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ABSTRACT

New principals face many challenges as they begin their profession. They must discover how to fit into the existing work group at their school (organizational socialization), while remaining distinct enough to contribute creatively to the growth and development of the school (leadership succession). As part of a larger phenomenological study, 10 new rural high school principals were interviewed about their decisions to accept or challenge norms in their schools during their first year on the job. Without clear directions or any formal induction program to introduce them to their districts and schools, the 10 new principals began their duties with preconceived ideas about their job and their school. Once on the job, their decisions to conform or challenge existing norms in their schools were determined by contextual variables, specific problem situations, and other individuals and groups in their schools and communities. Interviewees discussed rural community culture and politics, insider advantages and disadvantages, outsider disadvantages, principal turnover rates at their schools, problem situations, work overload, and relationships with teachers and the superintendent. Eight participants reported that they had no time to consider school improvement issues. Two years later, eight participants had moved to administrative positions in other schools. (Contains 20 references and the interview guide.) (SV)

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**Learning the Ropes or Being Hung:
Organizational Socialization Influences
on
New Rural High School Principals**

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Learning the Ropes or Being Hung: Organizational Socialization Influences on New Rural High School Principals

New principals face many challenges as they begin their new profession. One of their toughest challenges is discovering how to fit into the existing work group already in place in the school (organizational socialization), but at the same time remain different and distinct so as to contribute creatively to the growth and development of the school (leadership succession) (Hart, 1994).

Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes (1992) define *socialization* as the “process through which an individual acquires the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to perform a social role effectively” (p. 44). In terms of professions, socialization can be broken down into three distinct categories: anticipatory, professional, and organizational. *Anticipatory socialization* refers to those experiences that an individual brings to a situation “that effect the way in which they will interpret and make use of new information” (Zeichner and Gore, 1989, p.13). *Professional socialization* occurs during training or preparation programs. *Organizational socialization* occurs when an individual moves into an employment position.

Each new principal brings to his/her principalship preconceived ideas about the principalship based on his/her experiences as a teacher (anticipatory socialization) and his/her professional preparation program (professional socialization). Once on the job, the new principal must “learn the ropes” as they attempt to fit into the existing work group in the school (organizational socialization). The focus of this paper is on this third category – organizational socialization.

There has been considerable research in the area of occupational socialization for new principals focusing on the bureaucratic socialization of principals, or how the organization structures the socialization process. What appears to be missing from the literature is research on the influence of the context, or the schools themselves, on the socialization of new principals (Hart, 1993). “Common sense, along with numerous studies, tells us that contextual variables such as organizational size, staff characteristics, technology, and environment influence leaders in organizations. In spite of this, research concerning the school’s impact on school administrators has been limited” (Norton, 1994, p.5). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the influence of organizational socialization on new rural public high school principals’ decisions about when to conform to school norms (a standard, model, pattern, or practice regarded as typical) and when to challenge them as they attempted to “fit in,” but at the same time remain different and distinct so as to contribute creatively to the growth and development of the school.

Method

This study was part of a larger phenomenological study that also examined the influence of anticipatory and professional socialization on new rural high school principals’ decisions about when to conform and when to challenge school norms. Ten new rural

public high school principals (5 male/ 5 female) were selected to participate in this study (see Table 1). "New principal" was defined as someone in his/her first or second year of his/her first principalship with no prior formal administrative experience. For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to focus on new principals in rural public high schools where these principals were the only administrators in their building.

Table 1
Demographics of the Participant Sample

| Name | Sex | Age | | | Hired from | | Grade Configuration | Size | Career Path |
|---------|-----|-------|-------|-----|------------|----------|---------------------|------|--|
| | | 29-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Inside | Outside | | | |
| Melissa | F | 31 | | | | Outsider | 7-12 | 450 | Elem./special education |
| Eva | F | | | 50 | | Outsider | 9-12 | 220 | Teaching/Personal Business/ Theatre Management/High School English |
| Peggy | F | | 42 | | Insider | | PreK-12 | 360 | Elementary education |
| Linda | F | | 49 | | Insider | | 9-12 | 115 | Elementary education/ Learning Disabled |
| Susan | F | | | 54 | Insider | | 9-12 | 525 | High School – Home Economics |
| Daniel | M | | | 51 | Insider | | 9-12 | 235 | High School Business/Guidance Counseling |
| Barry | M | 37 | | | | Outsider | PreK-12 | 250 | Business/Military/High School Business |
| Robert | M | 30 | | | | Outsider | 9-12 | 63 | High School Math |
| Charlie | M | 30 | | | | Outsider | 7-12 | 151 | High School Business |
| Jeremy | M | 29 | | | | Outsider | 9-12 | 151 | Business/High School English |

