

Pursuing Her Initial Vice Principalship:

A Narrative Inquiry

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations, and Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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### **Abstract**

The attainment of my initial vice-principalship position was a challenge and, as a result, I was curious if other women's experiences were similar to mine. The aim of this research study was to examine women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalships. In developing the aim of this research, two themes emerged in a literature review; career paths of women in educational leadership and mentorship in education. These themes described barriers and/or supports for women's entry into vice-principalship positions. I used a narrative inquiry methodology to co-create and re-story six urban women vice-principals and principals' retelling of their lived experiences. I found barriers and/or supports for women's entry into vice-principalship positions described in the literature continued to exist. Although the participants' experiences of attaining a vice-principalship ranged from 16 years ago to as recent as 5 years ago, their experiences were similar and demonstrated social reproduction of hegemonic androcentric beliefs. I realized although some of my experiences were dissimilar to the participants' experiences, my experiences were also framed by hegemonic androcentric beliefs and I unconsciously accepted them to be true. In examining these lived experiences, the field of educational administration can better prepare for removing barriers and/ or providing support for women to pursue their initial vice-principalship position.

*Keywords:* vice-principal; career path; mentorship; educational administration; urban; women; leadership

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all the women who shared their experiences in pursuing their initial vice-principalship.

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Jerome Cranston. I appreciate your support in guiding me through this process and pointing me in a forward direction. I will be forever grateful.

Thank you to my committee members Dr. Melanie Janzen, University of Manitoba, and Dr. Robert Mizzi, University of Manitoba. Your questions, feedback, and encouragement have made this my best work so far.

Thank you to my parents, Joanne and Rudy, for your unwavering support and encouraging me to be a child who, “Makes your life interesting!”

Thank you to Sam and Kate, my children, who inspire me to make the world a better place.

And finally, to Brett, my husband, thank you.

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## Prologue

### A Walk in the Bois-des-esprits

I began my journey in the Bois-des-esprits, an urban forest, following a wide and well-travelled path. Prior to my departure, I had read and researched about the forest. I also had an opportunity to have conversations with recent travelers. I felt well-planned and prepared for the expedition I was undertaking. In hindsight, I was under-prepared for the journey. I barely noticed small leafy trees, reflective puddles, or flowers at the edge of the path. I was also unprepared for the mosquitoes, marsh, and perilous rocks during the excitement of my departure.

As I walked through the urban forest, I occasionally met a fellow traveler who in turn taught me about the forest and the path I was on. Some travelers acknowledged me and gestured a greeting. Some travelers encouraged me to continue along the path by giving directions, some ignored me intent on their own path, and others discouraged me by describing the path ahead too hard to travel. However, there were some individuals who walked with me and shared their knowledge about the forest and the path I was on. One traveler shared with me a map of the urban forest and gave me a compass. Another traveler offered me bug-repellant. These experiences with fellow travelers developed my knowledge of the forest so I could notice the small leafy trees, take time to enjoy the reflective puddles, and stop to smell the flowers at the path's edge. Soon I was sharing knowledge about the forest with other individuals I met, and I could marvel at the magnificence of nature on the path.

The wide and well-travelled path became less traveled and narrowed the further I explored into the forest. I became acutely aware that I rarely came across a fellow traveler and I relied heavily upon the map and compass provided to me by the earlier traveler. Larger trees provided soothing shade and I could hear a river calling to me in the distance. From time to time,



large fallen trees blocked my progress on the narrow path. I had to find a way around by going deeper into the urban forest, but I eventually found my way back to the path. At a certain point in my journey, I decided to see and experience the frolicking river and not just hear its enchanting sounds. So, I listened and for the first time I noticed markers for an even less traveled footpath. Compared to the wide and well-travelled path on which I began my journey, the footpath's markings were a challenge to find. The markers were small pieces of cloth tied intermittently to the branches of the bushes that lined the ever-narrowing footpath. The map became useless and the ever-present mosquitoes became unrelenting. There would be no amount of bug spray that would halt the attack. Additionally, the earth below my feet became a wet marsh with treacherous footing. I tripped a few times and unexpectedly found myself soaked and covered in mud. I continued to scan the marsh bushes for markers, and although I was now wet, covered in mud, and mosquito bitten, I forged ahead and reveled in trees, flowers, and berries I had never seen before. Although I was miserable, it was a sight to behold.

With the compass, I found enough markers to keep me moving through the marsh in the direction of the river's sounds. I eventually came upon solid ground and could view the wide and swiftly moving river. I took pause and reflected on my journey to this point. I decided to walk parallel to the river's edge and look for an area where I could traverse the river safely. I carefully hiked upstream in what seemed a tenuous and challenging trudge due to enormous jagged rocks and slippery conditions. After what seemed a prolonged exploration, I found a place to ford the river and experience a new part of the forest. My journey in the Bois-des-esprits continues and I am learning about unfamiliar flora and fauna in the woods.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Pursuing My Initial Vice-Principalship**

The decision to pursue my initial vice-principalship was not an easy decision to make. I was finishing my nineteenth year of teaching in the spring of 2013. My sister, who had been a principal for several years in an urban school division, kept encouraging me to apply to vice-principal positions within my own urban school division. I had worked in a divisional leadership role for the previous six years and I believed that it was time to pursue new challenges in my career. I began to apply to vice-principalship postings in my school division because of coaxing by my sister and my desire to pursue new career challenges. Although I decided to pursue a vice-principalship, I found the attainment of a position a challenge. I was curious to know if other women had similar experiences as I did.

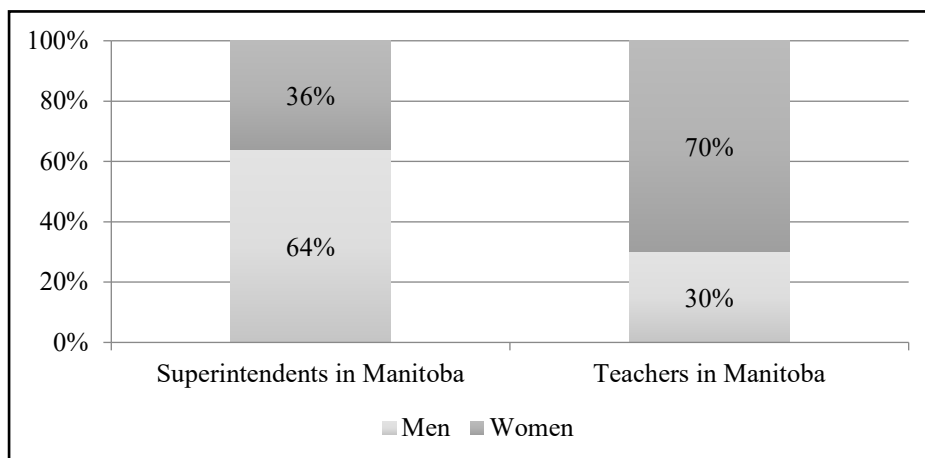
In the spring of 2013, my school division announced a master's cohort in Educational Leadership. Although I had already completed a master's degree, I wanted to pursue additional academic goals. My first master's degree was a comprehensive program; therefore, it was considered to be a terminal degree. While I was completing my previous graduate work, I still had questions I wanted to explore regarding educational leadership. These questions led me to apply to the cohort. I hoped to be admitted so that I could pursue two academic goals. My first academic goal was to write a thesis and my second academic goal was to prepare for a vice-principal position through the course work and other intellectual engagements. I was fortunate to be admitted to the divisional cohort and began the journey towards my two academic goals.

At the same time as I applied to the cohort, I continued to apply to vice-principalship positions and was unsuccessful many times. I was discouraged by these experiences. Through my cohort course work, I began to seek answers to questions about women's experiences in

educational leadership. Dr. Dawn Wallin had been researching and publishing articles related to career paths and the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency in Manitoba (Wallin, 2010; Wallin, 2012). I devoured the information in Wallin's articles as I was interested in why women continue to be underrepresented in the superintendency in Manitoba.

Women have traditionally been underrepresented in educational leadership roles and this holds true in the superintendency in Manitoba (Wallin, 2012). In September 2016, of the 39 school divisions in Manitoba, there were 14 women superintendents (Government of Manitoba, 2016). This represents a three-fold increase in the number of women the superintendency in Manitoba from Crippen and Wallin's research in the early 2000's. While this starts to approach gender parity, this is still a disproportionate underrepresentation of women in the superintendency. As The Manitoba Teachers' society reports, 70% of the teachers in Manitoba in 2015 are women (Stephenson, 2015). The number of women in the teaching profession in Manitoba at 70% is inversely representative of the number of women in the superintendency as demonstrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Gender Representation in Educational Positions in Manitoba*



These results could imply that there is not a pool of suitable women candidates in Manitoba. However, the opposite seems to be true. In the fall of 2016, 26 of the 53 (or 51%) of the assistant superintendents in school divisions in Manitoba were held by women. As Wallin (2012) reported in her study of Manitoba Superintendents:

Discussions regarding sex/gender and the superintendency recognize the persistence of the disproportionately low representation of women in the superintendency... The sex proportions of the assistant superintendency were more equitable; women represented half (26 out of 52) of the assistant superintendents of the province. Even though intuitively one would think that those who hire superintendents draw primarily from the pool of assistant superintendents, the major drop in representation from the assistant superintendency to the superintendency illustrates that sex/gender plays a role in senior-level career advancement, either systematically or individually (Wallin, 2012, p. 421).

Although there is a talented pool of well-educated and experienced women senior administrators in Manitoba, their advancement to the superintendency is barred by societal factors or personal factors (Wallin & Crippen, 2007; Wallin, 2010, 2012).

Wallin's (2010, 2012) research identified that women superintendents' first steps on their career paths in educational leadership were as vice-principals and principals. I was curious about women in educational leadership roles, and specifically, the reasons women pursue their initial vice-principalship or principalship positions. Additionally, I was curious if similar barriers inhibited their advancement to the vice-principalship positions.

Fortunately, as part of my academic program, I was required to complete a research methodology course. I chose to undertake qualitative research methods, and in the course, I was required to conduct a preliminary research study and create field notes. The focus of the

preliminary study was to examine the reasons women pursue a vice-principalship position. Wallin (2010; 2012) identified these initial formal educational leadership positions, vice-principal and principal, were the first steps in the career path for many women superintendents. I knew my own reasons for wanting to pursue a vice-principalship position; my sister had suggested that I would be a good candidate and I was ready for a new career challenge. I was extremely curious why other women chose to pursue vice-principal positions, and I wanted to know if their reasons in pursuing a vice-principalship were similar to mine.

During the preliminary study that I conducted in the spring of 2015, I chose to interview three women who were recently appointed vice-principals in an urban school division. In the analysis of the field texts, the participants of this preliminary study expounded on the importance of mentors in their careers. All three women participants reported they were actively encouraged by mentors to pursue formal leadership roles and were explicitly asked by those mentors to apply to vice-principal positions. In my field notes, one participant described her experience with her mentor, “And I was really encouraged to leave... you know to move, to take a step.” Another participant described her mentor approaching her and saying, “You know, you need to apply for that.” A third participant credited her mentor as such, “Without her, I wouldn’t be an administrator.” I wanted to further explore the participants’ understandings of mentors and mentorship in their initial pursuit of a vice-principalship position more extensively.

At the same time that I was conducting the preliminary interviews, I continued to apply to vice-principalship positions. After two years of applying, I successfully attained my initial vice-principalship. The preliminary study participants reported that they attained their vice-principalship on their first attempt of applying to the position. This was significantly different from my experience. I had applied multiple times unsuccessfully and I started to consider that

my experience may have been different from other women's experiences. As a result, this preliminary study informed the aim of this research study because the participants' experiences were different from my own experience.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this research study was to examine women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship positions. I interviewed six urban women vice-principals or principals and I invited them to retell their experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship position using a narrative inquiry methodology. The questions this study aimed to investigate were designed to develop a rich understanding of the participants' experiences. The questions were as follows:

1. What were pivotal moments and/or critical points in the participants' career paths as educators?
2. What were the perceived barriers and/ or opportunities afforded to the participants in pursuing their initial vice-principalships?
3. How do they identify the individuals who influenced their decision to pursue a vice-principalship?
4. What were the perceived effects of mentors that led them to pursue a vice-principalship?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is important to study the experiences of women pursuing their initial vice-principalships so educational leadership can reflect on societal and systemic barriers and/or supports that exist consciously and unconsciously within our organizations. Young and McLeod (2001) emphasize that educational leadership must try to understand women's motivations to enter the field so that faculty and field practitioners can support women in pursuing their initial vice-principalship positions.

This study seeks to understand women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship position, so the field of educational leadership is better prepared to support the talented pool of aspiring women educators. It is my hope that this study contributes to the body of knowledge in leadership preparation, and specifically, to educational leadership preparation in Manitoba. As a profession, we must better support aspiring women vice-principals in their pursuit of their initial vice-principalship. First, so that barriers that appear in women's career paths can be overcome and second, to have better representation of women in leadership positions.

### **From an Idea to Thesis Topic**

Once I attained my initial vice-principalship, I continued to reflect on my experience. My preliminary study piqued my interest as to why women pursue their initial vice-principalships and I wondered if other women's experiences were similar to mine. The preliminary study participants described different experiences than I had pursuing my initial vice-principalship. I persevered and continued to pursue my initial vice-principalship through the support of my family. This personal reflection influenced and informed the aim of this study.

John Dewey (1933) writes that, we do not learn from experience, but we learn from reflecting on experience. When I considered Dewey's work, I noticed how my parallel experiences of course work in my master's program and the pursuit of my initial vice-principalship had been a highly personal and reflective process. Each course challenged my thinking about educational administration, and each unsuccessful vice-principalship interview compelled me to reflect on my understandings and my personal beliefs. One aspect of reflective thinking to which I was introduced early on in my program was developed by John Dewey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dewey (1933) defined reflective thinking as, "*active,*

*persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” [original emphasis] (p. 9).*

Of course, Dewey’s definition of reflective thinking is not the sole authoritative voice about reflection as there are other understandings about reflective thinking in education. My understandings about reflective thinking were further influenced by the work of Jenny Moon (2001) who defined the term as:

a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess. (p. 2)

The work of Moon (2001) and Dewey (1933) influenced my understanding about the process of reflective thinking throughout my master’s program. There were many times during my master’s program and in my pursuit of my initial vice-principalship that I processed my knowledge and the emotions I experienced to consolidate my understanding through reflective thinking.

