one of the greatest school systems in the United States. MWM256F

But despite the splendor and the greatness and sometimes the boastfulness of this Fairfax County School system, that we always try to keep in mind that it is the youngster that we teach. MWM212F

Interviewees talked about how Fairfax is one of the places others follow and how this sometimes produces a “fishbowl” effect as far as media attention.

They were the big things that, as I look back at Annandale, that certainly got me in the newspaper and on television because Annandale High School is a part of the Fairfax County School System, one of the finest systems in the country. We have students whose parents are very transient. They come and go. And therefore we have contacts all over the county. No matter what we do in Fairfax County, whether it is good or bad, we hear about it [in] other parts of the country. SWM144F

In talking about the Standards of Quality mandated by the State of Virginia, several principals commented on how these just reproduced what was already in force in Fairfax. The implication seemed to be that Fairfax was far ahead of, and therefore better than, the rest of Virginia.

Well, I think in many cases it is duplicated by what we already have in progressive school systems like Fairfax County. We really have run two systems, we have our own guidelines that are standing up and the state’s standards of quality. I think the state’s Standards of Quality say the real role...As I said, we need these Standards of Quality to definitely keep us on the ball, but specifically in areas where we are not providing the minimum things the youngsters need. The minimum course offerings, the minimum experiences, and within the class, the very basic things are covered. MWM210F

Some of these things applied when the state standards came along some of the things applied more to the smaller school systems than they did in ours. And some of the standards set were ones we had already met. Much of Virginia is so dissimilar from Northern Virginia Fairfax County is so different from some of the other districts in the state that it is difficult to say this is the standard that everyone has to meet. I would see in some cases where some of the people in other parts of the state would have a heck of a time with this because in Fairfax County, a lot of these standards have already been met and these other folks out there in Southwestern Virginia, or wherever, were only beginning. EWM202F

I was glad to see they had Standards of Quality because for many years, before the state got around to it, Fairfax County had had Standards of Quality, and, of course, this sounds like we’re "patting" ourselves on the back, but, I think, if you read the Standards of Quality for the state and the ones for Fairfax County, you’ll find great likeness. It could be that our superintendent who went to the state level had something to do with that, but there is a great deal of likeness in it. EWF168F
“Being ahead” was part of the “Fairfax identity” in the narratives. Interviewees detailed how Fairfax was 10 years ahead to move on new educational approaches such as the middle school concept, the subschool concept and the open space concept, or how Fairfax was first to institute merit pay or a grievance policy. This seemed to produce in some principals a cynical attitude about the cycles of innovation or about adopting ideas before they were tested elsewhere.

By 1962, with the new math and science programs, foreign language, and English programs, you were expected to have innovations. Schools became much less defined. Classrooms became more informal. Lack of structure was considered to have merit. Along with this came many other disruptions. Superintendents were hired to open the instructional program. Open education became a philosophy...We broke out of that in the late 1970’s almost with a revolution against the open classroom. The walls were put back up and straight rows instead of round tables were used. This is in fact the pendulum we go through. The difference between that period, and now is that the pendulum is moving faster. We go from one extreme to another because there is merit on both sides and we have to find the middle ground...One thing we did learn in the early 1960’s when we tried to implement the military’s way of teaching a foreign language in our schools—by building a cubicle and putting earphones on the student and teaching them French in 6 weeks. It took 3 or 4 years to realize that that is not the way people learn. They learn by sharing, not by isolation. I am convinced that cubicles will be revitalized and probably torn down again.

I would hope that we stop trying everything that comes down the pike. We should benefit from what other systems have tried and the innovations they have tried. I know Fairfax County is big on being the first to try everything. It is a big feather in your cap to say, “Hey, we did this and we did that.” But there are a lot of things that suffer along the way when we try everything just because we heard it was the thing to do.

Rapid Growth As Context
Between 1955 and 1968, the population in Fairfax exploded.

The student population of the county at that time was 35,000, and we believed that we would double our population in the next ten years, and we doubled the population in the next five. From 1955 to 1960, Fairfax county was growing at a rate of one to two classrooms a day. Each year we were opening several elementary schools and several high schools.

The middle school concept was instituted in response to this phenomenal growth.

So the intermediate program that was developed in Fairfax County, and was to become the middle school program throughout the country, was a result of an old gentleman that understood schools, and worried a lot about junior high schools. It was Mr. Woodson’s feeling that seventh and eighth graders
needed an environment more of their own. So Fairfax County introduced a program of intermediate education in 1960. SWM147F

In 1960, eight middle schools were opened simultaneously. In 1963 three new high schools opened.

The year that I went in they opened up, I think, I'm not certain I think it was Jeb Stuart and Robert E. Lee and James Madison. Those three schools were opened, I think, at that time. They opened three high schools in one year. SWM175F

Integration was “completed”; what had been two separate systems were formally merged into one. Principals faced increasingly diverse student populations as a result both of mandated desegregation and rapid population growth. Many layers of administration sprang up to form a complex administrative superstructure.

There is the school board and the concerns of the school board in terms of the educational program, in terms of the building needs, and so on and attendance at those meetings and, as in the case of Fairfax, there were two school boards, three superintendents, all of whom that you have to deal with. SWM221F

Hayfield included three Magisterial Districts—Lee, Mount Vernon and Springfield Magisterial Districts. So, you had three School Board Members and three Board of Supervisor Members to deal with from time to time. That gave some interesting political aspects in terms of certain things that were going on in terms of school balance. SWF148F

The first curriculum specialist Fairfax County ever had was a science supervisor and so he’d come around to see us and then he took a job with HEW and so they needed some poor soul and so they said, “Would you?” so I did for one year and it was a good experience. You know, working Central office you learned a lot of things. You learn how the system works and which button to push and which bell to ring to get things done, you know. And I was science fair director for Northern Virginia. MWM256F

Principals were recruited from Southwest Virginia to meet the growing need for school administrators. Career tracks were established in an attempt to streamline both principal preparation (by requiring a stint as an assistant principal prior to becoming principal), and clarify advancement possibilities (cf. a military hierarchy). Central office control was tightened in an effort to standardize what was happening in schools across the district, and the handbooks and policies for which Fairfax is known became ubiquitous.

We were growing so rapidly that many principals of that time didn’t have much experience. Central administration felt the necessity to run the school from the central office. Therefore, as a principal, you had very little authority. I had an assistant superintendent call on me and tell me that it was his understanding that my school had an innovation and my reply was “Oh, I hope not.” Because that was a not a good thing in those days. All schools were alike, everyone had the same schedule, used the same textbooks, etc. SWM147F
There was great diversity in the populations of different areas, a fact often noted by principals who gave the demographics of an area when telling about a new school that they served in as principal. Neighborhoods changed and communities, in general, became much more diverse.

My biggest headache I guess was trying to stay abreast of all the constant changes. And I think that number one among the changes was the Vietnam War, the drugs, and of the other things that came with it. My other concern, another of my concerns was the fact that the community was continually changing. The community when I became principal of Annandale was a community primarily of single dwellings, of people who owned their houses or rented their houses, who were very much interested in the school. As time went by this changed. We began to get more apartments and a more diverse population. We were primarily Caucasian when I became principal. But when I retired in 1986, Annandale was some 25% minority. And the largest group of the minority were not Blacks, but Orientals. These particular people presented some real problems. They also presented some real pluses. Many of these Orientals were excellent students.

By the early 1970s the district’s central office staff included supervisors, specialists, and district superintendents. By the late 1970s, the area system was in place. The county was divided into areas, each with its own superintendent and central office, all overseen by a single Superintendent. All school principals reported to and worked with their area’s central administration.

I liked the area administration type organization and autonomy that each individual principal has in their schools. For example, when I opened Sunrise Valley, I think this is one of the greatest things that Fairfax County does. They give the principal a school building and they give you all the money and they let you do the hiring. And the books that are purchased, the furniture that’s purchased, the equipment that’s purchased, all of those things are purchased by the principal. All the staff is hired by the principal. So that everything that goes in that building is the principal’s responsibility. And of course, if it doesn’t work out nobody to blame but that principal. I think it’s really a good way of working it. And as I say I like the area of administration. I think it brought it down a little closer to the grassroots rather than having a ivory tower in Fairfax that everything had to run through. You had people down in the area who were a little more grassroots and interested in going on in that particular area because they are working around in all of these schools, going to PTA’s listening.

I do like the area offices, I like the decentralization of central services. I would like also probably that they return some of the responsibility in the decision-making process to the principal. And whether it is in relation to field trips, whether it is in relation to minority achievement, I think that the County sets out, let me give you an example. The County sets out with established 10 or 12 or 15 goals. Okay, and they say, “This is what we hope to accomplish; this is what you should do.” If they turn them down to the area office, the area office rewrites those 12 or 15 goals and then it becomes just a, you know, a homework task from the area office to the schools. The schools say, “Okay, these are our goals whether they’re on communication,
minority achievement, or something such as that.” It could be the school’s not having a problem in minority achievement or creative writing or something such as that, but yet they’re still obligated because this is a top priority by the School Board that comes down to the area that comes down to the schools of writing a work plan for that priority when in effect they could have another direction they want that school to go into from the experience of the PTA and input from the community and they often don’t have that, I guess, power to make those kind of decisions on their own. So that if anything, I’d like to see the principal be given more authority to make decisions on their own and, I guess, that would be it if we’re going to change it. EWM190F

When a new innovation was being put into place, teachers needed help or a crisis occurred, principals said they “had experts come in and work with us” SWM144F.

[Teachers] need support, they need to work with you, they need to work with assistant principals, they need to be checked on and they need to [know] why they are being evaluated. And all the help that they can get, that’s where your specialist from your area office comes into play. Because it’s something you can not do and certainly your specialists are the ones that can do this for you. SBM208F

Well, the Fairfax County Schools not only had the instructional expertise, but the school system also had other people who were most helpful. Psychologists and in particular, people who could help you in times of crisis, because we had, in my opinion as principal at Annandale, several student suicides. And this puts a tremendous impact on the school. And these people were able to come out and work with us. SWM144F

[after talking about a suicide which happened] Today, there is a whole team set up that you can call. You can call the county and get social workers and psychologists and so on beside your own in-house counseling that goes on normally. SWF148F

Often, the principals meetings monthly, and we had specialists from the ESL Department at our principals’ meetings working with us and at any point I could call for help. They would come to my school and work with me and the faculty. And often we did do this because it was important for not only the principal to be aware of the various cultures, but it is very important for teachers to be instructed, because the children—there’s where the action was with that classroom teacher. We would ask various people to come to our faculty meetings and work with classroom teachers. Whatever our needs were. We had to identify what our needs were, then we would ask for the help. EWF248F

Well, we were always given so such help in Fairfax County. And, I’ve heard some principals complain about not getting help where they felt they needed the psychologist. But I think the key there is to make sure you have a case before you call in a psychologist. I think many people cried wolf before there was a need to. And I was always sure I had a case that needed help, and was always able to get it. EWF168F
At last count, there were over 200 schools in Fairfax County now organized into three areas, each with its own Area Superintendent and Central Office.

**Who the Principals Were**

The diversity of population was not matched to the diversity of people coming into the principalship. Into the mid 1970s, several of the principals said that the vast majority of principals at all levels in Fairfax County were White males with high school teaching and coaching experience, as well as military experience.

I would guess that 75% of the principals in this country are former coaches. The reason is probably because coaching is excellent training ground for administration. It was also a political base. Coaches were normally the most popular people in their community. If you were a successful football coach and you wanted to go into administration, you would have a lot of people to support you. SWM147F

Concurrent with the growth in bureaucratic structure and the Fairfax County Public Schools becoming “known” as a “quality school system,” credentialling became more of an issue. A Master’s degree was required for Fairfax principals by the early 1960’s at a time when principals in the other parts of the state of Virginia needed only a Bachelor’s degree and to have begun on an advanced degree or taken a few courses in educational administration to be hired. By the late 1960’s, Fairfax County required assistant principals to have completed their Master’s degree prior to taking that role. Several principals stated the “rules” during the interview.

To be a principal in Fairfax County, you have to have at least a master’s degree and I got my bachelor’s from Lynchburg College as I mentioned earlier, and my master’s from George Washington University. My master’s is in elementary administration and supervision. I’m a native of the area and proud of that. I graduated from Fairfax High School. EWM156F

When I came along, they said you pretty much needed the Master’s degree, so I had to have that, though nothing much more specific than that. I have taken a lot of seminar courses, administrative seminars. EWM202F

You had to have your masters degree in education in order to be a principal. An assistant principal could be working on that degree with the understanding that it had to be completed before you became a principal. SWM147F

Still, most interviewees related being personally invited or told that they would have the high school principalship by the superintendent, or that they had been selected for a principalship.

While I was at Fairfax, the superintendent, Jack Davis, came to me and told me he would like for me to go to Robinson to become principal. I explained to him that I was not really interested, and wanted to go back to Lanier. Superintendents have a way to be very persuasive, so I did, in April of 1973
become the principal of Robinson, and was there for the next eleven years. SWM147F

I was appointed to the principalship. It seems they had their eye on me for a particular school, and they wanted me to have a little experience at least something. So that is why I was just in there 3 months until I was appointed Principal at Walnut Hill. EWM202F

The few women who were hired tended to have been older, with more classroom experience or some other outside work experience (e.g., experience as a journalist, geologist, Reading Specialist). The one female high school principal in this sample had also been a coach. The other women principals were hired at the elementary level and several mentioned that they were in the minority as female educational administrators. This explains why a lot of the discourse of Fairfax County principals mirrors the discourse of White male educational administrators but also highlights the different responses of the women and, in some cases, the one Black male principal in the cohort to the same backdrop.

**Standardization**

Being a principal in Fairfax in the 1960s-1980s meant that you were dealing with an area that was rapidly growing and with a demanding population/community. Due to the increasing complexity, there was a tremendous attempt to regulate and standardize. This was probably also influenced by the proximity to several military bases in Northern Virginia, and the dominant theories of educational administration in vogue at that time which had a largely bureaucratic and scientific management focus (Beck & Murphy, 1993). What was supposed to be happening at each high school, for example, and how things were supposed to be handled was explicitly spelled out and highly regulated. The County’s policy manual for educational administrators was referred to as the Blue Book. There were “very well defined regulations. You know, the Blue Book is monstrous.” SWM175F. Several principals found this reassuring:

> In a system as large as this one I think it’s a necessary evil, so to speak, to have central office policies, because it would be a lonely world sitting out there in a school unless you had some guidelines because there are many problems you run into each day facing parents and various problems that come up. You need the backing of the central office and those big, blue books that we deem our Bibles because they really give you the back up. You couldn’t expect somebody from central office to be there at your elbow, but when you have the “regs,” you can pull them out and find something that would show that you were taking the proper steps. EWF168F

Throughout the growth of a hierarchical administrative superstructure, and despite the drive toward standardization, implementation continued to be very uneven. Some were working in fully equipped new facilities.

[GROVETON] was opened up, the newest Fairfax County High School. It was a very expensive school, plastered walls with the exception of the classrooms, but there where plastered walls. Now days you go in a school and it is cinder-block walls, painted. That school had terrazzo tile halls. There was a quality about it. It had birch wood on the doors, birch cabinets,
birch material on the auditorium seating. It was considered a showplace in 1956. But it soon became, as it was called, a shoebox, by some people. It was so small. It was built for, like, 1100 to 1200 students to start with. SWM175F

Others were in new facilities with no supplies, and still others were in poorly maintained facilities with a lack of basic materials.

During the same period of time, some principals had autonomy to hire while others did not.

Of course personnel office does the hiring of teachers in Fairfax County, and a principal doesn’t always have a say in what you do there. SWM187F

So I called up Jack Burkholder who was in personnel and I said, ”Since when does a person no longer have the opportunity to select?“ ...They have these review panels. SWM175F

Well, of course, when I first started, personnel staffed my school. And when personnel approached me about opening an elementary school, and I had never taught below the 5th grade, I expressed to the director of personnel that I didn’t feel quite comfortable here. Because I had never taught at the primary grades. She herself had been a principal before going into personnel work, and she felt the same way. But, she said, you are starting a new school and that’s a good neighborhood. We’ll give you a good strong faculty and you will learn from the primary teachers. EWF168F

I think probably the most important factor and the thing that I had a fairly free hand with—and this was the year ’72-’73—was the staffing of the school. It was still in a growth [period] so that it wasn’t the problem of placing teachers and where are teachers going to work and were worried that if you moved somebody because there won’t be a position, etc. all the things that are occurring today. So I was able fairly early—had a year of course to get ready to open school—but I was able to start early on interviewing teachers and really spent a lot of time on that and that was rewarding for me. I think probably the school is what it is today because of the people that came in and started. SWM177F

Well, when we were able to select teachers, it would be depending on the field, depending on the available pool of teachers and the field made a difference how many people were available. It’s almost like going out on a talent search. I would go so far as to—went and drove 100 miles to observe a person in a classroom that I was interested in getting to teach. In the latter years that, with the increase in the activity of the personnel departments and assignments, we did not have that much leeway in terms of hiring that we used to. Now, in a lot of cases, you wouldn’t do anything, personnel would send them to you. SWM221F

The superintendent called me in and gave me an offer I couldn’t refuse. A brand new school and opportunities to pick a lot of my staff and my assistants and organize the school the way I thought it would effectively run
and meeting the needs of the city and great opportunities, so I leaped at it.

