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Narratives of Longevity From the Perspective of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators in North America: a Multiple Case Study

Janet Ledesma
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ABSTRACT

NARRATIVES OF LONGEVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN NORTH AMERICA: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Janet Ledesma

Chair: Shirley Freed
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: NARRATIVES OF LONGEVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN NORTH AMERICA: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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Problem

The average length of stay for school principals in the Seventh-day Adventist system of education in North America is 2.5-4.0 years. Elementary principals remain in leadership for 2.5 years, day academy principals stay for 3.6 years, and boarding academy principals stay for 4.0 years. Many studies have identified reasons why school principals leave their jobs. However, few studies have been conducted to understand why principals in the organization stay.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of principals who have remained in leadership in the Adventist system of education in North America longer
than 10 years in a single school building. The research question, How do principals in the Adventist system of education in North America describe their role and the experiences that helped them stay as administrators in one location for 10 consecutive years? was the focus of this study.

Method

A qualitative multiple-case study design using narrative inquiry was utilized to describe the experiences of Adventist principals in North America who stayed a minimum of 10 years in one location. The criterion used for this sampling directly reflected the purpose of this study and guided the identification of information-rich cases. The primary criterion used for the study was (a) the principal had served as an administrator for 10 consecutive years in one school building, (b) they were identified by their union education directors and approved to participate in this study by their local education superintendents, (c) the principals were chosen with every effort to reflect a balance between gender, ethnicity, and a balance of service time, school size, and types of schools, and (d) Spiritual leadership theory and resiliency theory as theoretical perspectives.

Findings

Principals in the Adventist system of education in North America who have stayed in one building for 10 or more consecutive years are resilient spiritual leaders. They thrive inspite of the fact the role and expectations associated with their jobs are undefined and quite complex. The demands of the job, personnel issues, parent and student issues, board issues, financial issues, constituency and community issues all
contribute to over work and imbalanced lives. Yet because of their strong relationship with God, they are able to be resilient even when faced with adversity. Most rely on prayer and the support of their families to sustain them through many difficult and challenging moments. They stay because of their passion for the students, commitment to God’s calling, passion for ministry, and passion to serve others.
Andrews University
School of Education

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A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

by
Janet Ledesma
July 2011
NARRATIVES OF LONGEVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN NORTH AMERICA: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

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(Philippians 1:3)

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I dedicate this study to Seventh-day Adventist Principals. Never forget that you have been called by God to make a difference in the lives of the students whom you serve.

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and all of your plans will succeed.”

(Proverbs 16:3)
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Across the country public- and private-school districts are reporting a shortage of school principals. In 1998, 50% of 400 superintendents surveyed indicated difficulty filling principal vacancies (Educational Research Service, 2000a). In 2000, one out of every five principals in Vermont retired or resigned; in New York City, 163 schools began the school year with interim principals; and in Washington State, 15% of the principals departed at the conclusion of their term (Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2000). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a 10 to 20% increase in vacancies for educational administrators through 2008 (Copland, 2001).

According to a 1998 joint study commissioned by the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (2001) and the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, more than half of elementary, middle, and high schools reported a shortage of principal candidates. The study indicated that the shortage of school principals was reported in all types of schools—rural, urban, and suburban.

In a 1999 study conducted by a task force of members of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA, 2001), 90% of the superintendents reported a shortage in the pool of candidates for high-school principals, 84% for middle-school candidates, and 73% for elementary-school candidates.
In another study conducted in Illinois, Mulhall, Flowers, and Mertens (2004) reported that 70% of the respondents believed there would be a major shortage of candidates in their districts within 5 years. The findings indicated the participants believed this shortage would reach an alarming crisis point.

The principal shortage that school districts are reporting has reached a crisis point that has captured media attention. “Principals Wanted: Apply Just About Anywhere,” was the title of Education Weekly’s lead article on January 12, 2000 (Olson, 2000). Listed in this article were the results of interviews with various superintendents from New York, Massachusetts, Maine, and West Virginia. The superintendents expressed frustration at the difficulties they were experiencing in filling principal vacancies (Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2000).

Lovely (2004a) emphasized in the American Association of School Administrator’s weekly web edition that vacancies for principals are spread throughout the United States. He further expressed concerns about who would lead schools if quality principals are not attracted, promoted, or retained in the principalship.

Private-school districts have experienced the impact of principal shortages as well. In data obtained from the Diocese of Galveston-Houston it was revealed that at the end of the school year 1999-2000, 11 of the 60 principals of Catholic elementary and middle schools left by the end of the year. Of the 11 who left, three retired, while the rest left for personal reasons. The following year, there was a slight difference with only nine principals leaving the Diocese. Out of the nine who left, four retired and the others left for personal reasons. In 2002-2003, there were 12 principal vacancies. One was for a
principal vacancy in another school, the others left because of the following reasons: three retired, one passed away, and three left for personal reasons (Goldstein, 2003).

In data obtained from the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists it was revealed that in 2006 there were several principal vacancies. While a national search was conducted through the employment website of the North America Division of SDA, the jobs remained vacant for many months. In one school, an interim principal was assigned in the hopes of securing a permanent one (Jim Epperson, August 15, 2007, personal communication).

Research indicates that part of the reason attributed to the principal shortage is that performing the job of principal has become unappealing (Young & Creighton, 2002). J. Malone (2002) emphasizes that the principal shortage is not due to a lack of experienced, skilled candidates, but in the ability to encourage those who have leadership capabilities to be willing to do so. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) noted that educators who hold administrative licenses are not applying for positions, and fewer are pursuing licensure. Recent studies suggest that although there is an ample supply of possible candidates for principals (individuals who have completed the necessary course work and certification processes), educational leaders are not attracted to the job (Archer, 2003; Lashway, 2001, 2003; Mulhall et al., 2004; Roza, 2003).

In addition, vice principals and teachers who have the ability to be strong school leaders are not willing to assume the job of the principal. As a result, school districts are grappling with ways of addressing the vacancies created when the job is not appealing (Fenwick, 2000; McAdams, 1997; Potter, 2001; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamarra, 2002). Lack of capable educational leaders, willing to do the principal’s job
yet not willing to do so because of the difficulty of the job, is being reported as among the greatest problems that face schools today (Lovely, 2004b).

The complexities of the job coupled with the failure of choosing the profession have resulted in a nationwide shortage of school principals (Copland, 2001; McAdams, 1997). In a recent job satisfaction survey, administrators reported the principalship to be a lonely job with more recognition given to mistakes rather than to the accomplishments attained. Hence, this overwhelming sense of defeat and the huge complexity of the job lead to principals leaving the job, thereby creating principal shortages (Zellner, Jinkins, et al., 2002).

Studies indicate that the complexity accompanied with the principal’s job is a reason why school leaders are leaving the principalship (Wilmore, 2004). Principals today face the complex task of creating a school-wide vision, being an instructional leader, planning effective professional development, guiding teachers, handling discipline, attending events, coordinating buses, and all the other minute details that come with supervising a school (Richard, 2000).

The complexities associated with the principal’s job is a major turnoff to the principalship and as such principals are leaving or able candidates are choosing not to assume the principalship (L. Fenwick & Pierce, 2001). Consequently, the impact of the complex challenges that principals face has been identified as a major disincentive to people choosing the principalship as a career path (d’Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002; d’Arbon & Dorman, 2004). DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) summarized the situation as follows:
The principalship is at a crossroads. Although much has been invested in the principalship in hopes for school reform, there are concerns that the resources to make these growing expectations realistic have not been forthcoming. The result is a job that looks to many to be impossible, and many of those from whose ranks principals have traditionally come are not pursuing the position. (p. 48)

Another reason attributed to why school leaders are leaving the principalship is due to the high expectations associated with the job. Schools have always needed effective principals. However, in recent years, the expectations of an “effective” leader have changed significantly. Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) found that the “role of the principal in the United States Schools has swelled to include a staggering array of professional tasks and competencies” (p. 4).

As a result, effective school principals confront a gamut of expectations that range from simple to quite complex challenges. Davis et al. (2005) acknowledge that principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, and special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. In addition, principals are expected to serve the often conflicting needs and interests of many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies.

Furthermore, high expectations associated with the principal’s job have led to the premise in many educational school systems that in order for principals to lead effectively they must be “super principals” (Pierce, 2000). This point is clearly depicted in Copland’s (2001) study of the principal’s job. He scanned several media sources in which the principal’s job was advertised. Copland then synthesized the requirements of
the job descriptions posted and developed his own advertisement illustrating the portrait
of the much-needed principal. The description reads as follows:

**Position Vacant: School Principal**
Qualifications: Wisdom of a sage, vision of a Chief Executive Officer, intellect of a scholar, leadership of a point guard, compassion of a counselor, moral strength of a nun, courage of a firefighter, craft knowledge of a surgeon, political savvy of a senator, toughness of a soldier, listening skills of a blind man, humility of a saint, collaborative skills of an entrepreneur, certitude of a civil rights activist, charisma of a stage performer, and patience of Job. Salary: lower than you might expect. (p. 528)

Admittedly, Copland’s (2001) depiction of the “super principal” intentionally exceeds the bounds of ridiculous. However, on any given school day, principals from across the nation may be confronted with fulfilling these same kinds of expectations.

The expectations and complexities associated with the principal’s job are daunting. The role of the principal has expanded and become increasingly complex over the last 25 years (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). For many principals, the work load and the demands of the job are simply not doable, creating increased conflicts between their personal and professional lives, along with decreased levels of job satisfaction (Eckman, 2004; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). For others who could be potential principal candidates, the underlying assumption in the literature is that performing the job of principal has become unappealing (Kerrins, 2001; Young & Creighton, 2002).

Furthermore, the expectations coupled by the complexities of the job have led many principals to leave their positions, thereby resulting in a high turnover in the principalship (Pounder & Merrill, 2001) and a growing shortage of qualified and experienced candidates for principal positions in nearly all districts in the United States (Houston, 1998; Protheroe & Perkins-Gough, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001).
Context of the Study

Today, the Adventist educational system in North America faces the challenge of retaining school principals (Caskey, 2002). The stakes for Adventist school principals are rising because of the complexities and the demands associated with their roles. Consequently, there is a shortage of school principals in the Adventist educational system in North America. Larry Blackmer, Vice President of Education in North America, acknowledges that the longevity of a school principal within the Adventist school system is short lived. He cited burnout, high expectations, isolation, job dissatisfaction, controversy, and lack of support services as key reasons why principals leave (L. Blackmer, personal communication, July 15, 2007).

The supply of qualified and willing candidates is not available in sufficient numbers to meet the current personnel needs for administration within the Adventist system of education because those who are currently serving as principals are leaving and those who are qualified are not interested (Caskey, 2002). This dilemma is further emphasized by Larry Blackmer (personal communication, June 30, 2004), NAD Vice President of Education, and Dennis Plubell (personal communication, October 1, 2008), NAD Associate Director of Education, who shared that each year school districts are challenged to fill principal vacancies because of the shortage of principals.

In 1984, Corky Lawson, former principal of Highland Adventist Academy, started collecting data, tracking the longevity of secondary-school principals within the Adventist system of education. When he retired, the data were then compiled by Ron Russell, former director of education for the Mid-America Union of SDA, and upon his retirement, the data have since been compiled by his son, Gary Russell, principal of
Sunnydale Adventist Academy. These data are the only data that track the stay of secondary-school principals in the Adventist system of education in North America. The data reveal that the average stay a principal has served in a current building over the last 6 years is 4.0 years for boarding-school principals and 3.6 years for day-school principals (Appendix E).

The data obtained for elementary-school principals were generated through the information provided in the opening and closing reports compiled by the school administrators on a yearly basis and submitted to their local education departments. According to the data, the average stay of an elementary-school principal during the last 6 years is 2.5 years.

**Statement of the Problem**

Adventist principals in North America stay an average of 2.5 years at the elementary level, 3.6 years at day secondary schools, and 4.0 years at secondary boarding-schools. Educational superintendents and union directors within the Adventist system of education note that as a school-wide system, the expectations and demands associated with Adventist school principals are just as complex and daunting as their counterparts in public or other private school systems.

However, there are principals within the Adventist system of education in North America who have stayed for many years beyond the average. There is no research documenting why these principals stay for extended periods of time and contribute to building strong educational systems. It is important to understand why Adventist school principals who stay remain in leadership since there are no studies related to principal retention, longevity of principals, or the types of support needed for principals to remain
in schools for extended periods of time as administrators in the system of education in North America.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of school principals who have remained in leadership at the same school building for 10 consecutive years in the Adventist system of education in North America and to discover why they stay.

**Research Question**

How do principals in the Adventist system of education in North America describe their role and the experiences that helped them stay in one location for 10 or more consecutive years?

**Methodology**

In order to answer the research question, I utilized a qualitative multiple-case study design using narrative inquiry. This approach enabled me to tell the story of Adventist principals who stay for consecutive years in educational administration in one school building, and provided rich, descriptive data of their experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

Stake (1995) identifies a case study as research that is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied. Other researchers identify a case study as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). A case study is “the process of learning about the case and the product of learning” (Stake, 1995, pp. 236-237). Using the case study approach to
research enabled me to investigate and learn why Adventist school principals in North America stay in leadership for consecutive years.

I used narrative inquiry as a way of understanding the experiences of the principals. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “If we understand the world narratively, then it makes sense to study the world narratively” (p. 18). Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. A narrative study is the research of the ways humans experience the world. Essentially, people’s lives consist of stories.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also note that research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant. Therefore, through narrative inquiry I was able to tell the stories of the experiences that Adventist school principals live and why they stay in denominational leadership longer than the typical 2.5–4.0 years for consecutive years.

**Rationale for the Study**

By studying Adventist school principals in North America who stay in one school building for 10 or more years, we can learn much about the strategies needed to retain administrators. In recent years, many studies look at the complexity of the principal’s job, the shortage of principals, and how to retain school principals, yet none have looked at retention through the lens of the Adventist school principal. We do not know why Adventist principals stay for consecutive years. Likewise, we do know what is needed to
retain them. Adventist principals who stay will inform others of their specific administrative experiences that helped them stay.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study was framed through the lens of resiliency and spiritual leadership theory. The literature demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the stress of the principal’s job and their capability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cash, 2001; Copland, 2001, L. Greene, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Patterson, Patterson, & Collins, 2002).

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune (Janas, 2002) and as an individual’s “capacity to face stressors without a significant negative disruption in functioning” (Perry, 2002, p. 33). The concept is that in order for an individual to recover from adversity, the person must demonstrate a return to their pre-adversity level of functioning (Carver, 1998) or a return to a baseline where the individual is able to return to the previous levels of functioning (Ickovics & Park, 1998).

Individuals who are able to bounce back from adversity seem to use both internal and external strategies for coping. Exploring how individuals use internal and external characteristics, resilience has been the focus of recent research on resiliency theory. Park (1998) emphasizes:

Characteristics of people themselves including their personalities, their resources, their beliefs, and their resultant cognitions and behaviors, throughout the coping process are believed by many researchers to be among the strongest determinants of how individuals fare in terms of both their psychological and physical health when faced with stressful experiences. These characteristics, along with situational factors, may also determine the extent to which people thrive or experience growth through responding to and coping with stressful and traumatic experiences. (p. 268)
If resilient individuals are able to overcome serious challenges and emerge as even stronger leaders as a result of coping with adversity, the implications for applying the theory of resiliency to school principals can be meaningful. Resiliency theory was one of the lenses applied to better understand the internal and external characteristics that Adventist principals in North America use to overcome the serious challenges associated with the principalship and to gain a fuller understanding of why they stay.

Spiritual leadership theory comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual well-being through calling and membership and, ultimately, become more organizationally committed and productive (Fry, 2003). When spiritual leadership theory is applied, the leaders are able to (a) create a vision for the organization whereby leaders and group members experience a sense of calling and (b) they establish a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby people have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others (Fry, 2003).

In recent years educational advocates have addressed the need to analyze spirituality in the context of public-school leadership. For example, Thompson (1993) stated that a clear image of spiritual leadership should be developed in order to reevaluate spirituality as it relates to public-school leadership.

The significance of spiritual leadership is recognized in several studies. Hoyle (2002) noted that a power greater than human knowledge must drive effective school leaders. He emphasized that leaders lack depth of understanding when they merely rely on knowledge, by failing to include their spirituality. Klenke (2003) contends that the
The core of effective leadership may be solidified in a spiritual dimension. Kessler (2002) stated that the essence of leadership lies from within a deep connection with one’s self. The characteristics of a spiritual leader exude from within a person and distinguish themselves from religious dogma. Traits such as compassion, integrity, and perseverance are not monopolized by the religious dogma of a single group but resonate from within the individual. These traits are the result of a strong connection to others and something bigger than the individual.

According to Hoyle (2002) spiritual qualities are often overlooked as they relate to leadership positions. For example, leadership preparation programs develop courses concentrated on essential areas of leadership such as decision making, teacher evaluations, and other key topics that have traditionally been associated with school leadership. These courses intend to prepare administrators to be effective leaders when facing difficult situations in schools.

Kessler (2002) emphasized the importance of spiritual leadership by noting that the reality of school leadership should align an individual in situations that require more than core knowledge. Every day school administrators must face the problems associated with the complexities of the job with dignity and compassion. However, these traits cannot be learned or developed through conventional course work.

Thus, spiritual leadership theory was the other lens applied to this study as a way of understanding how principals describe the experiences that helped them stay for consecutive years in the Adventist educational system in North America. Spirituality is an indispensable quality that warrants further investigation and research as it compares to the Adventist school principal.
Klenke (2003) recognized that more quantitative and qualitative research is needed to integrate spirituality into existing theories of leadership. The aspects of spirituality combined with leadership theory could deepen the understanding of school leadership. However, there are few empirical studies exploring spirituality of educational leaders, thus revealing a gap in the available research regarding school leadership.

**Significance/Importance of the Study**

This study stems from the belief that there is a problem with the retention of school principals in the Adventist educational system and that school leaders have to find ways of retaining them. Currently, the supply of effective and qualified administrators to serve as principals is not sufficient to meet the immediate personnel demands for school leaders within the Adventist educational system in North America (Caskey, 2002).

Through the sharing of their lived personal experiences, Adventist school principals shared the reasons why they stay. Accordingly, the data collected provided information that helped us gain insight on the complexity of their jobs. In addition, the information shared will be used to equip educational administrators with the skills needed to better retain their school principals in the future. This study identified the types of support that were utilized by the school principals that enabled them to stay in leadership in one building for consecutive years. As a result, the emerging themes collected in the study can be used by educational leaders and supervisors for the purpose of retaining school principals for leadership within the Adventist system of education in North America.
Definition of Terms

Administrator: One who administers, especially one who works as a manager in a business, government agency, or school.

Adventist: A member of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination who maintains the Second Advent of Christ is imminent.

Balance: Work-life balance is a broad concept that includes the proper prioritizing between “work” (career and ambition) and "life" (health, pleasure, leisure, family, and spiritual development) (“Work-Life Balance,” 2011).

Burn-out: Fatigue, frustration, or apathy resulting from prolonged stress, overwork, or intense activity.

Conference: A regional administrative structure in the Seventh-day Adventist Church responsible for local churches and local school operation which draws boundaries of administrative responsibility for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Configuration of operation of school: The principals in this study are Adventist administrators of Adventist schools within North America, which are configured as follows: pre-kindergarten/kindergarten to eighth grade (P/K-8), pre-kindergarten/kindergarten to 10th grade (P/K-10), pre-kindergarten/kindergarten to 12th grade (P/K-12), and ninth grade to 12th grade (9-12).

Culture: A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems (Schein, 1992).
**Division:** The operational leadership and coordinating administrative structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which includes unions and local conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For example, this study was conducted in the North America Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Educator:** A specialist in the theory and practice of education.

**Leadership:** The process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives (Yukl, 2002).

**Mentor:** To serve as a trusted counselor or teacher, especially in occupational settings.

**Pre K-12th Grade:** The classification of grade levels within the Adventist school system; elementary to secondary schools range in grades from the pre-kindergarten to the 12th-grade level.