Participants were interviewed face-to-face, twice during the spring semester of 1999 to generate data in order to describe the meaning of the lived socialization experiences of these individuals. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule for each set of interviews (see Appendix A). These interviews were tape-recorded.

The unit of analysis in this study was the new principal in a rural high school. The study provided only the perspective of the principal. Although current socialization literature has expanded to include reciprocity of socialization among all the members of the school community, the researcher was only concerned with the perceptions of the new principals and how these perceptions influenced their decisions to accept or challenge norms in their schools. While descriptions from only the principal's point of view have obvious limitations, they provide an important part of the overall picture of socialization of new principals (Gregory, 1983). The importance of the ten participants' views is increased by

the official expectations of principals in schools – that they will shape the attitudes and behaviors of others (Smircich, 1983).

Although the researcher visited each school, no formal observations were made. Understanding of the contextual factors of each school comes only from school demographic data and descriptions shared by the new principals. The study was limited to data collected through interviewing.

Analysis

The recorded interview data were transcribed verbatim for each participant and each interview by a professional transcriber. These transcriptions were then used to create a *vignette*, a brief description of the participant's first year(s) as a new principal. These transcriptions were then subjected to a phenomenological analysis methodology developed by Colaizzi (1978). The first step in this process was to read each participant's transcripts, referred to as *protocols*, in order to acquire a feeling for them, a making sense out of them. Phrases or sentences that directly pertained to the investigated phenomenon were then extracted from each transcript. Meanings were formulated by spelling out the meaning of each significant statement. These meanings were arranged into clusters of themes. This allowed for the emergence of themes that were common to all of the participants. The results were integrated into a description of the investigated topic. The researcher then returned to each participant and asked the participant to review the findings about his/her experience (i.e., "How do my results compare with your experience?" "Have I omitted anything?"). The purpose of this step was to validate the findings. Any relevant new data was worked into the final product of the research. Another researcher trained in qualitative methods reviewed the transcriptions and findings and provided peer review.

Results and Conclusions

This study found five organizational socialization factors that influenced new rural high school principals' decisions about when to conform and when to challenge existing norms in their school: a lack of a formal administrative orientation program, a lack of clear expectations from the superintendent and the school board, contextual variables, situations these principals found in their schools, and individuals and groups in the school community.

Lack of a Formal Orientation Program

All 10 participants reported that they did not participate in any type of administrative orientation program. Only one of the participants reported receiving clear job expectations from the superintendent and the school board. As a result, these new principals spent their first few months in their principalships learning about their jobs, their school communities, and trying to figure out job expectations on their own. They reported that they did not attempt to implement any changes the first few months as they attempted to "get to know" their schools.

Contextual Variables

Contextual variables were also identified as factors influencing new principals' decisions to conform or to challenge existing school norms. All ten of the participants identified the small/rural school culture, insider/outsider status, and principal turnover rates as factors influencing the decisions they made. The five women participants identified gender as an issue, and five participants identified age as a factor.

There appeared to be a distinct "rural school" culture in these participants' schools that influenced these principals' decisions about when to conform to school norms and when to challenge them. For these participants, they had to learn the culture of a rural school community. As the comments in Table 2 suggest, this is a reality the new principals faced. Carson (1999) uses the word "solidarity" to describe the rural school culture. This research reaffirms the power of this notion.