MWM210F

We had a very fine faculty which, by the way, I was allowed by the Personnel Department to pick my own teachers and also had the say in who would be the counselors, the guidance director and the assistant principal.

MWM212F

The reason the school went so well is because he had a faculty for getting things done. I think that’s very important. If you have a faculty you have a staff there who trains people. I was fortunate in Sunrise Valley, for example, the same way with Stenwood. Being in Stenwood for 15 years, there wasn’t a teacher in there that I didn’t hire. Same way with Sunrise Valley, when a principal opens up a new school they can hire every staff person, and when you can do that you can interview the people and you can find out, try to the best that you can, find out their strengths and those kinds of things and build on them. That’s what I did, is build on the strength of the staff that I had, and their personalities, their ideas.

EWM156F

These factors, as might be expected, led to a variety of perceptions and responses about the effectiveness of the central office administration and the amount of support felt by principals. Some of these perceptions were shared along the lines of gender and level cohorts; others seemed to be much more specific to particular situations. What is significant for the purposes of this study is to begin to examine how the administrative culture of a school district enters the construction of identity of self-as-principal. What is startling to recognize is the amount of time and space the county received in these interviews ostensibly about the experiences of individuals. Again, the idea of a social construction of self, identity and role is reinforced.

Fairfax Parents

Several high school principals cited the importance of having Fairfax parents “on your side.” Parents were generally talked about as demanding and somewhat intrusive. Several principals mentioned the pressure of having to deal with parents who “think they know how it should be.” White male principals in particular saw this as intrusive:

Most of the pressures involved dealing with people who had preset notions. People who have not been in the school for years, but yet have a mindset about what’s going on and they know how to deal with it. Particularly in an area where you have a large number of college graduates—there are many people who feel that just because they went to school, went to high school and graduated from college, they know all about what should happen.

SWM221F

Another thing was that I had some pain-in-the neck educating kind of parents who wanted our school to be like another school, not taking into consideration all the different things we were doing. There was always someone saying, “Well, I was over at this school the other day [a neighboring school] and they were doing such and such in their library and
it would be nice to have that here.” That kind of thing used to bother me. 
EWM202F

The biggest pressure I guess was the parents, especially the ones who were new to the schools, and thought they knew everything and they were going to change things and things were going to done their way. I always found that if you let them know that you thought that you knew everything there was to know and you weren’t a novice to the school or to the school business, then usually they would back off and accept what you were trying to tell them about their student or placement of their child. EWM156F

This led many Fairfax principals to talk about how they were explicitly protective of their teachers.

But it’s always interesting that most people that finish high school or above are experts in education. I haven’t seen one yet who wasn’t. I was, I guess, in a sense, protective of the teachers. I think that’s the way you ought to be. 
SBM208F

I’d listen to the parents, but the teachers and I were the professionals and that’s the way we operated the school. I would listen to the parents, hear their suggestions and those kinds of things, but I didn’t care much to have some Colonel in the Air Force who didn’t know much else but how to fly planes or push paper in the Pentagon come in and tell me how to run my school. I was always accused of taking up for my teachers, you know. Many times I would have people, parents come in and say maybe it’s not going to do me any good because I know you are going take up for your teacher, and if I felt the teacher was right, sure I’d take up for them, absolutely. 
EWM156F

I was always supportive of the teachers and very protective of them because I knew what it was like in the classroom and I knew what it was like trying to put on a performance for people, so I tried to protect them somewhat in that respect. EWM202F

Female and Black principals, although noting the demanding nature of the parent population, also emphasized the importance of parent involvement in their remarks. They contended that they got a lot of parental support once a good working relationship was established. They seemed to welcome the interest and involvement of the parents in their children’s education and saw it as the principal’s job to channel this constructively. This was a significant contrast to the White male principals of all levels who, as mentioned earlier, were more likely to see demanding parents as a problem.

I had an excellent school community. I was extremely fortunate. Parents were interested in what was happening to their children. And it was more of a stable community. It wasn’t a community where everybody was mortgaged to the hilt and worried about meeting all the payments. It was a very very stable community. And that was to my advantage. EWF168F
All the mothers and fathers seemed to be aware of the pressures that were being brought on the school, and we had a marvelous PTA. The fathers and mothers were just so helpful. The room mothers did everything that they could to help the teachers. Mothers volunteered to do work for the teachers like getting things for them...I think it was a wonderful community. Many is the time that I’ve walked through the hall that I wondered how could I be so fortunate just to have that community. EWF220F

The other thing, I think that sometimes prevents this is parent demands and I don’t think the parents realize this sometimes but some of their demands, parent demands do take a lot away from, and by parent demands, I mean parents coming in without appointments, just dropping in and wanting to see you, and I was the kind that I felt that if I was in the office and a parent came in I would just as soon see them right then and there and take care of the problem, at that point in time, rather than have them going away from the building stewing and having to come back at another time. EWF182F

In some Fairfax communities, the high percentage of students going on to higher education, the high education level of the parents and the parents’ high expectations of the school were noted.

However, the Fairfax County Public Schools have always been blessed with the fact that the vast majority of its students go on to some form of higher education. But the main philosophy was that you prepared a youngster for life in all respects...My key to success was the fact that I was fortunate enough to have a very fine faculty, excellent students, and most supportive community, and school board members who cared about Annandale and who would fight for us. If you have these ingredients and if you go out and you show the community that you care about them, they in return will react to you. This is why I think whatever success I had occurred. SWM144F

James Madison is Vienna’s High School. The parents demanded a quality educational program and that they were willing to give endlessly of their time, financial assistance or whatever the school needed to bring that about. There was a strong self identification with the parents, kids, and Madison community. Madison had a well-defined school boundary. For the most part the kids were homogenous in the sense that they looked forward to coming to Madison they wanted to be at Madison, they fought to get in at Madison because of long standing traditions. SWM191F

By contrast, other areas were dealing with high numbers of low SES families and a variety of social problems. Female principals, in particular, tried to get parents into the schools and to have the school serve as a resource for the community. They talked about having English as a Second Language Programs and the difficulties that occurred when parents spoke little or no English and had different cultural expectations of schooling. Principals in these schools tended to be annoyed that resource allocation was by numbers instead of need. It is interesting to note that this system which prided itself on being standardized was perceived by its principals as uneven and unfair with resource allocation.
**The Influence of the Military**

The military influence of the discourse was very heavy in Fairfax and affected the principals in a variety of ways. Many of the male principals, White and Black, had military backgrounds which influenced how they spoke about self-as-principal. The proximity of the Pentagon and several military bases meant that many of the families of students were in the military which made for a transient school population in some areas of the county. In addition, having so many parents, teachers and administrators with military backgrounds influenced attitudes about discipline. Many retired military were hired to teach, and to be principals, which further reinforced the discourse. As noted in Chapter 3, military metaphors and basis of leadership style as a principal on experience in the military was common among the narratives of retired White male principals in this study and was largely unquestioned by them. The very hierarchy and bureaucracy of the school system itself was built and expanded using an explicitly military model. Those familiar with the military, male or female, felt that they had an “edge” on working the bureaucracy of the school system.

I think one thing that did help me in the principalship, I worked for the government for three years, five years when I was overseas and was a dependent wife, and when you work with the military, you learn to listen, to do as you are told, and to question not what is given you to do, and I think it puts you in good stead for working with any large school system because there’s a lot that’s gone on that is handed down that’s its not up to you to question. It’s up to you to see that it’s put into effect. EWF168F

I think that I owe a great deal to my training as a naval officer. I think that my two years on active duty and my 19 years in the Reserves played a very big part in my life as an administrator. I learned there a sense of responsibility, a sense of orderliness, a sense of dedication. And I think that was one of the things that played a big part in my success as a principal. SWM144F

However, others questioned whether the heavy overlay of the military onto the educational system was so positive.

But I found that in a lot of ways that the military was...that the school seemed to be mimicking what was going on in the Pentagon. And that there was a tremendous military influence in the school system. And those of us who were not military were on the fringes, and that would, accounted for a lot of the good ol’ boy relationships among the principals because they were also good-ol’ boy military. I think it’s a sad commentary but that’s the way it was. And they had not only the principal’s salary but they had the military retirement, too. Most of them had not had more than a smattering of education classes, just enough to get their certificates. And they really did not have a feel for elementary education, in my estimation. Now, I might be doing them a disservice, because there undoubtedly were good ones in there, but this was just an overall feeling that I had. That it was, there was a good nitch for them as retired military. And they ran the school as a military installation, pretty much. And there the status was on the new school that you got, the new equipment that you got, and the new rugs, the new furniture, that was a status. EWF197F
I was trying to improve the relationships between teachers and students. There was a real hostility on the part of a lot of the students at Ft. Hunt towards the staff members. It was a lot to do with the makeup of the staff, a large percentage of retired military, excellent subject matter people, very skilled in physics and mathematics, those fields. I'd have to say that department was one of the best departments but in dealing with kids they didn't score so well sometimes. The Social Studies department was all males, no women at all. And I was trying to integrate females into the various departments. SWM175F

Some of the interviewees contrasted the schools where they served as principal, revealing the socio-cultural diversity of the county onto which this military model was imposed.

I was principal of Groveton High School from 1963 until 1970. Then I went to Falls Church. That was when Superintendent Watts decided to move principals around who were in schools longer than ten years. So then Fort Hunt became available, had an opening, it was close to home and just seemed like the logical place for me to be. Fort Hunt was a real challenge. It was a school needing some change in administration. ... I was trying to improve the relationships between teachers and students. There was real hostility...of a lot of the students at Ft. Hunt towards the staff members...Groveton High School was a school that served quite a cross section of population. There was no real majority of social class. It was just a cross section. It just had everything. And I think that actually was a plus for that school. Ft. Hunt when I was there was 44% senior military, either retired or active duty. It was heavy military. Certain attitudes and so forth, you know, are generated in that environment. SWM175F

Well, Foster Intermediate was a small school if you compare it to Hayfield. There were 750 youngsters and about 35 to 38 teachers and various support staff—guidance counselors, secretaries, custodians and so on. It is a very pleasant area. We had a very affluent community and we had a very low socio-economic. There was a good ethnic mix. We had one of the English as a Second Language Programs within the building. It was a super faculty and we received super rapport and support from the community. We also had a gifted center in that building. So, there was a good mix of kids and they were always interesting. They were fun, and it was interesting to watch various mixes within the student population rate. After a while it got to be very good and it was a lot of fun to deal with. Hayfield, of course, is a very large school, a ten-acre building with grades 7-12 and again, a very diverse student population—22 minorities. We had Asian, Black, Hispanic. I think we even had an American Indian in the building. Hayfield drew from the largest school boundary attendance area within Fairfax County School System. Sometimes it took our youngsters 25 or 30 minutes or more just to get to and from school. It included areas from the Occuquan River Lorton northward all the way up toward Telegraph Road and fringed into parts of what is called the Pohick Planning Area which is near Robinson School area. SWF148F

That's the difference between Madison and a number of schools that I have been in over the years. Kids came to school at Madison truly because they
wanted to come there. I’ll give you an example. Madison has the lowest dropout rate than any in Fairfax County, and has the lowest vandalism rate than any in Fairfax County, and has the lowest suspension rate than any in Fairfax County. Those things may not mean much to an outsider, but to a building principal and a faculty and to a community they mean a great deal because it means the kids have taken ownership of the building and want to participate in what is going on in the building. That’s the difference.

Westlawn was a very interesting school and at times very difficult school. The educational and economical level was very diverse, ah, we ah, it would go from very low economically and educationally to the Ph.D. and everything in the middle. Ah, we had low income and a little more middle income than the higher level. This made it very interesting. And I thought it was a very good situation for children. This is the way of the real world. Ah, we all work with all kinds of people. I thought Westlawn was a very good place for children to be because of this diversity.

At one point in the late 1970s, a policy was instituted to have principals who had been at their schools longer than ten years were transferred to other schools. This military mode of transfer led to more than one principal’s decision to retire and, for whatever reason, didn’t result in some principals being moved. Again, the standardization so avidly sought was thwarted.

Establishing Oneself as Part of the “Machine” of Educational Administration

Name dropping is endemic to the discourse of Fairfax principals interviewed in this study. This web of connections seems to serve as a context for oneself as a principal. Males talk about talking frequently with other principals and going to meetings and exchanging ideas; female principals reported much less of that. Some female principals from Fairfax expressed a feeling of exclusion based on gender.

Male principals tended to resent the lack of autonomy created by the central office administrative superstructure and they did not like having to deal with layers of superiors.

I think that the tremendous growth in size of school staffs, that outside of the school building, has had a negative effect on the school system in that a lot of the focus has changed—from the focus of being on the students to a focus on problems that really don’t have anything to do with the school. Well, basically are politically oriented. And because there are a lot of people, for example, I think I mentioned it before, that are involved in school systems but are not inside of a school building who are doing things—decisions that are made by them that really aren’t contributory to the schools, to the students themselves. They are based on how somebody in the community would think rather than what’s best for the kids, and I just think that that has hurt the school system’s job...The people in the schools were supposed to listen to everybody—listen to the kids, listen to the parents, listen to that. But the level and this is what I am concerned about in the bureaucracy is what is middle management. Top management didn’t appear to feel the responsibility to listen to middle management. I mean, there were
some gestures at it but there were some individuals who did, but for the most part, the people at the levels and particularly the policy makers—school boards—made a big deal out of listening to the kids and the public, but they didn’t do a hell of a lot of listening. SWM221F

Sometimes you have to take charge of things, you can’t wait for an approval from them. You do it and then you say, “Well I did it, what do you think?” Then they say, “OK, you did it, you should [have] called us about it.” But I said I didn’t have time. It happens once in a while...I think that sometimes you have to make a decision, you can’t wait for the central office to hand down a decision, because it’s time consuming. So the decision has to be made right away. You make it, then if you can justify your actions they generally go along with it. SBM208F

I never got hung up—this goes back to who you are as a person—I never got hung up on the support issue. If I felt I had done my job well, and the area superintendent overruled me, that’s his decision. That’s something he’s got to do, and I didn’t come out of there bellyaching. That’s just the way it is. But if I knew, then pretty soon I’d begin to see that he just isn’t going to support this. Rather than go through that, I’d just as soon come back and probably go to the teacher and say, “Hey, let’s deal with this at the school”, because the teacher and the student need to see that the power is in the school and not outside. SWM177F

...and dealing with some of the Area Office personnel. Most of them were pleasant and knew what our situations were, but still it was rather frustrating at times knowing that whatever you did, there was always someone there ready to criticize. EWM202F

Females and those males with prior central office experience seemed to see the structure as a resource for support.

