

Listening to Voices at the Educational Frontline: New Administrators' Experiences of the Transition from Teacher to Vice-principal

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the transition from teaching to administration through the voices of four novice vice-principals. An integrative approach was used to capture the interaction between new vice-principals, their external contexts, and the resulting leadership outcomes. The data revealed that in spite of these new administrators' intention to create better schools for all students, they encountered multiple factors that hindered their ability to achieve their leadership goals. Key obstacles included the ambiguous legal and institutional configuration of the vice-principalship, inadequate preparation for challenging front line managerial and disciplinary roles, and inappropriate transitional support. Through listening to new vice-principals voices and providing relevant preparation and coordinated supports, school districts, policy makers, professional associations, and regulatory bodies can improve this transition and address some of the leadership challenges facing schools.

Keywords: vice-principals, transitions, socialization, leadership, administration, role ambiguity, stress

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Introduction

For many teachers, the appointment to an administrative post is regarded as an important career achievement because of its association with upward professional mobility and increased organizational influence (Armstrong, 2009). However, although it is a common perception that the transition from teaching to administration is seamless, it is not uncommon for new administrators to experience multiple and ongoing challenges as they adapt to and make sense of their new administrative roles and contexts (Armstrong, 2012; Dotlich, Noel, & Walker, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Reports from new and practising administrators have consistently shown that new vice-principals are more and more likely to enter hectic and fragmented working environments where challenge and change are the norm (Armstrong, 2014; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Even those administrators who feel prepared to perform administrative tasks often find themselves unprepared for the social and emotional changes that accompany both their exit from teaching and entry into administration. They are also challenged by the vagaries and conflicts of their ill-defined middle management role (Armstrong, 2010, 2014), the complexities of administrative decision making (Olson, 2000; Sigford, 1998), and the political demands of their school, district, and community (Armstrong, 2014; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Novice administrators are also shocked to discover the number and variety of responsibilities and demands embedded in their new frontline position and the dramatic psychological effects that it has on their personal lives (Armstrong, 2012, 2014; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

This paper examines the nature of the transition from teaching to administration from the perspectives of four recently appointed secondary school vice-principals. It gives voice to the personal and professional challenges and successes they encounter during their early administrative trajectory as they adjust to and make sense of their new position and contexts. Although vice-principals perform many varied and significant leadership and management roles in areas related to personnel supervision and evaluation, curriculum, student discipline, and supporting students, families and communities, the field of educational administration continues to foreground and privilege principals' voices and experiences (Armstrong, 2010; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012). The participants identify the people, structures, and events that they perceive as significant in facilitating or hindering their administrative transition and make recommendations for change. This paper begins with a brief description of the research context and the study's methodological and theoretical perspectives in order to locate the vice-principals' transitional experiences. It further discusses how this administrative transition can be supported and makes suggestions for coordinated improvements. The next section provides a brief overview of the research context and contextualizes the working world of the vice-principalship.

Research Context

Many variables influence administrators' transitional trajectories, among which are individual personalities, the nature and location of their role, and the social, political, and cultural contexts and climates within which their transitions occur (Armstrong, 2009, 2012). When administrative trajectories take place in environments of deep structural change, they create additional layers of

challenge and uncertainty. Such is the case for new administrators who were appointed to the vice-principalship in North American jurisdictions over the past two decades. For vice-principals in Ontario, their transitions have been impacted by wide-ranging provincial reforms and restructuring initiatives that administrators are legally required to implement. The literature identifies a number of external change factors such as deep policy and procedural shifts, redefinition of administrative roles and responsibilities, increased accountabilities, and diminished supports which challenge both new and experienced frontline administrators (Armstrong, 2014; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Read, 2012). The vice-principalship has also undergone drastic alterations due to the legal redefinition of vice-principals as managers, downsizing and downloading, and centralizing mechanisms that remove or limit local decision-making powers (Armstrong, 2012; Nunavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williams, 2001). Furthermore, the removal of school administrators' from teachers' unions has created rigid boundaries between teachers and administrators, generating a climate of uncertainty and animosity. This combination of intersecting changes at the school, district, and provincial levels has generated additional transitional layers, making it difficult for newcomers to anticipate outcomes, address challenges, and access traditional supports.