During my course work, I was also introduced to Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) as a strategy to aid in my reflective thinking. I was introduced to the idea that metaphors are pervasive in our everyday language and we use metaphors to create our conceptual systems to understand the world in which we live (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Morgan, 1997). I had the revelation that my life experiences, and the language used to conceptualize those experiences, have influenced the way I understand the experiences. For example, I have used the metaphor of walking through the Bois-des-esprits and compared it to other experiences, such as pursuing my initial vice-principalship, to explain how I think and understand those experiences.



Another example is from when I was a child and I fell into a small, yet swift moving and cold river. As I explored the river bank, I tripped over the wet and slippery rocks and was terrified when I hit the water. Fortunately, I was quickly scooped out of the river by my uncle. I compared that frightening and shocking experience of tripping and falling into the cold water with the disheartening experience of each unsuccessful attempt at attaining my initial vice-principalship. My perception of both experiences, falling into the river and being the unsuccessful candidate, were uncomfortable. However, in both cases I had someone to help me out of the cold water. My uncle scooped me up when I fell in the river, and my social supports consoled me when I was the unsuccessful candidate. I consolidated my knowledge, emotions, and understanding of the world by comparing the previous experiences and using them as metaphors to articulate these new experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Morgan, 1997). Morgan (1997) describes, “The use of metaphors implies a *way of thinking* and a *way of seeing* that pervade how we understand our world generally” (p.4). This led me to my decision to use metaphor as a conceptual tool in this study.

I wrestled with the idea that my understandings of metaphors are influenced and perpetuated by the society in which I live. Metaphors shape not only what I see in the world but influence how I see the world. My understanding of metaphors perpetuate why I see the world through my particular perspective (Charmaz, 2012). If I had never fallen into the swift moving river, I would never have experienced the emotions to be able to compare it to pursuing my initial vice-principalship. If I did not live adjacent to an urban forest, I would not have been able to write the metaphorical narrative “A Walk in the Bois-des-esprits”. How I see the world and what I can see are intricately woven with my own experiences. The metaphors that I use to describe my world are a direct result of my previous experiences. I make meaning of my world

from the experiences I already know, and most importantly, I perpetuate the perspective. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2012). I began to reflect, using my understandings of reflective thinking and metaphor theory, about my own personal use of metaphor to describe my experience of pursuing my initial vice-principalship.

I also began to reflect on the limitations imposed by society on women, including me, consciously or unconsciously. Morgan (1997) describes that organizations perpetuate conscious and unconscious processes and that the people within those organization can be limited or imprisoned by these processes. My deliberation of these limitations, conscious or unconscious processes of organizations, began when I read the allegory of Socrates' psychic prison from Plato's *The Republic*. Socrates described the experiences of three inhabitants in an underground cave. The cave's opening is facing a large blazing fire and as people and objects move between the blazing fire and the cave opening, shadows are created on a wall in the cave. The three inhabitants of the cave are chained to an adjacent wall so that they cannot move and are only able to view the shadows on the illuminated wall in front of them. The three inhabitants label and describe the shadows they see and sounds they hear from outside to create a reality. The inhabitants' truth and reality are based in the shadowy world because they have no knowledge of any other. Socrates then described that if one of the inhabitants is released, the inhabitant would realize that the shadows are really part of a complex reality and that the knowledge and reality of the cave inhabitants is distorted and flawed. If the former inhabitant returned to the cave, the returned inhabitant would never be able to return to the old way of living as they have seen the complex reality. The returned inhabitant may also be ridiculed for the views they hold as the images created in the cave are more meaningful to the inhabitants who never left (Morgan, 1997). I began to consider that my way of thinking, my metaphors, and my reality is constructed

by the shadows I see on the illuminated wall in front of me similar to the inhabitants of the cave. I then considered my experiences pursuing a vice-principalship and realized that it would be valuable to know more about the common experiences of women pursuing their initial vice-principalship positions.

### **My Artifact**

The prologue “A Walk in the Bois-des-esprits” is an artifact used to describe my experience pursuing my initial vice-principalship. Clandinin and Caine (2013) encourage researchers in the first step of a narrative inquiry to, “engage in intensive autobiographical narrative inquiries” (p.170). I call the metaphorical narrative “A Walk in the Bois-des-esprit” an artifact because this is my first field text as the researcher and the beginnings of my intensive autobiographical narrative inquiry.

By using a metaphorical narrative, the narrative describes not only my perception of the experiences pursuing my initial vice-principalship, but it illuminates my life’s experiences and societal constraints (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Embedded in my metaphor are concepts, societal constructs, and expectations which I have been exposed to and that I have influenced me throughout my entire life. I have matched my experiences in my career to similar ideas and feelings that I have previously experienced in other situations. I assimilated language from those prior experiences to conceptualize and make sense of my world. I described my context and my understanding through what I perceived as similar experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2012). My use of the walk through the wood metaphor described not only my previous life experiences but also how I perceived and conceptualized my world (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Although the use of metaphor is a conceptual tool to view one's world, Morgan (1997) cautions that the use of metaphor can have drawbacks. Morgan (1997) describes that metaphors can create insights but that they can also be incomplete and misleading. To illustrate this point, using a walk in the woods as a metaphor for my initial pursuit for a vice-principalship, provides valuable insight into how I perceive my own career path and how I have managed interpersonal relationships, career decisions, and career opportunities. The metaphors in the narrative are also potentially misleading because it oversimplifies the experience. It glosses over barriers, career challenges, and missteps (Given, 2008; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Morgan, 1997).

I began to consider that if the metaphors I use in my language to describe my experience are concepts and societal constructs which I have been exposed to and that I have personally experienced throughout my entire life have embedded hegemonic androcentric perspectives. These androcentric perspectives act on me consciously and unconsciously. I have matched my experiences in my career to similar ideas and feelings that I have previously experienced in other situations.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is comprised of a prologue and five chapters. In the prologue, the reader was introduced to my artifact of a metaphorical narrative in pursuing my initial vice-principalship. In Chapter One, the reader was introduced to my rationale for the study. Chapter Two offers a review of the literature and was organized into the following themes: career paths of women in educational administration, and mentorship in education. The third chapter describes the methodology and the rationale for the methods used in this study. In Chapter Four, I introduce the participants of the research project and present the final research texts by retelling the

participants' stories. Finally, Chapter Five are the discussion and conclusions in relation to the research questions and provides implications for policy, practice, and research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations to any study and the limitations of this qualitative study are as follows. The first limitation is the use of metaphor. Although the metaphor can create creative insights into the participants' experience in the pursuit of her initial vice-principalship, the metaphor can become a distortion (Morgan, 1997). As previously described in Plato's allegory of the psychic prison, the metaphors that the participants choose to describe their experiences may allow creative insight into their experiences of pursuing a vice-principalships. The same metaphor can also potentially distort the participants' experiences (Morgan, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

The participants in this study, as women, represent a minority group within educational leadership. However, the larger pool of potential participants who successfully attained their initial vice-principalship in urban school divisions are predominantly white, heterosexual, cisgender, persons without a disability, and educated. Of the potential participants who contacted me, there were no potential participants who identified as a person with a disability, transgender, queer, or being of colour. Thus, all participants in this study were cisgender, heterosexual, persons without a disability, and white women. This study may not reflect all women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalships.

A final limitation is that those who participated in the study volunteered themselves and were ready to share their stories with a novice researcher. Some women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship may have been too difficult to share with a novice researcher. Clandinin and Caine (2013) identify that relationships between the researcher and the

participants are central idea of narrative inquiry. They may be unwilling to share their experiences with a researcher they do not know or trust. These women's stories may surface with a different or more prominent researcher.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

There are delimitations to any study and the delimitations of this qualitative study are as follows. The first delimitation of this study is that the participants were all from urban school divisions. The choice was made to conduct research in an urban centre to limit costs and facilitate convenience for myself and the participants. Although the participants represent a wide variety of experiences, this study may not be reflective of the experiences of women pursuing their initial vice-principalship in rural school divisions or in other urban school divisions across Canada.

Secondly, I have included only women participants who have successfully attained their initial vice-principalship. I decided I would include only those women participants who have attained vice-principalship positions to remain within the scope of this research study.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Androcentric beliefs.** Androcentric beliefs are conscious or unconscious beliefs that focus or centre around men. Blackmore, Thomson and Barty (2006) describe that educational leadership has historically been androcentric.

**Hegemony.** Hegemony is referred to as the dominant culture or group. In educational leadership, masculine hegemony has been the dominant culture or group (Lazar, 2005).

**Mentor.** In a review of the literature on mentorship, a mentor is an experienced and trusted guide who works with a protégé or mentee. The mentor assists the protégé on a career path and provides professional development based on the mentor's experiences (Clayton, Sanzo

& Myran, 2013). There can be formal or explicit programs that coordinate the relationship between a mentor and protégé, however, there can also be informal mentoring. The definition of mentors can be expanded to include not only professional mentors but personal mentors (Hansman, 1998; Wallin & Crippen, 2008). Therefore, the term mentor can be qualified and can include and is not limited to; peer mentor, informal mentor, formal mentor, professional mentor, and personal mentor.

**Protégé or mentee.** In a review of the literature of mentorship, the terms protégé and mentee are used interchangeably, and this research study utilizes both terms when they are referenced in the literature. A protégé or mentee is one who is supported or guided by a mentor (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004b; Erich, 1994).

**Formal/explicit mentoring.** In reviewing the literature about mentorship in education, there were numerous studies that focused on the formal or explicit mentoring of vice-principals and principals (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004b; Erich, 1994). The studies of formal or explicit mentoring purport that mentorship can assist with job preparation and socialization of the role of vice-principal. Formal or explicit mentoring is a specific, highly structured and formalized program that matches a mentor with a protégé within a district or leadership preparation program. For this research study, the terms formal mentoring and explicit mentoring are used interchangeably as they are in the literature.

**Informal/implicit mentoring.** Informal or implicit mentoring are the interactions between a protégé and a mentor outside of a formalized program. Their interactions are not formalized through structures of a formal district or leadership preparation program. The interactions between protégé and mentor are based on mutual selection within social networks (Wallin & Crippen, 2008). For example, my sister is an administrator in another school division.

We have a protégé/mentor relationship that has been formed through family dinners and not through a formalized program.

**Professional endorsements.** Professional endorsements in education are encouragements from teacher peers or educational leaders such as vice-principals, principals, assistant superintendents or superintendents. The teacher peers or educational leaders encourage a colleague to pursue leadership opportunities, such as vice-principalship, through positive comments and suggestions. These positive comments and suggestions by a teacher peer or educational leader can be referred to as the “tap on the shoulder” (Marshall & Kasten, 1994, as cited in Young & McLeod, 2001) that signifies confidence in the abilities of the aspiring vice-principals.

**Personal and professional supports.** Personal supports consist of the personal relationships of family and friends of the aspiring women vice-principals. Examples of these personal relationships may include but are not limited to; parent, sibling, spouse, friend, or partner. These personal relationships are supportive of the women educator pursuing her initial vice-principalship and the aspiring women vice-principals identify the relationships as a positive support. Professional supports are the professional networks, supportive colleagues, and social groups the aspiring women vice-principals choose to belong to and can include but are not limited to organizations such as Philanthropic Educational Organization (P.E.O.), Kin Canada, Daughters of the Nile, Chambers of Commerce, and Toastmasters. These professional supports are the relationships that aspiring women vice-principals seek out in the community and identify the relationship as a positive support (Young & McLeod, 2001).



**Summary**

This chapter summarized my experiences in pursuing my initial vice-principalship. It has provided a brief discussion of the development of my research topic and the relevance of the research topic to me. I introduced my researcher positioning and purpose for this research study. In the following chapter, I explore the literature that is relevant to the research topic, specifically that of the career paths of women in educational leadership and mentorship in education.

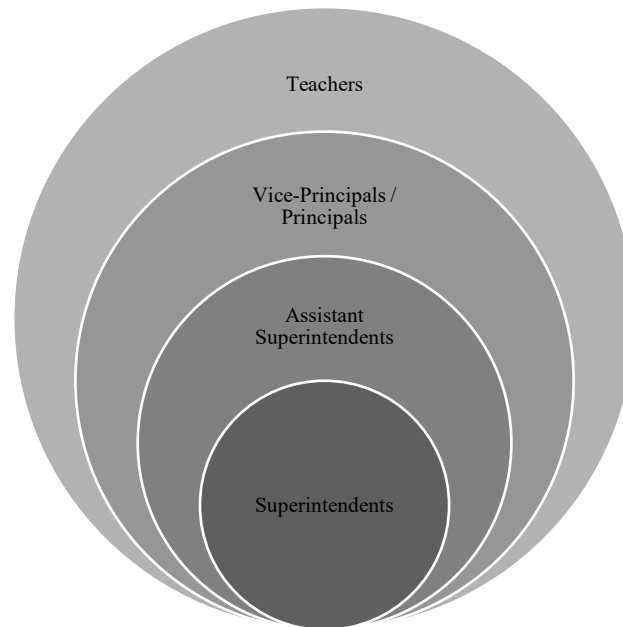
## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Career Paths of Women in Educational Leadership**

Throughout my master's program I had a keen interest in literature regarding the career paths of women in educational leadership. As previously mentioned, I was fascinated with Wallin and Crippen's work with the career paths of women superintendents in Manitoba. Career paths are the specific roles that an educator moves through during her career. Each educator's career path is unique to that individual. There are some educators who choose to leave the classroom during their career and pursue formal educational leadership opportunities as divisional leaders, divisional consultants, divisional coordinators, vice-principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. Many women embark on a career in education and find themselves in a variety of educational leadership positions throughout their lifetime (Crippen & Wallin, 2008a, 2008b; Wallin, 2010, 2012).