Being principal was quite a challenge, I think, in Fairfax County. And I think, at that point in time, it was, I had felt maybe that I had a little more backing than I did later on in the experience. To give you a little bit of background, in those days we had what we called elementary supervisors and your elementary supervisor, there was one for the primary level and an elementary supervisor for the 4th through 6th grade. They were by your building at least once a month if not oftener, if not more often. Then they came, of course, on call and any teacher of course too could call and ask for their help or expertise in a certain area. They would look up research for you, they would also come in and do demonstration lessons, they would also come in and help a teacher set up reading groups if she felt that she needed help in that and they were very willing to come in and help in any area that you felt, at that point in time, you needed help. Many years later, the elementary supervisors were changed and that’s when the Department of Instruction was formed and you had begun to have your expertise in the different, in the different phases of the curriculum. For instance, you had someone in charge of language arts, math, social studies and so forth. We felt, we meaning some of the elementary principals felt, that, at that point in time, a lot of those people were high school oriented and were not as familiar
with the elementary curriculum as possibly they should have been...It was fun and it was sort of nice to begin to see changes in the county. I think the area, administrative areas, have made a big difference in the county and it has helped with the growth we have seen in the last ten to fifteen years in the county. It has been nice to feel that you can pick up the phone quickly and call somebody in the area and get help. EWF182F

And I had good supervisors at the county level that I could always just pick up the phone and talk to. EWF180F

They came, they were on call to you and they also came routinely. But then we had them; I think they were a valuable asset, and I still love my supervisors. They are retired. They were delightful. Also, they had meetings for areas, and brought up new ideas for instruction. They were what kept you growing as an instructor, as a principal. New techniques, new things to do. EWF197F

Several principals commented on the grievance policy and the role of Fairfax County in the grievance procedure. These comments provide insight into principals’ perceptions of how the system was supposed to work and the layers involved. Although some Fairfax principals acknowledged that such a procedure is necessary in some cases to protect the teacher, others bemoaned the fact that the grievance policy has made it much more difficult to get rid of weak or incompetent teachers. They saw that as a problem. The role of the Fairfax Educational Association (FEA) is also noted in the principals’ comments.

In terms of handling grievances in Fairfax County, there is a basic policy. First of all, you try to resolve the issue at the local level. The teacher talks with the principal and they try to resolve it. If that didn’t work, they can bring in either the FEA or the other union representative to try to work out or resolve the problem. If that doesn’t work, within so many working days, they can appeal to the area office. If they are not happy with that, they can appeal to the superintendent. If they are not happy with that, they can appeal to the school board. That is the final authority. I think I had two at Hayfield. Both of them were not major issues and we resolved them at the local level. SWF148F

I really felt that the FEA probably is more supportive to teachers than our personnel department is to elementary school principals. That was my personal feeling. It isn’t that they’re not supportive to us, but I think that we can do, and our hands are tied, and we can do very little with the ineffective teacher except, you know, put pressure on a defect of an ineffective teacher and document and document and document and document to the point where you’re spending more time on documentation and writing letters informing the teacher and I guess that was frustrating... EWM190F

Very few go to the extreme of a formal hearing—sometimes we might have the teacher ask to have somebody else on the faculty, maybe a member of the advisory committee or somebody sit in with it—probably once every two or three years, I might go so far as to have somebody from the professional association, the Fairfax Education Association, come in. But that was usually
in very extreme situation. The majority of the times that I have a teacher association representative in, a person conceded that my position was probably correct, I may have had a procedural violation that we had to work on, but that the teacher needed further correction on her own part if we have the groundwork laid. The main thing is to provide the teacher with a clear knowledge of what the problems are and what needs to be done. MWM210F

Principals at all levels said there was much too much required paperwork.

I think the necessary, let me emphasize that the necessary paper work that a principal has to go through with all the reports to the different levels and different agencies, certainly robbed from me the time I’d have liked to be in the classroom and the halls with the teachers and the students. I kind of resented that. I saw it as a necessity, something that needed to be done and there were time lines that needed to be met because there was someone else who needed that information to make their deadline. But I always resented that... SWM191F

So I would say the biggest change was the increased paper work over the years that pulled you that one step further away from your primary responsibility of what I felt was my goal was—to be a real model to the kids. So that the paper work continually pulled me away from that and that’s maybe something personal. EWM190F

I think the pressure of paper was what really finally helped me decide to retire because every year there was more and more reports and statistics and the whole thing, and I just felt that the children were the losers, and we did not have the time to work with teachers or spend as much time in the classrooms and with children as I wanted to. It became just a rat race. Took all the pleasure out of it. EWF168F

Some principals went so far as to say that all of the paperwork demanded resulted in “phony” reports:

I do think a lot of people are so phony and come up with these fine sounding things and in Fairfax County, here’s a paper, I had to submit my goals. It gets to be phony. SWM175F

Fairfax principals generally found the county’s teacher evaluation policies inflexible, artificial and unhelpful to teachers.

The evaluation itself I’ve had difficulty with because I was not sure how much they were actually used—they were sort of—well, you ended up with a lot of trite statements that really didn’t mean a whole lot... SWM221F

They had little positive to say about the earlier checklists either. For a few principals, the evaluation expectations make it easier for them “to know what to look for.” But most felt that although they were responsible for the instructional program, they did not need to be closely involved with instruction but could delegate that to an assistant. They also said that they felt the evaluation policies made it harder to fire people.
I ran into this where teachers who I thought weren’t doing a very good job for me. Other times it was the way they treated kids. It really got me upset. I’d sit down with them and talk it through and say, “Hey, I’d do something else.” The job market was good enough that people could listen to that and think, “Yeah, maybe, I could.” Usually if they didn’t treat the kids very well, they didn’t like teaching anyway. I know I sat down once—I suppose this was eight or nine years ago—I was sitting down and listing some people I felt I had encouraged to get out of the profession. People that I liked! They were nice people! It was a list of twelve to fifteen people over six to seven years. People that I hadn’t had to fire. I think that came up because I ran into a couple of cases where I was going to have to fire them. I said to myself, “I haven’t really been through a whole grievance.” What happened to all those other people that I didn’t think much of either? It was because they were willing to move on their own. Then we got to the point where the market elsewhere, particularly the profession, jobs were tight. People weren’t going to give up their jobs for anything. I had a couple cases where I had to file on some people. I didn’t ever have to go to the board of level dismissal, because the people I dealt with either went somewhere else, someone else ended up with that problem, or people moved. So one experience I’ve never actually had is where I had to sit at a board level hearing saying, “He’s got to go.” I avoided it, missed it, fortunately. SWM177F

I think the principal, from what I’ve seen, is becoming less and less of an instructional leader, I’m talking about Fairfax County or a large high school, and more of an administrator in a sense. You have a system of a principal who looks in on instruction and discipline. The principal, of course, can’t get away from being the school-community relations head. Uh, he is the liaison person between the school community and the superintendent. The principal had less and less time to give the personal touch in a large high school as in Fairfax County. Rather than being able to get into the classroom and actually become a part of all that goes on in the school, he’s become more of the “person of last resort”; the one who takes the... from the assistant principals, parents, students, but has less time to really do the personal contact. Lot of it’s being delegated. But, ah, the principal should be the ultimate authority on the assignments and the movements of teachers. Whether or not teacher should be reprimanded, dismissed or, or, uh...And for setting up inservice programs. And here again the principal can’t do it all. He needs help. SWM187F

Fairfax principals did not like the way test scores were published and used to compare schools. Several connected socio-economic status of the student population as determining standardized test scores, and they felt it was quite unfair to compare scores from schools situated in upper or middle class areas with scores from schools in more disadvantaged areas. They often became quite irate in the interviews when talking about the unfairness of this practice.

Then, too, test scores are taken out of context. Too many schools are judged by how high their SAT’s are, the number of Merit Semi-Finalists or Finalists they have, and so forth. Rather than the real test which is how far has the faculty and the administration of that school taken these students. How far have they gone from A to B. I think as a principal that I was much
more successful if I could improve the education of my students. Take them from where they were to some point down the road because too often the schools where you have a high social-economic community will have the highest test scores. Therefore, these schools are labeled as better schools than the others, when really the real job of education may be going on in the schools where the scores are not quite as good because of the social-economic and because maybe their people are not as good test takers. But tests will always be around because you’ve got to have some means of measuring things, and until they find a better one, tests will be there.

SWM144F

The thing I guess I object to most, the achievement test, especially is the publication of the doggone things. Not that you had anything to hide, but there are some communities around that are of a low, socioeconomic level and parents look at the scores of their students in comparison to some of those in the higher socioeconomic levels and there is a big discrepancy. Some parents cannot understand it they don’t understand why their school isn’t doing as well as another school. It is an unfair comparison. I guess it’s the publication of the achievement test scores probably more so than the tests themselves in what they are trying to accomplish.

EWM202F

But to use a test as the end of all, and say that this is a good school or this is a bad school, and they’re not teaching properly because of test scores is unfair because the thing they do not look at, and they should never give these scores out without showing the IQ in the school. You take a school with a high percentage of foreign speaking students, and you put those scores next to a regular middle-class community, and it is not fair, and, yet, I know for a fact that Fairfax real estate people get these lists, and people buy homes according to the school community and how the school tests, and I think it’s awful, and it forces people to do what happened this spring in Fairfax - teaching to the test, and it’s because they feel such a horrible pressure that they have to do well.

EWF168F

Fairfax principals coming from Southwest Virginia talked about some of the differences in being an administrator in Fairfax. They talked about losing autonomy and having less access to professional development opportunities upon moving to Fairfax, but having, on the other hand, more service support. The remarks of one principal, in particular, highlight this:

Whereas when I came to Fairfax County, you have a school board with a higher level of education, of various experiences. The community makes quite a number of demands on the schools. Uh, their education, the parents education level is generally higher than you find in a lot of areas. Uh, and, and a lot more things are being done for the schools through the central office. Different from Franklin County. For example, I actually did the contracting for work to be done around the school. Installing the lights on the football field. Things of this nature, of course would be done with the approval of the superintendent of schools, and the school board. Wherein Fairfax County, those things were done through the board of education. Uh, personnel were hired at central office. Whereas the principal in Franklin County went out and beat bushes to try to find teachers. Uh, that was done
for me when I came to Fairfax County. And if you had a window pane knocked out, you didn’t call on your custodian to repair it you called the central office, one of the departments, and they came out to repair it. Um, and, and it follows then that your whole styles of operation would be quite different in Fairfax County as opposed to Franklin County...Fairfax County did take away some of the freedom you had, and on the other hand it gave you more materials to work with. It gave you, uh, uh, they compensated in other ways. So you can’t say one situation is better than the other. One reason I came to Fairfax County was because I wanted my children to have a chance for the best education they could have. Uh it was nice to be able to call the shots at Franklin County. I was probably oh, uh,—sort of a big fish in a small pond. In Fairfax County you’re a small fish in a big pond, and uh... Whereas we had one consolidated high school in Franklin County, there, in Fairfax County there are 24 to 25 high schools. So there’s quite a difference. So, as I said it ties your hands somewhat because you can’t put all your eggs in one basket. When you’re in a community where there’s one high school, the whole community is behind that one school...to come into a situation like Fairfax County...If uh, you gave one principal the opportunity to go to a national conference you’d have 24 other principals to consider. What do you do about it? Everybody can’t go. So if you took just a few each year you would find that uh, uh... I believe that principals of a large school systems would have fewer opportunities to participate in the national level or state level activities than in the other situations. So, so I’m sure a principal in Fairfax County doesn’t have as much of an opportunity to go to a national conference. Whereas, in Franklin County I was not only expected to go the Southern Assoc. of School Principal convention, or to NASSP, and to become active in one of those associations so that you could really get a feel for what’s going on...I think, uh, in that, during my lifetime, it has changed from sort of the big, happy family concept where the principal was the father and the mother of the group and uh, you did things together as a family. Uh, as shifting over to, not an antagonistic situation, but there is some of it. Maybe they have to recognize that, but with the teacher unions as they are and, the teachers having a process, not going to someone necessarily in the school, the superintendent or the school board, but going to another agency for assistance. To find a change in relations between administrators and the teaching staff, I’ve seen that change during my lifetime. SWM187F

The Times They are A’Changing

Many of the interviewees discussed how the principalship in Fairfax became increasingly complex and how the demands and expectations continued to grow. They saw the role as one of trying to meet demands—demands of students, teachers, parents and Central Office (at both the Area and District levels) and of feeling that the expectations in all of these areas were continually being raised. Principals felt that they were sent mixed messages from the Central Offices.

Our School Board and the Central Area Offices continued adding on things that were expected of teachers without taking anything away. The principals that I have always had chats with had the very same feelings. They were continually complaining about that. They would talk to people in a position
of authority, clear up to the superintendent’s level, but they would never
listen they would act as though they were listening, and like they were
sympathetic, but they just never did. They would just continue to add things
on and on. This causes a decrease in the instructional time that a teacher has,
as you know, and it is very frustrating because these principals know that the
parents out there continue to want and expect quality education, quality
instruction. And on the other hand, they are adding on this program and that
program. Every time you add on a program, You have got to cut down in
some other area, and that was very frustrating for me as a principal maybe
not the pressure so much as the frustration in that I knew what was expected
of the teachers and yet they continued to cut in on their instructional time
and that bothered me. Everyone always talks about the basics, and we didn’t
have much time for the basics because of all of that. EWM202F

The superintendent could come down and say forget about cafeteria duty,
forget about the PTA, don’t worry about that parent that called at 4:30 in the
afternoon. If you don’t worry about that parent who called at 4:30 in the
afternoon, if you don’t keep your PTA abreast with the executive board
meeting, or you’re not settling the cafeteria from time to time even though
you have a good cafeteria hostess in there, what kind of school are you
going to have? And how soon will it be before the superintendent’s coming
down and saying Look, if you can’t run that place I’m going to get someone
else in there who can run it. So to say for a superintendent to say Look
you’re no longer manager of that school; I want you to forget about the
cafeteria, forget about the PTA, forget about the field trips, you know. I want
you going about observing and evaluating teachers. At what expense do you
want me as an administrator to sit down and worry about evaluating teachers
because who’s going to settle that bus problem that just came in at 3 o’clock
when the kid was fighting on the bus going home. It is the principal that’s
going to have to settle that so that it is nice and ideal to say Hey, the skillful
teacher and the evaluation plan that’s your first priority, but what about that
900 of that other school day that you have to take care of. You can’t delegate
that to your bus teacher. You can’t delegate that to someone else unless you
have an assistant principal. So that you see I feel very strong about that. I
think the superintendent did ask that it move toward curriculum and it move
toward teacher evaluation, but this is the same concern I’m having from a lot
of the principals, you know. Sure that’s okay. I’d like to do that but who
takes care of all these other problems that come up in a normal school day?
You have to take care of them as a principal. EWM190F

Although this theme was sounded throughout the entire interview sample, in Fairfax this
was described with a particular urgency and current changes in policies were specifically
cast against what had been the case in the past.

I don’t believe the plan in two years is going to work. I see it at this point
undoing a lot of what Jack Davis set up in the humanistic approach and Jack
Burkholder followed through with a humanistic approach. I saw a lot of that
coming down from the superintendent, to the area superintendents, to the
principals, to the teachers, and to the kids. What I’ve been reading and what
I’ve been hearing from the staff and the pressure being put on staff to be
selfish in a lot of respects in what they’re doing because they seem to be in
petition with one another, is not good for the kids, it’s not good for the teachers because this is some thing that I’ve never seen before in the elementary grades. The pressure that’s being put on principals this year and last year...The pressure is being put on the staff, you know, for the skillful teacher and for the merit pay. It’s being placed on the principals to be placed on the staff and I think that this isn’t good. I—at least two principals have had the comment to me that they can’t afford to be a friend to any of their staff members any more. So that I’m just hoping that in the two years that this has gone this has it still has to play out before it goes into full cycle I guess that we don’t lose in the County what we built up in the last 20 years with the humanistic approach. I just hope that merit pay, performance pay doesn’t take that away. EWM190F

The conflicts between the espoused rhetoric of site-based management juxtaposed against the omnipresence of the county’s control was commented on by several principals.

It is not effective at this time because there are too many strings attached and too many approvals. Too many things on the school based management have to be approved by the area superintendent and the area superintendent is reluctant to approve them because it might be contrary to central administration. I like the idea and the concept of school-based management if it’s just not paper work. I think right now even though the school’s saying we have school-based management, in effect you really don’t have school-based management in a true sense of the terms but I do like it. EWM190F

*What leadership techniques did you use while creating a climate for learning?*

I dealt with teachers in a democratic fashion, and I had them involved as much as possible in the decision-making process, especially in things that concerned them. I always tried to get them involved. If my superiors mandated something, I got input from them regarding the ways we would implement that mandate.