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

This study draws on qualitative methodology in an attempt to give voice to new vice-principals and to understand their role transitions. Vice-principals represent the vast majority of administrators and outnumber principals in many jurisdictions, and the vice-principalship is often the main entry point into administration. However, vice-principals' voices and experiences are often ignored or marginalized in the educational administrative literature and in the field (Armstrong, 2009, 2012; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Qualitative research can be used to understand how participants construct their social settings and make sense of their experiences (Cresswell, 2011; Merriam, 2002). It acknowledges that representing experience (both one's own and that of other people's) is a complex undertaking because of the limitations of human linguistic forms to capture the full depth, breath, essence, and complexity of felt and lived experience (Armstrong, 2009; Merriam, 2002). This approach also acknowledges the dynamics of representing others' experiences, particularly with respect to the relative power of researchers and participants, and makes attempts to address this imbalance by foregrounding the participants' voices (Armstrong, 2009; Merriam, 2002).

This exploration of new vice-principals' transitions uses an integrative framework in order to capture the dialectical nature of transitions, i.e., the interactions between new vice-principals and their external contexts (Armstrong, 2009, 2010; 2012). With respect to vice-principals' transitions, these interactions occur primarily at the organizational frontlines of their particular school and are nested within their surrounding district, institutional, and societal contexts. Schlossberg (1981) also recognizes that transitions do not occur in a vacuum, and she underscores the importance of focusing on these dynamic interrelationships. In her argument for the inclusion of individual and contextual factors, she states that "studying the transition process requires the simultaneous analysis of individual characteristics and external occurrences" (p. 3). Her viewpoint is supported by Nicholson (1990) who contends that a comprehensive understanding of transitions can be achieved through the use of a perspective that accounts for the interaction of the person, his or her social, political, economic, physical, and cultural milieu,

and the ways in which social stratification and organizational design impose constraints on the individual's choices.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews were approximately 90-minutes in duration and took place in a mutually agreed upon location. The interview questions were designed to gather background information on the participants, their motivations for becoming vice-principals, their experiences of the transition from teacher to administrator, their challenges and success, the people, structures, and events that supported and/or hindered their role transition, and the changes experienced as a result of their administrative experiences. In order to ensure transparency and to develop a relationship of trust throughout the interview process, the interviewer informed participants of the benefits and drawbacks of participating before each interview, provided assurances of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting results, and communicated the importance of choosing a location that provided safety and confidentiality for the participants.

Consistent with Merriam (2002), the researcher used a conversational approach throughout the interviews in order to put the participants at ease. Given that the purpose of this inquiry was to listen to the vice-principals' voices, the researcher also drew on her expertise as a trained counsellor and employed techniques associated with active, attentive, and empathetic listening. In order to put participants at ease, the interviewer started with the more structured background questions about their school, current role, etc. As the interview progressed, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences. This approach facilitated dialogue and allowed her to develop rapport with the participants. The participants' interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to ensure accuracy. The participants were provided with copies of their transcript and were encouraged to review them for accuracy and to modify them as necessary. The participants made no modifications to their transcripts.

Participants

The participants were four newly appointed secondary school vice-principals who were in their first to third year of experience as administrators. The pseudonyms Grant, John, Alice, and Wilma were used to ensure the participants' confidentiality. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: number of years of experiences as secondary school vice-principals; type of school, i.e., regular collegiate or special school; recommendation by vice-principal colleagues; and willingness to participate in this research. The participants were in their early to late forties and had taught in a variety of schools for approximately 13-18 years. They had also worked in varied leadership roles and were appointed as department chairs prior to becoming vice-principals. The participants' administrative experience as vice-principals ranged from 1-3 years, and they had all remained in the schools in which they had been placed at the beginning of their tenure. Both Andrea and John were placed in large collegiate with populations ranging from 1700-2300 students, while Grant and Wilma worked in vocational schools with populations ranging from 400-600 students.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using constant comparative methods (Creswell, 2011; Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 2002) and consisted of reading and re-reading the participants' interviews independently and holistically in order to identify differences, similarities, and contradictions in the data. Line-by-line analyses were conducted based on the research questions, and additional categories were constructed based on emerging themes and patterns. As part of the member checking process, participants received copies of their transcribed interviews and the related interpretations. They were also invited to edit, amend, or clarify any responses and/or themes in order to ensure accuracy enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell 2011). They made no requests for changes to the transcripts or the interpretations, confirming that these were valid.

Overall, the participants described their transition as a challenging process that was characterized by personal and professional challenges and changes. The next section reports on the participants' challenges and their attempts to adapt to their new contexts and roles, highlighting the following themes: (a) role dissonance and dislocation; (b) work intensity and stress; and (c) supports and relationships.