In Crippen and Wallin's (2008a; 2008b) research, they interviewed women superintendents in Manitoba. The participants described the many possible career paths that women could follow in education. These initial steps into leadership roles contributed to their career development. Crippen and Wallin (2008a; 2008b) described that many women superintendents in Manitoba were once principals or vice-principals, directors, or assistant superintendents, consultants or coordinators, and teachers. This can be represented in the following figure.

*Figure 2. Career Path Subsets of Educational Leaders*



Many studies in the body of literature on career paths of women in educational leadership from multiple countries describe various factors that hinder women's movement to positions as vice-principals and principals. Blackmore, Thomson, and Barty (2006) suggest women are not ascending to vice-principals and principals because there is homosociability and selection reproduction in hiring committees. This reproduction favours the hiring of men, as the historical dominant culture of educational leadership has been androcentric (Blackmore, Thomson & Barty, 2006). As a result, educational leadership has invisible barriers; cultural beliefs surrounding gender and patriarchal structures that favour men for leadership roles. These invisible barriers and cultural beliefs are barriers for women advancing in educational leadership roles (Baker, 2014; Blackmore, 2006, 2013; Drudy, 2008; Duncan, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989; Shakeshaft, Nowell & Perry, 1991; Wallin, 2010, 2012, 2015).

One theme that is prevalent in the literature of career paths of women in educational leadership is the belief that the socialization of a newly appointed woman vice-principal is necessary to facilitate her successful transition from teacher to vice-principal (Clayton et al.,

2013). This is a barrier because of the ways in which women become socialized into vice-principal roles. As there are statistically more men in educational leadership roles, the socialization of a woman vice-principal can require that she take on an androcentric standpoint and alienate a feminine style of leadership or alternative leadership styles (Sherman, 2005). As a result, a woman educator's self-perception is that they do not fit the role of vice-principal. Additionally, men in educational leadership are highly valued when they have a caring or holistic leadership style but when these same characteristics are applied to women's leadership style, they continue to be undervalued (Wallin & Crippen, 2007).

A second theme that is prevalent in the literature of career paths of women in educational administration is a belief about role identity, and ultimately, role conflict. Sherman (2005) reported that several of the women participants in her study believed that they could not be successful mothers and successful administrators simultaneously. This is a barrier because women educator's role identities of what constituted a successful vice-principal and successful mother were in conflict. The pressures of societal expectations on what constitutes a successful mother on the women educator conflicted with the androcentric perspectives of educational leadership. Ultimately, several participants in Sherman's study self-selected alternative educational leadership paths that would require less time outside the home that aligned with societal expectations for women (Sherman, 2005).

A third theme prevalent in the literature of career paths of women in educational administrations are the beliefs about authority and gender that permeate education. Drudy (2008) describes in her study, "a correlation between masculinity and authority [which] seems to be obvious and unquestioned in the social order of gender and in the gender regimes of schools and thus forms an implicit discourse of subordination of women" (p. 320). This naturalized social

order is a barrier because hiring committees perceive women educators as lacking authority in comparison to men and, as a result, women educators are not successful in attaining a vice-principalship. Many aspiring women vice-principals seek alternative leadership opportunities after multiple unsuccessful attempts at attaining a vice-principalship.

A final theme prevalent in the literature of career paths of women in educational administration is the importance of mentorship. Crippen and Wallin (2008a) interviewed women superintendents in Manitoba and reported that the role of mentorship was very important in ascending to the role of the superintendent. The participants of the study described that mentorship by a colleague influenced them to leave the familiarity of their classroom and had a significant impact in their initial pursuit of a vice-principalship that put them on a career path to the superintendency (Wallin & Crippen, 2008a). This is a barrier because men continue to make up the majority of role models and potential mentors in educational leadership (Crippen & Wallin, 2008a, 2008b; Wallin, 2012). There are fewer women superintendents as role models and potential mentors to aspiring women vice-principals who can aid in the socialization, encourage formation of new role identities and dispel beliefs about gender (Wallin, 2012).

The themes of socialization, role identity, authority and gender, and mentorship in the literature of career paths of women in educational administration demonstrate there are numerous barriers for aspiring women vice-principals in educational leadership. The noticeable gaps in the literature seem to be related to Canadian women and educational leadership in Canada. Specifically, there seems to be an absence of research into the entrance of Canadian women educators into the vice-principalship role.

### **Mentorship in Education**

The role of mentorship in education emerged as another theme in this literature review and mentorship has been touted as instrumental in the success of newly inducted educational leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Crippen & Wallin, 2008a, 2008b; Daresh, 2004a; Wallin, 1999, 2010; Wilmore, 2004). In fact, Daresh (2004a) advocates the first strategy for newly appointed vice-principal is to “find a mentor” (p. 97). Daresh (2004a) further explains that finding a mentor is the one thing that a newly appointed vice-principal can do to ensure his/her survival and effectiveness in their new role. Wallin (1999) echoes this sentiment specifically in the recruiting and supporting of women in educational leadership. She suggests that anyone entering a new professional role will need support and guidance. Some school districts have developed formalized or explicit mentoring to provide this support for new educational administration. In the literature, these formalized mentorship programs can be organized in a single district, in collaboration with a university and school district, or organized solely by a university (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004a; Sherman, 2005; Wilmore, 2004).

Formal or explicit mentoring programs are created to help aspiring educational leaders develop skills that are required to successfully fulfill their duties as a vice-principal and/or principal (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004a; Wilmore, 2004). These programs have increased in popularity, supporting aspiring educational leaders to develop skills, because principals/ vice-principals are seen as integral to the process of school improvement (Blackmore, Thompson & Barty, 2006; Clayton et al., 2013; Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). These formal or explicit programs are promoted by senior leadership and are seen as integral to staff development (Ehrich, 1994). Therefore, formal or explicit mentoring programs exist for two primary reasons: human resource needs and role socialization.

The first reason formal or explicit mentoring programs exist is to provide for a human resource need, specifically to assist in job preparation for a vice-principalship (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004a; Wilmore, 2004). School districts look to formal mentoring programs to enhance and develop aspiring educational leaders' skills. The intent is that with the development of aspiring education leaders' skills, the newly appointed vice-principal will feel effective in their new role and as a result have a degree of satisfaction in their job. School boards will be able to retain aspiring educational leaders and newly appointed educational leaders in vice-principalships by providing mentoring for the development of necessary skills for job effectiveness (Daresh, 2004a). The employer that invests in these formal or explicit mentoring programs looks at reducing human resource costs by retaining newly appointed vice-principals who feel satisfied in their position.

The second reason formal or explicit mentoring programs exist is to provide socialization into the role of vice-principal. The process of becoming a vice-principal and acquiring the role identity is an intricate process of reflection and learning (Brown-Ferrigno, 2003; Clayton et al., 2013). The formation of this new role identity as a vice-principal originates in learning and using language and behaviours of a professional identity (Fuller, 2014). Mentors can assist aspiring educational leaders participating in a formal mentoring program by providing insight into the expectations of the new role by using language of the group and modelling behaviours (Clayton et al., 2013). Organizations use a formal or explicit mentoring program to aid in the formation of role identity and socialization of newly appointed women vice-principals' (Wallin, 1999).

### **Intended Outcomes of a Formal or Explicit Mentorship Program**

There are many intended outcomes for the development of explicit or formal mentoring programs. One intended outcome is that there is a mutual benefit in professional development for

both the mentor and protégé. The mentor has an opportunity to share knowledge and information from their vast experiences but also has an opportunity to experience perspectives from the protégé's experiences. There is reciprocal teaching and learning between the mentor and protégé (Clayton et al., 2013).

A second intended outcome is that protégés gain leadership knowledge and skill. Protégés participating in a formalized mentorship program report they feel confident about their effectiveness in their new role (Daresh, 2004b). Protégés have an opportunity to learn from experienced colleagues and as a result increase their knowledge in the field of educational administration. The protégés have increased feelings of confidence with their perceived increased knowledge and skill (Daresh, 2004b).

A third intended outcome of the development of an explicit or formal mentoring program is that some programs were created to include more minorities and women in educational leadership roles. Women and minorities are historically underrepresented in educational leadership roles (Baker, 2014; Ehrich, 1994; Wallin, 2010). There are invisible societal barriers and cultural beliefs surrounding gender that inhibit women pursuing a vice-principalship. There are also structures in society that support men in leadership roles in the workplace (Baker, 2014). To overcome the invisible barriers and cultural beliefs, explicit or formal mentorship programs offer access to and opportunity for women and minorities to experience mentorship, which they were denied (Lumby 2014; Sherman, 2005)).

### **Critiques of a Formal Mentorship Program**

The three aforementioned intended outcomes, the benefits of professional development for the mentor and protégé, the assistance in job preparation, and the inclusion of minorities and women are reasons school divisions seek to develop formal or explicit mentoring programs.



Although there are perceived benefits to developing a formalized mentoring program, there are also problems that are inherent to explicit or formal mentorship programs. Formal mentoring programs are not always positive and there are reasons why formal or explicit mentoring may not be the best preparation for aspiring women pursuing her initial vice-principalship (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004b; Hansman, 1998; Lumby, 2014).

One impediment is that the formal/explicit mentoring program can reinforce the status quo of traditional educational administration experiences (Clayton et al., 2013; Lumby, 2014). Which applicants are invited to participate, and which applicants are excluded in an explicit or formal mentorship program can reinforce the traditional androcentric and hegemonic educational administration perspectives, specifically, the white male experience (Sherman, 2005; Lumby 2014). Sherman (2005) further describes how senior leadership controls the type of leadership that is taught and how the participants perceived the formal or explicit mentorship program to promote a particular view of leadership. Although the programs are created with the intentions to promote women and minorities in educational leadership, often minorities' and women's voices are not heard, nor are their leadership styles recognized. Participants in these formal/explicit programs can also be falsely labelled as affirmative action tokens regardless of qualifications (Sherman, 2005). Standardization and isomorphism can result when only one perspective is taught in an explicit or formalized mentorship program.

The literature also describes a second impediment of a formal/explicit mentoring program as the lack of connection between educational administration theory and practical on-the-job experiences (Clayton et al., 2013). Some study participants reported that there was too much theory and not enough relevant on-the-job experience (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004b). This conflict between theory and on-the-job training can lead the participant to feel ill-prepared for

the day-to-day tasks as a school-based administrator. This dichotomy can lead the participant in a formal/explicit mentorship program to feel helpless and can result in job dissatisfaction.

A third impediment is that cross-gender mentoring can be an issue (Erich, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1989). Men have held and continue to hold a disproportionate number of senior educational leadership roles in relation to the number of women in the teaching profession. As a result, many of the mentors, those educational leaders with experience, will be men and many of the mentor-protégé relationships will potentially have a man-woman composition with the man being the mentor and the woman the protégé. Some problems with a heterosexual man-woman composition of a mentor-protégé may include sexual tension between mentor-protégé, marital disruption for either or both the mentor-protégé, and sexual innuendos suggested by others (Ehrich, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1989).

A final impediment is the amount of resources that are required to deliver an effective formalized mentorship program. Formalized mentorship programs incur not only the financial costs such as release time but there are also human resource costs associated to employee time and salary as well. In this transparency driven and financially constricted political climate, a formalized mentorship program can be unattainable to smaller school divisions due to the large financial cost and human resources that are required. Although larger school divisions may have the financial capital and human resources available, competing divisional priorities may take precedent.

### **Contributing to the Literature**

Based on this review of the literature related to the mentorship of vice-principals, there seemed to be a lack of research regarding the topics of informal/implicit mentoring with mentors and protégés. The women I spoke with in my preliminary research study did not participate in a

formal/explicit mentorship program for aspiring vice-principals in their school divisions. However, the participants did express the importance of mentors in the development of their career path and each participant identified an informal/implicit mentor. The preliminary study participants were able to identify a mentor without the assistance of formal/explicit mentorship program. This leads me to believe that the preliminary study participants were exposed to the concept of a mentor prior to developing the informal/implicit mentorship relationship. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) describe that, “research reveals how metaphor structures how we think and what thoughts are permitted” (p. 267). As a result, it is possible that if an aspiring vice-principal or potential protégé does not have life experiences that have exposed them to the concept of a mentor, they may never find a mentor outside of a formal/explicit mentorship program. There was a lack of research in the literature of how implicit and informal mentoring developed between a mentor and protégé.

Another gap in the literature was surrounding the concept of professional endorsements in attaining a vice-principalship role. There is the possibility that the mentorship experiences the women described in my preliminary study were not mentorship relationships. These experiences could potentially be professional endorsements (Young & McLeod, 2001). The participants’ previous experiences and lack of conceptual understanding about professional endorsements could lead the participants to mislabel the professional endorsements as mentorship relationships.

Although there is a wealth of information in the field of gender and education, there seems to be less research on the topic of what prompts women to decide to pursue a vice-principalship. Young and McLeod (2001) found there were four factors that greatly affect women’s decisions to pursue educational leadership roles, including; the candidate’s own career aspirations; the candidate’s administrative role models; the candidate’s exposure to

transformative leadership styles; and the endorsements and/or support they receive (Young & McLeod, 2001). Young and McLeod (2001) encouraged further research in this area as their research took place in a single state and their participants were predominantly white and middle class. The experiences of aspiring vice-principals and principals in other countries and who are minorities are not reflected in their results.

### **Summary**

There are gaps in the literature relating to aspiring educational leaders' career paths in educational leadership, specifically regarding women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship. There also continues to be gaps in the literature regarding the mentorship of women in educational administration. The aim of this research study was to examine women's experiences in pursuing their initial vice-principalships and to add to the growing body of research.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Although there is a qualified pool of candidates of aspiring women vice-principals, societal and individual barriers impede women from attaining these roles (Reynolds & Young, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wallin, 1999, 2012; Wallin & Crippen, 2007; Young & McLeod, 2001). The purpose of this study was to examine women's experiences in pursuing their initial vice-principalship. This study has used qualitative methodology and specifically, a narrative inquiry methodology. The stories of the participants were collected using the research instrument of an in-depth interview. Once the participants' stories were collected and transcribed verbatim, the interim research texts were read, and re-read to create the final texts. This chapter reviews the rationale for the decisions that I made in approaching this study.