**Principal:** One who holds a position of presiding rank, especially the head of an elementary, middle, or high school.

**Principal Retention:** A deliberate strategy, instituted at school, local, and national levels, to address the demand for and the supply of an adequate cadre of principals.

**Principal Shortage:** A lack of or an inadequate supply of licensed principals within a given licensure area in a school district or system.

**Professional development:** The advancement of skills or expertise to succeed in a particular profession through continued education.

**Resilience:** The ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004).
Seventh-day Adventist (SDA): A conservative Christian organization operating churches, schools, and health-care facilities throughout the world. Their belief system shares many common tenets with mainline Christian churches but espouses certain unique beliefs, such as keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and expecting the literal second coming of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual leadership theory: A theory concerned with those qualities of the human spirit that balance the individual and the organization. It focuses on altruistic love—regard or devotion to the interests of others (Fry, 2003).

Stress: A mentally or emotionally disruptive or upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences and capable of affecting physical health, usually characterized by increased heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, muscular tension, irritability, and depression.

Support services: Empowering resources used to hold up or add strength to school principals.

Transformational leader: A leadership style in which the enhancement of the individual and collective problem-solving capacities of the organizational members; such capacities are exercised in the identification of goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement (Burns, 1978).

Union: Regional headquarters for a cluster of conferences and having supervision and coordination for the Seventh-day Adventist Church ministries in a particular region.

Assumptions

The major assumption in this study is that principals who stay in the Adventist system of education for more than the typical 2.5 to 4.0 years in a single school building
will be able to articulate the reasons why they stay in school leadership—thus informing the system of potential strategies for retention.

**Limitations of the Study**

All proposed research projects have limitations; none is perfectly designed as “there are trade-offs” (Patton, 2002, p. 223). Therefore, the limitations in my study were (a) the participants’ willingness to share their stories, (b) extenuating circumstances beyond the control of the participants which limited the amount of time that they could dedicate to my research due to the daily demands of their roles as principal, (c) the ability of the respondent to be reflective on the day of the interview, and (d) my inability to interpret the intended message conveyed in a manner that would capture the thought of the interviewee.

**Delimitations**

The study was delimited to Adventist school principals in North America who rendered 10 or more years of service to educational administration in one school building.

**Summary**

This study tells the story of 14 principals within the Adventist system of education in North America who remained in their work environment for at least 10 consecutive years. Through the narrative of their lived experiences the principals shared the reasons why they have stayed in educational ministry longer than the typical 2.5 years at the elementary level, 3.6 years at day secondary schools, and 4.0 years at secondary boarding-schools.
Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the overview of the study. Chapter 2 explores the literature on the complexities associated with the principal’s role, retention, shortage, and expectations associated with the principalship. Leadership theory as it relates to school administrators is explored also. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Adventist system of education in North America. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study, which consisted of a qualitative multiple-case study research design with a narrative emphasis. Chapter 4 describes the narratives of the 14 principals in the study. Chapter 5 consists of the cross-case analysis of the study. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the findings of why some Adventist principals in North America stay longer than the typical 2.5 to 4.0 years. The study on the longevity of Adventist principals concludes with recommendations for future studies and the impact that this study may have on administrative leaders of principals within the Adventist educational system in North America.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of the literature addresses the issue of principal retention. The chapter is divided into five major sections: (a) the principalship, (b) principal retention, (c) leadership theories associated with school leadership, (d) resilience theory, and (e) a historical perspective on Seventh-day Adventist education as it relates to this study. Attention is given to the principalship as a whole. Therefore, the role, significance, responsibilities and complexities associated with the principal’s job provide a rich background to the problem of principal retention. In addition, this chapter reviews possible reasons for why principals are leaving, and support services identified in the literature to retain principals.

The review of the literature served as the foundation of this study. By understanding issues relating to principal retention within various school systems of education in both private and public sectors, a platform was developed for understanding principal retention within the Adventist system of education in North America.

The Principalship

The principal’s job is a vitally important one (Teske, 2001). The job entails many responsibilities, all of which are directly associated with quality school leadership. One of
the primary responsibilities of the school principal is establishing a positive school climate. Research on school effectiveness, school climate, and student achievement all reveal one commonality, the fact that good happenings in schools depend to a great degree on the quality of school leadership (Tirozzi, 2001). Taylor and Tashakkori (1994) studied data from 9,987 teachers and 27,994 students concerning healthy school climates. School leadership was one of three major factors that determine school climate. Most striking is the fact that through the years several studies underscore the importance and value that it is for principals to establish positive and healthy school climates. For example, many researchers depicted the positive impact that a healthy school climate developed by the principal has upon the students and their achievement (Bulach & Malone, 1994; Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2000; Newman, Freed, Kaak, & White, 2007; Paredes & Frazer, 1992; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Winter & Sweeney, 1994).

In a study conducted by the Maryland State Department (Andersen, 2000) on the principalship, Arthur Anderson, a noted leader in the educational arena, indicated that the school principal has the greatest single impact on student performance. In a meta-analysis conducted by the McRel organization on the effects of school leadership, it was found that the principal has a direct correlation on student achievement. In addition, 66 leadership practices embedded into 21 leadership responsibilities, each with statistically significant relationships to student achievement, were identified as essential for the principalship (Waters et al., 2003).

In addition, it is important for principals to demonstrate strong leadership capabilities to lead effectively. In a study conducted by Education World (Hopkins, 2006), a strong school leader is identified as a principal who demonstrates important
characteristics of leadership. Across the nation 43 principals were surveyed to comment on what they perceived to be the most essential leadership traits. The following top 10 traits emerged as characteristics in quality principals: (a) has a stated vision for the school and a plan to achieve that vision, (b) clearly stated goals and expectations for students, staff, and parents, (c) is visible; gets out of the office and is seen all over the school, (d) is trustworthy and straight with students and staff, (e) helps develop leadership skills in others, (f) develops strong teachers; cultivates good teaching practice, (g) shows that he or she is not in charge alone; involves others, (h) has a sense of humor, (i) is a role model for students and staff, and (j) offers meaningful kindnesses and kudos to staff and students (Hopkins, 2008).

Because of the direct impact the principalship has upon school climate, school effectiveness, and student achievement, research indicates that retaining strong leaders to the principalship and giving them the support they need to succeed is the most critical step that school districts can take to ensure excellent schools and raise student achievement (Ferrandino & Tirrozzi, 2000). As a result, there needs to be an increased attention and funding directed towards programs that retain the best principals (Andersen, 2000).

Complexities of the Principal’s Job

A significant number of vacancies in the principalship have been met by a decreasing number of qualified and willing candidates (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The literature attributes this to the overwhelming complexity of the principal’s job (Richard, 2000). “There is no question that the role of the school leader has become more complex and in many ways undoable” (Fullan, 2008, p. 3). Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy,
and Muth (2007) describe the principal’s job as the most complex job in education and further emphasize that because of the complexities of the principal’s job, the survival of the principalship is in jeopardy:

Entrusted with children’s learning and safety, and responsible for stewardship of a historical symbol of community hopes for the future, principals operate at the nexus of public policy, family values, community aspirations, and emerging knowledge. The job has always been difficult and dynamic, responding to the evolving needs of students, the challenging economy, and the nation’s priorities. But the challenges now facing school leaders are so significant and have such high stakes that they threaten the survival of the principalship as we know it. (p. 1)

Principals have always had difficult jobs, facing rapid fire, simultaneous, and messy problems in complex environments (Ferrandino, 2001). Principals have to deal effectively with daily challenges so that they and their schools are credible in the eyes of families, school administrators, students, educational professionals, and others in the community. Principals’ decisions in these matters have uncertain consequences, differentially benefit some groups, and often require difficult ethical choices (Bellamy et al., 2007).

While difficult work is familiar in many professional environments, the current combination of ambitious goals for student learning and the social conditions in school communities create pressing challenges for school leaders. Principals are expected to overcome barriers to learning and show reliable student achievement, all in an environment conducive to excellence (Ferrandino, Alexandria, & Hartford, 2003).

In order for principals to succeed, they must be comfortable in settings characterized by competition and consumer choice, serve as vigorous and intentional champions of student learning, actively lead the teaching and learning process, and ensure that instruction both matches the content tested by state mandates and meets the
needs of each one of a very diverse group of children. Principals face all of these challenges in full public view.

Furthermore, the complexities are not only because of the demands associated with their jobs, they are constantly also faced with new initiatives for effective leadership such as focusing on operational change (Manzzoni, 1995; Wirt & Kirst, 1997) to foster a climate of excellence and embarking on paths of influencing school quality (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003)—all in an attempt to demonstrate that they can increasingly be held accountable for leading schools to high levels of learning.

The complexities associated with the principalship are magnified by the additional stress and time demands that can wreak havoc on both new and experienced administrators, profoundly affecting their personal and family lives as well as creating problems with their health and job satisfaction. Many principals do not survive these complexities. Some seek other alternatives than to remain as leaders. Sergiovanni (2001) provided a strikingly rich description of the constantly evolving role of the principal and the complexities associated with the role because of the numerous responsibilities associated with the job. He shared that the principal no longer has a full plate but a full platter. Portin, Shen, and Williams (1998) also reported on the continued evolving role of the principal as extremely complex. In surveys, principals have reported that the responsibilities of educational leadership are often too difficult to work into the schedule due to managerial responsibilities.

In short, the complexities associated with the principals’ job are huge. The demands placed upon principals have increased, but the profession has not changed to
meet those demands. Principals increasingly say that the job is simply not doable. As a result many school districts are reporting a shortage of qualified candidates for the job. Has the job become too difficult or the expectations too high to accomplish? There are many who think so. Wilmore (2004) emphasizes that many principals are retiring or leaving the field for a myriad of reasons. Some are tired and battle-scarred from leading the crusade for so long. Others have begun to think the gains are not worth the bruises. Still others realize they can make more money elsewhere and choose to do so.

The principalship is at risk. The problems associated with the complexities of the principal’s job are compounded that in addition to the principal’s job being difficult, many individuals with school leadership abilities are simply not attracted to the job. According to Wilmore (2004), principals are experiencing deep frustrations over the complex role of the school leader. Fewer people are interested in a job that many say is marked by heavy pressure, long hours, and inadequate pay. “I think principals feel an incredible amount of pressure and I believe that one indication of that is the fewer number of people that are interested in going into the principalship,” says Mildred Blackman, director of the Principal’s Center at Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Sinatra (2000) emphasizes that “there aren’t great waiting lines of people saying, ‘Gee, I’d love to have that job when the principal retires or resigns’” (p. 1).

Principal Shortage

The literature suggests that the inability of school systems to retain school principals is causing a shortage of school principals. Due to the complexities associated with the principal’s job, the educational community faces a crisis relative to the shortage of principals created by principals leaving. The result is that school systems are losing
quality people and experiencing a shortage of trained and certified school administrators (Educational Research Service, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2001).

Across the country, school districts are holding principals more accountable for their leadership and how schools perform. Although the end result is better leadership and better schools, the push seems to have another effect: a nationwide principal shortage. As a result, nearly 50% of America’s school districts report having trouble finding candidates (Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000). In addition, recent research indicates that the documented and growing shortage of quality principals continues to rise (L. Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Million, 1998; Potter, 2001; Richardson, 1999; “Study Warns,” 1998).

This shortage has occurred among all types of schools (rural, urban, and suburban), all sectors (public, parochial, private) and all levels (elementary, junior high/middle, and high school). The most frequently mentioned barriers that discourage potential principal applicants are compensation, increased expectations, ambiguous roles, stresses of the job, and stress that becomes intolerable which leads to illness, divorce, or resignation (Adams, 1999; Argetsinger, 2000; B. Berry, 2004a; L. Fenwick, 2000; Hammond, Muffs, & Sciascia, 2001; Yerkes & Guaglione, 1998).

In addition, research indicates there are a limited number of candidates available for the position of principals (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2003). McAdams (1997) described a pool of applicants for principal vacancies that continues to shrink. Zellner, Jinkins, et al. (2002) identified the difficult task of recruiting candidates to fill educational vacancies. L. Fenwick (2000) made predictions for a nationwide shortage of school administrators. She reported that the shortage of principal candidates is primarily because of the
following two reasons: (a) more principals are reaching retirement age, and (b) fewer teachers desire to fill the vacancies in leadership.

However, Roza (2003) contends that while some school districts are experiencing difficulties finding good principals, there are far more candidates certified to be principals than there are principal vacancies to fill. The study found that despite the widespread alarm about the universal shortage of principals, shortages are not the norm. It was noted that where there have been reductions in the number of certified staff, these conditions are district and even school specific and are more pronounced in the secondary than the elementary level. The study further indicates that the perceptions of the shortage are driven by demands for a new and different kind of school principal. Roza (2003) argues that in a lot of ways the purported shortage is a matter of definition because there are certainly plenty of certified candidates with high-level leadership skills to fill principal vacancies.

While researchers may concur with Roza (2003) that the issue of principal shortage must be defined appropriately, others disagree wholeheartedly with her claim that recent studies reporting the rise of the shortages of principals is a matter of perception. Based on my review of the literature, the issue of principal shortage is prevalent and indeed real in school systems across the country.

It extends to the Seventh-day Adventist system of education in North America as well. According to the research, there is indeed a shortage of school principals and a lack of willingness on behalf of qualified candidates to assume the principalship. The supply of qualified and willing candidates is not available in sufficient numbers to meet the current personnel needs for administration with the Adventist system of education
This belief is further affirmed by Larry Blackmer (personal communication, June 30, 2004), NAD Vice President of Education, Dennis Plubell (personal communication, October 1, 2008), NAD Associate Director of Education, Ron Russell (personal communication, April 16, 2009), former director of education of the Mid-America Union of SDA, and Gary Russell (personal communication, April 20, 2009).

According to data from Corkey Lawson (personal communication, October 1, 2008), Larry Blackmer (personal communication, June 30, 2004), NAD Vice President of Education, and Dennis Plubell (personal communication, October 1, 2008), the average stay that a principal has served in a current building over the last 6 years (since March 2004) is 2.5 years for elementary-school principals, 4.0 years for boarding-school principals, and 3.6 years for day-school principals within the North America Division of Seventh-day Adventists. The retention issue is compounded by the fact that there are fewer qualified principals willing to fill vacant jobs for the principalship when available within the Adventist system of education as well.

Research indicates a growing shortage of quality principals (L. Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Million, 1998; Potter, 2001; Richardson, 1999; “Study Warns,” 1998). As a result, the shortage of candidates for principals makes retaining current principals even more critical. It is important that the principal shortage be resolved in ways that preserve the role of professional administrators as leaders of the schools. The challenge that districts face is to encourage able principals to be willing to continue as leaders (Blackman & Fenwick, 2000).
The unwillingness on behalf of quality educators and administrators to become principals is not due to a lack of ability and capability, it is simply a result of an unwillingness to serve in an area that is perceived to be laden with difficult conditions and circumstances:

It’s not a shortage in terms of not actually having the numbers to fill the positions. . . . There are thousands of people out there with degrees. We are finding more and more high-quality teachers and administrators who simply do not have the will to be a principal. (Sinatra, 2000)

Research indicates many reasons why many skilled administrators are not attracted to the principalship (Lewis, 1992). In a joint study conducted by the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP) (Educational Research Service, 2000b), the following were identified as barriers to attracting qualified candidates to accepting the principalship: (a) compensation insufficient compared to responsibilities, (b) job generally too stressful, (c) too much time required, (d) difficult to satisfy demands of parents/community, (e) societal problems make it difficult to focus on instruction, (f) fewer experienced teachers interested, (g) testing/accountability pressures too great, (h) job viewed as less satisfying than previously, (i) bad press/public relations problems for district add pressure to job, (j) inadequate funding for schools, (k) opening not well publicized, (l) would lose tenure as a teacher, and (m) no tenure associated with the position.

In another study conducted by the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000), 90 principals from various school districts, and reflecting strong agreement within the field, identified the following five reasons why relatively few people are seeking to become principals: (a) the changing demands of the job including increased
accountability, (b) salary, (c) time, (d) lack of parental and community support, and (e) lack of respect.

In short, the conflict between the increasing complexities of the job and the fact that the principalship is no longer attractive to many qualified leaders portends a challenge to school systems, due to the shortage of principals, that it is emerging. As a result of the increasing demands upon the work life of a principal, not only does the turnover rate continue at a high level but fewer candidates are being attracted to the principalship position (Kruger, van Eck, & Vermeulen, 2005).

In a recent study by Pounder and Merrill (2001), of 170 high-school assistant principals and middle-school principals, only 30% of them indicated that they had a career goal to seek a high-school principalship. This fact supports the related findings of a study of school superintendents by T. Whitaker (2003) whereby respondents reported the shortage of principal candidates based upon their aspirations to do so. Overall, 90% of the superintendents rated the shortage of principals from the availability pool as moderate to extreme. Consequently, the challenges associated with the shortage of principals and the inability to attract capable ones is forcing school districts to address the issue of principal retention.

**Principal Retention**

Many districts are struggling with the problem of principal retention (Zellner, Ward, et al., 2002). Studies indicate the major reasons for the lack of principal retention and the reasons why school principals often say “it just isn’t worth it” are (a) the changing demands of the job, (b) salary, (c) time, (d) lack of parent and community support and the negativity of the media and pupil towards schools, (e) chronic stress, and
lack of respect (B. A. R. Berry, 2004b; Hoffman, 2004; Kennedy, 2000). As a result, districts across the nation are looking at ways of retaining many of the 93,200 principals who are dedicated, persistent, inspiring, and effective school leaders. While the future of the principalship is in question as the conflict between the demands of the job and the shrinking pool of qualified candidates continues to rise, there is no alternative. Communities around the country must look at ways to retain principals by preparing them to meet the challenges associated with the principalship and to guarantee leaders who will continue to build strong schools. Principals need to be encouraged that the job is doable, and support structures must be put in place that will add a new perspective into their leadership role. In doing everything that is within the power of school districts to help retain principals, there will not then be a concern about the shortage of principals (Cushing, Kerrins, & Phillipstone, 2003).

Strategies for Principal Retention

As school districts grapple with the challenges associated with the retention of school principals, research indicates that the need to develop principal-retention strategies is imperative (Brubaker & Coble, 2006; Potter, 2001). Peterson and Kelley (2001) identified strategies for retaining school principals which included the creation of cohort groups of potential principal candidates within a district or a consortium of neighboring districts. The groups would offer training, discussion, and work with new principals. The cohort would continue as support for new principals and would increase formal and informal opportunities for networking among new, experienced, and aspiring principals.

They suggested implementing the concept of a master principal, similar to that of the master teacher, with that person responsible for mentoring new principals. This would
provide opportunities for teachers and other staff members who are potential candidates for the principalship to learn more about the position. These opportunities should include time for training, as well as conversations with current principals. In addition, they recommended that internships be provided for teachers who are good candidates to assume the principalship.

Lovely (2004a) recommended helping new principals develop skills in the capacity to handle a world full of brief encounters. He noted that school leaders need to help new principals maintain a repertoire of cognitive and interpersonal skills that will help them tackle varied assignments and constituencies while learning to function under fragmented circumstances. He suggested that this can be done by school districts developing induction programs to train new principals.

According to Kimball and Sirotnik (2000), there are many districts that are resorting to induction programs to train new principals and to retain current principals in the work force. Induction programs are training and support programs that particularly address and fine-tune the skill set of principals (Villani, 2006). In a study in which 12 school principals completed an induction program, Aiken (2002) identified five key essentials termed as “needs” that characterized the induction period of a principal: (a) the need to find one’s voice, (b) the need to form alliances and networks, (c) the need to develop a leadership persona, (d) the need to find a balance between custodianship and innovation, and (e) the need to make connections with the larger community.

According to both Kimball and Sirotnik (2000), school districts must do more to support their principals. They further emphasized that principals need to be afforded the opportunity to network and continue their learning process for leadership. Within the
context of these learning opportunities lie the strategies that districts need to put in place to help retain their principals. These researched strategies include: job sharing, professional development, school board support, salary increase, mentoring opportunities, stress management, and reflection times.