Table 2
Rural Community Culture and Politics

| Participant | Comments |
|-------------|---|
| Eva | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rural families tend to be very close... What has happened, particularly in this community are the kids run the school, and they run you out.</i> • <i>In a rural community you are out there, and you are on your own!</i> |
| Linda | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In a small town, the coffee shop is usually the place where the news gets out.</i> • <i>It [teacher resignation] was small town politics. The stories get spread, and they grow, and the board feels they have to act on it, and they did. Whether it was true or not was beside the point. They asked for a resignation and got it.</i> • <i>The coffee shop people knew who was fired, hired, retained, or whatever before the teachers knew. It's not a bad place, but definitely a small town.</i> |
| Barry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>You go up here to the little neighborhood restaurant at 5:00 in the morning and the whole neighborhood comes in. They all gossip and gab, and this type of thing. They just spread out through the neighborhood throughout the day, and they gather again the next morning and the next rumors are going around.</i> • <i>To come in from an outside area, it takes you at least two years to figure out who's related to whom. How does this person plug in? Were they once on the school board? Were they once on the PTO? Who are they, and how are they involved in the entire school spectrum?</i> |
| Robert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It's interesting, nothing goes unnoticed in a small school. In a larger school, things happen, people don't find out about it. But in a small school, you know everything that goes on and you have to deal with it as it comes to you.</i> • <i>You know that's what you get in a small school. A few people hold all the cards, whether it be parents, or students, or whatever.</i> • <i>In a small school, I try not to think of politics too much. But it comes up anyway. These people you know. They are people that are in the school and you have to discipline their child. It's very difficult to not think about the fact that it is the son of a teacher.</i> |

Although not originally controlled for in the selection of participants for this research study, insider/outsider status emerged as a significant theme from the data. An “insider” was someone who was hired from within the district. The individual had been a member of the faculty for several years and was then hired as the principal. An “outsider” was defined as someone hired from outside the school district.

For those principals hired from within the district, being an insider proved to be an important factor in dealing with the school community. All four insiders reported that part of their reasoning for applying for the principalship in their high school was to bring some sense of consistency and stability to the school. Three of the four insiders expressed a need to provide consistency for their faculties; therefore, they did not try to implement major changes in their schools. On the other hand, one thought it made it easier for him to implement changes. All four reported distinct advantages and disadvantages to being an insider as Table 3 indicates.

Table 3
Insider Advantages/Disadvantages

| Participants | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|----------------|---|--|
| Peggy (42) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency/stability. • Reputation – knows what she is talking about. • Knew school. • Knew families in the community. • On a couple of issues, new person would have been massacred. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People tend to assume you know all the answers.</i> • Would have been more helpful with a new person. • Jealous faculty. • Teachers take advantage of someone that’s been on the inside. • Teachers can say things that they normally would not say to somebody else. • Evaluating friends. • Everyone knows your personal life. • Teacher/Board perception: From 60 miles away – professional. Within 50 miles – you don’t know anything. |
| Linda (49) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation –respect in school and in community • Knew school. • Knew students. • Has relationship with families and parents outside the school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because know so well, they come to her with things that ordinarily would not – a lot of personal problems. • Sees students she had in elementary school being short-changed. |
| Susan (54) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knew what the board wanted in a principal. • Knew faculty and school climate. • Supporters on the faculty. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating former peers. • Never been anywhere else – not having seen how other places do things. • <i>They want me to still be one of them.</i> |
| Daniel (51) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knew what teachers expected. • Knew teacher personalities. • Easier to implement changes. • Teachers comfortable sharing concerns. • Reputation established. • Knew students and families. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Being a friend, thought could take advantage of me.</i> • Accused of playing favorites. • Negotiations – found himself torn because he thinks teachers deserve what they are asking for. |

For those individuals hired from outside the school district, being an outsider meant that they could be more objective in dealing with students and with staff. They did not know the history behind students, staff, and issues, which was a plus at times because it kept them out of the politics, but also a disadvantage as the comments in Table 4 illustrate.

The data from this research suggests that insider/outsider status is a significant factor in the socialization of new principals and varied from principal to principal within their status group. For example, outsider status appeared to have more of an impact on the two female outsiders as they attempted to implement change in their schools. One said that she was constantly reminded that she was an outsider. The other summed up her experience by saying, "They really resent you coming in and fixing them. They're not broken." On the other hand, the three male outsiders never mentioned being reminded of their outsider status. These results are consistent with Hart's (1993) summary of the research on insider/outsider status in which she found that "the relative advantage of insider or outsider succession is strongly contextual" (p. 72); it really depends on the school context.