*Which leadership techniques were successful and unsuccessful?*

I felt those things were successful when the faculty members were most involved. And the opposite was true those things that were not successful were often the times someone would come in and say, “Hey, folks, this is coming from up there and this is what we have to do, and we have got to do it.” Those things that they did not have their heart in and those things in which they were not a part of the decision-making process those were the things that did not go as well. EWM202F

**Concluding Thoughts**

One repeated note in the Fairfax county interviews was that of needing to “keep everybody happy.” While high school principals across the state talked about their role as one of “balancer,” in Fairfax this cut across levels and genders.
My biggest headache, in a nutshell, was keeping everyone happy—all the different factions that you deal with, of course, the Central Office staff and Area staff, the faculty and staff, the parents and students all of these groups had to be kept happy. The students were the least of my problems. This is a tremendous job and an impossible job, but it is something that is expected of you and you just have to do your best at it. EWM202F

There are all kinds of other pressures that are involved, being constantly in the middle is a pressure, you are constantly in the middle between the teacher and student, between the teacher and the parent, a lot of times between the student and the parent, between the community and then the student body sometimes. You can put any combination of two things together and it’s most likely the principal, at one time or another, be caught in the middle. So that I guess that is—if you can put it into one thing, being in the middle is the pressure. You can’t ever be right. SWM221F

The Fairfax interviewees, regardless of level, talked about agentive selves as principal. They set the tone for “their” school; they told stories of crises with themselves as hero, and they talked about the principalship as a central role in the school. This was done with greater emphasis than in the narratives of principals in general. The comments of the two principals below summarize the general tone nicely:

Well, I think maybe we’ve said it before that we’re sort of charged with, I believe our superintendent Mr. Woodson said, that the principal would set the tone for the school and I think the way that we would set the tone, the principal would through cooperation, with the teachers and understanding of the teacher, the parents, and all of the staff, the secretaries, the cafeteria people, special teachers, custodians, all of the aides, all of the people who keep the school running and going and supervisors. EWF220F

I do believe—and the great thing about the principalship—is that it should carry the mark of its leader. You know sometimes that’s good and sometimes that’s bad. So in that sense, all three schools, I’d like to think people looked at them when I was there and say, “Well, they’re his!” SWM177F

As my analysis of these interviews indicates, a particular administrative culture, in conjunction with commonality of time, space and demographics, can have a significant impact on role definition and identity of self-as-principal. Through these principals’ common construction of a county administrative persona against the backdrop of a particular locality, one can sense how these factors can seriously influence development and enactment of one’s identity as a principal.

**Concluding Comments**

This chapter looked at contextual factors identified by the principals in this study as impacting their construction of identity as a principal. Will the important factors be the same for earlier or later cohorts of principals, principals from other states, principals with a wider range of religious backgrounds? Probably not. The relevance of context, as defined in this chapter, to better understanding how principals, and by extension, other educators, define
their roles and construct their identities seems obvious. The very idea of standardization across contexts seems nigh impossible, even if that should be a desirable goal.

The discourse contrasts which emerged as a result of this methodology are intriguing to me. These interviews were not ostensibly about the impact of socio-cultural and contextual factors on role definition and construction of identity of self-as-principal. They were a set of narrative responses to questions about one’s tenure as a school principal. And yet, these striking patterns emerged as to what larger contextual frames, discourses, and socio-cultural factors corresponded to contrasting discourses.

Therefore, the findings indicate that the theory I was attempting to explore, is sound. Narratives can be examined using socio-cultural discourse analysis to trace influences on construction of self. That has some implications for how selves are socially constructed and invites us to consider how we come to be who we are. This is discussed in the next chapter.

The findings themselves about socio-cultural and contextual influences on construction of self-as-principal lead to some interesting implications for the preparation of educational administrators as well as suggesting some directions for further study. These are also discussed in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: 
Conclusions: 
The Connective Tissue of Theory and Practice as a Context for Thoughts, Questions, Possible Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

Introduction
This study has been conducted on two levels simultaneously. On one level it serves as a case in point of a theory regarding the nature of the Self and the relationship between self-construction and narrative. I began the study with the premise that primary influences on identity of self should be able to be determined through a socio-cultural approach to discourse analysis. This is because we are ourselves social constructions who have available to us only the discourses enjoined by our selves and it is through narrative that we construct meaning and understanding of who we are/were. On another level, the study is an example of discourse analysis as a methodology applied to a particular set of interviews with retired school principals in Virginia and what was discovered as a result of that analysis. Both of these have implications which can be examined.

The process of research is recursive and dialogical while the product of a written description of that process is necessarily linear. In this final chapter I outline a theory of self-construction exemplified by this study. To better contextualize what I see as important implications of this theory, I next examine the study as an example of pragmatic social constructivism (cf. Garrison, 1995, forthcoming) and critical pragmatism (cf. Cherryholmes, 1988). Then, I summarize the specific findings of the study obtained through discourse analysis of the interview transcripts. I look at the implications of my findings as I see them related to education generally and to educational administration and the principalship in particular. Finally, I outline some suggestions for further research which are based upon both the theoretical and the practical aspects of this study.

Back To Theory: The Implications of Being a Tosser of Stones
The connections between Bakhtin’s understanding of language as dialogical and Dewey’s understandings of language as a dialogical meaning making tool have been discussed at length by others (i.e., Garrison, 1995; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). Back to the beginning. Back to where the great thinking on mind, self and identity in the fields of philosophy and psychology converge. In developing a working understanding of self, identity and role, and the interrelationships among these and with language and society, I must acknowledge my debt to Bakhtin, Casey, Cherryholmes, Dewey, Foucault, Garrison, Greene, Gregg, Grogan, Hermans & Kempen, James, Johnson, Mead, Nespor, Rosaldo, Weedon, and Wertsch. Although they have all kept me awake at night, they have also provided a roadmap for a most fruitful journey into thinking about these realms, so fundamental to our understandings of what it means to understand oneself as human. I take responsibility for any misrepresentation of their ideas; all problems and misunderstandings remaining in the following discussion are mine.
Two points from those discussions are worth reiterating here. Garrison (1995) remarks that whether what we say corresponds to some externally verifiable reality (even if this were possible to ascertain) is only a secondary consideration:

That the inner representations we employ to process information may help us successfully coordinate our actions effectively does not imply that they are epistemologically privileged internal representations corresponding to external reality. (p. 721, italics in original)

If what we are trying to discern is an understanding of major influences on construction of identity of self-in-action, then what is important is not whether what one says about oneself is “true,” but from what meta-narratives one draws in order to describe action, intention, etc.

Secondly, Bakhtin’s insistence that speech is action and Dewey’s understanding that language as a tool for meaning making is generative, not archival, implies that language is an active means for constructing self, one which simultaneously allows for understanding and which impacts future understanding. In the process of narrating our stories about selves (our self-representation, as it were), we come to new understandings of who we are, who else we might be, and how we negotiate/transact our identities of selves. Thus narrative construction of self is a primary human meaning making activity, an analysis of which helps a person better understand him/herself/selves and which gives the listener insight into powerful socio-cultural influences on the self/selves being narrated.

This statement rests on several assumptions. One is an understanding of the relationship between narrative and self-construction. This was discussed in Chapter Two. Recall Bruner’s (1990) assertion that the best way to see the self is through retrospective autobiography. He says that it would be impossible to articulate self-in-action, past or present, in anything other than narrative form. If we really want to know “what the person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for, what kinds of plights he thought he was in, and so on” (p. 120), we have to ask. The result will be “an account of what one thinks one did in what settings for what felt reasons. It will inevitably be a narrative and...its form will be as revealing as its substance” (p. 119).

The second assumption is that self construction is a creative act, not a passive one. As Bruner (1990) explains, a self is a product/producer of culture. The construction of a self is an imaginative process in response to perceived choices (see also Johnson, 1993).

Perhaps even more fundamental in terms of implications for this study is a cluster of assumptions regarding a particular generative understanding of self/selves, how selves are transacted and then constructed, and the nature of the relationship between Self and selves. Foundational to my understanding of identity transaction of selves are the following five points assembled from my reading of a wide variety of works having to do with the social construction of the self.²

² Of course, this represents the current thinking of my self as emergent scholar; once I enunciate it, it will change how I understand it and will be available as a text for others to transact meaning with which might influence how they see me and thus, ultimately, how I see my self-as-emergent-scholar.
1. We each have many selves (James initiated this idea in 1890; Mead, Dewey and countless others have built upon it). James (1890) talks about the distinction between an “I” and a “me.” For James, we can have many socially determined “Me’s”, which are similar to roles, whereas it is the “I” which remains constant throughout. Mead (1934) saw each self that we develop as having an “I” and a “Me.” For Mead, each “Me” was externally and socially defined as a role and it was the “I” of each self that generated the possibilities for new responses and innovation by providing the self with a vehicle for reflection. Thus, “Me’s” were more stable than “I’s.” The relationship between selves was described as dialogical, therefore selves influenced one another. In this study, the self being examined is self-as-principal. The “Me” of self-as-principal is self-in-role as the role is understood and externally defined. The “I” of self-as-principal is how that role is enacted and transacted given the interaction between biological factors, socio-cultural factors, experiences of other selves and the moral imagination of the “I.” The interaction of the “I” and the “Me” create and define self-as-principal. A role theory that ignored the “Me” aspect of self-in-role would ignore that selves are socially constructed entities and would subscribe to the notion of a person as an entirely autonomous independent being; a role theory that ignored the “I” would see role as entirely externally determined making generativity of self an impossibility and ignoring how “I”/ “Me” interactions are what defines self-in-role. (For more complete descriptions of Mead’s development of the relationship between the “I” and the “Me,” see Garrison, forthcoming; Gregg, 1991; Hermans & Kempen, 1993.)

One could be self-as-principal, self-as-daughter, self-as-mother, self-as-partner, self-as-teacher, self-as-choir director, self-as-writer, self-as-African- American-woman at the same time. I see selves existing both simultaneously and serially through time. I do not believe that there is a Self hierarchically poised above the other selves, or as a composite of all other selves that exists as an entity independent of context. What might be the case is that as we grow and develop selves, there is a core overlay which begins to develop as a core concept of our understanding of who we are as a person (in Mead’s terminology an “I” versus a “Me”) which exists across contexts. (Whether this is different than just having those aspects of self repeated across contexts is not clear. I do not think this is particularly relevant to this argument; neither is the unresolved issue of spirit/soul.).

2. Self construction is dialogical and developmental (Dewey and Mead both play with this idea; others build upon their understandings). Our selves are constructed dialogically between who we are as socio-cultural entities and our physiological endowment, the situations we find ourselves in, the power relationships in our world. The same set of selves (read “person”) will transact/construct identity of self-as-principal differently in a large

When a stone is tossed into a pond, the thrower changes, because s/he has now thrown that stone, the stone changes location and physical state, and the pond is disturbed. Scary stuff.

3 One comment made often by those grappling with Mead, Dewey or James’ work is that it is not consistent, that what is written in one place somehow contradicts what is written in another. Further, those who ascribe to a developmental theory of thought are comfortable when the discrepancies are in what they perceive to be an evolutionary direction but discomforted when thoughts expressed later seem to undercut earlier statements regarded by the critic as “more true.” This seems to me but another example of the nonlinear nature of learning and of the damage of consistency being held as a paramount nature of trueness.
 Fairfax high school than in a small K-12 school in the mountains. This dynamic exchange causes us to learn which leads us to act. Learning is the process of making meaning, and that meaning is expressed in the actions our selves take. When we describe those selves using language, we come to new understandings of who we are as that self, and therefore, we construct new meanings about self which constitutes new learning when acted upon. It is through this process that moral imagination may be cultivated. The act of narrating performs the dual role of revealing to us the temporal and causal significance of our actions and our evaluations of those actions (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). The very process of narrating our selves allows us to grow in our understandings of the possibilities for action that exist.

3. Therefore, descriptions of mind, identity and role are not representations of inner fields but of understandings as enacted by selves in and across contexts. Wertsch (1991) says

A fundamental assumption of a socio-cultural approach to mind is that what is to be described and explained is human action...I use the term socio-cultural because I want to understand how mental action is situated in cultural, historical and institutional settings. (p. 8 & 15, emphasis in original)

This approach negates the idea that mind or identity is solely internal or exists independent of context. Our understandings as expressed through language, however, are closely connected to primary identities as constructed in society because we acquire all of our language in interaction with others. What kinds of languages we acquire and, therefore, discourses which we have access to and use, are delimited by socio-cultural and contextual locations in society, which structure how we understand our selves.

Herein lies the connection to the assertion that selves can be studied in narrative. Looking at an earlier identity recreated in narrative by one’s present self-as-interviewee allows examination of the process of [re]construction of that identity through narrative. When subjected to a process of socio-cultural discourse analysis, such narratives illuminate what meta-narratives were being drawn on to construct an identity of self-in-action. In the case of this study, an analysis of narratives created during oral history interviews about self-as-principal generated insights into the meanings and understandings each interviewee held about him/her self-as-principal as well as primary socio-cultural and contextual factors that influenced those meanings and understandings.

There is always a potential difference between the behavioral changes initiated by changes in selves/roles and how we describe/understand those changes.

Role change by definition brings about behavioral change, and it may also bring about change in metaphoric self-representation, but the two are fundamentally different. (Gregg, 1991, p. 202)

The possibility that what we understand to be true about a self-in-action and how we actually behave as a self-in-action will not match has already been dismissed as unimportant in terms of which of the two is more “real.” Its importance for this discussion lies in how the discourses used to describe self-in-action reveal understanding of self-in-role. For example, if a person views self-as-principal as more directly emerging from or connected to self-as-teacher, s/he will most likely narrate self-as-principal very differently than someone who sees self-as-principal most directly connected to self-as-platoon leader. (This is overly
simplistic because selves are typically built upon and related to other clusters of selves, as opposed to another single self, but it provides an idea of what is meant here.)

4. Selves are embedded. They do not exist apart from context. They do not exist without awareness of their existence and the meanings they possess. They must be identified. They are constructed in action, in a field of practice. Identity is the process of naming of a self or selves and accepting and incorporating that naming into further action. Externally imposed identities are only a useful component of self to the extent they are internalized as part of self.

   Our selves are never simply defined in terms of individualized properties. Rather, we define ourselves partly in terms of what we accept as our appropriate place within dialogical actions, not only in face-to-face interactions but also as part of larger social units. (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 106)

To identify means to attach meaning in the process of naming. There is a difference between having and using meanings, and being conscious of those meanings and, thus, being able to talk about them. Constructing a narrative about self-in-action is one way to become conscious. But, it would be impossible to be “mindful” all of the time. As Mead (1934) points out, “In fact, it is essential to the economy of our conduct that the connection between stimulation and response should sink below the threshold of consciousness” (p. 127). There is an understanding that most of the time we act out of habit; that is, without conscious awareness of why we do what we do. As defined by Dewey and Mead, unreflective habit is embodied meaning (Garrison, forthcoming). Much contemporary research into behavioral and role theory concludes that people act from their beliefs. This makes sense if one defines beliefs as do Dewey and Mead:

   Beliefs for Dewey and Mead are habits, and habits are embodied dispositions to act evincing emotion...Habits are never entirely separate from a specific context of action, including the community in which an agent resides. (ibid., p. 21-22)

If beliefs are embodied meanings, then the retrospective articulation by the “I” of beliefs as motivation or intention behind the actions of a self-in-action, or “me”, allows one to see where among the myriad of applicable socio-cultural factors and contextual factors particular habits are situated. This retrospective articulation becomes an act of interruption of habit which generates awareness about self. We will come back to this point later.

   Garrison (forthcoming) summarizes the relationship between mind and self, and between the I and the “me”:

Minds emerge when agents can manipulate socio-linguistic meanings: selves emerge when the agent can take the perspective of others in interpreting their own symbolic acts, thereby becoming self-consciously aware of their minds (as a system of meanings). Self-awareness involves the “I.”

A self is comprised of an “I” as well as a “me.” It is the “I” that provides reflective self-awareness of the empirical “me.” Recall that the “I” is only operative when the habitual functioning of the “me” is disrupted. The “I”
however, never appears because it is...the expressive functional “I can do” at the center of reconstructive action. (p. 23)

In this study, the “I” of self-as-principal retrospectively narrates and constructs the “me” of self-as-principal through a self as interviewee and through a lens of “what I did.” We have no way of knowing how these people formerly constructed “self-as-principal”, how that construction corresponded to this construction in this interview, or whether or not a given individual had even constructed an identity of self-as-principal for him/herself in the past. Therefore, we cannot know whether or not these are constructions or reconstructions. But, again, this is not particularly relevant beyond understanding that it is the case and that self-construction and meaning-making are always this complex.

The important point here is that this is a truly social conception of mind and self.