Job Sharing

To ease the burden of the complexities of the principal’s job, some school districts are turning to job sharing (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Muffs & Schmitz, 1999). This strategy divides tasks between two leaders who possess skills in different areas. The tasks of supervising instruction of teachers and managing discipline of students would be shared between the two principals. Job sharing allows schools to benefit from a more rounded leadership because principals are leading from the strength of their skill set. It can also enable someone who is interested in pursuing a career in administration to determine if school administration is a good fit for them by participating in a part-time job-sharing internship.

Job sharing works best based upon the needs of the school. Muff and Schmitz (1999) described one school’s solution: The “veteran” principal works the “first shift” and the intern principal covers the afternoon hours. Because the job requires constant communication, the two principals’ shifts overlap at least 1 hour a day so they can work together. Or one observes a class while the other addresses other school concerns. Although both principals attend school-related events, they alternate for other afterschool activities so that both principals have more time to spend with their families.

Another form of job sharing is leadership that is shared not by another individual but by a team (Lambert, 2002). At the Farragut High School in Knoxville, Tennessee, the
principalship is shared by a team of six. There is one principal for each grade level and that person moves along with his or her class. After the 4-year rotation is complete, he or she starts over again with a new class of ninth graders (Ashford, 2000).

In England and Wales, some school districts job share by splitting administrative responsibilities away from instruction. School heads work in tandem with business managers called bursars. The impact of utilizing the skills of business managers to job-share the principal’s job has been so effective in Houston, Texas, that in January 2001, the school district inaugurated a training program to certify business managers who are expected to ease the burden on principals (Richard, 2000).

Professional Development

Another strategy for the retention of school principals is for school districts to provide an increased level of professional development. The Educational Research Service (ERS, 2000b) found that principals repeatedly expressed a desire to augment their expertise and personal skills, but found the current professional development activities at their schools lacking. ERS found that one of the most frequently requested opportunities for development was the chance to network with other principals to exchange ideas, evaluate the demands of their jobs, and discuss how to implement change at their schools. Principals also placed a high value on follow-up training and training on how to translate ideas about change into practice.

The Chicago Public Schools has developed the most comprehensive programs for the professional developments of principals. Training is available for aspiring principals, first-year principals, and experienced administrators, and is geared toward addressing the
specific needs of each group. Techniques used in the training include case study, simulation, reflective analysis, and coaching (Peterson & Kelley, 2001).

The case of California’s Pajoaro Valley Unified School district is a prime example of comprehensive professional development. The program sets a common vision for principals through its Professional Standards for Administrators, which establishes clear goals for principals. Their Administrative Cycle of Inquiry includes self-assessment, personal and site goal setting, professional development, and evaluation. This comprehensive professional development offers the principal the opportunity to self-reflect and to meet with his or her supervisor and also with a peer/mentor partner (Casey & Donaldson, 2001).

The program is designed to meet the needs of the district. Pajoaro Valley’s zone-assistant superintendents gather information from principals regarding their professional development interests. The district’s Professional Communities Team then takes this information and provides the kinds of training and growth opportunities the principals perceive they need.

School Boards

Yerkes and Guaglianone (1998) suggest that the school board should educate the community about the changing role of the principal to gather increased support for principals and perhaps lessen the demands on those occupying this role. Yerkes and Guaglianone recommend school boards to take the following actions: (a) offer financial support for sabbaticals to give burnt-out principals a reprieve, (b) create a family friendly environment to accommodate principals’ personal lives, (c) review the salary schedule
and find a way to reward principals, (d) determine flexible attendance requirements and expectations at school functions, and (e) redesign the organizational structure of the job.

Furthermore, as a way of retaining principals, Doud and Keller (1998) suggest that boards should devise financial incentives to keep retirement-eligible principals from leaving. Therefore, as school boards look at ways to retain principals, not only should they review and consider compensation but they must also look at ways of providing incentives that will demonstrate a genuine desire on the part of the board to keep eligible and effective administrators.

Salary

General studies of the impact of salary on employee job satisfaction do not support the importance of salary in attracting and retaining personnel (Nettles, Perna, Patterson, Brandburn, & Zimbler, 2000). Contrary to these results for workers generally, studies of factors that serve to attract and retain school principals do indeed include salary levels. A Colorado study of school superintendents identified low salary as a primary reason that more individuals were not seeking the principalship (K. Whitaker, 2001). However there are several studies that identify salary as the key factor in principal retention (Hertling, 2001; Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). A recent report by the Association of California School Administrators (2001) reported the biggest hurdle for recruiting principals was indeed salary.

In the State of Maryland, principals are paid at the minimum entry point what the highest paid 12-month teacher in that school system would be compensated plus an additional 10% (Andersen, 2000). Principals are offered and receive better health and life insurance plans. Every principal is assigned an assistant principal regardless of the size of
the school. In addition, the Maryland State Department of Education and local school
districts pay for any fees or dues for professional organizations, for any national or state
conferences, and for any other professional development that raises the principalship to a
professional level.

Mentoring

Principals must teach their “craft” and support the superstars who will make
outstanding principals. Every effective, practicing principal should identify, encourage,
and nurture at least five aspiring principals before he or she retires or leaves the
principalship. Everything in an effective mentoring program for principals must be
focused on ensuring learning for both the mentee and the mentor and ultimately the
students (Young, Sheets, & Kesner, 2003, p. x).

Mentoring is a useful strategy in the ongoing professional development of both
novice and veteran principals (NAESP, 2001). School districts acknowledge that a
principal no matter how new or senior in the field must appreciate the value of and the
need for mentoring within the principalship profession. They also recognize the
significance of principals learning valuable lessons from other leaders. Therefore, many
school districts are looking at developing mentoring networks to recruit, retain, and
support school leaders (Barth, 1990, 1999; Daresh, 1997, 2001; Erlandson, Stark, &

According to mentoring expert John Daresh (2001), mentoring for school leaders
is meant to be at least one weapon in an arsenal of activities that could assist people who
take on the challenges of trying to make a difference in schools. Effective mentoring
must be understood as a process that is much more sophisticated than simple sharing craft
knowledge when called upon by organizational newcomers (Weingartner, 2009). It must be seen as a proactive instructional process in which a learning contract is established between the mentor and protégé (Daresh, 2001).

A mentoring network of principals as well as a framework of continuous support throughout the career of the principal is essential (Zachary, 2000). Those identified to be future leaders of schools need opportunities to engage in leadership activities that include planning, developing, directing, and implementing school programs and educational change that will make a positive difference in the campus community (Lindley, 2003; Zellner, Jinkins, et al., 2002).

Research suggests that the benefits of mentoring programs for mentor, protégés, and districts include (a) mentors report greater overall satisfaction, (b) for the protégé, the benefits include increased confidence about their professional competence, the ability to see theory translated into practice, the creation of a collegial support system, and a sense of belonging, and (c) school districts report higher motivation levels and job satisfaction among staff members and increased productivity, and an attitude of lifelong learning among administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1993; Lovely, 2004b; Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995; Roche, 1979). According to Daresh (2001), mentees learn more about their professional lives and gain more insight into their personal needs, visions, and values (from mentoring) than through any other kind of experience. As such, many school districts are implementing mentoring programs within their school communities to retain their principals.
Stress

The review of the literature reveals that the shortage of school leaders directly correlates with the complexities associated with the principalship. For example, the demanding workloads, long work days, inadequate salaries, lack of respect for the principalship, and the demands associated with increased accountability are contributors to the high levels of stress and burnout (Cushing et al., 2003; d’Arbon et al., 2002; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; B. G. Malone & Caddell, 2000; Norton, 2003; K. Whitaker, 2001; T. Whitaker, 2003). Ripley (1997) emphasizes the stresses of the principalship as follows:

Principals today are pulled in different directions and some are breaking under the stress. They are pressured to do this by one group, to do that by another, they must deal with parents who want one thing while the staff wants another. Principals must deal with tensions each day that lead to stress. (p. 55)

Stress is clinically defined as the “sum of the biological reactions to any adverse stimulus, mental or emotional, internal or external, that tends to disturb the organism’s balance” (Queen & Queen, 2005). Burnout is clinically defined “as the state of chronic stress; physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from the inability to cope effectively with the daily stresses of leadership over an extended period of time” (p. 7). Carr (1994) defined stress as that which puts pressure or strain on an individual which begins from a physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual state. Burnout, on the other hand, is identified with fatigue and discontentment (Friedman, 1995). The symptoms associated with stress and burnout include anxiety, irritability, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, ulcers, and illness (Friedman, 1995; Gates & Gmelch, 1998; Holt & Turner, n.d.; Park, 1997; Queen & Queen, 2005).
Several studies have been conducted on stress and burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1981) used a scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), to measure burnout. They found that burnout can be described and measured in three dimensions: emotional, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The measurement scale used in the study proved to be highly reliable and valid for measuring burnout.

Gates and Gmelch (1998) studied personal, professional, and organizational characteristics that contribute to administrator burnout using the Administrative Stress Index. The study indicated that there are four sources of stress: role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress. Thus, the study described burnout as multidimensional.

Allison (1997) studied principals with high and low levels of stress to determine common coping strategies and to explore the relationship between coping strategies and stress scores by adding to the understanding of how principals cope with stress. The study found that principals try to alleviate stress by using a variety of coping skills. The most common strategies that the principals used to cope with stress included a positive attitude, keeping a realistic perspective, having a physical health regimen, and engaging in activities that stimulate intellectual, social, and spiritual growth.

Reflection

A key component used in the mentoring and coaching of school principals is reflection time. Research suggests that this strategy is essential for the retention of the principals. T. Fenwick (2008) indicated that “all preparation experiences and programs should emphasize formal reflection, in strategies used for collaborating with teachers (particularly coaching teachers towards instructional improvement), and substantive time
to practice the variety of decision making and leadership skills associated with the principalship” (p. 18). Reflection would assist in assessing the practices used and associated with the principalship.

In conclusion, the problems associated with retaining school principals requires new strategies on the part of school districts as well as extended efforts to educate entire school communities about the importance of principal retention. While school districts examine the value of retaining their principals, the shortage continues. Thus, until the issue of principal retention is seen as imperative to the role of the principal, the principal shortage issue will remain unsolved.

**Leadership Theories**

The topic of leadership has been studied extensively since the 20th century. Throughout this time, both researchers and practitioners have sought to define and analyze leadership. Lunenburg, Ornstein, and Zhou (2003) claim that today there are almost as many different definitions of effective leadership as there are researchers who have studied the concept. In fact, more than 3,000 empirical investigations have examined leadership (Bass, 1997; Bass & Bass, 2008).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) reviewed theoretical perspectives dealing with leadership in educational administration over a 10-year period, and their findings suggest six major categories of leadership theory dominate contemporary writing about school leadership: (a) instructional leadership, (b) transformational leadership, (c) moral leadership, (d) participative leadership, (e) contingency leadership, and (f) managerial leadership. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections.
However, since this study focused exclusively on the lived experiences of Adventist school principals in North America who stay longer than the typical 2.5 to 4.0 years in educational administration, it is important to include the concept of spiritual leadership. Thus, in keeping with the theoretical underpinnings for this work, spiritual leadership was added to the theoretical perspective of this study. In addition, resiliency theory is another theoretical perspective in which this study was framed. By examining the issue of principal retention from the theoretical frameworks identified above, we will become more aware of the complexities and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences described by the participants in the study.

**Spiritual Leadership Theory**

Spiritual leadership theory comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual well-being through calling and membership and, ultimately, become more organizationally committed and productive (Fry, 2003). The theory espouses that the leader has a deep spiritual conviction about their calling. This sense of calling stirs the leader to create a vision for the organization that establishes a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love. Thus, the people within the organization develop a sense of membership, whereby they feel understood, appreciated, genuinely cared for, and a strong value for both self and others (Fry, 2003).

A spiritually rooted leader is equipped to face uncertainties and engage in the challenges that face school administrators (Soder, 2002). Klenke (2003) noted that a spiritual leader will bring purpose to the workplace, motivating others to see beyond immediate gratification and focus on contributing to the greater good of the school.
community. This attitude within the school tends to promote academic achievement and successful students.

A spiritual leader also creates a sense of community within the workplace that motivates people to live by a higher moral standard. Thompson (2005) explained that spirituality allows leaders to stabilize an organization when chaos and confusion seek to hinder advancement and lower hopes. He further emphasized that spiritual leaders can develop these characteristics within themselves through intentional practice and persistence. In essence, a person must make a conscientious choice to develop attributes of spirituality by setting time aside and by making individual sacrifices to nurture growth of a spiritual nature.

Instructional Leadership

The U.S. Department of Education’s Policy Forum on Educational Leadership (National Center on Education and the Economy, 1999) found that the number one characteristic of an effective leader is the ability to provide instructional leadership. The Forum noted instructional leadership meant different things for principals and took different forms in various districts; however, it was agreed “that all effective leaders provided teachers with informed feedback, guidance, support, and professional development that helped them teach better” (pp. 4-5).

The description of instructional leadership that has been used widely through the years is that of Smith and Andrews (1989). They identify the four roles of an instructional leader as (a) resource provider, (b) instructional resource, (c) communicator, and (d) visible presence. As a resource provider, the principal ensures that teachers have the materials, facilities, and budget needed to adequately perform their duties (Kohm &
Nance, 2007). As an instructional resource, the principal actively supports day-to-day instructional activities and programs by modeling desired behaviors, participating in in-service training, and consistently giving priority to instructional concerns. As a communicator, the principal has clear goals for the school and articulates those goals to faculty and staff. As a visible presence the principal engages in frequent classroom observations and is highly accessible to faculty and staff (Glickman, 2009).

Transformational Leadership

In its simplest term, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms individuals. In other words, transformational leadership is to get people to want to change, to improve, and to be led. It involves assessing the motives of the colleagues, satisfying their needs, and valuing them (Northouse, 2001). Therefore, a transformational leader is one who inspires one’s team and encourages them to excel in all areas. As such, there is buy-in and ownership in the process of growth by all team members.

Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engages with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on a higher order of intrinsic needs. This results in followers identifying with the needs of the leader (Burns, 1978). The four constructs of transformational leaders are:

1. Idealized influence (charisma): describes leaders who are exemplary role models for their associates. Leaders with idealized influence can be trusted and respected by their associates to make good decisions for the organizations.
2. Inspirational motivation: describes leaders who can articulate a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task at hand.

3. Intellectual stimulation: describes leaders who encourage innovation and creativity through challenging the normal beliefs or views of a group. They are leaders with intellectual stimulation who stimulate and encourage creativity in their followers.

4. Individualized consideration: describes leaders who can act as a mentor or coach to the follower and listen to the follower’s concerns and needs. Leaders with individualized consideration encompass the need to respect and celebrate the individual contribution that each follower can make to the team.

Building on the work of Burns (1978), Bass (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Stogdill, 1990), and Bass and Avolio (1994, see also Avolio & Bass, 1995), Kenneth Leithwood (1994) developed a transformational model for school leadership. He argued that the four I’s of transformational leadership previously identified were necessary skills for school principals to practice if they were to meet the increasing challenges of the 21st-century leader.

The four I’s of transformational leadership for school leaders included:
(a) individual consideration, in which the school leader attends to the needs of and provides personal attention to the individual staff members and particularly those whom seem left out, (b) intellectual stimulation, in which the leader helps staff members think of old problems in new ways, (c) inspirational motivation whereby through powerful and dynamic presence, the school administrator communicates high expectations for students
and teachers alike, and (d) idealized influence in which the principal uses personal accomplishments and demonstrated character as an effective principal to provide a model for the behaviors of teachers.

Moral Leadership

Coppola (1998) describes people who espouse moral leadership theory as leaders who share their spiritual and theistic world views, practice higher moral reasoning, inspire others to act with a vision, covenant to intentionally build community, and exercise a commitment to social justice. Moral leadership theory has been studied by a number of researchers (Etzioni, 1988, 1993; T. B. Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1991, 1992, 1996). Moral leadership is grounded in cultural norms and values and is central to Sergiovanni’s (1996) theory of school leadership.

Sergiovanni (1992) argued that schools are civil associations, and differ fundamentally from enterprise associations like corporations. He believes that what is suitable for corporations may not be appropriate for schools. Sergiovanni contended that a higher level of leadership authority is to be found in the professional and moral domains within the school system different from corporations. He noted that leaders are by nature morally responsive and are capable of responding to duties and obligations that stand above their own self-interest.

Several researchers’ proffered that schools have a moral obligation in their responsibility for the education of the students (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; W. Greenfield, 1995). A moral obligation makes moral connections that stem from the duties of the principals and are shared with the students, teachers, parents. The students accept responsibility and demonstrate it in the way they feel toward others and toward
their work. These obligations result from common commitments to their shared values and beliefs as a school system (Sergiovanni, 1998).

According to Wong (1998), moral leadership focuses quite directly on articulating and upholding the core values that are important to the school. Leadership is demonstrated through a focus on the core values and behavioral norms of the school community rather than on the rules, regulations, and policies. He emphasizes that moral leaders can potentially create a stronger impact on the life of teachers, students, and the school community. Wong believes that moral leadership has the potential to be both a motivating and stabilizing factor in sustaining the performance of school systems.

Participative Leadership

A school’s effectiveness is proportional to the extent to which school leaders enable teachers to participate in all aspects of the school’s functioning including school policy decision making, reviewing and sharing a coherent sense of direction, and acknowledging the wider school community (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002). Input refers to the extent in which the school administrator involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, 2005). It is associated with transformational leadership, TQM, and instructional leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

DePree (1989) defined participative leadership theory as everyone having the right and the duty to influence decision making and to understand the results. Participative leadership guarantees that decisions will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning. Participative management is not democratic. De Pree notes further that the
effective leader will recognize that having a say differs from having a vote for all colleagues.

Contingency Theory

In the contingency theory of leadership, the success of the leader is a function of various factors in the form of subordinate, task, and/or group variables. The effectiveness of a given pattern of leader behavior is contingent upon the demands imposed by the situation. Contingency theory focuses on using different styles of leadership appropriate to the needs created by different organizational situations. Fiedler and Garcia (1987) asserts that group performance is contingent on the leader's psychological orientation and on three contextual variables: group atmosphere, task structure, and leader’s power position.

This theory explains that group performance is a result of the interaction of two factors: contingency and situational. These factors are known as leadership style and situational favorableness. In Fiedler and Garcia’s (1987) model, leadership effectiveness is the result of interaction between the style of the leader and the characteristics of the environment in which the leader works. In an organization, contingency theory works on the premise that (a) there is no universal way or one best way to manage an organization, (b) the design of an organization and its subsystems must fit with the environment, (c) effective organizations not only have a proper ‘fit’ with the environment, but also between its subsystems, and (d) the needs of an organization are better satisfied when they are properly designed and the management style is appropriate both to the tasks undertaken and the nature of the work group.
Managerial Leadership

Capitalizing on the work of Mintzberg (1973) on managerial leadership, Yukl (1982) studied managerial leadership as it relates to school principals. Managerial leadership typically involves a large variety of activities during the work day, and these activities are usually characterized by brevity and fragmentation. Managerial leaders show a strong preference towards verbal communication and they spend a significant amount of time interacting with people outside of the immediate work environment such as superiors, peers, clients, and suppliers. These managers gravitate toward the active aspects of their jobs, and they prefer activities that are non-routine but well defined.

The focus of interest for managerial leaders is on current information rather than previous information, on specific issues rather than broad ones. According to Yukl (1982), managerial leaders are seldom found to engage in general planning or abstract discussion. He further noted that managerial effectiveness can be improved if less time is spent on superficial activities and more time is devoted to important but neglected functions such as planning and organizing, subordinate development, and team building.

Ten managerial leadership roles were identified by Yukl (1982) and are applicable to any manager or school administrator. The relative importance of the role varies from one manager to another. The managerial leadership role is largely predetermined by the nature of the position of the leader. Of the 10 managerial traits associated with the managerial leader, three deal with interpersonal behavior: (a) figurehead, (b) leader, and (c) liaison; three deal with information processing: (d) monitor, (e) disseminator, and (f) spokesman; the remaining four roles deal with
decision making: (g) entrepreneur, (h) disturbance handler, (i) resource allocator, and
(j) negotiator.