#### **Qualitative or Quantitative**

In developing the methodology for this research study, there were many reasons to choose a qualitative approach especially if the problem should be explored (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). My ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs suggest that a qualitative approach would be the most suited way for me approach to this research.

My ontological view is that there are multiple realities (Creswell, 2013; Given, 2008). Each woman vice-principal and principal I interviewed has experienced the phenomenon of pursuing her initial vice-principalship; however, each participant's experiences have been different. As Given (2008) notes, each participant's viewpoint will create a rich description of experiences, provide a different perspective, and will explain their own realities. The participants' previous life experiences are interwoven in the language they use to share their narrative stories. What language the participants chooses and how they use language to describe

their experiences will create an understanding of their life's experiences in relation to social structures (Manchin & Mayr, 2012).

My epistemological view is that the knowledge of women as a marginalized group of educational leaders can provide valuable insight to not only the dominant group of educational leaders but other marginalized groups (Given, 2008; Naples & Gurr, 2014). Women who have successfully attained their initial vice-principalship are members of both the dominant societal and educational group and the marginalized women educational leadership group. The dominant educational leadership group can be perceived as androcentric (Kachur-Reiko & Wallin, 2011). Lazar (2005) describes that, "gender ideology is hegemonic in that it often does not appear as domination at all; instead it seems largely consensual and acceptable to most in a community" (p. 7). Therefore, analyzing women educational leaders' descriptions of experiences pursuing a vice-principalship position in the dominant group of educational leaders allow us to reveal the masculine hegemonic structures that are taken for granted in and by the dominant group (Lazar, 2005). The membership in both groups affords the participants a global perspective of both the dominant group and the marginalized group (Given, 2008; Naples & Gurr, 2014).

My axiological view creates a bias due to my belonging to perceived dominant groups in society (Creswell, 2013). I am a white, middle class, person without a disability, Anglophone, educated, heterosexual, cisgender female and I bring to the research a unique perspective with experience as an educator. I have successfully attained a vice-principalship position and as a result, I belong to both the dominant educational leadership and marginalized women in educational leadership groups (Given, 2008; Naples & Gurr, 2014). I understand that I hold a unique perspective and that this perspective has influenced the type of research questions that I have created (Given, 2008).

Therefore, I decided that the best way to approach this research study was to use a qualitative approach as a result of my ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs. With that initial decision being made, the next decision that I needed to make was what type of qualitative approach I would use within the scope of qualitative research.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

After careful consideration, I decided to use narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995). Clandinin and Caine (2008; 2013) describe that narrative inquiry is both a methodology and a way of understanding experience. Narrative inquiry was determined to be the best way for me to approach this study due to my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

My personal justification for using narrative inquiry is that all narrative inquiries begin with narrative beginnings, and in my case, I began with an autobiographical narrative inquiry. This autobiographical inquiry began with the creation of my artifact, “Walk in the Bois-des-esprits” and continued with my literature review. I was able to locate myself within the research literature and locate myself in relation with potential study participants as women and as a vice-principal. I was able to study who I am, and more importantly, who I am becoming in relation to my experience in pursuing, and successfully attaining, my initial vice-principalship position. This narrative beginning of autobiographical inquiry was the starting point that shaped my research study and developed my own understanding of my perspective.

My practical justification for using narrative inquiry is the consideration for social justice and equity. The consideration for social justice and equity resonated with me as I developed my perspective in my autobiographical inquiry. As previously stated, there is a large pool of

qualified aspiring women vice-principals, yet there continues to be societal and individual barriers that impede women from attaining educational leadership positions. In using narrative inquiry, I developed a deeper understanding of women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship and examined how social contexts shape the experiences. I wondered how my experiences and other women's experiences could be shaped differently so that opportunities can be extended to women to pursue and successfully attain their initial vice-principalship. Narrative inquiry enabled me to work in the realm of social justice and equity.

My theoretical justification for using narrative inquiry is the consideration for social action and policy. I want to contribute to the literature of educational leadership so that additional opportunities for women and other marginalized groups are able to enter the field of educational leadership either through change in school division practices or policies. Narrative inquiry allows opportunity to examine the, "complexities, contradictions and inconsistencies" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p.175). There may be outstanding aspiring leaders that are discouraged, or alienated because their voices are not heard, or their style of leadership is not recognized by the hegemonic perspective. My hope is that through social action and policy changes as a result of this narrative inquiry will reduce and ultimately remove barriers for women in pursuing their initial vice-principalship positions.

Clandinin and Caine (2013) describe a process of narrative inquiry. First, the researcher engages with study participants in the field. Second, the researcher co-creates field texts with the study participants, and third, the field texts are then shaped into interim texts which are shared and negotiated with the participants to create the final research texts. I believed this process would assist me to examine women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship.



Therefore, I decided I would use a narrative inquiry as the methodology due to my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications.

### **Research Instrument and Creation of Field Texts**

Once I decided to use narrative inquiry, I needed to decide on the type of research instrument that would be best to co-create the stories of women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship position. The instrument I chose was the in-depth interview with a semi-structured interview guide. As Hesse-Biber (2014) describes, "the *in-depth interview* [original emphasis] seeks to understand the 'lived experiences' of the individual" (p.189). The semi-structured interview guide for the in-depth interview was designed to elicit conversation. As Clandinin and Caine (2013) describe, creating field texts in a narrative inquiry is a co-composition between the researcher and the participants of the study. Conversations, "create a space for the voices and stories of both participants and researchers to be heard and composed" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 167). The semi-structured interview guide provided me with a framework for the interviews (and helped to calm my nervousness) in conducting the in-depth interview. There was never any intention in the conversation to resolve issues or solve problems (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

Prior to the in-depth interview, I asked each participant to select an artifact to bring to the interview that represented their experience in pursuing their initial vice-principalship. Norum (2008) explains that artifacts are sources of data that can create insights into aspects of a person and that can enrich a study. The purpose of the artifacts was to encourage and prompt participants to tell their stories of pursuing their initial vice-principalship position (Clandinin and Caine, 2013). During the interview, I asked the participants to explain the significance of their artifact.

The artifacts the participants brought to the interview contributed greatly to the creation of the interim research texts. They allowed me to enter the midst (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) with the six participants of the study. The artifacts successfully elicited discussions regarding the participants pursuit of their initial vice-principalship. The descriptions of the artifacts contributed to the context and help to create the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

The goal in using the in-depth interview and an artifact was to develop a context of the phenomenon and develop a rich narrative to understand the participants' way of thinking (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Hess-Biber, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The in-depth interview was recorded using a digital recording device and then transcribed verbatim to create field texts.

### **Participant Recruitment, Selection and Negotiating Entry to the Field**

To recruit participants, I advertised for women who were currently working as school vice-principals or principals in urban school divisions through the University of Manitoba and the Council of School Leaders (COSL). I was purposeful in selecting participants by pre-screening them for a variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, and length of service as a school-based administrator. The participant recruitment and selection began in February 2018. The data collection process began March 2018 and was completed by the end of May 2018.

Once a participant agreed to participate in the study, and provided me with contact information, I emailed a copy of the consent form for the in-depth interview and the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) so that they could review the consent form and questions for the interview. This was the beginning of what Clandinin and Caine (2013) call negotiation of the researcher and the participants, "in the midst" (p. 169). The researcher and the participants come together and negotiate the complex realities of time, place and space

(Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Through email the participants and I mutually agreed to a meeting date, time, and setting for the in-depth interview to occur.

I conducted one in-depth interview with each participant, which took less than 60 minutes to complete. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and then I transcribed each interview verbatim to create field texts.

### **Member Checks and Creation of Interim Research Texts**

Transcribing the interviews verbatim was a laborious task but was important as I wanted to interact with the recording to co-create the field texts. Once each individual transcription was complete, I sent it by email to the participant so that the transcription could be reviewed. Each participant was invited to co-create interim texts by providing additions, corrections, and deletions to the transcript. This co-creation of interim texts with participants was essential to the narrative inquiry process and was required before I created final research texts. Once a participant either suggested corrections or deletions, I sent the updated transcript to be reviewed again. These member checks ensured the information that I was co-creating accurately reflected the participants' narratives of their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I was able to co-create interim research texts and then create final research texts once these member checks were completed.

### **Final Research Texts**

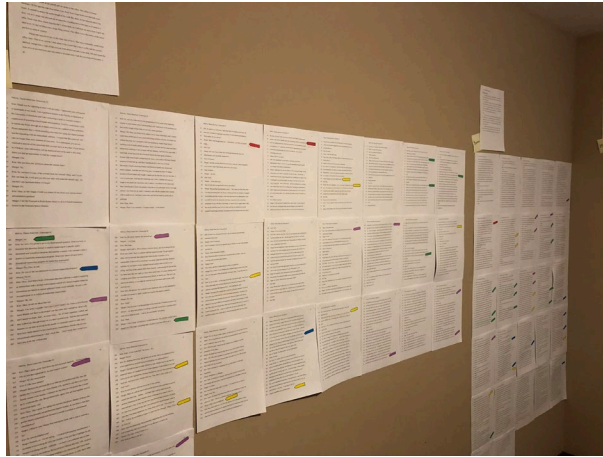
I created a final research text once the member checks of the interim research texts were complete. Bogden and Bilken (2007) describe data analysis as, "systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings" (p. 159). I needed to decide on how I was going to create final research texts from the interim research texts that were co-created using the in-depth interview

transcriptions. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) describe narrative analysis as a process where a researcher, “collects descriptions of events through interviews and observations and synthesizes them into narratives or stories” (p. 385). Riessman (2008) describes narrative analysis as a method for, “interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (p. 10). Each participant shared their experiences of pursuing initial vice-principalship and in doing so created meaning with me as the researcher. The participants made sense of their experiences and I in turn interpreted the stories (Gibbs, 2007).

Clandinin and Caine (2013) describe a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space made of temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality in this narrative inquiry space relates to the researcher’s and participants’ co-construction of the field notes and subsequent interim research notes over multiple interactions. Sociality has two aspects. The first aspect focuses the researcher and participants inward to thoughts, emotions, and moral responses. The second aspect focuses the researcher and participants outward to actions and events. Place focuses the researcher and participants to reflect upon where their stories took place and the events occurred.

In co-creating the participants stories, I read and re-read the interim research texts extensively. Within each interim research text, I began looking for the temporality, sociality, and place of the participants’ experiences in regard to the four research questions of this study. I decided that I would post the six interim research texts on the walls of my home office (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3. The Posted Interim Research Texts (Melvin, 2019).*



I was able to annotate the individual transcripts using coloured post it flags when the participants' story described critical points in their career paths, barriers and/or opportunities, people who influenced their decision to pursue a vice-principalship, and the perceived effect of mentors. I was able to view the entirety of the individual transcript since it was posted on the walls. I began to re-create participants' career paths and develop a chronology of the events in pursuing their initial vice-principalship to create the final research texts.

I was attentive to the relational responsibilities I had as the researcher while I was creating the field texts, the interim research texts, and the final research texts (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I was mindful that I co-created and negotiated with the study participants the "...living, reliving, telling, and retelling of stories" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169). I felt very responsible for the ethical care of the participants stories in creating the final research texts because the participants entrusted and entered into the midst with me (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### **Ethics and Confidentiality**

The Education Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba has approved this study (see appendix – for the certificate of approval). Field texts were co-created with participants using an individual in-depth interview. Participants were instructed that

participation in the study was voluntary and they could refuse to answer any question, leave the interview, and/or withdraw from the study at any time completely without penalty. All identifying characteristics including individual names, names of organizations, and places were removed from the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. My notes did not contain any identifying information. The digital recordings, transcripts and notes were destroyed, and hard copy data was shredded upon the completion of my thesis.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine women's experiences in pursuing their initial vice-principalships. The methodological choices that I made align with my epistemological, ontological, and axiological beliefs and my belief that this research would be best approached by using a qualitative method. Bogden and Bilken (2007) define qualitative research as, "an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects' point of view" (p. 274). I chose a narrative inquiry methodology with the research instrument of an in-depth interview. I was able to co-create with the study participants the field texts and interim field texts. As a researcher, I felt responsible for the ethical care of the final research texts because the study participants entrusted me and entered into the midst with me (Clandinin and Caine, 2013).

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I introduce the six participants of this research study and I narrate their experiences pursuing a vice-principalship position. Each of the participants of this study attained their initial vice-principalship within the last sixteen years. First, I constructed a chronology of events for each participant. Second, I constructed a chronology of events for all of the participants by when they attained their initial vice-principalship. I begin this chapter with the participant who attained their vice-principalship 16 years ago. The subsequent participants' stories follow chronologically by when they attained their initial vice-principalship and conclude with the participant who most recently attained her initial vice-principalship 5 years ago.

I chose to present the findings chronologically to help demarcate the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space using the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Each interview is presented as a continuous story highlighting the participants' reflections of their experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship position. Additionally, as each participant's experience is presented chronologically, it presents an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of women over a sixteen-year period.

The purpose of the artifacts was to prompt conversation from the participants about their experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship. Clandinin and Caine (2013) describe that artifacts are a method of entering the midst in narrative inquiry and allow the participant to speak about the experience the researcher is investigating. Prior to each interview, I asked the participants to bring an artifact that represents their experience pursuing their initial vice-principalship position. Each of these artifacts contributed to our co-construction of the field texts and interim research texts.

**Emma**

Emma contacted me after seeing a poster at the University of Manitoba. We connected by phone and we agreed to meet after school. Emma works in an urban school division and is currently a principal of a kindergarten to grade five French immersion school. We met at the school where Emma works a little after 4:30 p.m.. Emma was extremely accommodating to my request to meet. She arranged to meet on a day where she was able to stay late, and I was extremely grateful for her flexibility to meet.