Table 4
Outsider Disadvantages

| Disadvantages | Melissa (31) | Eva (50) | Barry (37) | Robert (30) | Charlie(30) | Jeremy(29) |
|--|--------------|----------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| • <i>We've always done it this way.</i> | X | | X | | X | X |
| • <i>They will never like me.</i> | X | | | | | |
| • <i>You don't know this place.</i> | X | | | | | |
| • <i>You're not from here. Reminded constantly, I'm an outsider.</i> | X | | | | | |
| • <i>They really resent you coming in and fixing them. They're not broken.</i> | | X | | | | |
| • <i>Lose your reputation.</i> | | X | | X | | X |
| • <i>Takes time to figure out what is going on in the school.</i> | X | X | X | X | | X |
| • <i>Don't know the history.</i> | X | X | X | X | | |
| • <i>Don't know enough/not prepared.</i> | | | | X | | |
| • <i>History is other people's story.</i> | | | | X | | |
| • <i>Don't know the politics.</i> | X | X | X | X | | |
| • <i>Completely unaware of things.</i> | | | | X | | |
| • <i>There are certain things you don't mess with.</i> | | | | | X | X |

These results also suggest that gender may be an issue. Hart (1995) suggests that individuals have certain expectations about what a principal “should be.” When new principals differ substantially from the conventional preconceptions about principals (traditionally older males), it may be difficult for the new principal to receive validation from their constituencies in their schools. All ten participants were asked, “Do you feel that there is anything about you personally (e.g., gender, race, age, years experience) that might be influencing your effectiveness?” None of the five male participants reported any issues with being male. On the other hand, all five women did bring up the issue of gender. These results suggest that women rural high school principals may have more difficulty being accepted than men may.

It is also interesting to note that in three of the participant’s situations, the individuals that created the most problems for these principals were female. Charol Shakeshaft (1995) has found that a common theme among women in leadership positions is “the belief that women are their own worst enemies” (p. xii). These results support her findings.

Another contextual variable, which appeared to have an influence on the participants’ socialization, was administrative turnover. In all of the participants’ schools, principal turnover was very high. Table 5 illustrates the turnover rate in each participant’s school.

Table 5
Principal Turnover Rates

| Participant | Insider/Outsider | Principal Turnover Rate |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Melissa | Outsider | 3 in 3 years |
| Eva | Outsider | 2 in 3 years |
| Peggy | Insider | 6 in 5 years |
| Linda | Insider | 2 in 5 years |
| Susan | Insider | 5 in 25 years |
| Daniel | Insider | 5 in 4 years |
| Barry | Outsider | 4 in 6 years |
| Robert | Outsider | 17 in 27 years |
| Charlie | Outsider | 2 in 4 years |
| Jeremy | Outsider | 2 in 5 years |

Hart (1987, 1988) and Firestone (1990) suggest that the results of administrator succession vary from setting to setting. The results from this study are similarly mixed. Nine of the participants reported that because of the high administrative turnover in their schools, teachers had developed attitudes and responses to new principals. It shaped the approach many of these new principals took with their staffs and influenced their decisions about when to conform and when to challenge. For the four insiders, the high degree of turnover made providing a sense of consistency an important priority for them with little attention given to changing things. For two of the outsiders, the high turnover rate in their schools created obstacles for them as they tried to change existing norms in their schools. Two of the outsiders thought that the turnover helped them in their ability

to change existing norms in their schools. For the outsiders, people with institutional history became important sources of information for these new principals.

The results of this study suggest that it is important for new principals to be aware of the turnover rates in their schools. In schools with high turnover rates, principals need to have an understanding of the reasons for this phenomenon. Is it simply that the school is an administrative stepping stone for new principals, or are there internal issues that create obstacles for new leaders?

Situations

These new principals found a variety of situations (Table 6) in their schools influencing their decisions to conform or to challenge school norms. Addressing situations such as a negative school climate and discipline issues and the workload of being the “lone administrator” in the school left little time for new principals to be instructional leaders in their schools.