Summary

This section reviewed the literature on leadership theories that apply to school administrators. In particular, focus was given to the theories of spiritual leadership, instructional leadership, transformational and transactional leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, contingency theory and managerial leadership. These theories were explored and reflected upon in determining the leadership styles of the participants in this study. In the next section, I discuss resilience theory as a perspective of the conceptual framework for this study.

Resilience Theory

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune and is essential for the effective principal. The literature demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the stress of the principal’s job and their ability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cash, 2001; Copland, 2001, R. R. Greene, 2002; L. Greene, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Patterson et al., 2002).

Survival, recovery, and thriving are concepts associated with resilience and describe the stage at which a person may be at during or after facing adversity. The concept of “thriving” refers to a person’s ability to go beyond their original level of functioning and to grow and function despite repeated exposure to stressful experiences (O’Leary, 1998). The literature suggests a number of variables that characterize resilience
and thriving. These variables include positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, and a high tolerance of uncertainty (Bonanno, 2004; Carver, 1998; Masten, 2005; O’Leary, 1998; Patterson et al., 2002; Ungar, 2004). As such, resilience and thriving are important concepts to explore in understanding and alleviating the issues pertaining to the retention of school principals.

The anomaly in the crisis associated with principal retention is that at a time when American schools need competent principals the most, the constant exposure to adversity and the prolong contact with stress prevents principals from surviving to a level of thriving (Nishikawa, 2006). Thus, if the very nature of the job is such that it tends to deplete the resilient capabilities of the leaders, there is a tremendous need to also investigate the organizational characteristics that principals perceive as supportive to their leadership.

**Construct of Resilience**

Resilience is defined as the act of rebounding or springing back after being stretched or pressed or recovering strength, spirit, and good humor. The term originates from the Latin word *resiliens*, which refers to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance (R. R. Greene et al., 2002). In several studies on resilience, researchers have largely avoided the definitional ambiguity in the resilience construct. Theorists from many fields have contributed to an expanding base on knowledge on the subject, yet the definition of resiliency continues to vary slightly among the experts (Nishikawa, 2006).
Masten (2005) defines resilience as a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation of development. Rutter (1987), a psychiatric risk researcher, states that the term is used to describe the positive tone of individual differences in people’s response to stress and adversity. Janas (2002) identified the term as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune. Perry (2002) defines resilience as the capacity to face stressors without significant negative disruption in functioning. In developmental literature, resilience is typically discussed in terms of protective psychological risk factors that foster the development of positive outcomes and healthy personality characteristics (Bonanno, 2004). However, despite the large body of research on resilience, there remains no full-blown theory on resilience. As such, the term is used interchangeably with positive coping, adaptation, and persistence (R. R. Greene et al., 2002). In essence, resilience researchers agree that resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to risk. While some individuals succumb to stress and adversity, others survive and respond well to the challenges associated with life’s hazards (Rutter, 1987).

History of Resilience Studies

Resiliency theory has been researched across many disciplines. From studies on human behavior to social science studies, resiliency theory has been defined and recognized in a number of fields. For example, resiliency was defined in the area of psychology as the ability to bounce back and to withstand hardship by repairing oneself (Higgins, 1994; Wolin & Wolin, 1993); in the field of psychiatry as the psychological and biological strengths humans require to master change successfully (Flach, 1988); and in the field of developmental psychopathology as the ability to cope with challenges and
threats while maintaining an internal and integrated sense of self (Garmezy & Masten, 1986).

In the field of human development, resiliency was defined as the ability to withstand or successfully cope with adversity (Werner & Smith, 2001); in the field of change management as the ability to demonstrate both strength and flexibility during the change process, while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior (Conner, 1993).

Resiliency theory was defined in the field of medicine as the ability to recognize pain, acknowledge its purpose, tolerate it for a while, until things begin to normalize (Flach, 1988; O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995); in the field of epidemiology as the ability to survive stress and to rise above disadvantage (Rutter, 1979); and in the field of nursing as the ability to regenerate power to respond to the internal or external environment for survival, growth, or development (Jones, 1991).

In the social sciences resiliency has been defined as the ability to bounce back from negative life experiences and become stronger while overcoming them (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Most recently, it has been used to conceptualize studies in the field of educational administration. Geocaris (2004) applied resilience theory to her study by identifying concrete ways for principals to thrive. Issacs (2003) applied resilience theory to determine the relationship among the dimensions of resilience of high-school principals toward strengthening the leadership abilities of principals.

Goldstein (2003) studied perceptions of school principals pertaining to their efficacy and resiliency. Nishikawa (2006) studied the internal and external variables utilized by thriving elementary principals in leadership and identified and described the organizational characteristics that support thriving as perceived by elementary-school
principals. Finally, Schaid (2005) studied psychological resiliency as it applied to the impact and struggle on spiritually centered educational leaders.

Models of Resilience

Several researchers have used different terms for the three resilience models that essentially describe the same mechanisms for the impact of stress on quality adaptation. They include compensatory model, the challenge model, and the protective factor of immunity versus vulnerability model (O’Leary, 1998).

The compensatory factor is a variable that neutralizes exposures to risk. Risk factors and compensatory factors independently contribute to the prediction outcome. In Werner and Smith’s (2001) study, four central characteristics emerged for the young adults labeled resilient: an active approach toward problem solving, a tendency to perceive experiences in a positive light even when they were suffering, the ability to gain other people’s positive attention, and a strong reliance on faith to maintain a positive life view. The compensatory factors identified in Kumpher and Hopkins’s (1993, as cited in Ungar, 2004) study included: optimism, empathy, insight, intellectual competence, self-esteem, direction or mission, and determination and perseverance.

The challenge model suggests that a risk factor, provided it is not too extreme, can actually enhance a person’s adaptation. In essence, the experience prepares the individual for the next challenge (O’Leary, 1998).

In the protective factor model of resilience, there is an interaction between protection and risk factors, which reduces the probability of a negative outcome and moderates the effect of exposure to risk (O’Leary, 1998). This model of resilience is derived from developmental literature and systems theory. It indicates that these
protective factors foster positive outcomes and healthy personality characteristics despite unfavorable or aversive life circumstances (Bonanno, 2004; Ungar, 2004). The protective factors identified included: emotional management skills, intrapersonal reflective skills, academic and job skills, ability to restore self-esteem, planning skills, life skills, and problem-solving skills (Ungar, 2004).

Thriving

Recent studies in resilience have started to look at the concept of “thriving.” Thriving emerged from the scientific study of the vulnerability and coping paradigms. Thriving is grounded on an individual’s positive transformation resulting from the experience of adversity (Nishikawa, 2006). Although thriving has received attention in the fields of social and behavioral psychology primarily in the last decade, the belief that “people are capable of transmuting traumatic experiences to gain wisdom, personal growth, positive personality changes, or more meaningful and productive lives has been a central theme in centuries of literature, poetry, and personal narratives” (Saakvitne, Tennen, & Affleck, 1998, p. 281). As such, the study of thriving and its application to the field of science, psychology, and medicine can “enhance our understanding of health and provide important opportunities for prevention and intervention” (Ickovics & Park, 1998, p. 237).

The current literature on thriving suggests that people will respond to thriving in three different ways when confronted by a challenge: they may (a) survive the incident, (b) recover from the incident, and (c) thrive as a result of enduring the hardship (Nishikawa, 2006). As a result, survivors continue to function although it may be in an impaired state. Recovery indicates a return to baseline where individuals return to their
previous level of functioning. However, thriving results in a transformation that includes a cognitive shift in response to a challenge. The person may refocus priorities and have a stronger sense of self. Usually thriving results from a profound event or crisis where a person’s sense of purpose, meaning, or identity is called into question (O’Leary, 1998). Additional transformations include the reconstruction of meaning; the renewal of faith, trust, hope, and connection; and redefinition of self, self in relation, and sense of community. After the crisis or trauma, adaptation occurs stemming from our attempts to survive and heal in the midst of suffering (Saakvitne et al., 1998).

The definition of thriving varies slightly among different researchers. Ickovics and Park (1998) defined thriving as the effective mobilization of individual and social resources in response to risk or threat, leading to positive mental or physical outcomes and/or positive social outcomes. Carver (1998) defined thriving as a decreased reactivity to subsequent stressors, faster recovery from subsequent stressors, or a consistently higher level of functioning. He further suggests that psychological thriving may reflect gains in skills, knowledge, confidence, or a sense of security in personal relationships. While the definitions stated above vary by researchers, it is apparent that thriving is characterized by a growth experience as a result of adversity, and as such, the individual demonstrates strengthened resilience after enduring hardship.

Theories associated with thriving include Constructivist Self-Determination Theory (Saakvitne et al., 1998). This theory emphasizes the developmental perspective that has been used to study both damage and growth after a trauma crisis to better understand thriving. CSDT integrates psychoanalytic theory with constructivist thinking, social learning theory, and cognitive development theory and emphasizes the individual’s
developmental, social, and cultural contexts (Saakvitne et al., 1998). The theory suggests that the uniqueness of an individual’s response to trauma is determined by the particular meaning ascribed to the trauma: the individual’s experience of self, age, and developmental stage; biological and psychological resources; interpersonal experiences and expectations; and his or her social, cultural, and economic background (Nishikawa, 2006).

In CSDT theory, five areas of self are affected by traumatic events including one’s frame of reference, self-capacities, ego resources, central psychological needs, and perceptual and memory system. “CSDT understands the individual’s adaptation to trauma as interaction between his or her personality and personal history and the traumatic event and its context. . . . The meaning of the traumatic event is in the survivor’s experience of it; each individual is affected in his or her own unique way” (Saakvitne et al., 1998). Emerging from trauma theory, CSDT is important because it can be applied to research on thriving in the following manner: (a) it integrates nomothetic and idiographic inquiry focusing on process and context, (b) it allows descriptive inquiry as well as moderator analysis, (c) it allows complexity by offering multivariate hypothesis, (d) it assesses both the automatic and intentional aspects of thriving, and (e) it allows for both gradual and abrupt steps toward thriving (Saakvitne et al., 1998). Because the CSDT is grounded in adaptation, it can provide a theoretical framework for understanding and researching the concept of thriving, as well as help guide efforts toward prevention and intervention.

As indicated above, thriving has prompted the field to explore perspectives in the hope of seeking an answer to why some people thrive following an adversity and others do not. In addition, Patterson and Kelleher (2005) state that thriving is largely determined
by a person’s resilience capacity. They explain that three fuel sources—personal values, personal efficacy, and personal energy—account for resilience capacity and help determine an individual’s response to adversity. In essence, as an individual grows from adversity, his resilience capacity is expanded through strengthening these three fuel sources which, in turn, provide more fuel for the individual to face the future. Thus, one becomes more competent and prepared to handle the next crisis.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) outline a resilience cycle that is commonly used by people facing adversity. The researchers suggest that even the most resilient individuals experience a rollercoaster effect as they work through the traumatic experience. A four-cycle phase to resilience is defined and includes a deteriorating phase, an adapting phase, a recovery phase, and a growing phase. Resilience capacity, for the most part, largely determines where in the cycle the individual finds himself. Thus, if a person is unable to adapt to their challenging experience, they will most likely sink into a dysfunctional level and will be unable to cope or survive the adversity. On the other hand, some may adapt but not fully recover, thus reaching survival level. Then there will be those who are able to reach the recovery phase and will return to the status quo. However, a small minority of individuals, those who are thrivers, will reach the growing phase and achieve a strengthened resilience level (Nishikawa, 2006). This growing phase is referred to as thriving. Pearsall (2003) emphasizes:

We thrive when we surpass and transcend our prior level of functioning, regain and even accelerate our upward psychological trajectory, and seem to have mentally and emotionally benefited from our suffering. Because of our crisis, we seem to begin to flourish. (p. 17)

Pearsall (2003) suggests that thrivers are rational optimists who know when to fight or flow with the adversity and when to let go and move forward.
In the field of educational administration, the recent attention to the concept of thriving focuses away from pathology and instead explores health and well-being. Thus understanding the characteristics that distinguish the individuals who thrive following a trauma or stressor from those who will help shape the interventions that school organizations create to develop thriving leadership. In addition, it brings attention to the role of adaptation in enduring and overcoming crisis (Nishikawa, 2006). Thriving can provide a useful framework for the integration of diverse concepts (coping, self-efficacy, and support used to explain adaptive response to challenge; Ickovics & Park, 1998). For example, the researchers emphasize:

Understanding the process of thriving can have important implications for prevention and intervention for those who face the challenges associated with illness, injury, upheaval, and personal or social adversity of many kinds. We can develop such interventions with an eye toward enhancing health and well-being, rather than simply promoting a return to baseline of the status quo. (p. 239)

The concept of thriving has significant promise in many fields of study. Understanding the variables that have the greatest influence on a person’s ability to thrive is especially important to understand.

Hardiness

Another term frequently found in the literature on resilience and thriving is the concept of “hardiness.” While synonymous with thriving, its definition also embraces an individual’s ability to make the best of difficult circumstances. There are three dimensions to hardiness as defined by Bonanno (2004): (a) being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life, (b) the belief that one can influence one’s surrounding and the outcome of events, and (c) the belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences. A definition which originated from existential personality
theory states that the construct of hardiness refers to a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful life events (Florian, Mikulincer, & Taubman, 1995; Maddi, 2005).

Theorists and researchers on personalities have paid a significant amount of attention to hardiness as an inner resource that may moderate the effects of stress on physical and mental health (Florian et al., 1995). Because hardiness is a personality trait that helps to buffer exposure to extreme stress, these individuals are able to appraise potentially stressful situations as less threatening and minimize distress. They are also more confident and better able to use coping and social support (Bonanno, 2004). The concept is that hardiness alters two appraisal components: (a) it reduces the appraisal of threat, and (b) it increases the expectations of coping effectively (Florian et al., 1995). Researchers Maddi and Kobasa (1984) identified hardiness as having a sense of control over one’s environment. In one of their studies, they analyzed the incidence of life stresses among hundreds of executives. Undoubtedly, hardiness emerged for those who stayed healthy in the face of adversity and felt that they had the stick-to-itiveness to exert a tangible impact on their surroundings (Segal, 1986).

Throughout the literature on resilience, the concept of hardiness emerges. While there are similarities pertaining to thriving and hardiness as it relates to resiliency theory, the use of the terms was reviewed separately to gain a fuller understanding of how they apply to the participants in this study.

Variables of Resilience

The literature addressing the concepts of resilience and thriving does so in the context of internal and external factors that contribute to an individual’s ability to thrive.
Carver (1998) refers to both internal and external components to thriving in the following manner:

To get through the experience successfully, they were forced to learn something they hadn’t had to know how to do before. Sometimes the skills bear on the external world . . . sometimes on handling internal matters, as in affect management. The skills may be actual skill or an enhanced knowledge base: knowledge of the nature of the domain, or knowledge of resources available to people confronting such problems. Whatever skills or knowledge the person acquires may be applicable to future problems. When people master a new skill, they are more fit to deal with an unpredictable world. When people develop new pathways to get from here to there, they are more flexible in confronting the unknown. These flexibilities build on each other. (p. 251)

Internal Variables

Internal variables in resiliency are defined as self-factors, personality factors, or individual resources. These factors appear to have significant impact on how a person interprets and deals with the crisis at hand. As such, these factors may include hardiness, coping ability, a sense of coherence, the use of personal resources, cognitive resources, threat appraisal, and self-efficacy (O’Leary, 1998). Other internal factors include temperaments such as modes of thought, response, action, positive self-esteem, a sense of being effectual, and being in control of one’s surroundings (Beardslee, 1989). In addition, self-factors such as optimism, empathy, insight, intellectual competence, direction or mission, and determination and perseverance are characteristics reported also to be present in thriving individuals (Ungar, 2004).

There have been several recent studies that discuss internal variables associated with resiliency and thriving. These studies continue to concur with the importance of a relatively small set of global factors associated with resilience: for example, the connections to competent and caring adults in the family and community, cognitive and
self-regulation skills, positive views of self, and the motivation to be effective in the environment (Masten, 2001, 2005; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Wyman, Sandler, Wolchik, & Nelson, 2000). Other variables reported include are self-enhancement; repressors of emotional dissociation; positive emotion and laughter; personal energy encompassing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy; core personal and professional values; and personal efficacy (Bonanno, 2004; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

However, the most consistent finding in the literature is that people possessing higher levels of the personality characteristics of optimism and hope are those who expect positive outcomes and who believe they have the ability to attain their goals and are more likely to report experiencing growth in response to stress (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Curbow, 1996; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

External Variables of Resilience

In the literature, researchers have defined external variables that have influence over a person’s ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity. Of the external variables defined, the most compelling and most consistent finding indicates the centrality of relationships as a critical component to resilience (Beardslee, 1989; Masten, 2005; O’Leary, 1998) and social support (Bonanno, 2004; Carver, 1998; Park, 1998; Nishikawa, 2006; Saakvitne et al., 1998). Carver (1998) states,

A person experiencing a traumatic event finds that help from others is readily available; that the significant others in his or her life can be counted on and that the result can be a positive change in the sense of the relationships involved. The person may experience a strengthening of the sense of security in those relationships. . . . Perhaps, then, the person who experiences ready availability during a period of adversity acquires an enhanced sense of security in relationships. In principle, this would permit the person’s future exploration to operate a more secure base. (p. 252)
According to studies on external variables associated with resilience, the literature points to the importance of relationships as a significant factor for the individual facing adversity. Whether the support comes from a relative or a caring individual, it is clear that social resources are a critical factor in resilience (O’Leary, 1998). At the core of a person’s ability to sustain himself is his intimacy with others, and sometimes these relationships serve as the major catalyst of the transformation in a one’s life and within oneself. Beardslee (1989) indicated that individuals who have handled adversarial experiences the best were those who had the presence of a close confiding relationship during trying times and emphasized the significance of relationships in their ability to be resilient. Furthermore, Masten (2005) studied external variables associated with resilience and found a similar small set of global factors associated with resilience, which included connections to competent caring adults in the family and the community. In his study, Rutter (1987) identified the availability of external support systems that encourage and reinforce coping skills for individuals as one of the three broad sets of variables associated with resilience.

Throughout the literature, the most significant external variable reported in contributing to an individual’s ability to handle and recuperate from a devastating experience is a strong social support network.

Career Resilience

Studies on the resilience of individuals have extended to career and organizational resilience. According to Patterson et al. (2002), organizations are characterized as resilient if they are (a) just getting by, (b) getting back to status quo after experiencing adversity, or (c) getting ahead through consistent improvement or high performance. This
thought aligns with the concept of survival, recovery, and thriving mentioned earlier. Therefore, the term “career resilience” refers to a person’s resistance to career disruption in a less than optimal environment, and the ability to handle poor working conditions while one is aware that these conditions exist (O’Leary, 1998).

The career resiliency of a leader is critical for their survival, adaptation, and success. The challenge that leaders face today is accepting the responsibility for doing whatever it takes to move ahead in the face of adversity. In essence, the resilient leader acts with courage about convictions in spite of the risks (Patterson & Patterson, 2001).

While resiliency is demonstrated in various careers, for the sake of this study, I reviewed the literature on the resiliency of school administrators. There are seven strengths identified with resilient school leaders. They (a) stay focused, (b) maintain high expectations, (c) create a climate of caring and support, (d) take charge, (e) remain flexible, (f) are positive in spite of adversity, and (g) create meaningful participation and shared responsibility (Patterson et al., 2002).

Without resilient leadership the travesty of the leader is the inability to deal with the multiple and changing dynamics of the organization, which eventually leads to burnout. The complexities associated with the principal’s job lead many leaders to complain that they experience high levels of stress due to the day-to-day situations of roles; time constraints; work overload; unrelenting pace; fragmentation and brevity of work; continual shifting gears; interpersonal conflicts; isolation; and organizational structures (Brock & Grady, 2002).
Organizational Resilience

Studies on organizational resiliency indicate that an organization has the ability to create an environment that enhances career resiliency for their employees (Brock & Grady, 2002; Nishikawa, 2006). To achieve this goal, the organization would need to demonstrate the fortitude that clearly outlines the support for their workers. An organization committed to building resilient employees will reflect organizational strength and support, openness of organizational communication, organizational encouragement of individual contributions and personal growth, organizational openness to risk taking, and organizational encouragement of competitive situations among employees (O’Leary, 1998).