Emma and I met in her office which was located in the main school office. Her office was a large square located in the centre interior of the building. There were no windows to the outside. When I entered her office, the desk was to my left and was L-shaped. Emma sat across from me on the short side of the desk that acted as a table. I was able to place my digital recorder on the table and I was able to pull up a chair. Emma was comfortably seated in her chair across from me. Once I set up the recorder, Emma was ready to proceed. Our interview lasted just over 50 minutes.

Emma described that she was originally unsure of what to bring as an artifact to the interview to represent the pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. Every time she thought about what to bring, she kept going back to her current school profile. Her school profile outlines the school's priorities for the current school year and includes information on previous years' successes, expected outcomes with strategies, indicators, and data collection.

During her interview, Emma described the school profile as a culmination of her own learning in a variety of roles over 20 years' experience. The profile reflects how she is able to lead her school with a vision. She is able to communicate her vision as to what the teachers' jobs are in her school, a vision to what the student services teachers' jobs are in her school, and a



vision to what leadership is in her school. Emma explained that her school profile represents all that she has learned in her career and teaches others to support student learning. Emma described that all the roles in the profile culminate in providing amazing education for children. She ended by saying that her school profile represents what she does and where she has come from

Emma was appointed to her first vice-principalship 16 years ago. Prior to her appointment, she was working in a French immersion school teaching grade three and four in a rural school division. During her fourth year of teaching, the vice-principal of her school was retiring, and she decided that she would apply for the vice-principalship that was about to be vacated. She recalls the event as follows:

My mother is a successful school administrator, and my father is a teacher. Because of my mother's success in the field of administration and her encouragement, I had always thought that's where I would end up. I hadn't been in the classroom very long when I became an administrator. I had only been in the classroom four years. One of those I was actually on two mat leaves. So, it came earlier than I expected because my vice-principal retired, and nobody was applying for the job. Nobody. And nobody was really interested, and I was terrified to get somebody that would be awful, and I thought, "Well, I probably could do it? I guess so." and my colleagues went, "Really? You'd do it? Oh, for sure we'll work for you!" and I'm, "Okay". So, I threw my hat in the ring and I got it!

Emma described her colleagues' professional endorsements as integral support for her initial vice-principalship application. She describes their contributions to her attainment of her initial vice-principalship and success in her initial vice-principalship as follows:

The beauty of it was because my colleagues had supported me entering the position, I also had devoted people supporting me through all of it and we worked as a team and

nobody ever gave up, so I ended up being okay. That's how it worked! Oh, I wouldn't have done it without them, those early years were the hardest of my life. I'll never forget them. It was so difficult. They were very, very, very helpful. Yeah, we grew up together. We all got our jobs... It was a very interesting staff. Two-thirds of us were hired in the same year. So, we had grown up together through that. And the other third were people that just took all of us under their wing. As a teaching staff, when I was part of that, it was a wonderful environment to work in and I loved working with those people! Still one of my favourite groups of people I've worked with.

Emma identified that her colleagues were integral to her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. However, Emma also recognized that her family was vital to her success as a vice-principal. She described her family's contributions as follows:

Well, my life context definitely was at that time, my husband was supportive of my career, and still, even today, we're exes now, but he's definitely supportive of my career. And supports me through helping with kids when I'm busy with stuff in the evening. And that's vice versa, too. So that's always been good, my family has always been supportive. My parents no longer live in town, so my ex-husband's mother was essential to our survival.

Emma went on to be principal of her rural school. After a few years she applied to an urban school division and subsequently attained a vice-principalship there. Emma described the following when asked about personal and professional factors potential candidates should consider before pursuing their initial vice-principalship:

Well, if I were to give advice to anybody, it is always going to be about maintaining balance and knowing what your boundaries are. If I were to give advice to a woman, it

really has to do with... I don't know how to explain it, I don't want to say it's kitschy... it's cliché to say working in a man's world, because it's not really like that. But there are some institutionalized expectations that I think aren't conducive to mothers, I don't know that I've challenged them, or I've just discarded them, and I don't know if that's how I've survived this or not. I'm not sure but I'm not a workaholic. I think if I were to say if you're going into administration my advice would be to be a high achiever and not an overachiever and you will always make it work. I'm a hard worker, I'm smart, I'm creative, I'm all the things that this job requires of a person, I believe. But I know when to stop and I know that the world doesn't need me all the time. So, it's okay. I think the best advice I ever gave and take myself, is if this job ever becomes too much for me, I'll just take a step down. And I did that once for the well-being of my kids and myself. It was a good decision.

Emma identified that the challenges of a work-life balance can be a potential barrier to pursuing a vice-principalship. She also identified institutionalized androcentric expectations of the position. Emma described the institutionalized androcentric expectations as follows:

It's interesting. I've run across some sexism but nothing that I'd say would be crippling. Not really. I think we are in a care-giving profession, so you don't see it quite that much. I've had one really upsetting experience in that sense but other than that. You know, in 20 years, I think that's been okay. Oh, I was very angry. Yeah and it was colleague to colleague so there was no power differential. There was no power imbalance. If there had been a power imbalance, it would have been extremely wrong. And because I had a good sense of self, I was capable of navigating that and dealing with it properly. I think. But yeah, it caught me off guard. I did not expect it. It was somebody who offered me a

judgement on a situation that was absolutely based on male gender stereotypes and I was just floored. It was really uncomfortable, but I dealt with it. It is what it is. And knowing what's worth standing up for and what's worth backing down from. And how both of those are completely legitimate strategies in this job. That was definitely something I applied from then.

Emma attributed her success as a vice-principal by participating in multiple informal mentorship relationships:

I've participated in many informal mentorship relationships and still do today. My Mom, being one of the big ones. When I'm stuck, I always call my mom. When I'm stuck, and my mother is so funny because my mother is the eternal educator. She'll say, "So, you need to reframe this. Draw three circles on a paper and in the first circle I want you..." And she gets me to go through these exercises and it's hilarious and it works every time! And I'm like, "Thanks Mom."

Emma further described additional informal mentorship relationships she participates in, "Recently, created an amazing network of female administrators that in the past two years have become my go-to people and my supports... but my supports in many areas nor just career." She then elaborated on the format of her informal mentorship relationships:

Did I create informal mentorship opportunities? Yes, people never sought me out and said, "Hey honey, let me mentor you." I think that would be a little condescending. I think people that I've met and worked with have always left their doors open and that's easy to walk through. So as long you don't feel intimidated or judged or unsupported by a person, then I think you feel safe enough generally to, to show some vulnerability and say, "Hey, I don't know how to do this. If you were me what would you do?" or, "Can

you help me think of some other options.” Probably, the hardest thing is that you feel blinded by your emotion and this is like, “I just hate this” and then you can’t get unstuck. I’ve always had people that I could go to when I feel like that, that have said, “Well, try looking at it this way.” And then when somebody gets you thinking, I’m off to the races. If I’m stuck, I need another person. Yes, those mentors have played critical roles for me at moments of impasse, or indecision, or weakness... vulnerability. Those people have played really important roles for me when I’ve needed it.

Emma did not participate in a formal mentorship relationship or program prior to her initial vice-principalship and she did not participate in a formal mentorship relationship or program after her appointment to her initial vice-principalship. When I asked her about formal mentoring, she described the following:

We had a joke that when you were hired, when you signed your contract they said, “Here’s the keys. Make it work!” and that’s exactly what it was like. Here’s the keys. Make it work. And everybody said that to me, “Oh, you’ll do fine. Here’s the keys. Make it work.” I’m like, okay. That’s exactly what it was.

### **Kara**

Kara works in an urban school division and is currently a vice-principal at a kindergarten to grade eight English school. Kara contacted me through email. She had received a poster distributed by a professor at the university. We corresponded and arranged a meeting time and date. Kara and I decided to meet at the school I work at after school. We met a little after 3:30 and we spoke for just over 45 minutes.

We met in a conference room at my school. The room was long and rectangular in shape. It had a door that was covered with horizontal blinds that provided a modicum of privacy. There

was a large conference style table with several chairs surrounding it. There were no phones, computers or other technology in the room. The only technology that was in the room was brought in by Kara and me.

Kara brought in a cloth bag. In the bag she had a binder and a small box that had her artifact in it. She sat across from me at the conference table. When she was comfortably seated, she immediately pulled out the items from the bag and placed them on the table. She also provided a signed copy of the consent form that I had emailed to her prior to the interview. We began the interview once I was ready with the digital recorder.

Kara brought a puzzle game called *Tantrix* as an artifact to represent the pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. *Tantrix* is played by placing hexagonal tiles to match other previously placed tiles to create coloured pathways. The goal of the game is to get as many of the playing pieces out on the table as possible.

Kara described the reason she chose this puzzle game as her artifact was even though you could control your path, sometimes you would have roadblocks along the way. She further explained that at other times you can rearrange your path, or control which way you want your future to go and if you have the right pieces or the right fit, you end up in the next step. It described the different pathways that she has gone in her career and felt this was similar to her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship.

Kara was appointed to her initial vice-principalship 12 years ago. Prior to Kara's initial appointment to her vice-principalship, she was working as a kindergarten teacher in a kindergarten to grade eight English school. She signaled an interest in school leadership three years earlier when she applied to the principal position at her school. She was unsuccessful in attaining the principal position but was interested in seeing what other opportunities were

available to her. Three years later, she signaled an interest to be a vice-principal by speaking with her vice-principal at that time. She recalls the events as follows:

I did so many leadership activities. I had always seen myself as someone to step up and help out. It was something that always came naturally to me. The school principal went on leave and so, stepping up to help out in the school and making things continue to run efficiently, it was actually my vice-principal that suggested and said, “Hey, have you thought about being a vice-principal? You should apply.” and I said, “Okay” and I applied. I really had no expectations about getting the position.

Kara applied and was successful in attaining her initial vice-principalship. Kara described the following reasons that supported her decision to pursue her initial vice-principalship:

I would say my family and my spouse day-to-day. My husband stayed home with the kids, so I didn’t have to worry about the family piece. And my admin partner. I think my division is pretty supportive as well. If there was something that you needed help with, they are there for you. Navigating those pieces and the things that were on my plate... I was resilient enough to keep that on the table and carry on with the career. And that’s important, if you are not resilient and able to overcome the things that are thrown at you every day, then it’s not a career choice.

Kara’s recognizes her family and spouse as supports for her career. She also indicates that her internal resilience was a contributing factor to her success in attaining her initial vice-principalship.

Kara indicated there was a potential barrier with colleagues once she had attained her initial vice-principalship. She described the barrier as follows:

I think that when you only have a small piece of vice-principalship, and you have other pieces mixed in. It's hard for staff to know which hat you are wearing and when. So, like when I was teaching kindergarten and the suggestion was, well why don't we do a winter carnival activity and we could each take a station, and someone asked, "Are you telling us to do that or are you asking as an idea? Which hat are you wearing?" So, I actually, cognizant, I made sure that I had said, "Okay, I'm telling you from a certain perspective." And I would pretend to take off a hat.

Kara identified that role identity could be a potential barrier in pursuit of a vice-principalship.

Before Kara was appointed to her initial vice-principalship, she participated in a formal mentorship program offered by her school division and she described the experience as follows:

I did take part of a leadership cohort. It was so long ago that I don't remember what it exactly looked like. I know that they met once a week, but it wasn't around being a principal or anything like that. It was just more, what does a good leader do?

Kara is one of two participants in this study that expressed she participated in a formal mentorship program.

Kara described the following when asked if she participated in an informal mentorship relationship:

Oh, Absolutely. I mean you work with your principal partner all the time. You decide in each position you go into what skills you have and what skills you want to work on. This is your portfolio. This is what we are going to work towards helping you learn. Or you ask them, "I haven't done this before. Can you tell me a little more about this?" Each of my principals have acted as a mentor to me and it's been great that way. I can tell you that it doesn't always happen.



**Margot**

Margot currently works in an urban school division and is a principal of a kindergarten to grade eight French immersion school. Margot contacted me through a poster she received from a colleague. We corresponded through email and decided to meet after school where she works for the interview. We met at approximately 3:15 pm and we spoke for just under 45 minutes

I met with Margot in her large rectangular office. On the opposite side from where I sat, there was a large book case that held many books. It seemed to stretch the entire length of the wall. Her desk, opposite the door, was an L-shaped desk that allowed me to place the recording device between us as it acted as a table. There were three chairs opposite the desk, so I selected one, and pulled it up to the table. The office was in the centre of the school and had no exterior window.

Margot sat opposite to me on the other side of the desk. She was comfortably seated in her office chair. Margot had a copy of the consent form printed out and on the desk. She had signed the form prior to our interview and was ready to proceed once I had the recording device ready.

When I had asked Margot to bring an artifact to the interview, she brought her thesis to represent her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. Margot had completed a master's degree in educational administration and her focus was the administrator's role in student engagement. She described that the thesis was a lot of work to complete but also fun at the same time.

She described her artifact represents the focus of what she does in her role as a principal. It was important to her because student engagement is her passion. She further explained that she supports her teachers to make sure her school's students are engaged in everything they do at school. Sometimes she is co-teaching with teachers but if she is not in the classroom, she finds

other ways to support teachers to engage students. Margot wants students growing as learners and empowered to be future citizens.

She described the significance of her artifact in pursuit of her initial vice-principalship as she put a lot of work into it and she was very proud of it. She further described the significance as it set her on the path to become the principal she is today. She continues to research and learn regarding student engagement through a professional learning network, a massive online open course (MOOC), and social media. She described that if her role was to simply sit and manage the budget as the principal she would “poke her eyes out”. Being able to do something hands-on, was an important aspect in Margot’s significance of her artifact.