Mind, and self-consciousness of the meanings that make up the mind, must be understood as a property of fields of action; it cannot be adequately comprehended in terms of individual psychological atoms, colliding into each other. (Garrison, forthcoming, p. 27)

5. Boundaries between selves are permeable and meanings may or may not transfer across contexts and selves. Influences on selves vary in origin and strength. A person transacts development of identity of self-as-principal against and within contextual factors such as location, school and administrative climate, features of the larger professional knowledge landscape. They bring to bear on those transactions past experiences by related selves, socio-cultural factors, and understandings of what is possible and required as defined by both of these. Issues of power, freedom, autonomy, and coercion enter the discussion at this point:

The inside and outside world function as highly open systems that have intensive transactional relationships. The self, as a highly contextual phenomenon, is bound to cultural and institutional constraints. Dominance relations are not only present in the outside world but, by the intensive transactions between the two, organize also the inside world. This implies that the possible array of imaginal positions becomes not only organized but restricted by the process of institutionalization (e.g., in family, school, church, military service and community life). Some of the possible positions are approved; others are disapproved or even rejected. The important implication is, finally, that, depending on the extent of dominance in dialogical relationships, some positions are strongly developed, whereas others are suppressed or even dissociated. (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 78)

The implication here is that we are bound by the socio-cultural and contextual factors that locate us in society in particular ways and that the vantage points, and, therefore, awareness of possibilities for self-construction, are quite different depending upon where one is. Thus, our selves are largely shaped by the limited forced choices we can see as we are developing any given self. People who share many socio-cultural identities and contextual factors are likely to be similarly limited in their perception of their options and in their access to only a certain set of discourses.
Does this mean that people are not unique? No, it means that people are unique first, biologically, then, by virtue of the unique collection of selves they develop (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), and, thirdly, by the meanings they make through reflection on self-as-action which generates meaning unique to them. It also means that the idea of an understanding of role independent of self or context, if it exists at all, is so ludicrously incomplete as to render its usefulness as a concept nearly meaningless.

The implications of all of this for thinking about education in general and educators and educator preparation are, of course, rather alarming. This way of thinking about learning and identity and self and role directly challenges most of what we do in education. Much of educational practice treats teaching as unidimensional and learners as unitary subjects. If teaching and learning are dialogical, teaching a process of facilitation of ruptures of habit so that learners make meanings from the spaces revealed, and teachers and learners composites of multiple selves as teachers and learners, much needs to be revisited. As Gregg (1991) asserts, “Self-representation may be a structure of differences but of differences that make a difference” (p. 208) and, as seen here, these do not correspond with what conventional wisdom says makes a difference. If the differences that make a difference are not input, standardization, and certification requirements, for example, but are the opportunities for reflection, discussion and experiences in a variety of contexts, cultures and settings, then much of what we do currently in schools is quite beside the point. By attempting to gloss over, denying or refusing to recognize socio-cultural and contextual factors that make for rich and complex differences, we may be doing very little that matters. Garrison (1995, forthcoming) warns that if Dewey’s perspective on learning is really considered, which basically corresponds to what has been outlined here, the premises that currently underlie much of current educational practice must be radically altered, resulting in a rethinking of almost everything we do as educators.

Pragmatic social constructivism.

If self construction is as I have described, then what I have outlined is akin to what Garrison (1995, forthcoming) describes as pragmatic social constructivism, an understanding of self and meaning making derived largely from the work of Mead and Dewey. I think that this study and its findings serve as an example of pragmatic social constructivism. In this section I want to briefly summarize what I understand to be the tenets of the theory and trace its relevance as a framework for understanding this study. (For a detailed and elegant description of pragmatic social constructivism, its basis in Mead and Dewey’s work, and its consequences for educational practice, please see Garrison, 1995.)

I see the emergence of self-as-principal as revealed by the various interviewees in this study through an analysis of their discourses about identity of self-as-principal as a clear example of what I think is meant by pragmatic social constructivism. Garrison (1995) talks about pragmatic social behaviorism as “providing social constructivism with a general theory of meaning making taken literally in terms of a culture’s language, tools and forms of labor” (p. 721). It would seem, then, in order to look at meaning making, and therefore, self-construction, one would have to look at discourse about identity of “self-as” in order to truly understand the meaning of a constructivist framework.

But first, it is helpful to understand what Dewey and Mead meant when they discussed the nature of the self as “constructed” and what that means in terms of social pragmatism. Garrison (1995) describes this succinctly when he says:
We ourselves are the product, the artifact, the construction of cultural labor created by tools—especially, the tool of tools. The labor of language “the cherishing mother of all significance” gives birth to our minds and our selves. It should come as no surprise that Dewey (1925/1981), influenced by Mead, saw “the self as the tool of tools, the means in all use of means”. (p.189 as quoted in Garrison, 1995, p. 726)

So, a self emerges as a consequence of participating in an extended series of transactions; it is not innately present antecedent to participation in those transactions. It is only through an examination of the implications of social and pragmatic that one can articulate any theory of constructivism and understand the nature of a self called into play by a particular context. If construction of a self is a generative process, then traditional role theory as a way of understanding the dynamics of organizations does not make sense. For example, my normative assumptions of how teachers, students, principals, etc. should act, based on some externally imposed definition of role, does not give me useful information either as to how people enacting those roles actually behave and interact and transact identities, or as to how to better see what is actually occurring in a given context. Rather, it blinds me to what might be happening and, therefore, limits my imagination in how to best work in that context. Yet, this is generally the approach taken in most training for educational administrators where aspiring school principals are asked to memorize role responsibilities and expectations and to apply templates onto existing situations in a way which assumes that roles can be assigned as mandated without regard to the personal compendium of selves taking them on, like masks to be put on and taken off at will and in a prescribed manner.

As discussed earlier, it is essential to understand the mind and self as distributed in a field of practice for a social pragmatic viewpoint to make sense. I made the point in Chapter 1 about the embeddedness of self and identity of self—as particularly in the context of education where there is necessarily an enmeshing of socially constructed contexts, where the boundaries between selves, among selves, among boundaries and through experiences are permeable and continually under transaction and where a unidirectional understanding of what is occurring is terribly impoverished. As Garrison (forthcoming) points out, a Deweyan perspective rejects the Cartesian “I think therefore I am” and instead sees embodied action, “I can do”, as the core of an identity of self. Actions of self-in-context are responses which encompass activity, feeling and idea; it is only possible later to reflect upon what one did and to talk about these as separate entities. Dewey cautions against letting these functional distinctions “harden into untenable dualisms between mind (ideas, etc.), bodily activity (behavior, etc.), or affect (desire, etc.)” (Garrison, forthcoming, p. 4).

This unified understanding of action and its relation to self and mind is the core of social pragmatism because it negates the idea that we are either entirely internally self determined or externally predetermined or that living engages only parts of a self at a time. It also undermines traditional Western theory which says that we as entirely independent beings act on our environment. Extended to the field of education, this way of thinking demolishes the concept of teaching as “something we do at others” and learning as “something that is received.” Instead, all interactions are transactions. In self-construction, and in meaning-making, (which are often the same thing), “an embodied being is internally involved in reconstructing itself and its world simultaneously...In the transaction between self and world, both are transformed” (Garrison, forthcoming, p. 11-12).
All of the interviewees in my study constructed an identity about self-as-principal during the course of an interview about their experiences as principal. Retired principals in the same “role” did not necessarily identify themselves in the same way. There were aspects of identity of self-as-principal which fell within discourse boundaries of socio-cultural or contextual cohorts. There were seemingly individual responses to different situations, which I might have interpreted as individual only because of lack of information and which might, in the majority of cases, reflect unidentified (by me) common socio-cultural factors or contextual factors. Yet the individual patterns of these differed depending on the individual, depending on the constellation of factors and experiences and understanding that individual used to negotiate and transact his or her identity of self-as-principal. The benefit of analyzing retrospective narratives is that one can see, through the discourses used, a summary of how that individual understood the socio-cultural and contextual factors reflected through language as influential on identity and, therefore, can better understand the transactional nature of self-construction.

Although this way of looking at self-construction also negates a Foucaultian view of selves as largely externally predetermined, because of the understanding of a transactional field of action, one must consider the limitations imposed by limited understandings or exposure to alternative possibilities to what exists. Rather than supporting the idea that we all begin with the same freedom to construct selves, this should make us acutely aware of the role of power in self construction. Garrison (1995) makes a salient point about the threat of social constructivism to educators and policy makers. He reinforces the inherent responsibility for those in more powerful positions in the educational enterprise (i.e., educational administrators, including school principals) to be the most aware of how they are constructing meaning and restricting the possibilities of others:

If mind and self are indeed made through participating in social practices and, as is rather obvious, social practices, tools and language are themselves social constructions and, equally obviously, there can be no doubt that power fashions practices and tools into the shape it desires for them, then there can be no doubt that political power can shape minds and selves into the form those who wield it desire. (p. 737)

To me, this, and the example of the discourse variants illustrated by this study, suggest the need for a framework of critical pragmatism in order to develop processes of mindful self-making as educational administrators.

**Critical pragmatism.**

By extending the examination of this study into the realms of critical theory, more insight can be gained as to how this study stands as an example of critical pragmatism. There are resulting implications of this both for educators and for education in general. An understanding of how power and privilege influence self-construction and narrative discourse about self is important to understanding how to mitigate those influences in favor of more democratic practices in education.

This study was of people occupying what is generally perceived to be a powerful position in our educational system: that of school principal. Yet, they did not all describe themselves-as-principal as powerful. Only some did so; generally those who conformed to the role as described in the mainstream literature about educational administration, mostly
White males, and those who occupied what they perceived to be the more powerful positions, that of high school principal. Other cohorts talked about power as “power with” or “the ability to get the job done” (White female elementary principals), or they did not mention power at all, yet related very powerful narratives about doing what was necessary to truly empower others (Black female elementary principals). Ostensibly, these principals could have defined the role, within certain parameters, however they liked. Yet, a cacophony of identities of self-as-principal did not emerge. Although stories varied, structural metaphors among those in cohort groups emerged in common. It is important to both look at why this might be the case and to examine the possible implications of it being the case.

Cherryholmes (1988) makes the following point:

If people are free to choose what to do, why is it they choose activities coincident with rules and normative commitments of established practice? Why do their choices not produce something closer to anarchy? One reason is ideological: people accept, internalize, and act according to shared ideas they believe are true and valid. (p. 5)

Recall that for Dewey, beliefs and habits are embodied meanings; “We have meanings, that is embodied and impassioned habits, but we do not know we have them until our unconscious, habitual functioning is disrupted” (Garrison, forthcoming, p. 21-22). This is where Dewey says reflective, self-aware and creative functioning, and thus moral imagination, is possible. Freedom cannot exist without both an awareness of what has gone on as habitual functioning and what other possibilities for action exist. Therefore, it is only as a result of this disruption of unconscious functioning that we gain a space for critical pragmatism to occur.

Cherryholmes (1988) agrees that this unconscious habitual functioning must be intentionally interrupted if we are to understand what causes us to act as educators. We tend to understand our personal (as opposed to professional) selves in terms of socio-cultural and contextual factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, one’s position in a family constellation, one’s developed and recognized talents. Cherryholmes (1988) points out:

Most of us do not use categories like these when we think about practice because our professional subjectivities [habits] are already shaped: we have internalized appropriate rules and ideologies, have accommodated ourselves to dominant power relationships, and are more concerned with performing expected actions than with analyzing them [unconscious functioning]. But in order to exert control over practice and not simply react to it, we must be explicit not only about what we do but also what it is that structures what we do [disruption]. (p. 6)

Note that by suturing Cherryholmes’ and Garrison’s words, one arrives at the same conclusion; for freedom to exist, disruption of unconscious habitual functioning must occur. But Dewey does not go on to explain the role of power in shaping our subjectivities, and thus our potential choices and opportunities for disjuncture, a point explicitly made by Cherryholmes (1988):

Social practices are supported by power arrangements. When I use the word *power*, it will refer to relations among individuals or groups based on social, political and material *asymmetries* by which some people are indulged and
rewarded and others negatively sanctioned and deprived...To the extent that ideology and power arrangements infiltrate our thinking and actions, they shape our subjectivities, that is how and what we think about ourselves and so act. (p. 5 & 6)

Without an understanding of power, therefore, we cannot understand how opportunities for self-construction are severely limited for some and expanded for others. The result is that opportunities for change are restricted.

It could be argued that what I found was that people act out of their value and beliefs systems; that values are individually determined and, therefore, uninteresting in terms of what it portends for possibilities for educational reform. I do not agree with this interpretation of my findings.

Even so, should someone take the position that we are free, autonomous beings, I believe that an understanding of power relations remains relevant. Cherryholmes (1988) points out that, “Values and preferences do not arise out of thin air, however; they are, among other things, effects of power and history” (p.181). We can see ourselves as choosing but the very menu we have to choose from is pre-determined by the power relations in which those choices are embedded and which, until we question them (i.e., disrupt unconscious functioning), block us from seeing other choices as viable or even as existing at all. Perspective is thus determined by position which is constructed by larger power arrangements in society.

Instead, I think that it is far more productive to interpret my findings as a case for what Cherryholmes (1988) terms as critical pragmatism. These principals made individual transactions as socio-cultural entities with contextual factors to create an identity of self-as-principal.

We are as much a product of time and place as are the texts and discourses-practices around us. We make decisions about beliefs and actions against this background. A vulgar and naive pragmatism, functionally reproducing things for good or ill, plays itself out if we remain uncritical and unreflective and attend only to what is “practical.” Critical pragmatism is realistic because it begins with what is in place. Critical pragmatism is relativistic because it is relative to what is in place. (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 185-86)

By more closely examining the patterns and consequences of those choices as revealed through their discourses about self-as-principal, we can better understand how educational practices come to be and can more fully refute any existing myth of standardization as applicable to the educational enterprise. With these understandings, we can better examine what we do and why we do it and what other alternate practices exist that might be useful, as opposed to the current trend of uncritical acceptance of whatever new comes on the scene.

This will contribute to a more considered understanding of what we do. Rethinking what we do as educators may cause us to make a renewed commitment to what presently exists or it may generate enthusiasm for a new direction. In any case, it is necessary to identify and criticize privileged themes in texts and discourse practices as well as themes that are silenced (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 153).
We cannot “get there” without doing three things: 1) asking educators why they do what they do, 2) get a better understanding of who those educators are, and 3) better understand the socio-cultural and contextual factors which influence their practices. Thus, we must include in our preparation of educators exposure to a variety of models, ways to gain a better understanding of who they are, opportunities to understand potential socio-cultural and contextual influences on their identity construction as educators and a process which encourages cultivation of their moral imagination, of what can be. Only then do we have a chance of breaking the status quo in education.

This is an unusual mandate to come out of a theoretical perspective. To me, this is what realizing how this study exists as a case study for critical pragmatism means. This is a global, more theoretical conclusion. Next, I discuss on a more micro level the findings of this study and the implications particularly for school principals and preparation of educational administrators.

**Summary of Findings**

In analyzing the discourses used in retrospective narratives about self-as-principal-in-action of 83 retired school principals in Virginia, I found that certain socio-cultural factors and contextual factors seemed to heavily influence construction identity of self-as-principal during the interviews. As noted in Chapter 1, my intent was not to explore leadership style, to present a survey of principals’ opinions about topics such as discipline or merit pay, to discover the veracity of the interviewees claims, or to interpret the meanings behind what was said. Instead, I focused on the following questions:

1. How do retired principals locate themselves and describe themselves, their actions, their understandings about education, their goals as principals and their daily routines in their stories about their tenures as principals?

2. As they (re)construct their identity of self-as-principal in the context of an interview, how is their understanding of that role revealed as they locate themselves within their stories vis-à-vis teachers, students, parents, the state, superintendents and central office, received knowledge, educational trends, mandates?

Certain socio-cultural factors such as race, gender and religion, and certain contextual factors, such as level, era, school size, open space schools, career track, special education, school district emerged as determiners of cohorts sharing discourse features about self-as-principal. I found, not surprisingly, that the White male discourses about self used by the interviewees in my study reflect the traditionally dominant discourses found in the literature on educational administration. I found that the level of school (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school) where one is a principal seems to influence how one talks about identity of self-as-principal in areas such as parents, special education, mission and conceptualization of role.

I found that the most profound discourse contrasts about self-as-principal emerged when the cohorts analyzed took into account both race and gender. Cohorts of retired White male, White female, Black male and Black female elementary principals talked somewhat differently about self-as-principal as revealed by how they talked about others, about mission, about stressful situations and about their perceptions of how they worked and what they were trying to accomplish. Very different structural metaphors for each cohort by level
and race/gender regarding self-as-principal emerged during the analysis. Religion also showed up as a feature of the narratives about self-as-principal across racial, gender and geographic lines.