Resilient organizations structure and restructure themselves to attain a mission, support the optimal development of shared decision making, build trust, encourage openness, and are tireless in their efforts to support the growth of the employee and their competence level. In addition, resilient organizations display feedback behaviors, set goals, and have intelligence-gathering mechanisms (Nishikawa, 2006). They employ people who react quickly and efficiently to change as well as employees who perceive experiences constructively, ensure adequate external resources, expand decision-making boundaries, develop the ability to create solutions on the spot, and develop tolerance for uncertainty (R. R. Greene et al., 2002).

A key characteristic associated with an organization committed to the resiliency of its employees is whether or not the organization can fully support and contribute to their resiliency. One way in which this support has been demonstrated successfully by organizations is by developing the employee’s level of optimism about how the adversity
is interpreted and strengthening the employee’s perception about his future after the adversity. This level of support enables the employee to effectively negotiate the challenge. As a result, an individual’s level of optimism or pessimism serves as a filter for interpreting the adversity that strikes (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Several studies on optimism indicate that optimism can be learned and strengthened (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005; Reivich & Shatte, 2002; Seligman, 1991). Thus, this information implies that organizations have a valuable influence on building their employees’ resilience capacity while at the same time reinforcing the resilience of the organization.

Thus, more research is needed to support the efforts of organizations willing to commit to fostering the resiliency of both the employee and the organization. While very little research currently exists on the topic of organizational resiliency, the recent surge on “thriving” studies dictates a necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of how resilience can be fostered within organizations (Nishikawa, 2006). The overwhelming benefit for the organization that fosters resilience and thriving in its workplace is a more highly motivated work force (O’Leary, 1998). As a result, there is a mutually positive outcome for both the employees and the organization.

In sum, it is evident that the responsibilities associated with the principal’s job are quite daunting due to the complexities associated with the job. While some of the stresses associated with the principal’s job may motivate some to perform at their best, too much stress causes gifted administrators to burn out (Brock & Grady, 2002). It is for this reason that resilience skills are critical for educational leaders to survive, recover, and thrive. In the context of leadership resilience, protective factors that increase a principal’s chance of overcoming adversity must be considered. The literature clearly indicates the
significance of external support systems and the importance of supportive, confiding relationships that have commonly been found in resilient individuals (Beardslee, 1989; Janas, 2002; O’Leary, 1998; Perry, 2002). These relationships protect the individual against the effects of stressful occurrences and therefore should be given considerable attention by educational institutions seeking to retain school principals.

Because a key factor to building a leader’s capacity for resilience is to ensure a social network of support in times of need, the common practice of how we grow our principals should be reevaluated. Principals should be able to have access to trusted peers and colleagues, time to reflect and collaborate with professional peers and colleagues, and transformational development opportunities that demand less social isolation and more opportunities for partnerships (Nishikawa, 2006)—all essential aspects to recruiting and retaining resilient school principals.

**Seventh-day Adventist Education**

Because this study primarily addresses principal retention as it relates to Seventh-day Adventist principals in North America, this section will focus on Adventist education. The Seventh-day Adventist educational system in North America offers education to students from pre-school to the 12th grade. The elementary schools enroll students at various levels; while most end in the eighth grade, some schools extend to the ninth grade. Some schools start with pre-school, others with kindergarten, and others in the first grade. Some junior academies offer education up to the 10th grade. The secondary schools offer ninth-12th-grade education and are called academies and are classified either as boarding-schools or day academies. The boarding-schools are all coeducational, and many offer a work-study program. All of these schools—elementary,
junior academies, and senior academies—comprise the North American Division’s P-12 school system.

The Office of Education at the North American Division serves as the primary policymaking, coordinating, and oversight body for its P-12 school system. It oversees a common curriculum, basic graduation requirements, and professional certification for its employees; writes textbooks; recommends textbooks for the subjects taught; sets up employment qualifications, salaries and wages, and employee benefits and retirement; and establishes goals and essential core elements for the curriculum in Adventist P-12 schools in North America.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that each student is unique and of inestimable value and that the development of the whole person is important (Thayer, 2008). While servant leadership is not explicitly stated, the idea is suggested in statements such as “students are educated to accept service as a way of life, to be sensitive to the needs of the people in the home and society, and to become active members of the church” (“Ministry Description,” 2011, para. 3). While Adventist education utilizes current curricular research, including national and professional standards, which are incorporated in the curriculum, the distinctive characteristics of Adventist education point to the redemptive aim of true education that is to restore human beings into the image of their Maker (Plubell, 2011).

The North America Division of Seventh-day Adventists invests time, talents, skills, personnel, and financial resources on a yearly basis to implement best practices and strategies, cutting-edge curriculum, and innovations in making our educational system first rate. Throughout the academic school year, there is training of personnel;
curricula are reviewed, studied, and developed; and professional growth activities are provided for administrators.

Several local conferences have implemented policies that enable school principals to enroll in educational administration programs at Adventist universities and local colleges. Most of these initiatives are done with the goal of preparing and retaining effective school leaders. These attempts may seem effortless when one recognizes the number of schools within the Adventist school system that have difficulties staffing administrative positions and retaining their school principals.

In its landmark publication *Journey to Excellence—A Focus on Adventist Education in the 21st Century*, Dennis Plubell (2011) of the North American Division Office of Education states that Adventist education is to impart far more than academic knowledge. It should foster a balanced development of the whole person—physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually—as well as an organizational culture that encourages continual, planned improvements. The stated goals for curriculum in Adventist schools are acceptance of God, commitment to the church, interpersonal relationships, responsible citizenship, healthy balanced living, intellectual development, communication skills, personal management, aesthetic appreciation, and career and service (Plubell, 2011). These goals help to articulate the high expectations of what students should know and be able to do upon completing the prescribed course of study.

The first Adventist school in North America began in 1853. Martha Byington was the first teacher. The objectives of the home-school Adventist concept to education differed from regular education in that its objectives were centered on character building, with the Bible serving as the basis of the curriculum; great emphasis was placed on labor
skills and missionary work. There were 17 students enrolled in the first classroom (Reynolds, 1986, pp. 85-86). In contrast to the first Adventist school, recent statistics prepared by the Department of Education of the Adventist Church indicate that there are over 7,804 schools worldwide with nearly 1.6 million students. It consists of 5,899 elementary schools, 1,748 secondary schools, and 110 colleges and universities.

Enrollment of students within the Adventist world-wide educational system consists of 1,085,177 students in elementary schools, 457,934 students enrolled in secondary schools, and 122,641 enrolled in colleges and universities, for a total enrollment of 1,673,828 students (“Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics,” 2011). In addition, according the National Center for Education Statistics (Nettles et al., 2000) the Seventh-day Adventist educational system is the second largest private-school system in North America.

Summary

This review of the literature was divided into five major sections: (a) the principalship, (b) principal retention, (c) leadership theories associated with school leadership, (d) resilience theory, and (e) a historical perspective on Seventh-day Adventist education as it relates to the study of principal retention. Attention was given to the principalship with the goal of understanding all that is involved with being a quality school principal. The role, significance, responsibilities, and complexities associated with the principal’s job provided a rich background for understanding the problem of principal retention. In addition, this chapter reviewed possible reasons why principals are leaving, and support services identified in the literature to retain school principals.
The review of the literature served as the foundation of this study. By understanding issues relating to principal retention within various school systems of education in both private and public sectors, a platform was developed for understanding principal retention within the Seventh-day Adventist system of education in North America.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Adventist principals in North America who served in a single school building for 10 or more years.

Research Design

A qualitative research design utilizing a multiple-case, narrative inquiry approach was the most appropriate manner to examine the main research question: How do Adventist school principals describe the experiences that help them stay in a leadership role in the Adventist system of education in one location for 10 or more consecutive years? Specifically, qualitative research was the inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). The next section gives a rationale for using a qualitative design, a multiple-case approach, and narrative inquiry.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is derived from the word quality and is used in the social sciences as the form of research designated to understand human or social problems
based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words and by reporting
detailed views of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Arguably, researchers in the
social sciences contend there is no universal definition for qualitative research; terms
such as interpretive, naturalistic, constructivist, ethnographic, and field work are used to
designate the vast amount of approaches that researchers can use in a qualitative study
(Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). In fact, qualitative research methods were developed in
the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena
(Marshall, 2006). Therefore, qualitative research is an inductive approach, and its goal is
to gain a deeper understanding of a person’s or group’s experience.

According to Ross (1999), qualitative approaches to research are based upon a
“world view” that is holistic and has the following beliefs: (a) there is not a single reality,
(b) realities based upon perceptions are different for each person and change over time,
and (c) what we know has meaning only within a given situation or context.

The definition that best describes the design of this qualitative research study is
Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It
consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These
practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations,
including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos
to the self. (p. 3)

Thus, the intended purpose of this qualitative research design was to enter the world of
the Adventist school principal in North America who stays longer than the typical 2.5 –
4.0 years, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.
Case-Study Research

Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 12). Qualitative case-study research design is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or a social unit (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). The single phenomenon of this study is the Adventist principal who has stayed in administrative leadership in a single building longer than 10 years.

The decision to utilize a case-study research design stemmed from the fact that this design was one of the most precise methods of gaining insight, discovery, and interpretation to how Adventist school principals who stayed in administration for consecutive years could be understood. The aim was to uncover the interaction of various influences of why Adventist school principals remain in educational ministry.

Stake (1995) claims that knowledge learned from a case-study qualitative research design is different from other research designs in the following four ways: Case-study knowledge is (a) more concrete, (b) more contextual, (c) more developed by reader interpretation, and (d) based more on reference populations determined by the reader. An intended goal of this study was to obtain a more concrete and contextual understanding of why principals remain in administrative leadership for more than the typical 2.5 – 4.0 years within the Adventist system of education in North America.

Further, case-study research helps to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object (Sanders, 1981). The multiple-case-study research design provided the opportunity to
understand through thick description the experiences of principals who stay in one school longer than the average stay.

There is a conventional view that case-study research is not a reliable method of investigation in the social sciences because it cannot be linked to a hypothesis. Flyvbjerg (2006) examined five misunderstandings prevalent in case-study research. These included (a) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge, (b) one cannot generalize from a single case, thus the single case cannot contribute to scientific development, (c) case-study research is most useful for generating hypotheses while other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building, (d) case-study research contains a bias toward verification, and (e) specific case-study research is difficult to summarize.

In comparing both opposing and supporting views of case study research, I felt a case-study approach to inquiry was the best design in order to answer the research question. The cases provided the exploration of a more detailed description of the lived experiences of the principals. It helped provide a clearer understanding of why principals stay and describe their experiences to inform this study.

**Narrative Inquiry**

The ultimate aim of research as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is the study of human experience. They concur with the work of Phillip Dewey by defining narrative inquiry as an epistemological research stance, methodology, and research discourse capable of getting at the content of human lives. They further argue that narrative inquiry captures and investigates experiences as human beings live them in
time, in space, in person, and in relationship. As such, these experiences were shared in the form of stories.

Storytelling is a natural way of recounting experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, creating reasonable order out of experience. We create narrative descriptions about our experiences for ourselves and others, and we also develop narratives to make sense of the behavior of others (Zellermayer, 1997). According to Polkinghorne (1988), people without narratives do not exist. Thus life itself might be considered a narrative inside which we find a number of other stories.

Gudmundsdottir (2001) noted that narrative research is the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narrative experiences. Therefore, by describing their experiences as principals who remain in the Adventist system of education for consecutive years despite the complexities of the job, principals told the story of why they remained in the system.

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. Furthermore, the places in which they live and work, their classrooms, their schools, and their communities, are also in the midst when we researchers arrive. Their institutions and their communities, their landscapes in the broadest sense, are also in the midst of stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 63-64)

Self as the Research Instrument

As I reflect upon my 28 years of educational leadership as a Seventh-day Adventist school principal, I often ask myself why I stay. While there have been extreme highs and lows along the way professionally, there has never been a day that I wanted to be in another career. I recognize as a researcher that because of my lived experiences, I am able to tell my own story and to recognize that while the principal’s job is difficult, it
is so worthwhile. It is worthwhile because of my passion for ministry, my passion for the students, and my passion to make a difference in the lives of those God has entrusted to me to serve.

While I have served in only four schools throughout my tenure as principal, I have learned great lessons in each one. My first assignment was at the Jackson Heights Adventist School. A tremendous amount of confidence was placed upon me inspite of the fact that I had no administrative experience. Thus, with no formal administrative training or experience, I was appointed the principal of the school simply because I was devoted to my calling. With no role clarification or expectations stipulated, I soon learned how to do my job by the on-the-job training that I attained on survival mode.

It was during this first assignment that I also learned about mentoring. Because of my inexperience as a school leader, my superintendent invested a lot of time in me. As a young leader, he offered unyielding support and guidance during many challenging times. I remained in educational ministry inspite of the adversities that I encountered, and while there were many times I was tempted to walk away from the principalship, my superintendent’s nurturing and mentoring sustained me.

My second assignment as principal of the Waldwick SDA School in Waldwick, NJ, was probably the most gratifying assignment of my professional career because the entire school family was supportive and engaged in the mission of the school. Because of the support I received at this assignment, I learned about the balance needed in both my personal and professional life as an educator, wife, and mother. As a result, I learned about coping skills that helped me maintain balance in my life.
In my third assignment as principal at Garden State Academy in Tranquility, NJ, I suffered my greatest professional defeat. After 4 years of many personal and professional sacrifices, the school that I loved so much closed under my administration. Inspite of the many times I pleaded for the Lord’s intervention, on June 30, 2005, the school ceased operations. Yet this horrific experience helped me to become the resilient leader that I am today.

Rather than walking away from educational ministry altogether, I grasped upon God’s promises, the support of my family and friends, and my inner strength. I became a stronger leader as a result of the experience and was therefore asked to serve as principal of the Forest Lake Education Center in Longwood, FL—one of the largest elementary Adventist schools in the system.

FLEC has been an amazing experience! Our school board is relentless in their quest towards educational excellence and our student body is spiritually focused. However, there are great challenges, yet I serve with tremendous peace each day. It is almost as if I had been groomed all along to be the spiritual leader, prepared with keen technical skills and the experience to handle all that lies ahead. The challenges invigorate me because of the supportive team that I am surrounded with. What is most important is that I am learning that the greatest contribution you can make to any organization is to fully give of yourself in service to others.

As I reflect on my choice to continue to serve as a school principal in the Adventist system of education in North America, I recognize that I stay because I am truly passionate about young people. I stay because God has always put the right people in my path to mentor me. I stay because of the professional growth activities that have
been provided to me. I stay because of my passion and commitment to Adventist education. Finally, I stay because Adventist education is a gift I must share with other school leaders to encourage them to stay the course no matter how difficult.

**Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Chein, 1981). It was noted by Patton (2002) that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Accordingly, purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research because the individuals selected for the study inform the research question.

The criterion used for this purposeful sampling directly reflected the purpose for this study and guided the identification of information-rich cases. The primary criteria were:

1. The principals had served as an Adventist school administrator for a minimum of 10 consecutive years in a single school building.

2. The principals were identified by their union education directors as valued and respected school leaders who had staying power because they had consistent enrollment trends, they developed positive school climates, genuine teamwork was evidenced, they operated strong financial programs, and the test scores of their students were within the normal or above average range as verified by the data collected by their superintendents.

3. Approval to participate in this study by the respondents’ local education superintendents was granted.
4. The principals were chosen with every effort to create a balance between gender, ethnicity, and a balance of service time.

To identify the administrators who fit the criterion for this study, I requested that the North America Division VP of Education, Mr. Larry Blackmer, grant me permission to contact the education directors from the nine unions within the North American Division. Upon Mr. Blackmer’s permission (Appendix A), the names of the principals who fit the above criterion were requested in writing and a letter was sent to all Union Directors of Education (Appendix B) detailing the purpose of the study and the interview questions for the study. The form they were to complete identifying principals in their region who fit the criterion was also included in the letter. Once I received the list of names compiled by the Union Directors of Education, I sent an email to all of the principals identified in order to gather some initial data regarding principal retention and to help select those who were willing to participate in the study (Appendix C). Their responses to the email question, Please describe why you stay as an Adventist principal, and what do you think could help the problem of principal retention? helped indicate whether the principal would be a good informant, reflective, perceptive, and have an in-depth description of their lived experiences. Finally, the principals were selected based upon a balance of gender and race and their overall willingness to participate. Table 1 summarizes the types of schools represented by the participants in this study.
Table 1

Demographics of Participants in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Union in North American Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number that qualified</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that did not qualify</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interview questions in which I elicited responses guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored. The goal was to engage the principal in a conversation that would give purpose or was aligned with the purpose of my study (Seidman, 2006). Patton (2002) explains,

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (p. 196)
The Interview Protocol

In July of 2007, Adventist school principals across North America were invited to attend the Principal’s Workshop on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. In order to help develop the interview protocol, I asked 44 principals to identify reasons why principals stay or leave. The principals attending were asked to complete a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree) by indicating the degree of agreement with the statements outlined (Appendix G). The results of the survey are listed in Table 2.

The questionnaire indicated the most identified reason why principals stay in the Adventist system of education was because they had a passion for their students. Also, the principals shared that the school board chairman, the pastor, and parents are supportive of their leadership. On the other hand, the principals indicated that those who leave are likely to leave because of the stresses of the job, the lack of balance between their personal and professional time, the complexity of the job, expectations being too high, and, finally, lack of mentoring. In sum, the responses of the principals are consistent with the national dilemma regarding principal retention outlined in chapter 2 of this study.

The survey results enabled me to identify some of the reasons why principals stay and why they leave. These results helped me frame the interview questions. The following nine interview questions represented information from the survey and the literature and helped me discover the reasons why Adventist principals stay in leadership for consecutive years.
### Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentage That Agree/Strongly Agree (N=44)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals stay because:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for students</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>93.2</td>
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<td>School board chair is supportive</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>84.1</td>
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<td>Parents are supportive</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>86.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastor is supportive</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
<td>73.0</td>
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<td>Able to manage stress</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>66.0</td>
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<td>Professional growth opportunities</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>68.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roles/expectations clearly defined</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>52.5</td>
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<td>They are properly trained</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance personal/professional time</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>50.0</td>
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<td>They have a mentor</td>
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<td>45.4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stresses of job</td>
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<td>91.0</td>
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<td>Lack of balance personal/professional time</td>
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<td>Complexity of job</td>
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<td>Expectations too high</td>
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<td>1.18</td>
<td>66.0</td>
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<td>1.19</td>
<td>57.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of professional growth</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>36.4</td>
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</table>
1. Please share with me a little about your service in Adventist education (years of service in Adventist education, years of service in this school).

2. Please share how you got started in Adventist education.

3. Describe the training that you have received to be a school principal. Describe how the role and expectations of the principalship were defined for you.

4. What does it mean to be an Adventist school principal and what do Adventist school principals do? What is difficult or easy about being an Adventist school principal?

5. What professional growth opportunities have you experienced as a school principal?

6. Describe how you maintain a balance between your personal and professional life as a school principal. How do you handle the stresses associated with school leadership?

7. Describe the support you may have received as a principal that has enabled you to stay in leadership within the Adventist system of education for consecutive years (Probe support from pastor, parent, school board, mentor, passion for students’ commitment to Adventist education).

8. Please share an experience that captures “why you stay” in Adventist education.

9. Are there any other things you would like to talk about? Is there any other question I should have asked?

Interview Procedure

The procedures I used to interview principals in the Adventist system of education in North America who remained in leadership for more than 10 years in a single building...
were conducted through telephone, video conferencing, or face-to-face sessions. The face-to-face sessions in the principal’s environment added another component of understanding to their work. It was obvious to me that these principals felt comfortable in their environment and did not behave in stressed or anxious ways, and clearly they enjoyed their work. Nine were conducted as face-to-face interviews, three were done by video conferencing, and two were done by telephone interviews. All responses were tape-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the principal’s perspective. I sent the interview protocol to the principals who participated in the study prior to the actual interview day. After the interviews were transcribed, I emailed the transcription to the principals for confirmation of the accuracy in their narratives.