Margot was appointed to her initial vice-principalship 11 years ago. Prior to her initial appointment as vice-principal, she was working as a teacher at a French immersion high school. During the time she was teaching, Margot was approached by an Assistant Superintendent of her school division suggesting she should apply to a vice-principalship. She described the series of events as such;

Honestly, I was told I needed to apply. That wasn’t anything in... ever... in my scope of wanting to do. I was just, I’m not going to say forced because I wasn’t forced that’s not what I mean, I was just told that I needed to apply and when I didn’t jump on that, I was brought down to the central office and told that I needed to apply... Well, um, well, he had a conversation with me once, and then he had it a second time and I just... hmmm... And then I got a call at school from his secretary informing me that I needed to be at a meeting at the central office at such and such a time, on this day and my principal was informed that I needed to be there. So, my principal was concerned for me, and I was concerned for myself because I had no idea why I was being summoned.... So, I went

down, and he just, “You need to do this.” And so, he convinced me to give it a shot, and then I thought, “Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll try it.” My first question was “Why me?” because it’s not that I had tonnes of teaching experience. But at the same time, I was involved in everything under the sun, at school in different leadership roles and support roles, so from that perspective I understood where he was coming from. And he also understood, well, he spent a lot of time in my classroom, just observing. So, I think because I was able to create those bonds with the students in high school, he assumed that that would be something that would be across the board in elementary school or otherwise. So, I think those were some of the things that he was looking at. And I just had to go into it believing that I could do it and not, “Oh what are you talking about, you have no idea.” So, it was, it was a nice complement for me, but it was also very terrifying because like I said, this wasn’t something that I had ever in my lifetime thought about.

Once the meeting had taken place with the Assistant Superintendent, Margot applied to a vice-principalship and succeeded in attaining the position.

After Margot was approached to apply to the position of vice principal, she described the age of her children as a factor she considered before accepting the position.

For me on a personal level, my children were a little bit older so that was easier for me. I don’t know, I know that I would never have considered it in a million years if they were small because it just takes up so much of your time. And I would not have been able to do the job justice if I was concerned about my two and three-year-old. For me, others can do it beautifully, that’s just from a personal perspective, my focus was my family. I couldn’t have done both. There’s no way. I just know where my limits are. So, when I was hired

on, my first position was then at École Renée, two of my three children were already there. So, mom was there, life was beautiful. So, it worked out really well for the family.

Once Margot accepted and was appointed to her vice-principalship, she described that she participated in an informal mentorship relationship with colleagues. Her school division did not have a formal mentorship program for aspiring or beginning vice-principals or principals. She did not participate in a formal mentorship program prior to her initial appointment to her vice-principalship and did not participate in a formal mentorship relationship after her initial appointment to her vice-principalship. She described her experience with her informal mentorship relationship with colleagues as follows:

Yes. I wouldn't have survived if I hadn't. I have a lot of friends and they've developed over the years, that I started my career with, and I leaned on them. So, if I had a question, I called, and they walked me through whatever it was that I needed to do. That has continued because we are only as strong as the people, we surround ourselves with. I have been really blessed to have some pretty extraordinary friends who are also extraordinary administrators. I don't think that... I don't think that I would have been able to do this without that.

Margot then further detailed how she developed the informal mentorship relationship with her colleagues:

The informal piece. One thing that is great about the district I work in is the Professional Learning Networks. That's one huge piece. We started with the Immersion people... I said, "Come to my house and we'll have dinner." So, all 14... or however many women came...and we laughed ourselves silly... but it was just breaking down those walls. Because not everybody knew each other really well, and then those walls are down after

a few of these types of meetings and then, “Oh, I have an idea about... What do you think?” And then everybody would answer back. And so, they came, we ordered food, laughed themselves silly, they loved it so much, they did it again six weeks later, then they did it again six weeks later, by then they’re comfortable with each other. So, you have a group of strong administrators that will share whatever they are doing and then they keep building on whatever their ideas are and its awesome.

Margot attributes her success as a vice-principal and principal to her colleagues that have supported her through the informal mentorship relationship that she has developed with them.

### **Kelly**

Kelly works in an urban school division and is currently a vice-principal in a kindergarten to grade eight English school. Kelly contacted me through email after receiving a poster from a colleague. Through email we arranged a convenient time and date to meet. We met a little after 4:00 p.m. and we spoke for a little over an hour. Kelly was extremely accommodating to my request to meet.

I met Kelly in her office at the school where she currently works. Her office is located in the main office of the school. There is a large reception area and her office door is the first door you can see as you enter the main school office. Her office was a small square with a large window that faced the main street the school is located on. There was a welcoming chair at a small rectangular table in front of the window. Kelly sat comfortable in her chair adjacent to me at the table. Once I set up the recorder, Kelly was ready to proceed.

Kelly described that her artifact was not a positive one. She had received a tin coin bank from a mentor in her school division. On one side of the tin coin bank was a picture of a young girl wearing a red dress with a white collar. Beside the picture of the conservatively dressed girl

within a speech bubble was the phrase, “I’m saving up for a unicorn”. On her dress was a round button that read, “Magic works, ask me how”.

In Kelly’s interview, she described the mentor gave her the tin coin bank because Kelly was too positive or “too Pollyanna like”. The mentor alluded that Kelly was unaware of the political savviness she needed to have in her pursuit of educational leadership. Kelly described that she is a very positive person, but she did not have a positive feeling about how leadership was determined. She had a belief and trust that aspiring leaders would be placed where you needed to be placed and when it was time.

Kelly explained that the significance of her artifact was that she did not get wrapped up in the political aspect pursuing leadership. She described that there were shifts in leadership and that the rules were changing. Kelly focused on the students and parents she served instead of “going out for drinks on Friday”. She chose not to, “play the game” or “be political” in her pursuit of educational leadership.

Kelly was appointed to her initial vice-principalship 10 years ago. Prior to her initial vice-principalship appointment, she was working in a divisional behavioural program for high school students. As the program was phased out, it was suggested to Kelly by her superintendent that she consider applying to vice-principal positions. She recalls the events as follows:

The division was moving away from off-site programs and it was suggested that I look at administration. I was good at working with at-risk kids and families and so, senior leadership thought that would be a good match with Vice-Principal. So that is how I went down that path. I always had considered administration. I don’t know why but even when I started my career, I remember being asked at my first interview “Where do you see

yourself?” and I said, “in admin”. So, I had always thought, why? I don’t know why I had thought that, but I always saw myself in that position.

Kelly described her own supports as follows:

They definitely need a support system because in administration you can think you are leaving at four, but you won’t be able to leave at four. Stuff always happens. The bus doesn’t pick up the kids, there is an accident at the end of the day. There is always stuff, so you cannot be set to a schedule. My husband and I sat down, and it was like okay, if I am going to do this, and he was a hundred percent on board. You need a support system... Definitely my husband and then I have some amazing friends. Some of them are in the education field as well.

Kelly outlined additional supports:

My administrative partner is amazing and when I had my last partner, they were amazing too. When you are partners with someone, it is like two police officers in a cruiser car, you have to have a really close, respectful relationship. You have to have somebody that you really...you have to have each other’s back.

Kelly acknowledges that her family, and specifically her husband, was a central support in her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. She identifies that her administrative partner was also a huge support in her success as a vice-principal. Kelly also described, “But my kids are grown, and my husband is amazing!” as factors she considered before pursuing her initial vice-principalship. She identified that family obligations can be a potential barrier.

Kelly is the second of two participants that participated in a formal mentorship program. She described her participation in a formalized program as follows:

Currently, there isn't a formal mentorship program in my school division. When I was initially appointed, there was a leadership program that was offered for people that were thinking of or that were wanting to pursue leadership. It was a program that was run at the division office. It was something like every Tuesday night and they would bring in other principals to speak with us. They talked to us about leadership, and what the position entailed. It was a good program; it was kind of a cohort. Actually, everyone that participated in the program are all administrators today. I had to apply to the program, and I thought it looked interesting. It was a former superintendent that really put the program together and pushed for it.

Kelly described the following when asked if she participated in an informal mentorship relationship:

Yes, I did. There are many people I will call on for different reasons that are in the division. People that are like family or cousins that you can reach out to. I have never felt that I could not reach out to people. There was one informal mentor. She was someone who embodied what I believe to be leadership. It is servant leadership. She just served. She was like a mother hen and she just took care of everybody.

She further describes an important informal mentor:

The strongest mentor is really the Principal you work with. I have had amazing people along the way that have been fabulous informal mentors. I also learned a lot from a very terrible administrator. It is not just from the positive mentors that you have. You can learn from what I call negative mentors that you have. You can learn from that too.



**Mary**

Mary works in an urban school division and is currently a vice-principal in a grade nine to grade 12 English high school. Mary contacted me after receiving a poster from a colleague. We arranged to meet after school, a little after 4:00 p.m., and we spoke for a little over an hour. Mary was extremely accommodating to my request to meet.

I met Mary in her office at the school where she currently works. The office was a large rectangle with a large set of windows that faced the main street the school is located on. As our interview progressed you can actually hear the traffic building in the background of the recording. Mary sat across from me at a circle table at one end of the rectangular office. She happened to have both Kleenex and chocolate on her table. The chocolate was delicious. Mary was comfortably seated in a chair across from me. Once I set up the recorder, Mary was ready to proceed.

Mary brought two graphic symbols as artifacts to her interview. The first graphic was a torch and the second graphic was a tangled ball of yarn. She described that the torch represented where she is now, as a current vice-principal, and the tangled ball of yarn was a representation of the initial pursuit of her vice-principalship.

Mary described the torch as her current representation of her role as a vice-principal. She felt the torch was a needed beacon for her staff. She wanted them to know they were working towards something. She also described that the torch needed to be passed to all her staff because the changes she and her principal partner were making were not a solo activity.

Mary described the tangled ball of yarn as a representation of the pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. She came into the pursuit of her vice-principalship from a place of frustration.

Mary did not like how things were going and she wanted to help make some changes. She felt trapped in bureaucracy.

Mary was appointed to her initial vice-principalship seven years ago. Prior to her initial vice-principalship appointment, she was working as a student services teacher in an English high school. She had been working in a variety of English high schools in both rural and urban locations. There was an open vice-principal position at the school she was teaching at and was asked by her principal to apply to the open position. She recalls the event as follows:

So, I had been thinking about it for a while... And I was doing my Master of Education in Educational Administration prior to that, and about a year before I applied, I thought "No, I don't want to do this." And it was partly because I was watching some very good friends not have fun... And I thought "You know, I don't think I need that." I think I could figure out something else. But then something happened at Coral Springs School and honestly, I don't know the details but what I do know is that there was a person placed in the vice-principal position at my school... And then for whatever reason they couldn't be moved, they had to stay in their original place. The Superintendent said to my principal, "Is there anybody in house who could do it?" So, I was tapped... I mean I was tapped and then I applied... And I know there were other people who applied as well, and I just was lucky and got the gig.

When Mary was asked to apply to the position, she contemplated the reasons why she would apply and then submitted her application. She described her supports for her application as follows:

I had lots of opportunities for leadership prior to my appointment. So, I was confident in me. I think just practice. Do you remember the days of the School Improvement Project?

All that was practice in consensus making, and creating capacity, and decision making from the ground up. You know, even though I didn't know at that time that that's what it was. For sure that was a support. I think knowing that others had confidence in me supported my decision to pursue a school-based administration role. My husband also supported me. He's pretty awesome.

Mary's support was her internal belief in her own abilities that she developed during prior opportunities for leadership. She also acknowledged the support of her spouse.

Mary identified barriers she considered before her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship. Mary first described the following:

I thought about the age of my kids and that's what slowed me down from doing it earlier. Just being a mom. And I think that's still a woman's issue more than it is a man's issue. Not that I don't have an amazing partner, who is a partner, but still, that's just the way the cookie crumbles. What other cliché can I use? So, for sure where you are in your family world and life, because I don't know that people recognize the hours. Or think of the level of intensity of a day. Because you know, at the end of a day, I'm done, and I don't have much left. So, knowing how to balance all that is a real trick, but certainly thinking about, where you are in your life cycle is really important, I think. Those would be the personal questions. I think knowing that it's going to take you out of direct contact with kids in terms of their learning, you know, the farther removed you are from the classroom, the less you feel like you have impact. I don't feel like that right now, but I did for sure feel like that at Coral Springs.

Mary also recounted:

I had an easier time than a lot of my colleagues in that sense, like I didn't have to fight for the position the same way. It felt like I cheated a little bit. I know I didn't. But it felt like I did. Especially given that era, it was a whole different era of hiring, and protocols, and what you had to do which I think has changed since then. I was very uncomfortable about some things that I was watching going on in the division. Like I already said, I saw a couple people who weren't having a lot of fun. I thought I'm not interested in kowtowing, or schmoozing, or bootlicking, or whatever is required. The things people did to get jobs. I'm not doing that. I'm not doing that, so if that's what it takes, I'm not doing it. And that's really why I backed out. I'm not talking about sleeping with people to get the job but bullshitting their way into a place of confidence. Well, if I have to do that, why would I bother. If I can be me and do it, then I'm okay.

Mary also further articulated:

And I think partly, I'm woefully naïve because I just ignore it and I just carry on. And it's not been an issue. But there have been moments. I got a lot of hassles at the beginning because I look younger than I am. But it didn't take long, and I got some credibility pretty fast. It's a word of mouth thing. But there are exceptions to that, and I'm so taken aback when I get that reaction. It's like "You wouldn't know," or "You're too..." or whatever it is, it's the diminishing of your experience, knowledge, expertise because you are perceived as young and female.

Mary described barriers regarding androcentric norms in relation to children and family obligations in pursuing a vice-principalship. She also identified that leaving the classroom is a barrier for some teachers. She identified that there were politics in achieving the vice-

principalship because she feels that she did not have to fight for her position by being “tapped” by the leadership. She also identified ageism and sexism as potential barriers.

Mary described the following when asked if she had participated in an informal mentorship relationship:

Yes, the first principal I worked for as a vice-principal was a mentor. We used to meet with other administrators where we would have conversations about what was going on in our buildings without being part of a formal meeting. Those were really healthy conversations and a really good opportunity for informal mentorship. I’ve been very lucky; my informal mentors have different strengths and they come at things differently.

Mary did not participate in a formal mentorship relationship or program prior to or after her initial vice-principalship appointment. When asked about participating in a formal mentorship program, she described the following;

No! And, you know, I think about how did we all survive? We were just making stuff up along the way. I didn’t know what I was doing. But that’s not totally fair, you watch people. You know, you learn by example. You know, I’ve been blessed to work with wonderful people.