Findings

The participants likened their early experience of administration to a "cultural shift" that was characterized by a sense of dislocation and feelings of ambiguity. Although they had taken the mandated principals' training courses and were all experienced curriculum leaders, they reported experiencing a number of shocks and surprises during the first year of their tenure. These experiences were primarily attributed to inappropriate preparation for their frontline location between teachers and upper-level administrators, differences between teaching and administration roles, responsibilities, and workloads, and lack of ongoing support and scaffolding.

Role dissonance and dislocation

All of the vice-principals reported that they felt that they did not belong in this new role or environment during the early months of their transition. Alice, for example, who had moved from a smaller school, reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer size of the physical plant and the number of staff and students. Although she recognized that she was no longer a teacher because of her new appointment, she did not feel that she was a vice-principal either. Like the other three vice-principals, she described feeling out of place in her administrative role. "I certainly do not see myself as a vice-principal. There is no question about that. But I am not sure about all that it means and all the values that are attached to that." The new vice-principals' feelings of displacement and uncertainty were connected to three co-occurring changes -- their upward shift in the school hierarchy, their relinquishment of their classroom duties and close relationship with students, and a sudden change in their relationships with their former teacher colleagues due to the vice-principals' supervisory status.

These unexpected changes served as an uncomfortable reminder of their lack of familiarity with the administrative culture and their limited preparation to meet administrative role demands. The change in teachers' attitudes and expectations also made the new vice-principals' aware that they were now outsiders to the teaching culture. Wilma explained:

Even though you see similarities in what you are doing, the staff sees you as a different type of person. All of a sudden, you have another level of respect that wasn't there. Not even a respect, but a deference that wasn't there before. I left in June as one of 23 teachers, where I would say, "I think... and everyone would say, "Well, that's a good idea, but who asked you anyway? (Wilma)

As she reflected on this unfamiliar dynamic, she went on to say that while this change in status afforded a sense of increased power, it also provoked feelings of loneliness:

So you leave in June, and in September you become one of two people who get to say what happens. Yet, you haven't changed. You haven't gained any great experience, but you are doing it all yourself. (Wilma)

The feeling of "doing it all by yourself" and the shift in teachers' perceptions and collegial interactions were poignant reminders to the vice-principals of their unexpected loss of a larger community of peers and their exit from the teaching culture. The corresponding lack of an administrative community led to feelings of being alone and isolated.

The vice-principals also commented on ambiguities inherent in their role which, unlike teaching, carried no clear timetable or definition of duties. In addition, because their role was defined as "duties as assigned by the principal" and they no longer belonged to a union, the vice-principals were unable to refuse difficult and/or unpopular managerial tasks. As a result, they often ended fulfilling roles and tasks that teachers and principals did not want to do. The participants also reported that although they had assumed that they would acquire greater power and influence as administrators, in reality, they had less power, flexibility, and time than teachers. Alice's comparison of the relative power of teachers and vice-principals highlights some of these ambiguities and contradictions:

You know, I have my own business cards and my own parking space and I've got the office. You are seen as having power when in fact I think you have less. I used to do things as a classroom teacher because I thought they were right. And I think I had more power and influence with what was going on in kids' lives through my programme and the way that I approached it than now. (Alice)

This combination of limited organizational power and influence and the inability to control their role led to unmanageable workloads and longer work days, and in the process increased the new administrators' feelings of stress and strain.

Work Intensity and Stress

The participants attributed their feelings of cultural and role dissonance to increases in the intensity, pace, and volume of their daily work which occurred mainly on the frontlines. These feelings were primarily connected to the difference between teachers and administrators' roles environments and demands. Unlike teaching where they enjoyed the privacy of their classroom and had a predictable timetable, participants felt that they were at the "beck and call" of the school and external community and had little control of their time. The pressure to respond immediately and effectively to varied and conflicting demands was exacerbated by the lack of training in basic technical tasks and unfamiliarity with their new school's clientele and culture. A consistent theme in the participants' responses was related to the lack of time allowed to ease into their role. Reflecting on the speed with which they were expected to acclimatize without training, Wilma said:

All of a sudden you are doing this job in September. You've got that week or two at the end of August to sort of acclimatize yourself to the building or whatever and meet a couple of people, but you are doing it right away. (Wilma)

The participants also reported that their frontline position increased their visibility to the whole community, exposing them to greater levels of scrutiny and expectation from their teaching peers. Wilma reported, "All of a sudden, you are in front of your peers all the time" while Grant said,

Teachers are coming to you and complaining about issues they would like you to solve. They figure that you have all of the answers, and kind of, expect you to do it for them. I think that created challenges in the first year. (Grant)