**Data Analysis**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) outlined the data analysis portion of qualitative research into three key processes:

1. Data reduction reduces potential data sources through the researcher’s choice of a conceptual framework, questions, and instruments. Once data become available, techniques such as coding, theme identification, clustering, and story writing further limit the selection of data.

2. Data display allows the data to be organized and assembled so that the researcher is able to draw conclusions or take action.

3. Conclusion-drawing and verification permit the researcher to interpret and draw meaning from the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The data in this study were coded from the transcriptions and analyzed for themes and patterns. The themes were determined through the careful examination of the data
collected. The data collected were color-coded for elements that related to the general research question on principal retention. The coded elements were grouped together and analyzed for common threads. I was able to code the responses for emerging themes and I continued this process until saturation of the data was attained. As a result, these threads produced the general themes for the study. The themes that emerged from the data were organized into categories.

The categories that emerged led to the interpretations and conclusions concerning how Adventist principals experience their work and answered why they stay in leadership for consecutive years. In sum, the data were organized around the research question and presented in both narrative and table format. In addition, the data analysis included the use of constant comparisons among the literature, interviews, and the experiences described by the principals.

**Trustworthiness/Internal Validity**

All researchers are concerned with trustworthiness issues. They want to know that there is “truth value” to their conclusions (Freed, 1991). Reality, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a “multiple set of mental constructions . . . made by humans; their constructions are in their minds, and they are, in the main, accessible to the humans who make them” (p. 295). Merriam (1998) suggests that since human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews. Therefore according to the research, in a qualitative research study we are closer to reality than if any other method were used. It was therefore my intent to understand the perspectives of the
principals, to uncover the complexity of their jobs, and to present a holistic interpretation of what was happening in their lives throughout the course of this study.

In planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting my work, I aimed for accuracy, and, whenever possible, methodological controls were built in to help. Another goal was that in the event that my data partly supported my predictions, my report would then contain enough data to let readers draw their own conclusions. To enhance the internal validity of my study, I used the following basic strategies identified by Merriam (1998):

1. Structural Corroboration: The means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs (Eisner, 1998, p. 110). My study consisted of 14 principals representing a variety of settings. In these settings, I sought a confluence of evidence that bred credibility and allowed a confidence about the observations, interpretations, and conclusions of this study through recurring behaviors.

2. Member checks: Once coded, interpreted, and analyzed, I consulted the principals with the data to confirm whether the results were accurate. The principals were able to share feedback regarding the results of the study (Merriam, 1998).

3. Peer examination: I continued to solicit the comments of my regional group members (The Servant Leaders) as the findings of my study emerged. I was open to feedback in my quest to bring integrity to the process of why Adventist principals stay in leadership for consecutive years (Merriam, 1998).

Generalizability

Researchers describe the process of generalizability in a qualitative research study as the process of learning through skills, images, and ideas, thereby allowing readers to
transfer the newly acquired knowledge (Eisner, 1998; Herriott & Firestone, 1983). As such, the results of this study will be used to inform the reader of the skills that principals need to stay in Adventist education for consecutive years. The information gathered from the experiences described by the principals will enable the reader to know the types of support Adventist principals need in order to remain in the system.

Using a rich thick description of the results of the data, the information gathered provided enough description so the readers are able to match the research situation and hence determine whether findings can be transferred (Merriam, 1998) to enhance the possibility of the results of this qualitative multiple-case research study. McMillan (2007) refers to this as naturalistic generalization.

**Institutional Review Board**

All protocol required by the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University was adhered to in this study. I began the process by completing and submitting the Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects Form to the IRB before beginning my study. I submitted an overview of the study as the Research Protocol Document for the IRB. Finally, I developed an informed consent that was signed by the principals before each interview began.

In addition, for the integrity of the research, I assured the participants in this study that engaging in this study posed no serious or ethical problems to them because my study was focused on results that were believable and trustworthy by using an ethical approach to research design. The belief was that there was simply no ethical alternative to being as accurate and honest as was humanly possible in all phases of my research (Merriam, 1998). In contrast, based upon the preliminary results, support was expressed
by NAD educational leaders, Union directors, and Conference superintendents for a better understanding of the reasons why school principals stay for consecutive years and the types of support needed for effective leadership.

Summary

In summary, this chapter outlined the methodology that was used in this study. As such, a multiple-case research design using a narrative approach to research was the best method for addressing the complex issue of principal retention in the Adventist system of education. The question for this study focused on principal retention and the types of support needed by principals in order for them to remain in leadership for consecutive years. Through the thick descriptions of their lived experiences, principals told the stories of why Adventist school principals stay in leadership longer than the typical 2.5 – 4.0 years in a single school building. Analytic induction resulted in the conclusions drawn by this research and the significance of the study.
CHAPTER IV

STORIES AND VOICES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the stories of 14 school principals in the Seventh-day Adventist school system in North America who remained in one location for at least 10 consecutive years. Through the narrative of their lived experiences, each principal gave meaning and understanding to why they stay.

Each story begins with an introduction of the principal, an overview of their school, their years of service, and how they got started in Adventist education. The narrative then proceeds with a description of their role and expectations, the complexities associated with their roles, professional growth opportunities and support that they have experienced, and finally how they balance their personal and professional lives. Each story ends with a perspective that represents why each principal stayed in leadership 10 or more consecutive years.

Hanna: The Teenage Praying Principal

Hanna is the principal of a junior academy in the Adventist system of education in North America. The school has an average enrollment of 125 students and 10 faculty/staff members, and operates a child development center for children of preschool
age. She has been at her current building for the last 14 years and has served as an Adventist school principal for the last 40 years.

Her introduction to school administration began in rural Belize in Central America, when at the tender age of 16, she was asked to be the vice principal of a two-teacher, two-room school house where her brother who was only 18 years old was the principal. To get to the school each day Hanna traveled by foot and horseback, yet because of her passion for the students and teaching the trip was worthwhile. At the age of 17, she was thrust into the principalship with only 1 year of administrative experience when the existing principal had a nervous breakdown.

Recognizing the task of being a principal was a huge one at any age; her dilemma was not only her age but she was being asked to be the administrator of a large Adventist school with an enrollment of over 200 students and a horrendous reputation. The school was directly across the street from a model Episcopal school. Hanna knew then she had to resort to her God-given instincts for guidance to set the tone and vision for the direction of her new school.

Hanna had the fortitude and courage to share with her school board that they would have to respect the authority of a 17-year-old and support her decisions no matter how painfully taken they were. The school board agreed and the first major decision she made was to get rid of the students who were not conducive to creating a healthy school environment. The first one was the conference president’s son, followed by the school board chair’s two grandchildren, and several children in the conference’s pastoral staff.

Soon 90 students out of the 192 were sent home either permanently or temporarily. Before the start of the new school year, there were now 102 students willing
and ready to learn and to be positive role models. Upon reflection, Hanna realizes this risky decision might have caused her to fail as a young administrator. But instead, it engendered the confidence and support of her local constituency because of the high level of standards she was seeking.

Hanna convincingly shares that her strong decisions were perhaps the best thing that happened to the students who were dismissed, as it served as a wake-up call for many of them. When those who were temporarily suspended returned to school or enrolled in their new schools, they had matured, became focused, and did well academically. Today she keeps in contact with many of them and proudly shares they are church leaders, business and medical professionals, pastors, and educators—all because she had the courage and determination to stand firm, as a young leader, to her convictions and make the right call on behalf of the other students in the school.

Her formal training in education came through a government teacher preparation program where she acquired a Pretrained Pupil Teacher Credential in her country. At the age of 21, she relocated to Jamaica where she completed an associate’s degree followed by a bachelor’s degree in education. After her undergraduate degrees, she began her graduate work through Andrews University’s extension program at Northern Caribbean University, where she received her master’s degree in supervision and administration. Hanna completed this degree by enrolling in summer classes each year until she completed her degree.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Hanna received no clarification about her role and the expectations associated with the job when asked to be a principal at a very young age. Her role and expectations
were defined as she relied upon the Lord for guidance and the experiences she attained on the job through the years.

It was by experience; it was actually my on-the-job experiences; I had no time to worry about my role or the expectations of the job. Apart from prayer, there was nothing else to do but learn your job. Yet, I have found if you ask God, He will teach you and I have been taught by God.

Several years later, when she accepted another principalship, the role and the expectations were not clearly defined there either. “When I came to the United States two days before I began the principalship, all I got was a bunch of keys; and they said, ‘This is your school. Go.’”

Hanna now credits the educational leaders in the conference where she has served for the last 14 years with helping her define her role and the expectations associated with the principalship. She believes the primary role of an Adventist principal is to have a vision for their school. As a visionary leader, she considers herself a pioneer of sorts. When she has been asked to consider a reassignment, she has always followed the advice of one of her favorite teacher advisors who challenged her to “always seek to serve at the school that would allow her to be a pioneer and build schools for Jesus.” She has held this advice close to her heart and uses it as her motto for every career move she has made.

For example, when she was asked to consider being the principal of a school that was hurting, in terms of its facilities and enrollment, or accepting the position at an established school with its great facilities and a stable enrollment, she accepted the position that had the greatest need. Hanna was convicted that “God would help her not only increase enrollment but build a new school representing Adventist education at its best.”
Hanna faced many challenges at this school not only because of the monumental task before her but because of staffing issues. For instance, she was one of only two new staff members hired that year and the previous principal was still part of the faculty along with her supporters. She described this dilemma as perhaps the most challenging in her entire professional career. Hanna knew, however, that her strength and success were from the Lord and she began to pray like never before. “I really learned how to pray. I learned there’s nothing more important to a Christian leader than prayer.”

She brought her faculty and staff together for daily worship and they developed a sense of team grounded in prayer. The parents embraced Hanna’s vision and soon joined her on her prayerful journey. When it was time to build a new school, they did so with a lot of prayer. She defines this experience as her “parking lot days” and shares:

I remember when I would go out to the parking lot and meet the parents, talk with them, and share my vision for the school with them. Some of them would say, “Woo that is too big for the school, how will we ever build a school? These same parents, however, became part of our prayer team. I remember the day after many prayers, when we built an altar on the spot where the new school was supposed to be and we prayed constantly and continuously. I then got the parents to share the vision of the school we were prayerfully building together. I think it boosted their faith when they saw the building going up.

Soon board members, faculty, staff, and parents caught her vision for the direction of the school. As the enrollment at her school increased, her prayers became more fervent. She engaged the school family in prayer and they became her prayer warriors and participated in prayer marches until the completion of the project.

I remember the Jericho marches when we would march around the spot where the school was to be built and we would claim God’s promises for the desire of a school on that spot. I remember the day when the school was built, the first phase, and we couldn’t get the permit. The parents were among the ones to lead the march around the school with the children and to pray for God’s direction and we got the permit because of prayer. There were so many times that we came through because of those
prayers. The entire school family took ownership of the school because together we had laid all of plans before the Lord.

In addition to defining her role as a prayerful visionary leader, Hanna defines her role as the one who sets the spiritual climate of her school through the programming of the various worships and services. She is also the accountant; supervisor of faculty, staff and students; marketer; and recruiter for the school. This year because of budgetary constraints, she functions as a classroom teacher—a role she relishes, as teaching was and continues to be her first love.

Complexities of the Principalship

According to Hanna, one of the complexities associated with the principal’s job is not being able to help the staff catch the vision of true Adventist education. This vision is founded on the philosophical principles of the Adventist Church and the belief that “beyond the earthly desires and goals for the students is the ultimate one for them to be a part of God’s kingdom.”

Another complexity associated with the principalship for Hanna is dwindling enrollments. She has seen this trend develop into an alarming pattern over the last 2 years. She believes this situation is not endemic to her school but across Adventist schools throughout North America. Decreasing enrollment challenges school leaders with the staffing of the appropriate number of faculty members needed to sustain a program. When schools need to cut faculty members due to budgetary constraints caused by decreasing enrollments, teachers are reassigned or dismissed. The complexities associated with faculty turnover cause leaders to fail to maintain a stable, spiritually driven, spiritually led connected team. Hanna recalls there were times when she went
7 years without a faculty turnover; in recent years, however, she has seen at least one teacher change per year.

Hanna considers the spiritual development of her team members as the easiest part of her job. She models strong spiritual convictions as she worships with her students and faculty and is very intentional about the spiritual climate that is fostered at her school. The faculty believes because they meet and pray every day, they see the face of God daily. Therefore before they look into the faces of the students, they have already seen God. This belief has made the difference at her school.

I have had visitors, both in an evaluation and in a regular setting, say to me there is a tone at the school that is different. I have heard people say they can feel the Spirit in the school.

She believes what people are experiencing when they visit the campus is the presence of God reflected in the lives of the administration, teachers, and students. Hanna emphasizes that “each day before I turn on the light, in my office or in any room, I ask God to enter in that particular room. I ask the Holy Spirit to just cover that room.” She explains when the spiritual climate and the faculty and staff are in congruence by being spiritually connected, the learning environment becomes natural and the students will be eager to learn.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Hanna considers herself privileged by the gamut of professional growth opportunities she has been afforded through the years. Yet the ones she has benefitted from the most are in her current assignment. For example, she has had the opportunity to join professional organizations and church-sponsored professional organizations, and to participate in post-graduate studies all funded by her employing organization. She has
also been exposed to, taught, and mastered some of the best cutting-edge practices and learning initiatives such as 4Mat training, balanced literacy, and differentiated instruction. Hanna has become a professional life coach by being trained and certified by her current office of education.

Support of the Principalship

Hanna receives the greatest support from her husband who is also her pastor. Her husband serves as the pastor of the largest congregation in her area, and yet they are a team. She shares that when they reflect upon their pastor/principal relationship, which is rare in many Adventist conferences, they would do it all over again because of the support and admiration they have for each other.

Because her husband was a former superintendent of schools for 9 years, he relates really well and understands the issues associated with the educational and pastoral responsibilities. Fully understanding what she goes through at home and at church, he is 100% in support of her, the school, and the relationship with their church. She attributes her husband’s love of Christian education and his passion for pastoral ministry as the greatest source of support she has received over the last 32 years.

Another strong support Hanna receives is in the form of the mentors who have touched her life so remarkably. One of her most outstanding mentor relationships began when she became a teacher in Jamaica. The mentor was her previous teacher who took a special interest in her leadership skills. “He was an awesome leader, humble, earthy, but a strong leader.” This mentor introduced her to school administration and leadership by describing and sharing his administrative experiences. He had just graduated from Andrews University himself and still made time to mentor her. Hanna acknowledges her
first life coach was preparing her all along to become an exceptional administrator some day, unlike the teacher extraordinaire she thought she would be.

When Hanna finished her undergraduate work and went on to graduate school she had some really terrific mentors there as well. Most were in the form of her professors who recognized her leadership potential and gifted her with their time, skills, and resources. As she reflects upon the impact they have had upon her life she is overcome with emotion by recognizing she was simply blessed by the best leaders ever in Adventist education—the same leaders who trained, encouraged, and fine-tuned her leadership skills by being her mentor.

Most recently, she has received mentoring support in the form of a principal support group that has been developed by the principals in her conference. Principal meetings have become shared experiences rather than the mundane informational meetings they once were. “We are able to share with our principals and therefore our relationships have become more candid and open from an administrator’s perspective.”

Hanna also credits her stable school board with affirming support of her leadership. Her school board chair has been the same for the last 13 years. While perhaps for most school settings this may not be the best option, through the years, the dynamics of this relationship have worked well for all at her school. The school board chair is also the director of the child development center associated with Hanna’s school.

She shares that when she began working at this school, there was a “disconnect” between the child development center and the school. There was also a “disconnect” between the church and the school. Yet the one thing that has made a difference is that Hanna has been able to build a bridge between the church and the school. Today, they are
pretty much connected in terms of their mutual goals, and the child development center is her main feeder school.

Hanna and her board chair have developed a “helping” relationship with each other. For example, she helps the child development center, and the school board chair readily assists her with issues that arise pertaining to the school. The support from her board is not only from her chair but also from the board members. She believes she has been blessed because she has hardly ever had an antagonistic person serve on the board.

Another support Hanna has is the parents. The support is so overwhelming she credits the parents for motivating her to continue to serve as their principal. She considers her relationship with the parents as wonderful. When the accreditation team came during the last school evaluation, the parent survey indicated there was 98% parent support for what is happening at the school. She credits this to the fact the parents take ownership of every detail of the school by being a part of the process. Most parents demonstrate their involvement by serving on the Home & School Association. “I like to say I have one of the best home and school associations in the entire Adventist world of education because of their strong support.”

Hanna receives strong support from her students. “I absolutely love the students.” She loves to track the students from when they first enroll in the school to how they develop through the years. Hanna thinks it is “awesome” to look back at the last 14 years in particular and notice 95% of her students are in line to graduate in a timely manner by their senior year of high school. “We have not had more than five students in all those years not complete high school.” She considers this a wonderful inspiration for her
current student body and invites former students to share their experiences with the currently enrolled students.

Finally, she now receives strong support from all of her faculty and the constituent pastors. Hanna describes them as pleasant, helpful, engaged, and deeply committed to the mission of the school as indicated by their prayers, loyalty, and support for 14 consecutive school years.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Hanna has always made it a point to maintain balance in her personal life. With the help of her husband who has been her greatest reminder of the need for her to maintain balance, it is a high priority issue for her. She and her husband spend quality time together as frequently as possible. Even when their children were small and living at home, they made it a point to spend time together. Now that they are empty nesters, they still prioritize their time together. Their mutual bond of 32 years also extends to their spiritual journey. They like to worship together, pray together daily, walk together at least four times a week in the mornings, cook together, and play together by making time for table tennis in the evenings. They have been doing this pretty much for their entire time together. According to Hanna, this has made all the difference in creating balance as she considers her husband her main source of strength.

When her load gets too heavy, it is her husband who reminds her of getting things back in check. He will demand she stop and walk away from what she is doing. During those overwhelming times, he insists on Hanna having appropriate rest by tucking her into bed and allowing her to have the rest her body needs and craves. Yet even while he expects her to take time out of her hectic schedule for restoration, if there is something he
can help her with, he will do so. Hanna shares that he always keeps tabs, for which she is truly grateful and appreciative.

In addition to her relationship with her husband, she has friends in her women’s ministry group. Her friends always keep tabs on her to make sure she is maintaining balance. They also have an opportunity to do a lot of girl stuff together like girls’ weekend out, shopping, and visiting. Hanna credits her active involvement in her church with the loyalty which has been reciprocated to her by her church friends. Through the years, “I help the church, and the church helps me. This is particularly true of my friends who are involved in the women’s ministry at my church.”

Why I Stay as Principal

After 40 years of service, Hanna remains in the Adventist system of education because of her vision for leading young people to an eternal and heavenly relationship with Jesus. She is also driven by the fact that on her campus are parents who were once ornery and divisive and today are strong supporters, loyal, thriving, and engaged as a direct result of her impact upon their lives. When contemplating on these difficult parents, she recalls a recent time when she found two letters in what she considers her “forever file” from parents who were once disgruntled. A letter read, “I did everything to annoy you. I did everything to frustrate you and you didn’t give up on me.” Hanna led by example and, as a result, had the blessing of seeing both parents baptized with their children. It still brings tears to her eyes to remember them going into the baptismal waters.

Today, the other parent is the director for the children’s choir at her church and does an exceptional job of directing the choir. Hanna is humbled every time the parent
comes and hugs her. The parent always shares “I am here because of you,” and her sons are always in church by her side growing and participating as well. The antagonistic and miserable parent whose letter she described was baptized a few years ago along with her children. Hanna also stays to help children develop a relationship with Jesus; “Whenever I see children growing towards Jesus and being baptized after I have taught and shared baptismal classes it’s an amazing experience for me. Leading them to Jesus has been the most outstanding experience for me.”