Context defined by the discourses about self-as-principal revealed a need to expand the definitions of context usually found in the literature to include features of the professional knowledge landscape, and for high school principals, era. Examples of how federal mandates were translated locally by cohorts sharing socio-cultural identities were clear in the case of special education, where the contrast was between elementary and middle school principals across gender, and desegregation, where the contrast was between Black and White cohorts across level. In the case of four counties, administrative culture seemed to have a direct influence on how those retired principals talked about their identity of self-as-principal. The result of a discourse analysis of the cohort of interviews presenting this most clearly, Fairfax, was presented as a case study to demonstrate the convergence of influences of location and administrative culture on narratives about self-as-principal.

Age, years of tenure as principal, educational background, rural vs. urban locations, and areas of the state did not seem to generate defined discourse cohorts. There well may be other ways that significant discourses could emerge through cohort analysis. This study does not claim to be comprehensive but merely illustrative of how discourse analysis by cohorts can yield insight into how these socio-cultural and contextual factors influence construction of identity of self-as-principal.

**Implications**

I think that the strongest implication of the findings of this study is a necessity to reframe the education of future educational administrators as preparation rather than training. The distinction is important; a training approach assumes that the mandate to be carried out by one in the role of principal is largely technical in nature and can be learned out-of-context and applied to any context equally successfully. Preparation, on the other hand, assumes that one knows oneself as instrument (i.e., is conscious of one’s own belief system, one’s strengths, weaknesses, and vision), and that one understands the negotiation of identity of self-as-principal as a transaction. In training, procedures, rules and models take precedence; in preparation, heuristics, communication skills, analytical skills and reflection are the paramount navigational tools that are developed. In training, moral imagination is ignored while an approach which attempts to prepare people for negotiating an identity as an educator must cultivate moral imagination.

The results of the study support the contention that individual people negotiate identities of self-as-principal in particular locations at particular times. This makes obvious two facts; 1) that the particular constellation of socio-cultural selves embodied by a particular person substantially influences the self one constructs as principal, and 2) the particular constellation of contextual factors one faces in time, place, and space become the background against/within which socio-cultural factors, experience base and one’s understanding of the expectations of self and role negotiate/transact an identity of self-as-principal.

This stance negates the appropriateness of a particular viewpoint, (i.e., a White male model), as being the single exemplar of leadership, particularly if we want more effective leadership and we want to encourage leadership in educational administration by others than
White males. The moral imagination revealed in the interviews of White females, Black males and Black females indicates the potential richness of alternative models which can and should be available to anyone going into educational administration, including White males.

It also negates the idea that a single internship experience or a flowchart view of leadership would be adequate preparation for the principalship. Given the wide variety of contextual factors seen to influence self construction in this limited study, a heightened awareness of the ways contextual constraints and opportunities might influence role definition is in order. A problem-solving approach involving many different kinds of scenarios and settings seems applicable.

A primary aim of preparation must be to provide opportunities for better understanding of who one is and what one envisions needs doing as an educational administrator. I thus join a general call in education for more reflective practice and the development of habits of mind which support reflective practice. Here, reflection is akin to disruption of unconscious habitual action. Reflection is, therefore, what can make creative action possible.

Many have made the case for school principal as moral agent (see Chapter 2). The impoverishment of some of these principals’ moral imaginations compared with others’ is astonishing, even within the limited context of these interview transcripts. There were those who faced the same kinds of conditions and choices and who made very different kinds of decisions. For example, one principal saw demanding parents as a problem while another in a similar community saw demanding parents as a potential resource. Elementary principals tended to talk about special education as a burden while middle school principals generally spoke about special education as a way to meet all children’s needs and as an integral component of an effective school. Some principals accepted scarcity of allocated resources as an excuse not to do things they said they would have liked to do while others came up with ingenious ways to make happen what they saw was in children’s best interests regardless of lack of resources from the school division. Presumably education in the best interests of far more children would be supported if the moral imagination of all aspiring educational administrators was deliberately cultivated.

These dimensions lay out a course of preparation for principals which was explicitly constructed with the intent of disrupting habitual ways of thinking about things so that new understandings could be constructed. Aspects of this would need to include an array of mentorships by different people in different places, lots of time for problem-solving and reflection, opportunities to develop vision, develop, test and practice conviction, observe deeply and ask and struggle with important questions. It would include models of leadership that are recursive and clustered, as well as those that are hierarchical, and would explore the strengths and weaknesses of all such conceptions. It would understand the principalship as a negotiation rather than as an imposition. And it would distinguish not only between the principalship and other positions in educational administration but between different levels of the principalship and the wide array of contextual factors that are influential at each level. The aim would be to help those who would-be school principals to explicitly understand the process of construction of identity of self-as-principal involved.

This means, of course, that positivist frameworks are largely irrelevant to preparation of principals (or of educators in general). It points out the futility of applying the idea of standardization to education. It makes ludicrous trying to train future educational administrators through a better understanding of role theory or emulation of the behaviors
of a particular leadership style or a self-measuring against the existence of common micro-social isolates as explanations for “success.” And, it means that we must not try to dodge the important questions of who we are and what we want. Indeed, change can only occur through thoughtful dialogue about those very things.

**Possible Directions for Future Research**

I found not only some prominent distinctions in the discourses about identity of self-as-principal between interview cohorts but some indications about how specific socio-cultural and contextual factors held in common seemed to influence construction of self-as-principal. This gives some insight into how particular influences operate on construction of self-as-principal.

More research is needed here. Similar socio-cultural discourse analysis of narratives about identity of self-as-principal constructed by principals in other states, of cohorts sharing similar socio-cultural identities across states and contexts, and of principals sharing minority or ethnic backgrounds other than the ones explored in this study might well contribute to better understanding of the significant influences on construction of self-as-principal.

Research into the effectiveness of programs of principal preparation along the lines proposed in the last section would give some indication if a wider “palette of colors” emerged in terms of the moral imagination employed by selves-as-principals in action. Thinking through the educational system through a Deweyan perspective would cause us to change criteria for effectiveness. By looking at principals-in-action using those lenses, we might be able to see if principals see themselves as responsible for opening up spaces for creative action or closing down possibilities even further.

Additional research into the conceptualizations of power held by principals might be helpful. I found that the contrasts in the discourses about identity of self-as-principal fell along race and gender lines. This is an exploration that could be continued and then brought back to aspiring principals as an array of possibilities.

Religion emerged as a prominent discourse feature, as did the military. More research into how these two institutions contribute to formation of identity of selves-as-educators might reveal some important insight into how discourses-practices are generated/reinforced in education and on what kind of preparation educators most rely in constructing their professional identities. It would also allow us to explore whether or not the prevalent usage of these institutional images and expressions are reflective of their importance or merely available and thus heavily used.

This approach to educational research seems a promising way to better understand how others educators construct identity of self-as-teacher, self-as-superintendent, self-as-specialist. It would enhance our understanding of the entire educational enterprise to see where and what influences most seriously impact identity construction, and if these change depending on one’s position.
Conclusion

In doing this project, I first constructed a theory about the relationship of narrative to self construction, and then proposed a method, socio-cultural discourse analysis, which I could apply to the data at hand. Using this methodology, I tested the theory and found that it generated some interesting insights and ways to think about educators and education. I then added to the theory in light of the study and added to the implications of the study in light of the revised theory. Such is the recursive nature of this dialectical process we call research for the purpose of generating knowledge. Both theory and the results of research have been relocated, juxtaposed with each other, in ways that are, to me, affirming and startling.

I thought it possible, even likely, that there would be some discourse contrasts; I did not expect there to be so many or that, in some cases, they would be so sharp. I half expected, despite some initial promising indicators, that upon closer analysis all contrasts would collapse, that the more influential factors would be ones about which I knew nothing, (i.e., religion of the interviewees, family background of the interviewees), or that there would be no discernible patterns at all, supporting the traditional western conception of individuals as self-contained autonomous beings. Instead, it became evident that even knowing a little about someone puts one in touch with likely influences on how they will define role and identify self-as-principal.

I think this is a promising avenue of educational research, pertinent to all of the current issues and dilemmas in American education. An understanding of the origins of discourses-practices would seem fundamental to understanding why things are the way they are and what might need to be influenced to bring about change. Cherryholmes’ (1988) point is well taken:

When the origins of discourse-practices are ignored, the material basis of discourse is ignored, the way in which power preceded and invades speech is ignored, criticism is ignored and ethical and ideological dimensions of speech are ignored; the result is that discourse-practices are determined, often invisibly, by rules, interests, commitments, and power structures of time and place. (p.48)

This is not a point that was made to me as a student, or as a teacher. Only in the process of my doctoral work have these connections been made. The possibilities of their relatedness intrigued me enough to devote my dissertation to exploring both the strength and implications of those relationships. I am now a believer. Perhaps I have also convinced you.
References


state and county based on data reported for 133 church groupings. Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center.


APPENDIX A:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL-ORAL HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Developed by Patrick W. Carlton, Ph.D.

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Would you begin by telling us about your family background-your childhood interests and development. (Birthplace, elementary and secondary education, family characteristics.)

Would you discuss your college education and preparation for entering the field of teaching. How many years did you serve as a teacher? a principal?

I wonder if you would discuss those experiences or events in your life that constituted important decision points in your career and how you feel about them now.

Would you talk about the circumstances surrounding your entry into the principalship.

What motivated you to enter the principalship? How did your motives change over the years?

Would you take us on a walk through your school, describing its appearance and any unusual features of the building.

Would you describe your personal philosophy of education. How did it evolve over the years?

Would you describe the instructional philosophy of your school, telling how it was developed and how it evolved over time.

What experiences/events in your professional life influenced your management philosophy? Please discuss these events.

What techniques did you use to create a successful climate for learning? Would you describe successful and any unsuccessful experiments in climate building in which you were involved.

What kinds of things do teachers expect principals to be able to do? Describe your views on what it takes to be an effective principal, describing the personal and professional characteristics of the "good principal."

As a follow up question, would you describe the expectations, both professional and personal, that were placed upon principals by their employers and the community during your period of employment. How do those expectations differ from today's situation?
A great deal of attention has been given to the topic of personal leadership in recent years. Please discuss your approach to leadership and describe some techniques which worked for you-and an incident in which your approach failed.

Cultural diversity is a topic of great interest and concern at this point in time. Would you discuss the nature of your student body(bodies) and comment on the problems, challenges and triumphs in which you participated while serving as principal.

Would you discuss your participation in handling the Civil Rights situation (integration) and describe your involvement with busing.

It has been said that the curriculum has become much more complex in recent years. Would you comment on the nature of the curriculum during the time you were principal and compare it to the situation in today's schools, citing positive and negative aspects of the situation then and now.

There are those who argue that standardized testing can provide a way to improve instruction. Please discuss your experience with such testing and provide us your views on its effect on the quality of the instructional program.

Could you describe your work day. That is, how did you spend your time? What was the normal number of hours per week you put in?

Would you describe some of the pressures you faced on a daily basis and explain how you coped with them. Describe your biggest headaches or concerns on the job. Describe the toughest decision or decisions that you had to make.

Would you tell us the key to your success as a principal.

Please discuss your professional code of ethics and give examples of how you applied it during your career.

Would you describe those aspects of your professional training which best prepared you for the principalship. Which training experiences were least useful?

If you had to do it again, what kinds of things would you do to better prepare yourself for the principalship? Would you describe your feelings, knowing what you now know, about entering the principalship yourself if given the opportunity to start anew.

What suggestions would you offer to universities as a way of helping them to better prepare candidates for administrative positions? Comment on weaknesses in traditional programs of training for administrators.

What is your view on the "mentoring" program for new administrators, in which an experienced administrator is paired with a neophyte. What experiences have you had with such an approach? Was there a mentor in your life?

There are those who argue that, more often than not, central office policies hinder, rather than help, building level administrators in carrying out their responsibilities. Would you give your views on this issue. If you were king, what changes would you make in the typical
system-wide organizational arrangements as a way of improving administrative efficiency and effectiveness?

If you were advising a person who is considering an administrative job, what would that advice be?

There are those who argue that the principal should be an instructional leader, and those that suggest that, realistically speaking, this person must be, above all, a good manager. Would you give your views on this issue and describe your own style.

Would you describe the ideal requirements for principal certification and discuss appropriate procedures for screening those who wish to become principals.

It is often said that the principal should be active in community affairs. Please discuss your involvement with and participation in civic groups and other community organizations.

Which community organizations or groups had the greatest influence?

It has been said that there is a home-school gap and that more parental involvement with the school’s needs to be developed. Would you give your view on this issue and describe how you interacted with parents and with citizens who were important to the well being of the school?

A good deal of attention has been given to career ladders, differential pay plans and merit pay in recent years. Would you give your views on these issues and describe any involvement you had with such approaches.

Would you describe your approach to teacher evaluation and give your philosophy of evaluation.

A good deal is said these days about teacher grievances. Would you give your views on the desirability of such procedures and describe your approach to handling teacher dissatisfaction.

Would you discuss teacher dismissal and your involvement in such activities.

What, in your view, should be the role of the Assistant Principal. Discuss your utilization of such personnel while on the job. Would you describe the most effective assistant principal with whom you had opportunity to serve. What became of this individual?

As you view it, what characteristics are associated with the most effective schools, and what features characterize less successful ones?

During the past decade schools have become much larger. Discuss your views on this phenomenon and suggest an ideal size for a school in terms of optimal administrative and instructional activities.

In recent years more and more programs for special groups of students (LD, Gifted and Talented, Non-English speaking) have been developed. Please discuss your experience with special student services and your views on today’s trends in this regard.
Salaries and other compensation have changed a good deal since you entered the profession. Would you discuss your recollections of the compensation system of your school system during your early years as principal and give your views on developments in this area since then.

Most systems presently have a tenure, or continuing contract system for teachers. Would you discuss the situation at the time you entered the profession and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of such a system.

There has traditionally been a commitment in this country to the principle of universal free public education. Would you give your views on this concept and indicate your feelings on the practicality of such an approach in this day and time.

Administrators presently spend a good deal of time complaining about the amount of paper work and the bureaucratic complexity with which they are forced to deal. Would you comment on the situation during your administrative career and compare the problems you encountered with your perceptions of the situation at this time.

Given the presence of administrative complexity, if there were three areas of administration that you could change in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of educational administration, what would they be?

As a follow up question, if you could change any three areas in the curriculum or overall operations of American schools, what would they be?

Would you describe your relationship with the Superintendent in terms of his general demeanor toward you and your school.

Would you discuss your general relationship, pro or con, with the Board of Education and comment on the effectiveness of school board operations in general.

Principals operate in a constantly tense environment. What kinds of things did you do to maintain your sanity under these stressful conditions?

Since you have now had some time to reflect on your career, I wonder if you would share with us what you consider to be your administrative strengths and weaknesses.

Would you discuss the circumstances leading up to your decision to retire at the time you did, giving your reasons and the mental processes your exercised in reaching the conclusion to step down.

Would you give us an overall comment on the pros and cons of administrative service, and any advice you would wish passed along to today’s principals.

Despite my best efforts to be comprehensive in my questioning, there is probably something I have left out. What have I not asked you that I should have?
APPENDIX B:
INTRODUCTION TO THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP
by Patrick W. Carlton, Ph. D., Series Editor

Oral History is defined as the preservation, normally through the use of audio recordings, of the recollections of those who have experienced important social occurrences or events. In a sense, this technique is perhaps the oldest form of information transmission, dating to periods well before Man could write. Indeed, the oral tradition in cultural transmission has held a prominent place in virtually all known human groupings. For example, Herodotus, the Greek chronicler of the Persian Wars of the Fifth Century, BC, utilized oral history data collection techniques in preparing his research notes.

This tradition continues to function in many parts of the modern world. Rather than qualifying as a "Johnny come lately" approach to data transmission and analysis, oral history deserves respect and veneration based upon its persistence and proven utility over time.

Oral history captures life information, the bits and pieces of data that would otherwise be lost to posterity. It serves to fill in the inevitable gaps in formal learning, often providing "the rest of the story," to quote a well-known radio personality. Use of the aural approach provides a sense of the respondent's personality, helping the researcher to understand more about "who this person really is," and providing hints concerning the respondent's inner thoughts and motivations. Intonation, voice timbre, and delivery can be surprisingly helpful here.