Eight of the ten participants identified “school climate” as a significant issue that they thought needed to be addressed in their schools. In six of the eight cases, the new principals attributed the problem to faculty issues – faculty turnover, lack of ownership by the faculty, older faculty members just “hanging in” till retirement, faculty tenure, and negative talk in the teachers’ lounge. In the other two cases, the student body and the community were identified as contributing to the negative climate in the school. All of the eight tried to address or were going to address this situation in their schools the following year. It was a norm that they identified as being a critical issue in their school that needed to be challenged.

Discipline issues were another situation all ten of new principals faced coming into their jobs. These principals came to their positions with an idea of what teachers should do and how discipline should be handled in a school. One of those expectations was that teachers should handle discipline in the classroom. Another was that teachers enforce the rules of the handbook. This was not the norm eight of the ten found in their schools and they all challenged.

During the interviews, eight of the participants reported that the high school principal workload was overbearing (see Table 7). Because of the workload, many of the principals found themselves putting in what they found to be an unreasonable number of hours, and not able to address all of their responsibilities. The workload came from being the lone administrator in a small rural school district. The principals in these small schools wore many hats – e.g., instructional leader, dean of students, personnel director, head of custodial staff, curriculum director, personal counselor, head of the secretarial staff, transportation director, cafeteria director, athletic director, and public relations director. As a result, principals had to make decisions about what issues to address and which to overlook or put lower on the priority list. Eva described her principalship behavior as always “reacting” to situations in the school.

As a result, the workload created a great deal of stress in seven of the participants' lives, and it took away from the participants' personal life. In perhaps the most extreme case, one of the participants indicated that she was now on medication for nerves as a result of the demands of the job. Five of the participants commented that they were beginning to question this sacrifice.

Table 6
Situations Faced by New Principals

| Participant | Situation |
|-------------|---|
| Melissa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disgruntled former principal and peer group • <i>We've always done it this way.</i> • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • Discipline – consistency and helping students understand that they are responsible for their choices • Getting teachers to stay in their rooms and teach • School politics |
| Eva | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring teachers • No disciplinary files • Discipline – everything landed at principal's door • Classroom discipline – getting teachers to accept responsibility • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • School politics |
| Peggy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firing "Coach" • Discipline – student attendance • Low staff/faculty morale • Secretaries fighting in the office • New lunch program |
| Linda | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School on academic warning list • Large faculty turnover • Superintendent's relationship with the board • Regaining teacher prep period • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • Discipline – stuck with old handbook |
| Susan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between board and administration • Relationship between board and teachers • Teacher evaluations • Teacher professionalism • Discipline • Negative school climate |
| Daniel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers not following the rules • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • Student handbook/discipline |
| Barry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency • Split in faculty – special education versus mainstream teachers • Classroom management/discipline |

| | |
|---------|---|
| Robert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • Implementing new board policies – closed campus, drug testing • Getting a handle on discipline • Dealing with poor teachers |
| Charlie | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline • New computer program • Student handbook • Lack of leadership in athletic program |
| Jeremy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating teachers – teachers staying in boxes and teaching, not interested in rest of school life • Negative school climate • Low faculty/staff morale • Dealing with poor teachers • Riffing a teacher |