Hanna wants educational leaders to know “principals need more support from fellow principals; a support system that would enable principals to learn from each other by networking and spending time in each other’s schools.” Networking with fellow administrators has been one of Hanna’s greatest blessings. She explains, “The more I share with other principals, the stronger I feel as a leader.” Hanna would like to see the principal-to-principal bond and the pair-sharing experience grow in the Adventist system of education. The principal’s job is a lonely job, she explains:

It can be a lonely job because sometimes deeply sharing of issues is not possible with your staff. It might discourage them if you share with them the deepest part of your low moments, but you can share with another principal, because I have found when you think you are alone with a problem, believe me, another principal is going through the same thing. It helps to share how we got around it.

In elaborating her point, Hanna notes principals do not need “more meetings or more theoretical pinning’s,” they need nurturing. “I would like to see a principal’s cruise where we would just have the opportunity to get time to spend together as principals and throw away the theoretical part for a while and just share and relax.” Hanna’s desire is for all school principals to have the same kind of support system she has experienced. A support system developed and implemented by educational leaders across the division
that would nurture, train, and empower school principals to be the very best in the ministry of Adventist education.

Lorena: The Duo-Responsibilities Principal

Lorena is principal and fifth- through eighth-grade teacher of a rural two-teacher Adventist elementary school. With 41 students enrolled, the school is on the higher end of what is considered a small school in the system. She is also the associate educational superintendent in her conference. Lorena has been in Adventist education for 23 years, with 22 of those years at her current school.

Lorena worked as a nurse for 12 years and then she experienced what she terms a “midlife crisis” and decided to become involved in education. She did not begin teaching in the traditional way; it happened as a result of crisis. When the principal/head teacher at the school had a nervous breakdown, the educational leader of the conference had no one to replace her. He was aware, however, that Lorena had a college degree and for 2 years had home schooled her children. One day he approached Lorena and pleaded with her to assist him in keeping the tiny school of seven students opened for the remainder of the year while they searched and hired the permanent teacher.

She prayerfully considered the offer and after much soul searching decided to accept the job on an interim basis. She was thrilled when the school year was over because she determined she would never teach again since teaching was not what she had trained for. Unbeknownst to Lorena, several months later, her local church opened their school. Again, she was invited to be the classroom teacher. Lorena accepted and returned to school. A couple of years later, she completed a degree and was certified in elementary education.
The Role and Expectations of the Principal

As a head teacher/principal, Lorena did not receive any formal training to become a principal until several years later when she enrolled in the Educational Administration program at Andrews University. She describes this experience as her “first formal training for principal work.” Prior to that, the bulk of her responsibilities were focused on teaching and enhancing her skills as a classroom teacher. Lorena shares that the role and expectations associated with the principalship were not defined to her at any time. “I’m not sure that the principalship was ever truly defined to me. There has not been any training or special support for the principalship work that I have experienced.” Consequently, Lorena explains she was basically “self-taught” in learning about her role and the expectations associated with the principalship. She sought out leaders with expertise in areas such as marketing and risk management and tried to learn as much as she could on her own.

Lorena believes she now has a full grasp of the role and the expectations associated with the principalship from a principal’s as well as from a superintendent’s perspective. She views the role of the principal primarily as one of management. She explains that the principal is the Chief Operating Officer of the institution in which they serve and should be able to manage all aspects of the program accordingly. This includes all aspects of marketing, finances, and staffing of the school. With this goal in mind, Lorena works hard to develop the skills of the principals in her conference by enhancing their management skills through training and visitations.
Complexities of the Principalship

Lorena identifies the greatest complexity associated with her job as the frustration of trying to juggle all of the teaching, principal, and superintendent responsibilities at the same time. The day is never long enough to accomplish all that must be completed. She notes, “There is never any time to do the mandatory things.” For Lorena, trying to be professional, on task, and thorough despite the time constraints is a huge challenge:

I would say trying to do a professional job of it knowing you can’t have the time to throw at it is a challenge. I mean, my whole day I’m teaching, then after school parents want to talk to me, then sometimes after that I’m suppose to do principalship. It ends up taking all weekend and every evening, that’s the stressful part of it for me.

Another complexity is the continual lack of funding to accomplish all that is needed to be done in a school. She likens it to “standing on the edge of a precipice and always looking into bankruptcy stress.” She dreams of being able to afford enrichment strategies and money to do the things that many principals desire for their school; compared to the reality, there is never any funding available to do so.

The easy part of the principalship for Lorena is that she has full autonomy within her school to lead as she pleases. Unlike her public school counterparts who are constantly regulated and monitored by their districts, she has the ability to craft creative proposals and be innovative. By leading in a creative and innovative manner, she is able to chase funds for her school by applying for environmental and student-driven grants few administrators seek after.

Another easy aspect of the principalship for Lorena is she is passionate about her job. “It is not for the money because there really is none in the private setting.” It is about having a passion for young people and the ministry of Christian education. Lorena
believes when one is truly passionate about their job as a principal, there will be an incomparable joy about fulfilling their role.

Lorena identifies the students and the parents as another easy aspect of the principalship. She shares that she loves the kids and every aspect of working with them. She considers the time she shares with her students as energizing.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Professional growth opportunities have been readily available to Lorena. For example, her union has provided the privilege of serving on various committees that have not only helped her as a leader but have enabled her to develop the teachers in her conference. She considers these experiences as outstanding professional growth opportunities for her. Lorena explains that the presenters who are brought in by the educational leaders of the union are specialists from around the country who have developed expertise to share with the administrators for their professional growth as leaders. The meetings are not only about classroom instruction; they are also about leadership initiatives to develop school administrators. Thus, she always looks forward to the seminars and workshops offered by her organization.

At her last union meetings, a professional marketer was invited to conduct training on marketing principles for Adventist schools. Lorena felt the meetings were fabulous. Not only were the administrators exposed to a myriad of marketing concepts, they had to come up with a new marketing idea to implement at their school. Upon the completion of the training, Lorena served as part of a subcommittee developed by her union where they formalized a marketing standard for all schools in her union. Lorena’s union is the only union that has this marketing standard. The standard was developed
because they collectively felt marketing was a critical component of growing the schools in her local union. The marketing standard developed is now used by all accrediting teams when Adventist schools are evaluated in her union.

Lorena is completing a master’s degree in educational administration, which is being fully funded by her employing organization. She describes this experience as overwhelming but great; “a few times I thought ‘what am I doing here?’ I mean with everything else I’m doing, I was thinking this is just crazy but I’m almost done.” Yet Lorena believes wholeheartedly that the professional growth opportunities afforded to her have heightened her awareness of management and leadership issues.

Support of the Principalship

Lorena is able to quickly identify the support she receives as a principal because of an assignment she just completed for her administrative internship at the university. The assignment was to make a list of the support and resources available to her as a principal. Lorena developed a list of people who have supported and continue to support her through the years. She identified union and conference educational directors and their associates. She notes that she relies upon them heavily for legal advice when dealing with a matter or an issue that perhaps may have legal ramifications.

She also considers her teachers as supportive because she can always count on them for anything she may need. Lorena says whenever she is in a bind, she simply turns to her faculty and says, “Ok, help me guys,” and they always do.

Lorena identifies her husband as a tremendous support for her. Her husband is also her pastor and is very busy. Yet, he always makes the time to go beyond his call of duty to help her and is really involved with the school. For example, he teaches a class,
con ducts Bible studies, and fellowships with the students. There are no concerns about how engaged he is with the students because he knows the program, the kids, and the parents so well.

She underscores the fact he is an absolute supporter of the school by the amount of time and money he has poured into the school. For example, they recently moved into a new school building that her husband designed and built. Lorena explains the local conference was struggling financially and could not allocate funds to renovate or build a school. Her husband used his funds and experience in construction to build the new building. For 2 years he worked faithfully with the help of some volunteers to build the school. In the end, he singlehandedly built a $250,000 school building for under $75,000. Lorena believes there is not a doubt that her husband is deeply committed to her school and to her.

The school board has also been supportive of Lorena, and while she does not want to portray them as a “yes board” as they do indeed disagree sometimes, they are extremely supportive. Although she sometimes comes up with some eccentric proposals, they are usually accepted and approved. Lorena believes the support gives her the opportunity to allow her creative juices to flow by having the ability to take risks as a leader without the fear of failing. The school board chair is not only supportive of her as a school administrator, but he is also supportive of her personally. He demonstrates it by being extremely concerned that perhaps she may be burning the candle at both ends. Thus, he always looks for ways to support her even though he’s very busy in his own job.

The support Lorena receives from the parents is huge. What impresses her most is that many of the students are not from Adventist families. There is a wide gap in the
socioeconomic level of her families. Some are business and community leaders, while others have no profession or very little financial means. Yet they all work together and are really supportive of Lorena’s leadership. She explains that at times when a student is disciplined, the parent may become upset and the support may waiver, but for the most part, the majority of her parents are “fabulous and supportive.”

The parents also demonstrate their support by volunteering to help her fulfill her responsibilities. Through the years, they have volunteered to be the secretary when she has not had one, teach an art class, head the citrus fruit program, and plan fundraisers to help fund the school trips and activities. Lorena believes the parents are just “a great group of people to work with.”

Lorena learned from her internship that support is just a matter of developing a network of people. She emphasizes that “leaders should always be able to connect to the right people for the right support at all times.”

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Lorena admits she has no balance between her personal and professional life. “I don’t have any balance; that’s an area I really have to work on,” she regretfully notes. She has hope this area will improve when she completes her master’s degree. “It’s getting just a hint better since my master’s program is almost over, and I’m on the last legs of my internship.”

Lorena notes that because her husband is fairly patient and her children are grown and do not live at home any longer the imbalance is justifiable. When she does have time, she enjoys spending it with her husband as they partake in all kinds of outdoor activities, Sabbath afternoon time together, hiking, mountain biking, and just enjoying each other’s
company. Lorena does not recommend this type of imbalance for any administrator. She acknowledges there are times when she does have balance, but then she goes for long periods of time without any.

There are times she is so overwhelmed by the lack of balance she is emotionally affected. During these times, she may have a “pity party” and let her emotions all out. Her trusted staff recognizes she needs time to regroup and advises her to be good to herself by taking some time off. Lorena recognizes that the better balance she has in her life, the less “pity parties” she will have. She has learned that balance helps her develop coping skills for when she is personally wounded by the things that happen. She believes every leader needs to develop balance in their lives but must also have shoulders to cry on when dealing with stress.

Lorena handles stress well because of the inner strength that reigns within her at all times. This inner strength enables her to be calm during most of her fears and challenges. During these times, she counts on her inner strength to handle the professional crisis or challenge. For example, sometimes when she does not know how they will get through financially for a particular month, she will reflect and say, “I’m not even going to worry about it; I mean I let it go and trust that God is just that amazing to fix it.”

Why I Stay as Principal

The fact that Lorena has a degree in nursing and has kept her certification current is at times not a wise thing for her. She explains that because she has options, when things at the school get challenging, there is always a tendency to want to run away and get back to her nursing career. While it does not happen often, Lorena shares:
I found that when I am having a really bad day or a really bad week, I will think “this is not worth the little bit of pay I receive, I’m going back to nursing”; you know you always have something else you can do.

However, upon prayerful reflection, she realizes she stays because she is a commissioned Adventist educator and administrator and must thus continue to dedicate her skills and talents to the ministry of Adventist education:

I have dedicated my life to this ministry because I believe the Lord called me to it. Because I could see the circumstances, when I look back, have led me to this and I think no amount of grief will run me out of this, I’ll be here for the long haul.

Lorena stays because of her tremendous need and desire to serve the students. She believes that this commitment is deeply ingrained in her. At the risk of sounding noble by making it a values-oriented remark, she emphasizes that “it is totally energizing to know that the skies have no limits” to what she is willing to do for her students. For example, she and a music teacher decided after watching a movie to put their heads together and develop a music program at her school. They went to inner-city schools and pleaded for borrowed instruments. The schools responded with instruments and money. She also received a little over $1,000 in grant money from a string organization. Before long, they had enough money to purchase instruments and music to begin the music program. That was 10 years ago, and today their orchestra is still going strong. Her orchestra is the only string orchestra organization in their entire county and it is invited to perform at various community and civic functions.

In recent years Lorena has been concerned about childhood obesity. The area that her school is in ranks high for childhood diabetes and obesity. Recognizing that her students really enjoy junk food, she decided that every time she got paid, she would buy fruit for the children. Lorena bought a big basket, filled it with fruit, and placed it in the
foyer of the school with a sign over it that read “Fruit, the perfect snack.” Excitedly she notes, “I can’t keep it filled all the time because I don’t have that kind of money but the kids love it and now snack on fruit all the time.” The parents are also excited and share that while the children may not be eating fruit at home, they are certainly enjoying it at school.

Lorena is currently looking into a Chiquita Banana company grant and other funding sources to keep the fruit program going because of the huge difference it has made upon her students. She believes it is these types of things she does for her students that have made a striking difference in their lives. She acknowledges, “By figuring out a way to meet the needs of my obese students, I discovered in just a little way I have helped improve their eating habits.”

From time to time there are people who tell Lorena they would never want to be a principal, yet she cannot imagine the concept of not being one. She believes as a principal she has the ability to really make a difference in the lives of the children. She emphasizes, “A classroom teacher can make a difference, no doubt about it, but when you become a principal you can empower so many other people to do so many special things,” and for Lorena, that is “just really exciting” and the reason why she stays. The rewards and validation Lorena receives from the ministry of Adventist education helps her stay when anyone else might have left.

In closing our interview, Lorena wants educational leaders to instill upon their principals a passion for students which she believes some are lacking.

I am so concerned when I look nationwide and see we have a group of principals who are lacking a passion for students. The job has to be about the students. It can’t be for the money or the prestige because neither of it is there. It has to be for the passion for these kids. It’s like an entrepreneur who can just look at nothing going on and see the
possibility for what could happen. We need to be the entrepreneurs for God in this area.

According to Lorena, principals must be absolutely committed and energized by working with children because the children deserve nothing but the very best.

Lorena wants educational leaders within the SDA system of education in North America to see that “the sky’s the limit” on what principals could do if they could get together, have funding, and be innovative leaders. She suggests perhaps by allocating more funding towards school programs, principals would be able to build something that is spectacular. She argues that the results from the Cognitive Genesis study indicate the Adventist system is doing a really good job teaching the students in all areas. She believes principals need to keep heading in that direction and find other ways they can really produce and advertise excellence in all areas of their school programs.

Educational leaders should also encourage the churches to be more supportive of their schools. Lorena explains that she cannot imagine SDA churches without SDA schools. Thus, from the pastors, to boards, to the members, all must be engaged and learn to collaborate with the local school to grow and support it.

**Millie: The “Nothing Is Impossible for Me” Principal**

Millie is the principal and head teacher of a small school in the Adventist system of education in North America. There are 10 students enrolled in Grades 1 through 8. She has served in this capacity for the last 25 years. Most of Millie’s administrative experience has been at this school.

Millie’s career in education began as a substitute and regular classroom teacher in the public-school system. Her life took a dramatic turn of events when she became a
Christian, joined the Adventist Church, and quit the public-school system of education. What was most exciting to Millie about her new church was that it sponsored a small elementary school as part of its ministry.

From the inception, Millie loved and was thrilled about the mission and philosophy of the school. She could not wait until her young children were of school age to enroll them. One day she was informed a new teacher and his wife would soon be joining the school family. When the teacher arrived, he shared that he needed a lot of help setting up his classroom since his wife was unavailable to help him. His wife was just starting a new job as a nurse and they had small children in the home. Recognizing his need, Millie agreed to help. She not only organized and decorated the classroom but agreed to teach four classes a day to help the school.

Several years later when the head teacher was reassigned, he encouraged Millie to apply for the job because she was still “doing a great job.” Upon prayerfully considering his suggestion, Millie interviewed and was offered the job, which she gladly accepted. What was most exciting to Millie was that her children were now of school age and would be attending the same school where she would be teaching. She smiles upon reflection and notes her career in Adventist education began in 1985 when her children started school. They have since graduated from elementary, secondary and their college years, yet Millie faithfully remains at the same school.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Millie had no formal training nor was the role and the expectations associated with the principalship ever defined to her when she first became an administrator. She emphatically recollects:
Nothing; I received no training. I had never been the principal and I never had any formal training to be a principal. I started out as a teacher and then after 2 years I was given 28 students in eight grades and told to do it.

Millie recognizes she was “self-taught” in understanding her role as a principal and the expectations associated with the job. She capitalized on what she observed and learned during her public-school years and from the previous principal at the school. She emphasizes:

I just followed suit with the leaders that we had before me and from my experience in the public-school system. I knew what those principals did and I knew what our principals do. So, I just put the two together and combined it and came up with a system that was compliant with all the rules and it worked.

Twenty-five years later, Millie acknowledges to this day she has never received any formal training about being a school principal nor has anyone ever indicated to her what the role and expectations associated with the principalship are. Yet because she was self-taught, she can now describe what her role as a small-school principal is and the expectations accompanied by the job.

A typical day begins early in the morning for Millie. She goes to the grocery store and buys food for the day’s lunch. She returns home and then packs all of the book bags in the car and heads off to school. When she arrives at the school, she does her janitorial responsibilities. She fills the water tank so there is an adequate supply of water for the day. Millie then gets the lessons ready as the students begin to trickle in. The students come in and she teaches her morning classes. She proceeds to cook lunch for the students while they work on their assignments independently at their tables. After lunch, they go to gym class, which she teaches, followed by the afternoon lessons. At the end of the day, she drives the students home as she is their bus driver as well.
Millie believes that as principal of a one-room school house, her leadership skills need to include a strong sense of creativity. Because the students stay year after year, she is constantly challenged to come up with brand-new ideas to keep it fresh and exciting in their minds. Therefore, Millie builds castle themes and has already decided that next school year she will have an under-the-sea theme to stimulate student learning. She has received strong recognition and affirmation by her school community for how elaborate, innovative, and exciting each theme is developed and used yearly.

Complexities of the Principalship

The most difficult aspect of the principalship for Millie is the isolation she feels in a one-room multigrade school environment. As the only adult in the building day after day, it is difficult for her to process many things without feedback from other adults present. She explains this is difficult for her because she has no sounding board where she can say, “What do you think?”

Many times she has to make difficult major decisions on her own. For example, when she has to call a snow day she must determine whether the conditions are safe for the students to travel in, follow suit with the local school district, or make the call based upon what her judgment deems best. These are all questions she wishes she had the benefit of discussing with another adult before making the final decision. In a very humorous manner, Millie describes experiences when adults visit the school, such as her violin teacher or the UPS man. She explains she simply does not know what to do with herself and schemes, “Oh man, wow, another grown up, another adult, let me just kidnap them by letting me chew their time up.”
Another complexity associated with her job is not having sufficient time in the day to accomplish all of the tasks of the day, compounded both by her teaching and administrative responsibilities. For example, when she receives an email in the middle of the day about something that needs to be completed from her superintendent of schools, she has to put the students on “individual mode” and complete the task. Millie says that the students are used to it and are very good about it. “They’re trained to do that, and are very, very receptive to my needs as a principal and a teacher and if something needs to be done, it gets done.”

The opportunity to dialog, conference, or meet with the parents is another complexity associated with Millie’s principalship in a small-school setting. She describes this inability to meet with parents as a “touchy situation.” She explains that the parents have pressing needs, yet she is unable to leave the children unattended. Therefore, the agreement she has developed with the parents is that whatever they need to share matters. However, because she is the only teacher in the school, they must meet with her before or after school or in another setting when the students are not present.

The easiest part about the principalship for Millie is the “kids.” She describes the children as loving and is inspired by how much they love school and education. She emphasizes that sometimes she simply cannot get the students to go home. In fact, she shares that the students want to be in school even when they are on vacation. Millie says she teases them by saying, “Oh just go home, I need a rest, go home,” yet they respond by sharing that they are not ready to go home yet.