### **Sofia**

Sofia works in an urban school division and is currently a vice-principal of a kindergarten to grade eight English school. Sofia contacted me through email after she received a poster from a colleague. We arranged to meet after school at the school she currently works at. We were able to meet in her office. She was very accommodating to my request to meet on such short notice.

Sofia’s office is located in the main office of the school. Her office is a large square located in the interior of the building. There were no windows to the outside. When I entered her

office, the desk was to the left and was L-shaped. Sofia sat across from me on the short side of the desk. I was able to place my digital recorder on the desk. Sofia was seated comfortably in her office chair and I sat in the comfortable chair she had across from her. She was ready once I set up the recording device.

Sofia brought to the interview a photograph of her family from approximately eighteen years ago. The photo is a group picture of Sofia and her siblings. She described the photograph as a representation of her story and her story was her artifact.

In the family photo was Sofia and her three siblings. The siblings were celebrating their only brother's wedding. From left to right were Sofia's older sister, then Sofia herself, Sofia's brother, and then Sofia's younger sister.

Sofia described the importance of her previous life experiences and where she has come from created resilience, an active pursuit of fulfillment, and happiness. These prior life experiences also created a desire to do something that no one had done in her family. Out of the four siblings, Sofia was the only one to finish high school and subsequently the only sibling to finish undergraduate and graduate work. The lack of education amongst her family members has provided her insight and affirmed her belief that education really is power.

Sofia further explained that her mother always valued education and really wanted all her children to graduate but life's circumstances took precedent. So, it was really important for Sofia that she was going to do something and start something new in her family.

Sofia was appointed to her first vice-principalship 6 years ago. Prior to Sofia's appointment to her initial vice-principalship, she was working in a kindergarten to grade eight English school as a student services teacher. She recalled her former principal encouraging her to apply to the open vice-principalship in the school.

Well, probably the biggest one would be that the current principal that I had at the time, who really looked and saw something in me and said, “You know, you really need to apply.” And I would consider them a mentor. For someone who was new who came in, as a new teacher, it was a real difficult culture to become a part of, and I had some very strong values and beliefs because I wasn’t a brand-new teacher, I was a new teacher, but I wasn’t brand new to life. And so, I was going in and I wanted to do the best that I could do for the kids. So, I think that was a difficult thing to navigate, but I quickly became a leader in amongst our grade level meetings, in the teams, just with PD and things like that. So, I would say those sorts of experiences lead me to apply.

Sofia described her personal supports as follows:

I have a group, there’s five of us. There’s four women that I’ve been friends with for 26, 27 years. Our kids all grew up together. We all have three kids. We’ve camped. We’ve done everything together. And now our kids are leaving and gone, and we still are doing everything together. They are professional women and I just value their opinion. They are super important in my life and like I say, they are like family to me. That is a huge support, because whenever there is anything with anybody, we are all there for each other.

Sofia’s supports are outside of the education domain. She acknowledged that support of her life-long friends contributed toward her pursuit of her initial vice-principalship.

When asked about potential barriers women should consider in pursuit of a vice-principalship, Sofia described the challenges of family obligations:

Well, I think it depends personally on your life. I just had this conversation with someone from here who was wanting to apply, and I think there’s lots and lots of great skills. I just

think that one thing one has to consider is their personal life and the dedication and the time because when you have a young family it can be really difficult. So, and when I think about are they at that activity, are they leading there, no, they are running home, which is totally fine, I think people are in different places in their life and we have to respect that then maybe, because you don't always have options to leave if you want to go pick up your daughter or whatever. So, I think personally you need to think about does this fit. For me, I'm at a point now where my kids are older, so it was a non-issue.

Sofia identified family obligations as a potential barrier to women in pursuing a vice-principalship.

When asked, Sofia had not participated in a formal mentorship program. However, Sofia explained the following informal mentorship relationship as integral to her professional learning when asked if she participated in an informal mentorship relationship:

Yes, I would say I do participate in an informal mentorship relationship selected by me. She has since become a close personal friend of mine. I just trust her professional judgement and so often she is a sounding board. "Hey, this came up. What do you think?" She is someone I can trust and confide in for a different perspective. There wasn't anything formal. I would say it was more just conversation. There's lots of discussion and I think she learns from me and vice versa. It's a reciprocal relationship that way. And she is just genuinely interested in my success and in everyone's successes.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter for this research study consists of three areas of discussion. First, I will conclude my intensive autobiographical narrative inquiry by reviewing my own experience pursuing my initial vice-principalship position in relation to the experiences of the six participants of this study. Second, I will review the research questions for the study and address the research questions from the data that emerged from this research study. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with implications for practice, implications for policy, and implications for further research in the field of educational leadership as a result of the findings in this research study.

### **My Walk in the Bois-des-esprits Revisited**

Although the participants of this study and I successfully attained vice-principalships, each woman's experience of the phenomena was different. We all took a walk in the woods, but the perceptions of our paths varied between each traveler. There were experiences that I shared with the participants prior to attaining a vice-principalship; I experienced role conflict, I had a network of personal and professional supports, I believed that school leadership required considerably longer working hours, and I received a professional endorsement also known as the tap on the shoulder. The experiences that differed on my path from the other travelers were my professional endorsement was outside my school division, I applied multiple times unsuccessfully before attaining a position, and I participated in multiple formal mentorship programs prior to and following the attainment of my initial vice-principalship. To conclude my autobiographical narrative (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), I will examine these similarities and differences.

Similar to four of the participants in my study and the participants in Sherman's (2005) study, prior to my attainment of my initial vice-principalship, I experienced role conflict. I had a preconceived notion that I could not be a good mother to my young children and be effective in the role of vice-principal at the same time. I do not remember anyone explicitly stating this to me. This message was transmitted to me, possibly by staff room conversations or colleague talk, but it was an assumption I held that was not based in fact or research. I believed, at that time, that I did not fit the role of vice-principal (Sherman, 2005). I began to pursue a vice-principalship when I perceived my children to be old enough for me to take on the role of vice-principal. This was only my perception as some colleagues thought my children were still quite young. Upon reflection, the age of my children should not have mattered. I can be a good mother and vice-principal at the same time.

A second similar experience that I had with the participants was that I did have a network of personal and professional supports. My professional supports consisted of informal mentors and peer mentors. The personal supports were my family and friends. My perceived greatest support came from my spouse, Brett, who encouraged me and supported me through the unsuccessful attempts of pursuing my initial vice-principalship. My next greatest support was my informal mentor, my sister, who encouraged me and supported me with sage professional advice. However, I also perceived to be supported and encouraged by my parents, my children, my peer mentors, and leaders in my school division. Young and McLeod (2001) identified that these personal and professional supports are one factor that affect a women's decision to pursue a vice-principalship. This factor was a huge contribution to my pursuit of my initial vice-principal. I do not believe I would be a vice-principal today without the personal and professional supports I received.

A third similar experience was that I believed school leadership required considerably longer working hours. I do remember colleagues explicitly stating this in staff room conversations that the vice-principalship required a large time commitment. This idea of time was the greatest barrier for me to pursuing my initial vice-principalship. This belief is an underlying assumption and is a perceived barrier for some women just like it was for me. Blackmore (2006) describes these invisible barriers and cultural beliefs are barriers for women advancing in educational leadership roles. After my attainment of my initial vice-principalship, my perception is that I work similar hours, but I have less autonomy to work the hours I choose than when I was in the classroom.

Finally, the fourth similar experience in pursuing my initial vice-principalship was that I received a professional endorsement (Young & McLeod, 2001). My professional endorsement, or tap on the shoulder, came from my sister as previously mentioned. She encouraged me and convinced me that I could do the job. My conversations with her about the skills required for the vice-principalship lasted months and maybe even years. I would categorize these conversations with my sister as socialization conversations (Clayton et al., 2013). In these conversations my sister aided in my socialization, encouraged me to form a new role identity, and dispelled my previously held beliefs (Wallin, 2012). Without this external encouragement, I do not think I would have begun my pursuit of a vice-principalship because my assumptions and unfounded beliefs were entrenched in my thinking.

One of the experiences that I had that differed from the participants was that my professional endorsement came from outside my own school division. My perceived effect is that I did not have a person of influence who knew the inner workings of my own division to guide me in the process. I do remember, after multiple unsuccessful attempts, being asked by a

colleague if I planned to apply to the vice-principalship I eventually attained. All six of the participants of this study received professional endorsements from within their own school divisions.

My second experience that was different was I applied multiple times unsuccessfully before attaining a vice-principalship. Although disheartening, it was not defeating. Drudy (2008) and Sherman (2005) describe unsuccessful candidates seek alternative leadership opportunities after multiple attempts. My personal supports, professional supports, and my own resiliency allowed me to continue to pursue a vice-principalship. I continued to apply because I had a belief that I could do the job successfully. I am hopeful that some unquestioned beliefs about gender and authority (Drudy, 2008) are being dispelled as all six of the participants in this study attained their vice-principalship on their first attempt.

The third experience that was different was I had the opportunity to participate in two formal education leadership programs prior to attaining my initial vice principalship; one being the master's cohort my school division coordinated with the university, and the second being a series of programs organized by the school division that I work in. Once I attained my initial vice-principalship, my school division also offered educational leadership sessions for new administrators. The body of literature regarding formal mentorship programs (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh 2004a; Sherman, 2005; Wallin, 1999; Wilmore 2004) suggests that I was well supported in pursuing my initial vice-principalship and supported after my attainment. I was not assigned a formal mentor in any of the programs and I did not have a formal mentor-protégé relationship as a result. However, I was able to develop relationships with other vice-principals and develop peer mentors. Only two of the participants in this study participated in a formal mentorship program prior to their attainment of their vice-principalship and none of the

participants participated in a formal mentorship program after their attainment of their vice-principalship. The two participants that participated in a formal mentorship program prior to the attainment of their vice-principalship were over 10 and 12 years ago. This suggests that very few school divisions were able to maintain mentorship programs in the subsequent years. The lack of formal mentorship programs forced the participants to seek informal mentorship relationships to assist in job preparation, socialization, and to feel effective in their new role. The six women in this study reported that they were all able to find informal mentors.

### **Review of the Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to examine women's experiences pursuing their initial vice-principalship. The questions for this research were as follows:

1. What were pivotal moments and/or critical points in the participants' career paths as educators?
2. What were the perceived barriers and/ or opportunities afforded to the participants in pursuing her initial vice-principalship?
3. How do they identify the individuals who influenced their decision to pursue a vice-principalship?
4. What were the perceived effects of mentors that led them to pursue a vice-principalship?

**Research question 1: What were pivotal moments and/or critical points in the participants' career paths as educators?** For all six women who participated in this research study, the pivotal moments and/or critical points in their pursuit of their initial vice-principalship were when they received a professional endorsement. Young & McLeod (2001) describe that receiving a professional endorsement is one factor that influence women to pursue a vice-principalship position.

The metaphorical language that the participants of this study used to describe pivotal moments and/or critical points in the pursuit of their initial vice-principalship include terms such as “told I needed to apply”, “summoned”, “tapped”, “nobody was applying for the job. Nobody. And nobody was really interested”, and “...it was a nice complement for me, but it was also terrifying...”. The use of this metaphorical language emphasizes the pivotal moment and/or critical incident when the participants were encouraged to apply to the position through a professional endorsement. Each of the participants used language regarding an external influence.

Each woman in this study received professional endorsements, encouragements, and or directives either from teacher peers or educational leaders such as vice-principals, principals, assistant superintendents, or superintendents. These positive comments and suggestions signify confidence in the abilities of the aspiring vice-principals. This is consistent with the bodies of literature in career paths of women in educational leadership and mentorship in education (Young & McLeod, 2001). The participants were approached by a colleague or colleagues, an informal mentor, a school or district educational leader such as vice-principal, principal, or assistant superintendent, and they suggested, encouraged and/or directed the participants to apply to the position of vice-principal. For all six of the participants of this study, they each attained their vice-principalship on their first attempt in applying to the positions.

Regardless of how many years ago the participant attained her vice-principalship, all six of the women who participated in this study attained their vice-principalship on their first attempt after they received their professional endorsement. The exception being Kara who applied to be a principal without receiving a professional endorsement to apply to the position. However, after

receiving a professional endorsement from her vice-principal, Kara applied and attained her vice-principalship on her first attempt.

Three of the participants' prior perceptions were that they never thought of applying to the position of vice-principal. These three participants enjoyed teaching in the classroom or working with students as student services teachers, guidance counsellors, or resource teachers. The other three participants' prior perceptions were that they would eventually be in the position of vice-principal. For all six of the participants, they actively pursued a vice-principalship after they received a professional endorsement regardless of their prior perceptions.

**Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers and/ or opportunities afforded to the participants in pursuing her initial vice-principalship?** The metaphorical language that participants used in this study regarding barriers include terms such as “that’s how I’ve survived this”, “capable of navigating”, “I would not have been able to do the job justice”, “the dedication and the time” and “knowing how to balance all that is a real trick”. This metaphorical language describes conflict with the participants' perceived expectations of societal roles and their perceived expectations of being a successful vice-principal (Sherman, 2005). Additionally, the metaphorical language reflects androcentric language of the masculine hegemonic educational leadership that continues to be perpetuated within the marginalized group of women educational leaders (Baker, 2014; Blackmore, 2006, 2013; Drudy, 2008; Duncan, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989; Shakeshaft et al., 1991; Wallin 2010, 2012, 2015).

The participants also used metaphorical language to describe their informal leadership opportunities. They included terms such as “I always see myself as someone to step up and help out”, “I was involved in everything under the sun”, “I was confident in me”, and “I think knowing that others had confidence in me supported my decision”. The use of these terms

indicates a confidence in their leadership abilities but also a caring leadership style (Wallin & Crippen, 2007). These metaphorical terms of confidence supported their rationale to pursue their initial vice-principalship.

Throughout the interviews each of the participants of this research study shared they volunteered and initiated to take on informal educational leadership roles within their school such as participating on, or leading school committees. All six of the participants in this research study were informal leaders in their schools through leadership opportunities that were available within their schools or within their school divisions.