Table 7
Participant Workload

| Participant | Workload Issue |
|-------------|--|
| Melissa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I didn't realize what I was getting myself into. Seven through twelve, I'm it.</i> |
| Susan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I guess as a teacher you hear about the major things that are going on, but you don't know about the parents calling all the time and teachers coming in with problems. There are a lot of decisions to be made that I don't think they [teachers] take into consideration. It always looks easier on the other side.</i> • <i>The hardest part of the job is that there's too much work for one person to do. I don't have an assistant or a dean of students. One of the things I didn't expect to take so much of my time is dealing with the custodian. I didn't even realize until after I had the job, that this was part of my job.</i> • <i>I don't feel like I do a good job because I'm spread so thin in a lot of different areas.</i> |
| Eva | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I wish I had more time to do in-service. One of the biggest problems in education is we do so much booster in-service and not a whole lot in depth. The principal is supposed to be a mentor and help teachers deal with things a little more effectively. Most of us are too stressed from everything else to do these kinds of things.</i> |
| Peggy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think the position of K-12 principal is a bear and a half.</i> |
| Linda | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As a teacher, I would come to a principal with a problem and think nothing of it. Now I'm looking at it and I get problems from the cook, the janitor, the teachers, the kids, and the parents. It's constantly trying to solve everybody's problems. You don't realize as a teacher how many of them there are out there because you were just the one – one on one with the principal at the time. And of course you were always wondering why they didn't do anything about it.</i> • <i>In a position like this, you kind of do everything yourself, because there isn't an assistant principal.</i> • <i>It's a job that probably takes you working at 150 percent, and I don't think anybody working even at 100 percent can do it.</i> |
| Barry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It's like the pit of the problems. If there's a problem in a school, it ends up here, basically. No matter how big the problem is or how small it is, it either starts here one way or the other, or it ends up right here. You deal with a lot of problems throughout the day. You're just going around putting out fires all day long.</i> |
| Jeremy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I just can't keep doing that and expect to have a life. I really believe that at a bigger school I really wouldn't have to do everything that I do here. Then maybe there would be some time for family and me.</i> |

Individuals and Groups

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) found that when a new member enters an organization, experienced members find ways to insure that the newcomer does not change the established norms of the organization. All 10 participants identified individuals and groups in the school community influencing the decisions they made about when to conform and when to challenge existing norms (see Table 8). It was through these interactions that the participants learned about the politics of the school community.

It appears from comparing the participants' experiences that the amount of influence that individuals or groups of individuals have over how well a new principal can implement change in a school is tied to how much power that individual or group has in a school. Hoy and Miskel (1991) define *power* as "the ability to get others to do what you want them to do" (p. 76). Mintzberg (1983) identified four internal power systems that are present in organizations that control organizational life (system of authority, system of ideology, system of expertise, and system of politics). The key is for principals to recognize these systems and know how to tap into and use each system effectively (Hoy and Miskel, 1991).

Summary

Without any clear directions, without any formal induction program to introduce the new principals to their districts and schools, the ten participants headed into their principalships with their preconceived ideas about their job as principal and about schools. Once on the job, these new principals had to make decisions about when to conform and when to challenge existing norms in their schools. The context, the situations, and the individuals/groups in their new schools influenced these decisions as they attempted to "fit in," but at the same time remain different and distinct so as to contribute creatively to the growth and development of the school.

Eight of the principals in this study reported that because they spent most of their time trying to learn about their schools, addressing the situations (negative school climate, discipline, and being the "lone administrator" in the school) they encountered in their schools, and dealing with the politics of the school community, they did not have time to focus on school improvement. As a result, only two of the 10 participants were able to reach stage four of Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes' (1992) five stages of professional socialization (socialization into the administrative profession beyond preparation programs) – educational leadership.

By the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, eight of the ten participants had moved to other administrative positions in different schools. At the start of the 2001-2002 school year, only one remained in her original school, eight had moved to administrative positions in other schools, and one had returned to teaching. If this is any indication of what is happening in other rural schools, it is a serious problem and raises two important

Table 8
Individuals/Groups Influencing New Principal

| Participant | Individuals | | Groups | |
|-------------|--|--|--|---|
| | Positive/Supportive | Negative/Resisting | Positive/Supportive | Negative/Resisting |
| Melissa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Principal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger faculty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group of 6 |
| Eva | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st year – 2 teachers • Elementary principal • 2 members of the board | 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary teachers • Certain community members • Kids run the school |
| Peggy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher/former best friend | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed faculty | |
| Linda | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty | |
| Susan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group of 6 |
| Daniel | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One faculty member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty | |
| Barry | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older faculty |
| Robert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One male faculty member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board |
| Charlie | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty member • Guidance counselor • Superintendent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math teacher/coach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board – have their own agendas |
| Jeremy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance counselor | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Building Leadership Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board |

questions. If the principal's position in the rural high school is turning over every one to two years, who becomes responsible for instructional leadership in the school? What can rural school districts do to change this phenomenon?