The participants also experienced their work during the first six months as all-consuming due to their increased workload and their responsibility to manage ongoing crises and solve problems. The pace of assigned tasks and the rate of new information and emails were constant, making them question their reasons for choosing this role and their competence. The intensity and immediacy of this pressure were communicated in the contrasting metaphors of water and fire that pervaded their descriptions of leading and managing from the front office. Wilma and Alice described their early experiences as a "baptism by fire" and "jumping off the deep end", while John observed, "You are always battling smoke and fire... Some days you feel like a puppet, with a lot of different people pulling the strings". Participants also commented on the stress associated with the reactive and crisis nature of their role and the pressure to take immediate control. Ongoing concerns were also voiced regarding work overload and loss of control over their personal schedules, which required at times ignoring basic bodily functions and their personal well-being. They all reported that during their early tenure, they literally had to write "Go to the washroom" in their daybooks. These patterns had physical consequences for all of the participants. While Alice, Wilma, and John reported weight loss and elevated blood pressure level during the first year, Grant attributed his changed sleeping habits to the daily stress of ensuring that staff absences were covered:

There is that transition in your personal life. You have to get up every morning and make that phone call, and make sure that you have enough supply teachers in your school. And that can be quite stressful because you have developed habits in your professional career and then, at the start of September, you have to start making these changes. (Grant)

Heavy workload demands and downloading from their school district also precluded working with their community in meaningful ways. In addition, ongoing staff reductions, a "surge" in district initiatives, ministry policies and paperwork, poor central office co-ordination, and lack of support for implementing new initiatives led to feelings of frustration. Wilma's comments encapsulated the general frustration of the participants, "So it adds for stress all around. So you just happen to be starting a new job at the same time that everything is in transition." Similarly, Grant recalled his frustration when caught between implementing new policies and conflicting communication from central office, "There was a time when I had a serious incident. I phoned somebody. They told me that they were the consultant at the board level. Then I went to the policy and it said something else."

These vice-principals were also responsible for maintaining safety in schools and disciplining students, and they experienced ethical conflicts when required to impose blanket punitive consequences on students. In many cases, they did not agree with some of their board's disciplinary policies and procedures and felt that alternative disciplinary approaches would have been more educative, particularly for students who were deemed to be at risk, or were identified

with special needs. However, they felt intense pressure to follow district and ministry safe schools' policies because of their legal obligations as agents of their district and ongoing pressure from teachers and senior colleagues to adopt harsher approaches. It is interesting to note that while John and Grant reported adjusting to their role as disciplinarians fairly quickly, the two female participants expressed more ethical and physical discomfort with this dimensions of their role. Both Alice and Wilma reported that they were often fearful of their personal safety because of verbal pushback from students and their parents. Wilma reported, "There were a few parents who were very demanding, who were very rude and almost threatening in some regards. And I think it was a difficult transition and a challenge." Alice, who was in a school with competing gangs, also recounted a stabbing incident that occurred during her first month that had made a lasting impression on her. She said, "That was really frightening, and I didn't realize the impact that it had at that moment, but I think it had a long term one." The crisis nature of their role, its unpredictability, and the lack of control over their workday created pervasive feelings of anxiety and tension. In addition, the loss of opportunities to engage positively with students and to provide sustainable and relevant supports for vulnerable individuals often provoked questions regarding their role's purpose, as expressed by Grant. "I feel like the more they lay on me, the less attention I can give to kids, and the less I can really do to fulfill one of my most primary functions." These ongoing challenges motivated the vice-principals to seek ways to manage stress and to integrate themselves into their community.

Supports and Relationships

The vice-principals' early experiences of isolation, loss, and overload and the ongoing negative interactions with others motivated them to seek out new avenues of support. Participants described intentionally seeking out a wide range of individuals and groups in order to access assistance and advice and to build collaborative relationships. For the most part, these interactions were with fellow vice-principal colleagues, business and operations staff, teachers and supervisory officers. Like the other vice-principals, Grant highlighted the importance of supportive relationships and environments, when he said, "It is important to move into an environment where it is supportive, where you can share things, make mistakes, take risks. And that's what gave me more confidence in myself because the learning curve is steep.