These informal leadership roles gave the participants opportunities to practice leadership skills and in turn, these demonstrated leadership skills were then noticed by colleagues, vice-principals, principals, and assistant superintendents. The participants of this research study were then asked to apply, through professional endorsements, to the formal leadership role of vice-principal or supported by colleagues to pursue their initial vice-principalships. Although most of the participants did not participate in a formal mentorship program, the participants leveraged educational leadership opportunities in their school or in their school division.

Most of the participants described that family obligations, specifically child rearing, were still barriers for women pursuing a vice-principalship. Four of the six participants in this research study were amenable to apply to the position of vice-principal, when asked through professional endorsements, because their children were older. Some of the participants believed that they could not do a good job at being both a vice-principal and a mother if their children were young. These participants suggested that this is a factor to consider before pursuing a vice-principalship as some of the participants suggested that the leadership role of vice-principal requires longer work hours than that of the role of a teacher. Three of the participants in this study even counsel



aspiring vice-principals to consider family obligations before pursuing a vice-principalship position. These androcentric beliefs were prevalent throughout most of the interviews and are consistent with the literature in career paths of women in educational leadership (Sherman, 2005).

Four of the participants of this study described that they needed to be convinced to apply to the position of vice-principal as some of the participants' anticipated expectations of the vice-principal role were in conflict with the other societal roles they currently held such as mother, spouse, and/or teacher. This notion of role conflict is one of the barriers identified within the literature in career paths of women in educational leadership. Similarly, to Sherman's (2005) study, four of the women participants in my study believed that they could not be successful mothers of young children and be successful administrators simultaneously. The participants' societal expectations on what constitutes a successful mother conflicted with the hegemonic androcentric perspectives of educational leadership.

**Research question 3: How do they identify the individuals who influenced their decision to pursue a vice-principalship?** The metaphorical language that the participants used to describe their professional and personal supports included "I also had devoted people supporting me through all of it", "my ex-husband's mother was essential to our survival", and "he was a hundred percent on board". These metaphorical phrases reflect the personal and professional supports each participant had to move forward with their pursuit of their initial vice-principalship.

Only two participants of this research study reported that they participated in a formal mentorship program prior to their attainment of their initial vice-principalship. It is interesting to note that these formal mentorship programs were offered over ten years ago. The women who

attained their vice-principalships more recently were not offered or participated in a formal mentorship program. This suggests that some school divisions did not sustain the mentorship programs or leadership development programs and do not currently offer them. The school division rely on the aspiring vice-principal to develop leadership skills independently of a formalized program.

Both Kara and Kelly suggest that their participation in a formal mentorship program contributed to their pursuit and successful attainment of their initial vice-principalship. Each of the formalized mentorship programs they participated in were organized by their school divisions. The formalized programs were promoted by the senior leadership. However, the programs did not include a formalized mentor-protégé relationship. The programs focused on professional development of leadership skills by having guest presenters who were educational leaders present to a group or groups of aspiring educational leaders. This panel type discussion or one-way monologue can reinforce the traditional androcentric perspectives (Sherman, 2005; Lumby, 2014) and that the presentation may promote a single view of leadership (Sherman, 2005).

The other four participants of this research study did not participate in a formal mentorship program. The participants who did not participate in a formal mentorship program were influenced by professional endorsements that were then supported by personal and professional supports. Most of the participants in this study identified informal mentors as individuals who provided the professional endorsement and influenced their decision to pursue a vice-principalship. However, some participants were encouraged by colleagues with professional endorsements to pursue their initial vice-principalship. This notion of women applying to their initial vice-principalship when they were encouraged through informal mentors and professional

endorsements is consistent with the literature in mentorship in educational leadership (Young & McLeod, 2001).

**Research question 4: What were the perceived effects of mentors that led them to pursue a vice-principalship?** The participants used metaphorical language such as, “I wouldn’t have survived if I hadn’t”, “(They) have become my go-to people and my supports... but my supports in many areas not just career”, “I’ve been blessed to work with wonderful people”, and “I would not have survived without them”. The perceived importance of peer mentors after attaining their initial vice-principalship became strikingly apparent in this study.

For the participants of this study, the perceived effects of mentors were essential prior to their pursuit of their initial vice-principalship due to their endorsements prior to attaining their initial vice-principalship. For all of the participants, what became apparent was the essential support of peer mentors after they attained their initial vice-principalship in the absence of formalized mentors and mentorship programs in their school divisions.

Prior to attaining their vice-principalship, only two of the participants in this study described participating in a formal mentorship program. However, the participants were never matched with a formal mentor by the program. The remaining four participants did not participate in a formal mentorship program prior to attaining their vice-principalship and yet, all participants in this study describe the effects of mentors as integral prior to their successful attainment of a vice-principalship. The importance of informal mentors is underscored in the dearth of formal mentors.

None of the participants in this study participated in a formal mentorship program after they attained their initial vice-principalship. The participants perceived effects of mentors, specifically peer mentors, were prevalent after they successfully attained their vice-principalship

and not before their attainment of their vice-principalship. Many of the participants described the peer mentors as informal mentors that were essential to developing new skills and contributed toward their success as new vice-principals. The participants of this study sought out these peer mentors by mutual selection through social networks. The six participants of this study did not experience a lack of connection between theory and practical on-the-job experiences (Clayton et al., 2013) because the participants sought advice from their peer mentors for practical on-the-job experiences.

The school divisions that hired the participants of this study did not invest in formal mentorship programs for these newly appointed vice-principals. The school divisions relied on the agency of the person who attained the vice-principalship to find their own informal mentors and develop the skills needed for the job. One applicant used the metaphorical language to describe this as, "Here's the keys. Make it work." The amount of resources that are required of a formalized mentorship program may continue to inhibit school divisions development of programs due to competing divisional priorities.

For all six of the participants, it did not matter the gender of the person who encouraged them to pursue a vice-principalship. What was essential was the professional endorsement their informal mentor provided prior to their attainment of a vice-principalship. Some of the participants were inspired by women, but it was the encouragement of the professional endorsements that meant the most to the participants of this research study and not the gender of the person who provided the encouragement.

Although all the participants of this study described that they interacted with male mentors, none of the participants of this study indicated any issues with heterosexual cross-sex mentorship. Since the participants of this study sought out these peer mentors by mutual

selection through social networks, the man-woman composition of the mentor-protégé experience did not cause sexual tension, marital disruption, or sexual innuendos for the participants of this study. This finding is contrary to Sherman's (2005) findings related to mentorship in education.

### **Implications for Policy**

I believe there are implications for policy as a result of this research study. As this study has demonstrated, there is a lack of formal mentorship programs and there is a reliance on successful candidates to seek out informal mentorship opportunities themselves. These informal mentor relationships developed by mutual selection may perpetuate androcentric and/or dominant perspectives. As a result, policy needs to be developed regarding mentorship of educational leaders by Manitoba Education and Training, the Council of School Leaders (COSL), and local school divisions to meet the intended outcomes of mentorship programs such as the mutual benefit in professional development of mentors and protégés, the increase of skills and knowledge and include participants that are historically underrepresented.

Although Manitoba Education and Training has recently updated the certificate in school leadership, I encourage the development of provincial policy regarding mentorship of educational leaders and specifically the mentorship of women in educational leadership. This can include an introduction to feminist perspectives in the certificate of school leadership.

I encourage the Council of School Leaders (COSL) to develop a women's caucus to disrupt androcentric and/or hegemonic perspectives that continue to be perpetuated in educational leadership. The women's caucus would specifically offer the following opportunities. First, the caucus would provide women educational leaders an option for formal mentorship with women mentoring women. Second, it would provide opportunity for women to

meet and discuss educational leadership issues from a women's perspective. Additionally, the caucus would provide an informal network of women educational leaders.

I encourage school divisions to create policy regarding formal mentorship programs for educational leaders and commit to the development of women educational leaders in their school divisions. By investing in these programs, school divisions are not leaving their educational leaders' development to happenstance.

### **Implications for Practice**

I believe there are implications for practice in the area of educational leadership in Manitoba as a result of this research study. All educational leaders must acknowledge that there continues to be hegemonic androcentric perspectives that are perpetuated in educational leadership. We should reflect on our individual practice and enact small changes within our own sphere of influence. I have identified hegemonic androcentric beliefs in my own practice and have challenged my previously held androcentric perspectives about work-life balance. As a result of this study, I am more aware of my influence as a leader when mentoring women teachers for educational leadership opportunities and I encourage other educational leaders to develop an awareness of their influence.

### **Implications for Research**

I believe there is a need to further examine women's experiences in educational leadership. As a result of the findings in this research study, there are additional questions to explore which would contribute to the body literature.

The first question to consider is how current educational leaders encourage candidates to pursue vice-principalships. Each of the candidates in this study ascribed significance to the professional endorsement they received from a peer, vice-principal, principal, assistant

superintendent, and /or superintendent. Receiving this professional endorsement was a pivotal moment pursuing their initial vice-principalship. Since this professional endorsement is such a pivotal moment in a women's pursuit of their initial vice-principalship, there should be further research as to the criteria current educational leaders are using to determine who they provide a professional endorsement to. In examining these criteria, the field of educational leadership can better include the group of marginalized women in the androcentric dominant group of educational leadership.

A second question to consider is how rural women's experiences in pursuing their initial vice-principalship compare to their urban colleagues. This research study focused on women's experiences in an urban context. The experiences of rural women should and need to be explored as their experiences could be significantly different from urban women's experiences. In examining these experiences, the field of educational leadership can better support women to pursue their initial vice-principalships in their local contexts.

A third question to consider for further research is if there is a measurable difference in the work hours between the roles of vice-principals and/or principals and classroom teachers. This was a significant barrier for me and three of the candidates of this research study in the pursuit of their initial vice-principalship. The belief that the vice-principalship role required significant additional work hours as compared to the role of classroom teacher, created role conflict. The candidates and I believed we could not be good mothers in conjunction with being a good vice-principal and this belief delayed our initial pursuit of a vice-principalship. In examining the hours worked, it can be determined to validate or reject the notion that the vice-principalship requires more work hours. It can then be determined if this is a real or perceived barrier for women pursuing their initial vice-principalship.

A fourth question to consider for further research is to examine the experiences of women pursuing their initial vice-principalship who are affected by additional marginalized identities. The participants in this study were all white, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual women. The experiences of women who are affected by additional marginalized identities are not represented in the findings of this study. To be reflective of society, educational leadership needs to examine these experiences so barriers can be overcome.

In closing, there is a need to continue to research the experiences of women pursuing their initial vice-principalship. Androcentric beliefs permeate the hegemonic culture of educational leadership in urban school divisions and these beliefs reproduce barriers to the marginalized group of women. If educational leadership is to expand and include marginalized groups such as women who are affected by additional marginalized identities such as indigenous, persons with a disability, transgender, queer, or being of colour, those of us who are members of the dominant educational leadership group need to examine and challenge the currently held hegemonic beliefs and structures that are pervasive in educational leadership.



**Appendix A.**

## Semi-Structured Interview Guide

**Introductory Questions**

1. Could you please tell me your current school administration position?
2. Please elaborate on the progression of your career from beginning teacher to current school administration role. Focus on all positions that you have had and the length of time you served in those positions.

**Key Questions and Possible Sub Question**

3. Prior to our interview, I had asked that you prepare and bring to the interview an artifact to represent your pursuit of school-based administration. Why did you choose the artifact? What is its significance to you?

**Research Question #1: What were pivotal moments and/or critical points in the participants' career paths as educators?**

4. What factors or significant events led you to apply to a school administrator position?  
Consider your previous position held immediately before your appointment to administration, your school context and your gender identity.
5. How many times did you apply to an administrator role before being appointed? How many years did this take?
6. What did you do to prepare to pursue school-based administration?

**Research Questions #2: What were the perceived barriers and/ or opportunities afforded to the participants in pursuing school-based administration?**

7. What factors, both personal and professional, should potential candidates consider before they pursue a school-based administrator role?
8. Please elaborate on the factors that supported your decision to pursue a school-based administrator role.
9. Please elaborate on the work challenges you have encountered as a school-based administrator.

**Research Question #3: How do they identify the individuals who influenced their decision to pursue school-based administration?**

10. A body of literature describes formal or explicit mentoring as a specific, highly structured and formalized program that matches a mentor with a protégé within a district or leadership preparation program. Does your school division have a formalized mentorship program for leadership preparation?
11. Do you or did you participate in a formal mentorship program?
12. A body of literature describes informal or implicit mentoring as interactions with a protégé and a mentor outside of a formal program where the interactions are based on mutual selection within social networks. Do you or did you participate in an informal mentorship relationship?
13. Do you feel you were informally mentored in any way?

**Research Question #4: What were the perceived effects of mentors that led them to pursue school-based administration?**

14. If you were mentored, by either informal mentorship or a formal mentorship program, which best contributed to your professional growth from teacher to administrator? Why?
15. Taking into account the gender identity of your mentor, do you believe that your mentor's gender identity influenced your decision to pursue a position in school administration?
16. Who do you consider to be your support system at present, both personally and professionally?
17. Taking into account the gender identity of those who make up your personal and professional support system, do you believe their gender identity influenced your decision to pursue a position in school administration?
18. Based on your experience, do you believe there is a difference in the ways in which men and women mentors impact women school administrator's? Please elaborate on your thoughts.

**Conclusion and Closing Comments**

19. We have covered a lot of information today. Is there anything else you want to add?

## Appendix B.



Research Ethics  
and Compliance

Human Ethics  
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## RENEWAL APPROVAL

**Date:** January 14, 2019 **New Expiry:** January 30, 2020

**TO:** **Kim Melvin** **(Advisor: Jerome Cranston)**  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** **Joseph Gordon, Chair**  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** **Protocol #E2018:005 (HS21499)**  
**Women's Experiences of Pursuing School-based Administration:**  
**A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

**Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)** has reviewed and renewed the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
3. This renewal is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
4. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.

**Funded Protocols:**

- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Renewal Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

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