The project which generated this collection of transcripts began as a result of a happy pair of intellectual coincidences which occurred in 1986. The first was the exposure of the editor to the ongoing oral history project currently being conducted at the US Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. The writer had the opportunity to serve at the facility for several weeks, gaining an appreciation for and understanding of this important collection effort. Soon after returning from this tour, the writer met Dr. Roland Barth of Howard University, well known for his work on Principals' Centers in recent years. Dr. Barth indicated, during a formal presentation to a Phi Delta Kappa Chapter in Northern Virginia, that there was need for more in-depth and less superficial research in professional education generally, and on the principalship in particular. The writer characterizes Dr. Barth's remarks as raising questions concerning the utility of research which is "a mile wide and an inch deep"—like the Platte River in Michener's Centennial. The obvious conclusion was that research capable of being characterized as "a foot wide and a mile deep" was indicated.

School principals, as is true with other busy public officials, are subject to constant pressures, inadequate time for decision-making, the requirement to be responsive to a constant parade of internally- and externally-based individuals, all of whom have a claim on their attention, and a lack of time for reflection and contemplation. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that so few of these persons record their experiences, thoughts, and dreams in written form. In most instances, the insights of these participant-observers in the great social and educational events of the 1940s through the 1980s are in imminent danger of being lost, for the ravages of time continue to take their toll within their graying ranks. Thus, immediate action designed to preserve the treasure trove of information processed by these dedicated educators seemed to be indicated.
Having come to this conclusion, the writer determined that the most effective—if not the most efficient—way in which to collect such data was through in-depth interviews with those whose long-term experiences and wisdom rendered them capable of providing assistance to generations of educational administrators yet to come. Thus, the Oral History of the Principalship was born with data collection beginning in early 1986 and continuing to the present time.

From the outset, the purpose of the project has been to gather the recollections and wisdom of veteran building principals, most of whom have never before been invited to contribute to the literature of educational administration. These dedicated men and women constitute a "national informational treasure" of immense proportions. It has been the aim of the project to capture, in an organized and scholarly manner, information on a wide variety of educational topics from those who experienced the events of the past forty to fifty years. The audio taped interviews, conducted by the writer and by advanced graduate students in Educational Administration, vary in length from one to three hours. Transcripts lengths vary between 15 and 100+ pages.

The interviews are based upon a standard question set, or protocol, with modifications designed to suit the interests of the person interviewed as well as those of the interviewer. Thus, there is some variation in content, although a substantial degree of commonality in subject matter does pervade the collection. Some of the topics covered in the interviews deal with: decision-making in education; ethics in administration; the characteristics of effective schools and of effective principals; philosophy of education and of administration; teacher evaluation and discipline; instructional leadership; school-community relations; teacher dismissal; grievances; relations with the school board and the superintendent of schools; career ladders and merit pay; training of administrators; and views on testing and the curriculum. The standard interview protocol which has evolved during the nine years of the project's life, is included as an appendix to this document.

Due to the modest level of funding available, collection has so far been limited almost exclusively to the four-state area around Washington, DC (Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina), with a few from other parts of the United States. Of note is a set of 16 interviews from Colorado collected while the editor served briefly at the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley; and a set of 25 interviews from Ohio, collected while the editor served with Youngstown State University. Respondents were elementary, middle, and secondary school principals who retired during the decades of the 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s. They vary in age from the mid-50s to the '90s. They are male and female, black and white. The academic training varies from the baccalaureate to the doctorate.

Participants also vary significantly in degree of articulateness, knowledge of current educational issues, responsiveness and general attitude toward education and the principalship. While most respondents seem to have enjoyed and valued their administrative experiences, some are quite bitter about the conditions under which they labored and are outspoken in their criticisms. The comments of some of the black principals who served before, during, and after desegregation in Virginia and Ohio are particularly impressive, filled with unusual insights into the "separate but unequal" school settings in which these men and women were forced to serve during the early years of their experience. The sense of hopefulness coupled with a recognition of and resignation to political realities of the day presented in these transcripts is noteworthy. Current and future generations of educators can learn important lessons in humility and steadfast dedication from these outstanding individuals.
The average American has a speaking vocabulary of only a few thousand words, far fewer than the average written vocabulary. Furthermore, most individuals do not speak in totally grammatical format, often to their embarrassment and chagrin when confronted with the recorded or transcribed results of their efforts. Consequently, the question of degree and type of editing during interview transcription is of salience in any project of this nature. In many projects, the interview subject is given the opportunity to review the final manuscript upon completion and to make any necessary emendations prior to the document's being placed in the project archive. Due to the pressures of time under which this project's interviewers labored, it was not convenient to engage in this practice. Consequently, those adjustments and corrections which were made were handled by the project typists and interviewers themselves.

However, the reader can rest assured that those corrections which have been made do not detract from the meaning of the text, and are usually cosmetic in nature. Repetitions of words or phrases; grunts and groans; and "uhhs," "ums," and "you-knows" were all considered fair game for editorial excision and have, in most instances, been so treated. Every effort has been made, however, to avoid any change that would alter the originally intended meaning of the text.

As a way of assisting readers in finding particular written passages on the audio tapes from which the transcriptions were drawn, in certain instances, tape counter numbers have been inserted in the text at intervals. Normally, but not always, these will be found in the left-hand margin of the paper.

Further assistance is provided to the reader/researcher in the form of transcriber developed indexes. These indexes list those topics discussed and provide indications of tape numbers, counter numbers, and transcript pages. Unfortunately, however, the practice of including such indexes was not adopted until late in the project, with the result that these topical researching aids are unavailable in some transcripts.

The importance of historical documentation of this type cannot be overemphasized. The office of public school principal is among the most influential of local level public service positions. These unsung heroes come and go, but the position remains, a symbol of administrative continuity and commitment to excellence in education, as well as to cultural continuity. The public schools have long served as a repository for American values and have served to transmit these values to succeeding generations of young people. As guardian of this process—keeper of the flame, as it were—the public school principal has long been an extraordinarily influential—if relatively unknown—actor in our society.

Today's principal is bound by the silver cord of tradition and duty to those who have gone before, serving the children of successive generations of Americans both honorably and well. As such, the former incumbents of this position deserve great respect and gratitude. To those who have patiently donated hundreds of hours to the process of creating these important historical records, we must express heartfelt thanks on behalf of this and generations yet to come. Such generosity and public-spiritedness is truly noteworthy.
APPENDIX C:
DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE

The analysis presented in this document is specifically based on the 83 interviews which comprise the study’s sample. These retired Virginia school principals served in 30 school systems throughout the state of Virginia. They represent interviews with 29 females (22 Caucasian, 7 African American; 27 elementary, 2 high school) and 54 males (44 Caucasian, 10 African American; 29 elementary, 7 middle school, and 18 high school in terms of career thrust). Several transcripts were, due to the nature of the analytical methodology used, looked at through more than one lens.

Sample by Interview Cohorts

Analysis in Chapter 3 based on the following 44 interviews with retired White male principals:

Elementary White Male: 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Years Covered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>1940s-1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>Fairfax</td>
<td>1953-1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>1958-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>1953-1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Shenandoah</td>
<td>1958-1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>1940-1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Prince William</td>
<td>1956-1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>1966-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>Fairfax</td>
<td>1967-1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>Arlington</td>
<td>1964-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>202</td>
<td>Fairfax</td>
<td>1967-1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>Orange/Prince William</td>
<td>1950s-1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>267</td>
<td>Roanoke County</td>
<td>1961-1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
<td>Roanoke County</td>
<td>1959-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
<td>1970-1985</td>
</tr>
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<td>315</td>
<td>Roanoke County</td>
<td>1966-1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>327</td>
<td>Martinsville</td>
<td>1970s and 80s</td>
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<td>Middle School White Male:</td>
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<tr>
<td>338 Pulaski</td>
<td>1964-1991</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>346 Montgomery</td>
<td>1957-1984</td>
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<tr>
<th>Secondary White Male:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>133 Arlington/Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154 Arlington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210 Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212 Wythe/Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256 Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>283 Franklin</td>
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<tr>
<td>337 Montgomery</td>
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<tr>
<td>175 Fairfax</td>
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<tr>
<td>177 Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187 Franklin/Fairfax</td>
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<tr>
<td>191 Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199 Clarke County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218 Prince William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>221 Fairfax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244 Loudoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>271 Radford City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>319 Dickenson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis in Chapter 4 based on 36 interviews with elementary principals from the following interview cohorts:

**Elementary White Female:**

- Fluvanna 1955-1980
- Portsmouth 1963-1971
- Fredericksburg 1976-1981
- Rappahannock 1950-1976
- Fairfax 1965-1979
- Fairfax 1964-1976
- Fairfax 1968-1986
- Fairfax 1962-1977
- Pr. Wm/Amherst/Fairfax 1956-1972
- Fairfax 1962-1979
- Buchanan 1975-1978
- Buchanan 1973-1976
- Roanoke County 1960-1977
- Roanoke County 1963-1980
- Allegheny 1946-1976
- Roanoke County 1972-1996
- Tazewell 1972-1988
- Roanoke County 1987-1995

105 339
119 348
145 350
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Credit: Meltzer
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<th>Number</th>
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<td><strong>Elementary Black Male:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Isle of Wight</td>
<td>1971-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Newport News</td>
<td>1972-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>1948-1977</td>
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<td>196</td>
<td>Henrico</td>
<td>1961-1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>324</td>
<td>Pittsylvania</td>
<td>1968-1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333</td>
<td>Pittsylvania</td>
<td>1967-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>349</td>
<td>Buckingham</td>
<td>1971-1976</td>
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<td><strong>Elementary Black Female:</strong></td>
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<td>1971-1985</td>
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<td>137</td>
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<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>1944-1968</td>
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<td>224</td>
<td>City of Alexandria</td>
<td>1960s-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>City of Alexandria/Fairfax</td>
<td>1960s-1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>343</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>1977-1987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis for Chapter 5 used all 83 interviews in the sample as the basis for its conclusions. The demographics for the Fairfax cohort are as follows:

Fairfax Cohort:

1 SWF 148
1 SBM 208
7 SWM 144,147,175,177, 187,191,221
6 EWF 168,180,182,197,220,248
3 EWM 156,190,202
4 MWM 133,210,212,256
Sample by Region and Decades of Service as Principal

REGION A: SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA  26

Radford City (1):  1967-1978
Martinsville City (1):  1970’s & 80’s
Dickenson County (1):  1971-1979
Tazewell County (1)  1972-1988

REGION B: CENTRAL VIRGINIA  8

Fluvanna County (1):  1955-1980
Rappahannock County (1):  1950-1976
Henrico County (1):  1961-1969
Buckingham County (1):  1971-1976
REGION C: NORTHERN VIRGINIA 36


Alexandria City (1): 1960’s-1982


Loudoun County (1): 1965-1970

Clarke County (1): 1969-1978

REGION D: SOUTHEAST VIRGINIA 13

Isle of Wight (1): 1971-1980


Virginia Beach (1): 1964-1993
APPENDIX D:

FRAMEWORK FOR METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

Moustakas (1990) elucidates a particular research model which he calls heuristic research. As guiding principles for a process, I found Moustakas’ work to be highly applicable to the investigation I completed.

The heuristic research question has definite characteristics:

- It seeks to reveal more fully the essence or meaning of a phenomenon of human experience.
- It seeks to discover the qualitative aspects, rather than the quantitative dimensions, of the phenomenon.
- It engages one’s total self and evokes a personal and passionate involvement and active participation in the process.
- It does not seek to predict or determine causal relationships.
- It is illuminated through careful descriptions, illustrations, metaphors, poetry, dialogue, and other creative renderings rather than by measurements, ratings or scores (p. 42).

The methods that might be used to explore and answer the question are open-ended in Moustakas’ model, but they must relate back to the question, must “facilitate collection of data that will disclose the nature, meaning and essence of the phenomenon being investigated”, and must “yield accurate and vivid dimensions of the experience” (p. 44). The transcripts from the oral history of the principalship project, although not collected by me, fit the parameters of data collection strategies outlined by Moustakas. The interviews were semi-structured, encouraging narrative responses. The interviewees understood the purpose of the interview was to tell the story of one’s self-as-principal.

Data analysis in Moustakas’ model, whatever the particular methods chosen, is very rigorous and involves immersion in each person’s data, diagrams of the phenomenon under investigation and individual responses to it, individual summary portraits and synthesizing pieces about the phenomenon itself. All of these are constantly compared back to the raw data to ensure that the researcher’s synthesis is fidelitous to the data. Relationships are constantly juxtaposed in the hope of finding new ways to make sense of the data. When this process is saturated, the research report can be written.

The Umbrella Strategy: Discourse Analysis

At this point I want to outline the premises of the overall approach to discourse analysis that I used. It is important to recognize that I was not trying to probe for an ultimate reality of being a principal in Virginia. I was not looking for some sort of objective or verifiable truth beyond the words of the those interviewed. I was not trying, for example, to compare the accounts and references of the principals interviewed from a specific county
during the same decade as a way to paint a “true” picture of administrative perspectives at that time, nor am I trying to verify principals’ characterizations of themselves as principals.

Bruner (1990) assumed that one could “dig out presuppositions buried in the life story by a close study of the language used...so we analyzed the discourse itself” (p. 123). Likewise, I looked at the text produced by each interviewee’s story about their identity as principal during an interview that specifically asked them to recall and recount themselves in that role. In contrast to approaches to oral history analysis which use life stories to understand underlying motives and psyche and to interpret personality (see, for example, several studies in Bertaux, 1981), the method of discourse analysis I employed followed the framework of Potter and Wetherell (1988).

Potter and Wetherell (1988) point out that the intent is not to use the discourse as a pathway to entities or phenomena lying ‘beyond’ the text. Discourse analysis does not take for granted that accounts reflect underlying attitudes or dispositions and therefore we do not expect that an individual’s discourse will be consistent and coherent. Rather the focus is on the discourse itself; how it is organized and what it is doing.

Thus, I treated the texts of the interviews as the data and did not look beyond them for evidence of intended meaning or use the text as evidence of attitudes or beliefs not manifest in the text.

If one wants to know is how reality is understood as revealed by how people tell their stories about what happened (Potter & Wetherell, 1988), the responses constitute a text that can be examined for itself. This process of narrative construction may not be conscious, but it is a very deliberate reflection of self-as-author because a narrative can only draw from the linguistic resources one has and it can only describe the understandings one holds.

By looking at a variety of features of the texts, I began to discern what the interviewee saw as important. Recounting includes such unselfconscious social activities such as blaming or justifying in the process of trying to make sense of actions taken or decisions made (Bruner, 1990; Potter and Wetherell, 1988). The storying itself is revealing because it is done using all of the resources one has at hand (i.e., the structural metaphors by which one understands the world, one’s perspective of events from where one is now). This fits well with Bakhtin’s idea of discourse as action instead of reflection, and provided direction for other lenses through which to examine the texts.

Thus, it is not necessary to go beyond the text. I used the texts themselves to answer the question of how principals (re)construct their identities of self-as-principal, what that identity meant to them, how they understood it, and what kinds of primary influences shaped that definition. It is, however, necessary to be very open to what is in the text, to what it reveals and to how it is constructed (Potter and Wetherell, 1988). I tried to put aside my preconceived notions about the role of principal and let each text define that role for me.
Framework for Analysis

In arguing for “an alternative to the mainstream tradition of interview research” (p. 105), Mishler (1986) concurs with Chanfrault-Duchet that textual analysis of oral history interviews must be multifaceted. Mishler asserts that Halliday’s triad of linguistic functions—textual, ideational and interpersonal—forms a useful framework for narrative analysis (p. 106).

Textual Considerations.

Within the texts it was necessary to look at how each interviewee speaks of the role of principal. How each storied his/her entrance and exit from that role, how each attempted to authenticate his/her account, and what metaphors, explicit or implicit, were revealed in each interviewee’s storying were used as indications of his/her understandings about self-as-principal.

I looked at the ways the interviewees’ examples and stories formed a text with their stated opinions. I focused on the following questions: Where and how did interviewees seek to clarify? How was what an interviewee said in one place in the interview reinforced or undermined by things shared at other points? When describing points of pressure or conflict, how did each narrator use authority or rhetorical device, appeal to received knowledge or to the interviewer’s understanding, or use metaphor to describe their actions?

I paid particular attention to the language used in description of self as principal-in-action. For example, in relating stories about actions-as-principal, how did a narrator locate agency? Did s/he say “we” did this, or “I” did this, or “my people” did this? How did each narrator frame the stories and how did s/he describe him/herself (e.g., as hero, savior, bungler, messenger, collaborator)? Where, if at all, are selves-as-principals articulated as protagonist, as subverter, as victim? Do particular tellings of identity of self-as-principal paint it as static or dynamic? What kinds of things did interviewees say they learned, are most proud of, regret?