Working with administrators who were accessible and tolerant of mistakes contributed positively to the new administrators' sense of safety and security. However, they all identified their building principal's support and mentoring as most important to their growth and development as administrators. The importance of supportive and empathetic principals to vice-principals' leadership and management learning was highlighted by Wilma:

My principal was amazing. Her door was always open and she was most understanding and supportive. And I think that would make or break how your first year went because if you couldn't ask those dumb questions such as: what do I do now, what do you think, and how many days? ... all that kind of stuff that would make for a very difficult and awkward time. (Wilma)

The process of listening to and dialoguing with their principals and working with them to create their own personal growth plans helped the participants develop a better understanding of their role expectations and how they fit into the school. However, this was not always a comfortable relationship. Working in the front office meant being in close proximity to their principal, which created discomfort for some of the new vice-principals. Alice, in particular, reported

experiencing heightened pressure related to rule conformity and institutional accountability because of her principal's supervisory role. She also wondered if her performance was being judged and if it would impact her chances of promotion. "Now you're right next door and what you do immediately goes to the principal, and I feel more responsibility to the system now and to policies and procedures."

The participants also reported receiving support from some of the vice-principals who were members of their administrative team. In particular, they valued opportunities to discuss their experiences and challenges with more experienced colleagues, and they appreciated their guidance. They also connected having someone to "vent to" and "knowing that they were not alone" to their ability to grow as administrators and put things into perspective, as described by John:

The other vice-principal was supportive. It was easy to sit down and talk about it and feel that this is not something that happens to me alone. It happens to everybody. Just sitting down and venting was a good way to get through. (John)

However, administrative team relationships were not without conflict. For example, some of the vice-principals felt that there were power imbalances between new and more senior team members, who sometimes attempted to silence newcomers' voices and undermine their decisions. In some cases, participants identified the existence of a competitive ethos between team members who were vying for the principals' support because they did not perceive the vice-principalship as a terminal career. Alluding to some of the problematic aspects of the administrative team dynamics, Alice observed:

You are supposed to be working together with people you are competing against for the role of principal because the role of vice-principal is not one that people see as the end of their career path. So there is that competitiveness that seems dichotomous with collaboration. (Alice)

What emerged from this picture was that the team relationship was dependent on the principal's management and leadership style and the compatibility of the team. When these components were lacking, a tense political environment was created, which increased the newcomers' feelings of discomfort and powerlessness.

Although the participants described "people interactions" as one of the most difficult aspects of their role, they reported experiencing a greater degree of comfort in dealing with people and building relationships over time. This change was primarily attributed to the vice-principals increased familiarity with the physical plant and the school and community culture. John reported feeling more comfortable and confident in his third year. He attributed this to having developed a clearer sense of the boundaries and possibilities of his role, the "rhythm" of the school, and the flow of academic school year. His feeling of having attained a high level of competence and familiarity with technical tasks, student discipline, and interpersonal interactions is encapsulated in the following comment:

I feel that I can be a lot more decisive about things. I have a pretty good sense of when to slow down and stop, analyze and consult, and bring people in. So I think I am sort of getting better at being a manager and a leader... knowing that I can affect the tone of the school and keep the place safe and secure and make kids feel that they can be risk-free. (John)

Like John, the other vice-principals associated their increased leadership confidence and competence to their ability to transform their negative disciplinary role into more positive interactions with students and to improve the general tone of the school. Grant observed:

There are days when you are making decisions and you know it's affecting a child, and you are hoping that you are doing something for the benefit of society. And there are times when you sit and work with teachers and try to implement a project, and you feel wonderful about it (Grant).

Although the vice-principals' frontline role continued to be challenging, their ability to work positively with teachers and the broader community to support students afforded them a new sense of purpose. In addition, their increased sense of connection and competence contributed to their ability to develop a different perspective of the role and facilitated their ability to navigate its multiple demands and challenges.

Discussion and Recommendations

This article focussed on four new secondary vice-principals' experiences as they transitioned from teaching to administration. The findings confirmed previous literature that consistently shows that moving from teaching to administration is a challenging process for which newcomers are unprepared (Armstrong, 2014; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). The participants' stories identified the existence of hidden and overt socialization practices that emanated from multiple arenas, but particularly from teachers and administrators. The vice-principals' metaphorical references to fire and water imagery speak to the intensity of this early socialization process and confirm the existence of "sink or swim" and "trial by fire" approaches in school and district induction processes. While these tactics were most probably unintentional, they ensured higher levels of conformity to expectations of vice-principals' roles as crisis managers and disciplinarians, as opposed to change agents and leaders. Further research is required to determine the nature and purposes of vice-principal socialization tactics so that aspiring and new administrators can be adequately prepared for this aspect of their transition. This information should also be shared with their supervisors, mentors, and colleagues so that they can provide social and emotional scaffolding as needed.