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that superintendents and school boards need to examine the needs of their high schools, clarify role expectations, and review the workload of the high school principal position before posting the job. For example, school improvement must become a shared responsibility of the entire educational community, not just the responsibility of the building principal. Superintendents and school boards must include other members of the educational community (faculty, staff, parents, and students) in the

hiring process to cultivate a sense of ownership of the school in the community and clarify expectations of the new principal. The results of this study, although limited, also suggest that there is a need for a more formalized organizational socialization process for new principals in rural high schools to help new principals learn more about their school communities and understand the expectations of the many different constituencies in their communities. Prospective new principals must also take the initiative and learn as much as possible about the school and the community before accepting a position.

Significance of the Study

For the individual principals participating in this study, this was an opportunity for “reflective practice” (Sergiovanni, 1991) – looking back systematically on what had happened to them during the first year or years of their principalship. By considering what affected their socialization process, the principals reflected on their development as a principal.

For the principal profession, this study extends existing knowledge about becoming a school leader, especially in rural schools. For example, most principals would use “survival” to describe their first year at a school (Parkay, Currie & Rhodes, 1992). What does “survival” mean in terms of “fitting in” or “remaining different,” or realizing or compromising goals, or defining one’s role or being defined by others? This study provided a more in-depth look into the lives of first year(s) rural high school principals and their perspectives on becoming a school leader.

This study provided insight into the reality of the organizational socialization influences on principals. It provides insight into why so many administrators espouse preferring activities associated with instructional leadership and educational improvement, but find their dominant role orientation focusing on activities aimed at maintaining organization stability (Greenfield, 1977).

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Appendix A

Interview Guide
New Principals and Career-Continuing Principals

Introduction: *Thanks for meeting with me today! I know how valuable your time is. As I explained to you in our recent phone conversation, I am interested in examining how new principals are socialized into schools.*

This interview will last approximately one hour. Again, this is voluntary and you do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. I will never use your name or associate the data with you in any way. Do you have any questions before we start?

First of all, I would like to ask you some questions about your background

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| <i>Anticipatory Socialization</i> |
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1. Describe your educational career path.

Possible Probes

- Describe your teaching experience -- What did you teach? What level?
- Why did you go into administration?
 - Did you have any particular experiences as a teacher that influenced how you developed your administrative approach/philosophy?
 - If so, describe this/these experiences.

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| <i>Professional Socialization</i> |
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2. Describe your administrative professional preparation.

Possible Probes

- Were there individuals or events that occurred in this program that had a significant impact on your administrator-self?

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| <i>Organizational Socialization</i> |
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The next few questions focus on your current school, the interview process, and your first reactions to the school.

3. Describe the organizational structure of the school.
4. How was your school described to you during your interview?
5. Tell me why you accepted the position.

6. Did you have any hesitations or reservations?
7. If so, what were they?
8. Tell me what you thought you were expected to do in the school.
9. What were your priorities at the beginning of school?
10. What influenced how you set your priorities?

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| <i>Socialization by Subordinates</i> |
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The next few questions focus on your experiences so far at _____.

11. How were you introduced to the school community?
 12. How did you become acquainted with your teaching staff?
 13. What is the make-up of the school faculty?
- Possible Probes
- What is the average number of years of teaching service at your school?
 - What is the male/female ratio?
 - How many tenured/non-tenured faculty?
14. How would you describe them?
 15. What are some of the big issues you have dealt with during these first few months?
 16. How have you handled them?
 17. Were there individual teachers, or groups of teachers that influenced how you handled these issues?
 18. Did some teachers influence you more than others?
 19. If so, how?
 20. How did the teachers react to your actions?
 21. What teacher agendas became apparent to you in these circumstances?
 22. Did you find yourself conforming to these agendas?
 23. Did you find yourself challenging these agendas?

24. Do you feel that there is anything about you personally (gender, race, age, years experience, etc.) that might be influencing your effectiveness?
25. If so, describe how _____ influences your effectiveness.
26. Have these interactions with teachers changed what you originally envisioned your leadership style to be?
27. What have you learned about teacher relations from handling these initial issues?
28. How will this knowledge about teacher relations affect how you handle similar issues in the future?
29. If you were to leave this position and another principal was hired, what advice would you give the new administrator about relations with teachers?
30. Is there anything you would like to add?



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