I focused on explicit, implicit and structural metaphors in the transcripts using the following questions as guidelines: What explicit metaphors were used by whom? What structural metaphors of education did members of various primary groups appear to subscribe to and appear to have guided their actions?

Ideational Considerations.

Ideational features relevant to this study included: a) how self/other was portrayed, b) how moral imagination was evidenced through an examination of structural metaphor, c) significant features of the professional knowledge landscape, and d) descriptions of how an exemplary principal was defined and how one relates one’s own performance to that definition. I looked at each of these across primary group identities to better understand similarities and differences in role definition. The discovery of patterns determined what further literature bases to explore. The following list is of guiding analytical questions in each of these areas:

Self/other
How did interviewees talk about students, teachers, parents, central office people, superintendents, and the local community. How was “Other” portrayed in anecdotes and stories? What kinds of stories about “Others” were shared?

**Moral imagination**  
What choices did interviewees say that they perceived? What is the extent of moral imagination revealed through their stories?

**Features of the professional knowledge landscape**  
How did they talk about the state, divisional mandates, their role vis-à-vis discipline, management, curriculum; what they think, in retrospect, it was all about. How did they include in stories their role as principal vis-à-vis the educational research, political climate, educational trends of the day?

**Descriptions of what constitutes an exemplary principal and how they relate their own performance in the role with what they say is needed**  
How were entry, appropriate preparation, qualities teachers expect a principal to have, actions that elicit pride or regret in retelling, and emphases about what is necessary for the job, storied?

**Interpersonal Considerations.**  
The interviews conducted as part of the Oral History of the Principalship Project were largely absent of the power differentials of concern to Briggs (1986) and Mishler (1986) regarding most research interviewing contexts. In this project, graduate students taking classes in educational administration asked retired principals to share their experiences as principal in the public schools. Most of the principals who participated were “personally selected”; that is, the interviewer(s) asked that particular person for an interview because s/he was their principal as an elementary or high school student, is a neighbor, was well recommended by a friend or colleague as someone who would be interesting to talk with, was their principal or supervisor as a teacher, or is a relative (i.e. aunt, father). Others were chosen from a list of retired K-12 principals compiled by Dr. Carlton. These are people who Dr. Carlton knows personally or people who have been recommended by others for inclusion in the data base. In setting up the interviews, therefore, the interviewers had several frames of reference from which to draw a picture of “choseness” of the interviewee.

The interviewees were appealed to as the experts about their experience; it was assumed that they had something to offer. All of the interviewees had been in roles of authority and public life; they were not intimidated by the interview format per se, although some provide initial responses that are short and clipped, possibly indicating nervousness early in the interview. The transcripts indicated that interviewees seemed generally anxious to please, share their experiences, give advice and/or help out graduate students with their assignment for class. Some initially protested that they don’t think they have much to say, yet the overwhelming number of interviews concluded with a statement of how much the retired interviewee enjoyed the experience of the interview (e.g., how they haven’t thought about these things for a long time; how it was fun to talk about this again; how, though
initially nervous, the interview was surprisingly comfortable; how they hope it helped; how they were glad to contribute; how they were happy to be asked).

If anything, it is the interviewers who were at a disadvantage. Many of them were new to interviewing and the transcripts reveal scattered evidence of nervousness, at least early on, in many interviews (i.e., saying “thank you” and moving on after each response, asking a question that the interviewee just answered, “jumping” the answers of the interviewee). While most of the graduate students seemed genuinely interested in the interview exercise, some mechanically went through the question set as though on a mission, never following up on responses.

Despite the initial reluctance or nervousness of some interviewers and interviewees, the transcripts revealed that most participants got engaged in the interview. Interviewer queries in the latter parts of the transcripts tend to reveal particular interests or follow closely responses by the interviewee. However, wording of particular questions, the order in which they are asked, the articulateness of the interviewee, the skill of the interviewer all vary substantially and contribute to the unevenness of individual interviews as well as across the interviews as a set.

Most of the interviewees, as indicated by longer, more fluid responses, seem to relax after just a few questions are posed. Some interviewees are willing to launch immediately into narratives about their educational history or descriptions of the school(s) where they were principal. All of the interviews in the sample contain some longer answers or narratives, or instances where the interviewee exhibits active co-construction of the interview (i.e., by clarifying, returning to a point made earlier, insisting on completing a response, reminding the interviewer of a point, referencing a common experience held by both participants, comments about the interviewer).

Most of the interviews took place in the home of the retired principal. When the interviews took place elsewhere, it seemed to be at the choice of the interviewee, and usually was at a place of business or a school. Because the sample only includes interviews by retired principals, the tone is generally candid, more so with some individuals than with others. For example, principals would share a concern, preceded by or followed by a statement that basically said “now don’t tell anyone I said this.” Others made strong statements and then justified them by saying “now that’s just my opinion.” Strong opinions on a myriad of topics from discipline to merit pay can be read throughout the transcripts.

Generally, the interviewees seemed to use the occasion to construct a thoughtful response; that is, a response that had integrity with their story of themselves as a principal. When giving a longer response, interviewees would often correct themselves on details, wanting to be accurate. Other parts of the interview were often referred to, and the relationship between that event and the topic presently being discussed was made explicit. Cases were often supported by providing scripts of dialogues that interviewees recreated in the interview context.

The interviews generally took 1-2 hours with some lasting as long as 3-4 hours; two interviews took place over two sessions. The interviewees ranged in age from their late 50’s to their late 80’s; the amount of time that had elapsed since their service as principals ranged from 1-30 years. There are also differences in the level of formality in the interviews, generally seeming to coincide with whether or not there is a prior relationship between
Thus, there is nothing standard about the specific interpersonal context within which these interviews took place. However, for the purposes of this study, aside from attentiveness to general comfort level as exhibited by question or response by either participant where it seems to substantially influence the discourse, the assumption is that the standard concerns about power differentials, are not in effect for these interviews. Like Bruner, I have concluded that once awareness about immediate interpersonal influences have been raised, “all one can counsel is the exercise of certain interpretive caution” (Bruner, 1990, p. 125).

Summary of the Analytical Process

Analyzing the texts involved reading each closely in order to look at all of the areas described under the textual and ideational functions above. I analyzed and diagrammed individual interviews in clusters of primary group identities. For example, I looked at all of the interviews of female elementary Caucasian principals as a cluster, and noted relationships and patterns and contrasts among individual interviews in each of the areas looked at. Individual interviews were sifted and looked through several times as parts of different clusters because people have several primary group identities. Thus, the same interview could have been analyzed as part of a cohort based on race and gender, and then as part of a county cohort. Trends and patterns were monitored closely and then associated with what seemed to be strong influences so as to identify contrasting discourses. Discovery of these patterns required going back to the literature in those areas revealed as important to search for theoretical frames to shed light on the phenomena discovered through analysis. These included gender, career paths, curriculum theory, desegregation, race and comparisons with findings from other studies of the role of the principal. The data was returned to again and again, and repeatedly questioned to ensure that dramatic statements by one or two people were not misconstrued as representative of a cohort. Only after saturation (Bertaux, 1981) occurred for each cohort did creative synthesis end as a process and begin as the writing of the story presented in this document.
APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA SOURCE

As of June 1997, the Oral History of the Principalship Project consists of 253+ interviews of retired K-12 administrators from throughout the United States whose careers span from the early years of this century to the present. Under the direction of Dr. Patrick Carlton, interviews have been conducted by graduate students over the past ten years. The interview transcripts and audio tapes are stored as a Special Collection at Newman Library at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia.

The bulk of the interviews are with retired principals whose administrative careers took place primarily in Virginia with pockets of interviews of North Carolina, Maryland, Ohio, Colorado, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC. Other states are represented by 1-5 interviews such as Louisiana, Connecticut, New York, Oregon, West Virginia, Florida and California. The interviews are based upon, but do not strictly follow, an interview protocol (see Appendix A). The resulting transcripts are anywhere from 20-100 pages in length and vary substantially in quality. (For a more detailed description of the project as a whole, please see Dr. Carlton’s “Introduction” which appears in each bound volume of interview transcripts, reprinted here as Appendix B).
APPENDIX F: PERMISSION FORM SIGNED BY INTERVIEWEES

(on Virginia Tech letterhead)

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Human Resources and Education, East Eggleston Hall, Blacksburg, Virginia, 24061-0302 (540) 231-5642 Fax: (540) 231-7845

COLLEGE OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND EDUCATION

VIRGINIA TECH

BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA 24061

ORAL HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

I, _______________________________, do hereby give Virginia Tech for such scholarly and educational uses as the College of Human Resources and Education shall determine, the tape-recorded interview(s) recorded with me as an unrestricted gift; and transfer to Virginia Tech legal title and all literary and property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use which I may want to make of the information in the recordings myself.

This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

_____________________________________ ___________________________
Signature of person interviewed Printed name of person interviewed

_________________________ ______________________
Date Street Address

______________________
City, State & Zip
VITA

JULIE MELTZER

100 Southampton Court, Blacksburg, VA 24060 540/552-3058 e-mail: jmeltzer@vt.edu

Curriculum Vitae

June 1997

EDUCATION:

1992-1997 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
   Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, July 1997
   Title of Dissertation: IN THEIR OWN WORDS: USING RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVES TO EXPLORE THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON DISCOURSES ABOUT IDENTITY OF SELF-AS-PRINCIPAL

1987-1989 Lesley College, Cambridge, MA
   M.Ed. Creative Arts in Learning
   Master’s Thesis: THE JOURNEYS WITHIN THE STORYTELLING EXPERIENCE.

1986 Simmons College
   Graduate courses in Children’s Literature

1982-83 Colorado College
   B.A. in Fine Arts/Drama

1980-82 Tufts University
   Dean’s List; 3.67 GPA

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE:

1997-pres. Assistant Professor, Teacher Education Dept., Ferrum College, Ferrum, VA.

1991-1997 Instructor in Education, Ferrum College, Ferrum, VA.

Taught upper level synthesis course and selected learning modules in integrated curriculum, learning styles, multicultural education, global perspectives, writing process and alternative assessment. College Supervisor of K-12 student teachers in all subject areas. Team instructor of upper level Strategies courses for elementary,
middle school, high school and all-level. Involved with program development, development of program’s conceptual framework, program assessment. Member of Teacher Education Committee. Extensive collaboration with area schools. Alumni outreach and support.

1991-pres. Educational Consultant. Work as educational consultant in curriculum, instruction and assessment in both private and public schools. Recent contracts have included implementation of division-wide training in writing process and writing assessment for the Franklin County Public Schools, curriculum and assessment design for the Blue Mountain School, Floyd, VA and work with interdisciplinary team to redesign curriculum for at-risk ninth graders at Franklin County High School, Rocky Mount, VA. Also involved with curriculum design project at the Blue Ridge Institute Museum, Ferrum, VA, with curriculum design and development for Mountain Community High School, a new independent school in this area.

1988-91 Fourth Grade Teacher, Cape Cod Academy, Osterville, MA. Classroom teacher in process oriented, arts integrated K-12 school. Also worked with drama in Upper and Lower school; co-director of Upper School Play for three years; Resident Storyteller; Storytelling workshops in-house.

1987-pres. Professional Storyteller. Freelance basis in New England and southwest Virginia. Performances of international folktales and original stories for children and adults of all ages in schools, libraries, bookstores, churches, etc. Co-founder of the Cape and Islands Storytellers’ Collaborative. LANES Regional Rep. Facilitator of storytelling workshops and classes for children and adults. Member of NSA.


Academic tutoring K-12, creative arts workshops for teachers, and consulting to schools on integrating the arts into the curriculum and other aspects of curriculum and instruction.

1989/90 Teacher and Co-Director, Cape Cod Academy Summer Tutoring Clinic, Osterville, MA. Helped design, teach and administer five week intensive basic skills and reinforcement clinic for students entering grades 2-6.

1988 Teacher, New Alchemy Institute Summer Program, Hatchville, MA. Taught and helped design summer arts and science environmental 1-2 week courses throughout the summer for children ages 5-11.

1987-88 Pre-K Teacher in Arts Integrated Program Early Childhood Center; Temple Ohabei Shalom, Brookline, MA. Curriculum design, family programming, authentic assessment, developmentally appropriate integrated unit activities.

1985-87 Religious School Coordinator, Falmouth Jewish Congregation, Falmouth, MA. Position included development and direction of Religious School curriculum for Pre/K through 7th grade, family and community programming, teacher workshops, development of resource center, and staff supervision. Also taught the pre/K class and beginning Hebrew (grades 3-5).
1986  Director and Co-Creator, Children-in-Motion summer pilot program for 6-10 year-olds, North Falmouth, MA.

1985-87  Creative Movement Specialist, Cape Cod, MA. Developed and taught creative movement programs for 3-5 year-olds on an ongoing basis in several area schools.

1985-87  Freelance Arts Educator, Cape Cod, MA. Taught the following classes in area schools, after school programs and summer programs: Creative Movement classes for parents and toddlers, Creative Movement classes for 3-7 year olds, Improvisational Dance classes for adults, Storytelling, Drama and Balancing/Tumbling/New Games classes for 6-10 year olds, Aerobics and Dance Aerobics for adults and seniors.

1985  Preschool Teacher in charge of Creative Arts, Cataumet Preschool, Cataumet, MA.

1983  Religious School Teacher, 7th and 8th grade, Temple Shalom, Colorado Springs, CO.

1983  Aide in the Public Schools, Colorado Springs, CO. Developed and taught mini-courses for gifted 3rd graders in reading/vocabulary, skit development, storytelling and word skills.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS:

Kappa Delta Pi

Global Alliance for the Transformation of Education

American Educational Research Association  Arts in the Public Interest

Association of Teacher Educators  National Storytelling Association

Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development

PUBLICATIONS:


A number of short articles in the LANES Museletter and TEKIAH, the newsletter of the Institute for Sustainable Living.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:


“Communicating the Strengths of Our Teacher Education Programs to Those Who Need to Know” Co-presenters: Betty Bailey and Julie Meltzer, SRATE Conference. Charleston, SC. October 1996.

“Preparing At-Risk Students to Participate in a Democratic Society” presented by Julie Meltzer, Middle States Council for the Social Studies 93rd Annual Conference, Wilmington, DE, March 1996.

“What is Our Goal? The Use of Individualized Learning Modules to Maximize Academic Achievement in Teacher Education” Co-presenters: Betty Bailey and Julie Meltzer, ATE Conference, St. Louis, MO, February, 1996.


“Foundations and Synthesis: How Two Course Segments Form the Bookends for One Teacher Preparation Program” Co-presenters: Julie Meltzer and Betty Bailey. ATE Conference, Detroit, MI, February, 1995.”
“WHAT We Want, HOW We Get It and HOW We Know We’ve Gotten It: A Look At How Three Outcomes are Reached in One Teacher Education Program” Co-presenters: Julie Meltzer and Betty Bailey. SRATE Conference, Baltimore, MD, October 1994.


Featured presenter at the 1990 Independent School Association of Massachusetts (ISAM) Summer Reading-Writing Workshop on using storytelling to enhance the teaching of reading and writing in Wellesley, MA.

Presentations at the 1988 and 1989 Board of Jewish Education (BJE) Early Childhood Conferences on integrating the arts into the pre-K curriculum in Needham, MA.

AWARDS AND HONORS:

Recipient of Appalachian College Association (ACA) Fellowship for the 1996-97 academic year to finish doctoral dissertation.

Recipient of ACA Travel Grant, 1996.

Recipient of ACA Travel Grant, 1995.

PHI KAPPA PHI

Member of award winning team for Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators, Innovative Teacher Education Curriculum Award, 1993.

Member of award winning team to develop a Center of Excellence in Language Arts, 1989.

Runner-up for Kennedy Award for 4th grade integrated Social Studies Curriculum, 1989.

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE:


GENERAL INTERESTS:
Multicultural women’s and children’s literature, writing, storytelling, drama, dance, fine arts, intentional community, ecology, crafts.

RESEARCH INTERESTS:
Educator Roles and Identities
Social Studies and At-Risk Populations
Education for Democracy
Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learning Populations
Conceptual Frameworks as Guides for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Teachers as Change Agents
Program Evaluation
Writing Assessment
Museum Education
Integrating the Arts into the Curriculum
Teaching Stories

MARITAL STATUS:
Happily married to Jonathan Bender (Ed.M. Harvard University, 1985); two children, Jacob George, born 5-21-91, and Jasmine Mee-Hyun, born 3-2-97.