The vice-principals' experiences substantiate earlier criticisms that leadership preparation programmes do not adequately prepare teachers for the complexities of leadership and management, or provide them with the practical knowledge and skills required to be successful frontline administrators or change agents (Armstrong, 2012; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The study's results demonstrate the need for preparation programs that are specifically geared to vice-principals' transitional needs and the demands of complex and difficult frontline roles. As it currently stands, Principal Qualifications Programs (PQP), as their moniker suggests, focus on preparing teachers to be principals. This approach is problematic for three main reasons: Firstly, it ignores that the vice-principalship, and not the principalship, is the most common entry-point into administration in Ontario. Secondly, it creates the false impression to teachers and other aspiring administrators that vice-principals perform the same roles as principals. Thirdly, it communicates that principals and vice-principals have equal access to power, even though the Ontario statutes clearly describe the role of the vice-principal as duties as assigned by the principal (Mackinnon & Milne, 1999). As the data revealed, because principals are legally empowered to assign vice-principals' tasks, vice-principals typically work in the shadow of their principal and often fulfill roles that principals are unwilling or unable to do. In order to reduce that surprises that newcomers experience, it is important for preparation programs to communicate that while there is some overlap in principals' and vice-principals' roles, differences in role expectations and power exist. This means that vice-principals should

not only be taught how to perform technical tasks, but also how to navigate their relationship with the principal in order access power and fulfill their leadership aspirations. In addition, because many secondary vice-principals work in administrative teams that are made up of principals and vice-principals, new vice-principals must learn how to navigate these political dynamics and build viable relationships. Bringing vice-principals' voices out of the shadows of administration can inform preparation programs, school districts, and policymakers regarding appropriate formative and developmental support for new administrators.

The participants' stories highlighted an urgent need for early and ongoing supports for aspiring and new vice-principals. Hartzell et al. (1995) identify three areas of support that are critical to the adjustment of novice vice-principals. These are: accurate information about their job; assistance in interpreting things in their new role and setting; and opportunities to develop relationships with others with whom they can talk and test reality. The participants asked for mentoring and support systems such as job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships that would provide them with opportunities to develop practical skills, learn about administrative roles and build relationships. While some of the participants were able to access mentoring and support over time and through their own personal initiative, their transitional stress and strain would have been lessened if they had received these supports in a timely and developmentally appropriate manner. Aspiring and new vice-principals should also be acquainted with the physical, cognitive, socio-emotional challenges that newcomers experience and how to navigate these challenges successfully. They should also be given accurate information about the losses that will occur when they leave teaching and should be provided with the cognitive and emotional scaffolding required for a transition of this magnitude. Instituting these initiatives can assist school districts in retaining new administrators and addressing the shrinking pools of qualified administrative candidates (Armstrong, 2014).

Finally, ongoing local and international reforms confirm that there is an urgent need for new 21st century forms of leadership in order to reduce achievement gaps and create more equitable schools. However, although these participants were identified by their school district as teacher leaders and had become administrators in order to improve schools for all students, they encountered multiple obstacles. While they were able to initiate some positive programs, their attempts fell short of their original goal to transform and improve schools. New vice-principals represent the future face of leadership at the district and provincial levels in Ontario, and their formative experiences will influence not only how they lead, but also how they socialize others into school leadership. Listening to and responding to new vice-principals' voices will provide valuable information regarding how (or how not) to prepare and support new leaders to meet the changing demands of school administration.

Conclusion

This paper reported on a qualitative study that examined the transition from teaching to administration through the voices of four novice vice-principals. An integrative approach was used to capture the dialectical interactions between new vice-principals and their external contexts, and the resulting impacts on their transition. The data revealed that although the participants became administrators with the intention of creating better schools for all students, they encountered multiple factors that hindered their ability to achieve these noble leadership goals. Key among these obstacles were the ambiguous legal and institutional configurations of the vice-principalship as "duties as assigned by the principal", inadequate preparation for

challenging disciplinary and front line managerial roles, and limited transitional support. Ongoing reforms in Ontario and anticipated shortages of qualified leadership candidates (Williams, 2001) have created an urgent need for school leaders who not only improve test scores, but who can address ongoing achievement and opportunity gaps for students. Meeting these objectives can be achieved through purposeful and integrated approaches that include listening to and acknowledging new vice-principals' challenges and needs, and addressing them through co-ordinated supports at the school, district, Ministry of Education, and the College of Teachers levels.

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