Millie admits the relationship she has with her students is like a family one. The students back her and she backs them up. As far as their work, if they have had a bad
night and for any reason cannot get the work done, she always gives them a grace period; therefore, they always work harder for her. Millie believes that the children are “just a very good group of students.”

Professional Growth Opportunities

For professional growth opportunities, Millie participates in various conference-and union-sponsored activities. She also serves on the Principal’s Advisory and the K-12 Board of Education at her conference. Millie has served on several small-school committees on the union level.

In 2005, Millie completed a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from her local university and is only one class short of attaining a reading specialist degree. She hopes to complete this degree by the end of summer. Upon completing the class to become a reading specialist, Millie will not pursue a doctoral degree as she believes that her master’s degree is serving her well. She emphasizes, “I don’t know; I’m not sure I need it at this point. So I just do what I can do and when I find a class that excites me, then, I’ll take it.”

Millie does not belong to any professional national organization or association. She believes that her professional growth needs are currently being met with the activities that she is engaged in. She does not see the value of participating in such organizations as her professional growth needs are being met within her local conference.

Support of the Principalship

Millie receives strong support from the pastor who ministers at all three of her constituent churches. She notes that no matter how busy the pastor is he always makes
time to pray with Millie and the children. The pastor conducts yearly Bible studies and baptismal classes with the students. Furthermore, the pastor has one church that does not even have any school-age children and yet the church still supports the school financially.

Millie has received significant support from all five of her school board members who represent the three constituent churches. They respect and have confidence in her decisions no matter how far-fetched they are. She receives strong support from her board chair who demonstrates it most by supporting her decisions.

For example, Millie shares that this has been the worst winter they have experienced in a very long time. With no snow days left, a blizzard was fast approaching. She prayed about the dilemma and the next day was impressed that inspite of the storm, school would be in session and classes would resume. In fact, the students could learn from the comfort of their homes as Millie would provide online classes in the ensuing days. She contacted her board chair about the idea and got full support and permission to proceed. For the next 3 days when the blizzard arrived, they had online school through Skype.

The mileage that she received from this “small” initiative was huge. According to Millie, she was contacted by her superintendent of schools, the educational directors of area district schools, the local news, and her union educational leaders, all congratulating her for the innovative and progressive manner in which she conducted school. Proudly, she states, her little school has been showcased on several media outlets. Also, her local public-school district will now be adopting online school days for make-up days in the future. Millie believes that none of this recognition would have been possible without her supportive school board chair.
Millie describes the parents as extremely supportive. They are very good parents who always go out of their way to help her. Together they have established good rapport through the years. They support her decisions and have tremendous confidence in her leadership as an administrator. What touches Millie the most is the parents make it a point to greet her each morning and always convey encouragement for the challenges of the day. She considers herself blessed because the parents do not complain, and are very happy about the school, her leadership, and the overall progress of the students.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Millie acknowledges that there is no balance between her personal and her professional life. She justifies not needing balance in her life because her husband is an interstate transporter who leaves home on Sundays and returns on Fridays. She believes if her husband were home more frequently perhaps she would have a need for balance. However, it would have been very difficult for her to do this based on the schedule she has maintained through the years. This arrangement has worked for the last 25 years for Millie and her husband, and she sees no reason to change things now.

Admittedly, Millie shares that her life is consumed by the school. While it may have its ups and downs, she says, “Most of my life is the school during the school months.” She describes her life as lopsided:

It’s lopsided because my life is mostly steadfast on the school and keeping it afloat; finding new and exciting things for the kids to do and that takes a lot of my time. Then there are times when I get backlogged too; there just is no personal life when that happens.
While Millie has a hard time maintaining balance in her life during the school year, she makes it a point to spend family time with her children and grandchildren when school is not in session.

Millie handles stress by praying. No matter how challenging the situation is, Millie always knows that she can rely on prayer for the solution. For example, recently, her superintendent asked if a principal from another school could come to observe her school for a day. Since the visiting principal had never been in a one-room school, the superintendent felt that it would be a good opportunity for her to observe Millie.

On the day the principal was to observe, Millie arrived at the school to complete havoc. The first thing she found was a dead mouse. She explained she never gets mice in her school but with the heavy snow it got in the building, died, and made the classroom stink. Suddenly, her sewer backed up. Now, she not only had a stinky school but a backed-up sewer as well. When the principal arrived, there was a backhoe digging out the sewer as well as a stinky school to welcome her.

Millie welcomed the principal by sharing, “If you’re coming to see what it’s like in a one-teacher school, you picked the perfect day because this is the worst possible scenario that could have happened.” Inspite of the chaos, when she received the visiting principal’s review, it was incredible. The principal indicated she learned a lot from being at the school just for one day. Millie knew without a doubt the principal was able to erase all the negativity of the day because she had prayed all through the crisis. She shared numerous experiences where she felt Satan was attacking her best-laid plans, but always credited prayer as God’s intervening power.
Why I Stay as Principal

Millie stays as an administrator in the Adventist system of education in North America because of the children. She underscores her sentiments by sharing that her husband keeps emphasizing to her how much she is needed by the students. He tells her, “I see the way those kids look at you in church and I see how much those kids depend on you. There’s no way you could ever leave them.” Despite the fact that through the years Millie has had many job offers and employment options, she would never consider leaving the children. Consequently, Millie has no regret about being at the school for the last 25 years and is thrilled to identify them as the joyous reason why she continues to serve.

Millie wants principals across the Adventist system of education in North America to just keep their eyes on the Lord and the children. She wants principals to know without any hesitation that the students are the sole purpose of their entire existence in a school. She emphasizes that it is their responsibility to make sure those eyes are smiling and wanting to be there every day. “That is really what you have to make sure you do and provide for them daily.”

Norman: Educating for Eternity

Norman is the principal of an inner-city elementary Adventist school. He has faithfully served at his current school for the last 23 years—13 as vice principal and 10 as principal. What is most impressive about his 40-year professional career in the Adventist system of education is 36 have been devoted to administration and only 4 to being a teacher. In college he majored in theology. When he realized his passion for pastoral ministry was not as compelling as his passion for educational ministry, Norman changed
his major to elementary education and never regretted his decision or the joy the children have brought him.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

By the time Norman became an administrator, he had received a master’s degree in administration and was ABD. However, when asked to become a principal, he received no formal training to carry out his responsibilities. Norman explains that this inability to recruit teachers with promise and then train them to become exceptional administrators is a huge drawback and weakness in the Adventist system of education. He defines the training he received to become a principal as on-the-job training. “It was simply about dealing with the issues as they came up; basically, it was on-the-job training.”

Norman credits most of the training he attained early on in his career from the wise advice he received from a trusted colleague. The colleague urged him to always surround himself with people who were smarter than he was and to heed their advice. He applied the advice to most of his administrative career. At one of his schools, his board chair was the President of a state junior college. Norman used the advice of this master administrator to learn how to handle the boards, as the chair was an expert in governance.

At another school he solicited the help of members with different crafts and trades from his constituent churches to help with the physical plant of his buildings. Through the years he followed the trusted advice of his former colleague. He capitalized on the skills and knowledge of those around him who were always willing and able to help him with the physical needs of his buildings. His helpers were contractors, sidewalk supervisors for big highway projects, and steel studders. If a job needed to be done, these tradesmen knew they would be contacted by Norman.
He recalls a time when he was about to give a quiz in his English class. The teacher across the hall was teaching multiplication facts to her younger students. However, the distractions associated with the open-concept school building were huge as there were no walls in the classrooms. As Norman went on with his quiz and the teaching continued, a little girl looked up at Norman and pleaded, “Mr. Norman, can’t you please make it stop?” And at that very moment he knew the distractions needed to stop. With the help of a church member who did a lot of work with steel studs and some other volunteers, Norman and the crew worked every evening putting up steel studs and dry walls. Soon they had five stand-alone classrooms. While Norman had never done anything like this before, the advice he embraced early on regarding “surrounding himself with smarter people” enabled him to have a plan for fixing the classrooms with the help of the very best people around. According to Norman all of these smart people helped him define his job as a school administrator.

Complexities of the Principalship

Norman describes the expectation of the “principal having to be the all in all” as a huge difficulty of his job. “It’s everything from fixing and unclogging toilets, to painting, repairing, and maintaining buildings.” In essence, the principal does everything according to what the challenges and the needs of the school day are. Whatever the demand, Norman has to be prepared and ready to handle the challenges accompanied by any given day. The responsibility of keeping a number of people happy for a significant amount of time without having a lot of them upset at him at any one time is another challenge Norman faces. He explains that in the Adventist school system, the community you serve
is beyond the scope of just your school building. For instance, the students you teach are
the students you go to church with on Sabbaths. Their parents are the church members
you worship with. He explains that it goes beyond having to worship with the same
students and parents; you also worship with the same faculty, staff, and board members
you work with during the week. Therefore, if anyone is upset at him for a decision he has
made during the week, it usually carries over into his encounter with that particular
individual at church on the weekend. Norman believes that if a large majority of them are
upset at you, it can make for a very uncomfortable worship experience during church. He
described having to worship with the parent whom he had just reminded has an
outstanding bill. Running into such a parent when they are trying so very badly to avoid
him is extremely awkward and uncomfortable for him. According to Norman, these
experiences cause isolation for the principal.

Dealing with perceptions associated with the principalship is a difficult challenge
for Norman. Whether it is a perception about academics, finances, the student body, or
the faculty, perceptions are always difficult to overcome. He recalls a time when he was a
principal of a senior high school and a parent came to enroll their child. The parent was
extremely desperate and anxious to have their son enrolled because the student had just
been released from a drug rehabilitation facility. In the course of the conversation, the
parent mentioned she had another child, a daughter. When asked why the daughter was
not being enrolled as well, the parent explained she was an honor student in the public
school and it was a good fit for her academically. Norman was dumbfounded; his school
was good enough for her drug-addicted son to be reformed at, but academically not good
enough for her honor-student daughter.
Norman recognizes that what is easy about the principalship are the children. Nothing compares to the joy he has teaching children. No matter the background, culture, or ethnicity, he believes his calling is the children. For example, when he was principal of a school affiliated with nine constituent Hispanic churches, he became “Hispanic friendly.” Norman visited their homes, ate their food, learned their culture and language, and worshipped with them in their churches, all with the intent of embracing all children.

Norman also considers working with experienced teachers as another easy aspect of the principalship. He once worked with a kindergarten teacher who was considered a genius and master teacher. Because of her skill set and expertise, she contributed heavily to the overall image and reputation of his program. The teacher’s influence and reputation were so stellar it reflected in the positive impact it had upon his yearly kindergarten enrollment numbers.

Professional Growth Opportunities

An array of professional growth opportunities is afforded to Norman. He is able to participate in any professional growth activity of his choice with funding provided from his local board and conference. He is a member of the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP). Every year Norman makes it a point to attend the annual convention sponsored by each organization. He proudly notes that through the years he has missed very few of them as they are meetings he eagerly awaits.

The reason he is able to participate in such wonderful professional growth opportunities is because the conference he works for sets professional growth as a high priority for all its workers. The conference solicits suggestions for growth opportunities,
and provides all of the funding, traveling, and lodging expenses for workers to participate. Norman is also provided the opportunity by his conference to share his new-found knowledge by presenting at upcoming faculty and staff in-service meetings.

Support of the Principalship

Norman receives support from many areas. He credits his faculty and staff with always being helpful with advice and counsel. He relies heavily on the team members and knows he can count on them because of the strong bond they have developed through the years, which is grounded in trust. He has the support of school board chairs who have guided and led him along his leadership journey. According to Norman, board chair support is the key to the overall success of the principal. He explains that if the board chair is supportive, then you are able to set upon a path of collaboration even when one does “something really stupid.”

Other times the board chair should take the time to help a principal understand the issues at hand even when they do not agree with it. Norman identifies this type of communication as one of the helpful aspects of working collaboratively with your board chair. He describes the relationship with his board chair as a “give and take” one, based upon the mutual trust and respect they have developed for each other through the years.

There was a time when the philosophy of his school board was that every school-age child was entitled to Christian education. It was the hard work and persistence of his board chair that enabled him to establish a combined formula whereby this philosophy became a reality. The conference, the church, and the school developed a “three-way” plan which enabled all school-age children to attend his school. Norman credits his
school board Chair for the vision and planning to make this dream a reality for all students.

Norman describes his local conference, other administrators, parents, and students as being very supportive of his leadership. He remembers a school day when a parent was extremely late to retrieve his child. It had been an extremely long day for Norman and he was frustrated and exasperated the parent had not communicated his reason for being late. When the parent arrived, Norman noticed how tired and haggard he was. He inquired why the parent was so tired. The parent explained he worked two construction jobs just to keep his kids at Norman’s school because of the exceptional leader that he was. He recalls how ashamed he felt about the lengths parents went through to support him. All of a sudden the burdens of the day subsided because yet again he was reminded of the support he has received from the parents on a daily basis through the years.

An area Norman identifies as lacking when it comes to principal support is pastoral support. In working with pastors, “they have not always been supportive.” He has worked with pastors who have been supportive of his leadership and are willing to partner with him in ministry, yet there are others who “could not care less.” While there appears to be a stereotype in terms of pastoral support, he has experienced both—support and nonsupport from them. He explains, based upon his experiences, that “those stereotypes that either one of those is accurate are true.” According to Norman, it is crucial for pastors to demonstrate support with their actions; “one of the things to do is to work together with the principal and stop shooting from the hip when it comes to principal support from the pastors.” When the principals and pastors are working together, then you will have a very strong school.
Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Norman does not see the need for balance in his life because his life is the school. He explains since he has no children of his own, he is able to work the long hours he does because he does not have many of the responsibilities most parents with children have. Norman considers the students as his biological children and credits his patient and understanding wife with any semblance of balance he has. “From time to time when I have a need for balance, my wife gives me gentle reminders about doing so.”

In many different ways, Mrs. Norman has encouraged and helped Norman to develop strategies for maintaining balance in his personal and professional life. They do fun things together, spend time together, and travel together when possible. Due to their lack of resources and time, they are able to travel only when he attends meetings or other types of business trips. They consider going away for professional meetings as an opportunity to enjoy each other while creating some semblance of balance for their lives. On many occasions after his wife’s very long hard day of work, she will join him at school just so they can spend time together and relieve him of his work load. Maintaining balance for Norman, while constantly being reminded of it by his wife, is an area where he has “made little strides” in over the last 40 years of ministry.

Norman handles stress by relying heavily upon the Lord; “certainly the Lord is a big portion of how I deal with stress as I simply lay all of my burdens upon the Lord for direction and guidance.” In dealing with stress, he continually recognizes the school does not belong to him but to God. “It’s easy to put all of the burdens upon my shoulder as if it’s my school, and I have to remind myself and say: ‘This isn’t mine, this is His and then say, Lord, since this is your problem, you have to take it and fix it.’” Norman prays, then
waits patiently upon the Lord for direction and guidance. He also enjoys photography, which is most gratifying for him as another stress reliever. Most of the time Norman is able to hone in on his photography skills while traveling. He considers traveling with his wife and his love for photography as a step in the right direction for relieving his stress.

Why I Stay as Principal

Norman stays as a school principal in the Adventist system of education because of his deep commitment, love, and passion for the children; “Simply, there is nothing else I would rather do than to be with the children.” He considers the opportunity to serve his students as the catalyst and number one reason that keeps him motivated and determined to be a principal year after year for 40 years of ministry. Working with children is critically important. “I believe if the church members and teachers really cared about the students they would stay also.”

Establishing the spiritual environment of the school is another reason Norman stays. According to Norman, the principal has the responsibility of establishing a spiritual environment that encourages children to know Christ on a personal level. Towards those goals, along with his faculty, they have worked feverishly through the years to establish a spiritual environment focusing on spiritual values. Through modeling Christian values, conducting chapels, weeks of spiritual emphasis, Bible studies, and baptismal classes the students are encouraged to know Christ personally. He embraces with deep conviction that he is truly making an eternal impact upon the life of each child by establishing the spiritual tone.

Norman stays because he wants to make a difference in the lives of students beyond his school family by providing enrollment opportunities for them. He seeks to
provide opportunities for all school-age students who wish to attend an Adventist school. He explains that while enrollment in Adventist schools may be down, it must become a shared responsibility; “All Adventist schools and constituent church members must provide enrollment opportunities for all students by establishing resources and funds to make their dreams a reality.”

Norman wants educational leaders in the Adventist system of education in North America to address the issue of principal retention. He believes principals can be retained if they had the sufficient support needed to perform their responsibilities. He identifies the strong support needed from local conference educational leaders, pastors, school board members, fellow administrators, parents and students. This kind of support strongly conveys a message to the principals that they are valued, appreciated, and cared for, and the educational systems are “heavily invested in growing them as leaders.”

He believes principals would be retained if the pastors were supportive. Norman appeals to pastors in the Adventist system to become supporters of their principals to keep them. According to Norman, there must be an intentional focus on the adequate professional training of the pastors on the university level as it relates to Christian education. “Our universities should look at training their ministers in educational ministry as part of their course work.” Courses such as introduction to educational ministry, philosophy of Adventist education, and the benefits of the integration of pastoral and educational ministry should be taught in the seminary. Developing two-track modules whereby educational and pastoral ministry would be integrated would help pastors to work collaboratively with their principals. This collaboration would enable pastors and
principals to work towards the same goals as they learn to understand, appreciate, and value each other’s ministries.

Norman suggests that Adventist systems need to develop formal principal preparation programs for aspiring and current principals. “It’s the piece that is missing in our system and it’s an important part of it.” He believes it would be very helpful if educational superintendents could begin to identify the areas of administrative growth needed from principals and provide adequate training for those currently in the system in areas of governance, conflict resolution, finance, dealing with constituent churches, school law, and dealing with unhappy students and parents. There must also be an intentional focus of recognizing aspiring principals who may be dedicated and committed teachers and have promise of becoming future principals. Developing a plan for recruiting, training, and providing internships and mentorships in administration for such educators would be an important step in the direction of growing future educational leaders. Finally, Norman feels Adventist educational leaders should send their principals to Hawaii for a much needed vacation and perhaps this will ensure they will stay in the system.

**Patricia: The Reluctant but Not Regretful Principal**

Patricia is the principal of an Adventist academy. The academy was established in 1954 and currently offers an educational program for students from preschool to high-school grades. With an enrollment of 487 students, the academy is considered a large school within the Adventist system of education in North America. Patricia has been in educational ministry for 26 years, 12 of those years at her current school.
Her career in Adventist education was not planned or intentional in any way. In fact, Patricia was first exposed to Adventist education when she worked as a part-time secretary while she finished her bachelor’s degree in education. She marvels,

I had no intention really of working in the Adventist system of education. I had heard a lot of things about it and a lot of them were not good. So, it was my determination not to work in an Adventist school ever.

However, at camp meeting one summer, the president of the conference asked Patricia what she was doing professionally and she told him she was pursuing a degree in education at the university. The president encouraged her to apply for a job as a school teacher within the Adventist system of education in the local conference. Patricia very respectfully indicated she would consider the opportunity; however she really had no such intent. Deep inside, what she really wanted to say to him was “yeah, whatever” and never applied for the job because she absolutely had no interest in becoming an Adventist teacher.

Several months after their initial conversation, Patricia was contacted by the president’s assistant inquiring about the resume. She reluctantly but respectfully submitted the resume, interviewed, and was offered the job. She recognizes the offer was providential because not only was she selected out of the 40 applicants, Patricia and another applicant were the only two new employees hired by the conference that year before a hiring freeze ensued. In addition, of all the other places Patricia submitted resumes and really wanted to work at, none responded as employers were not hiring any new teachers at the time. Patricia accepted the position reluctantly because she felt God was calling her.
Patricia’s interest in Adventist school administration began several years after she first started teaching. One day as she visited with her mother, she was encouraged to pursue a graduate degree in school administration. Her mother reasoned she was a natural leader and reflected upon her leadership capabilities at church. Patricia’s mother recalled that from a very young age, she had been a leader by sharing of her skills in Pathfinders and as a Sabbath school teacher. Patricia reflected prayerfully upon her mother’s advice and soon enrolled at the university to enhance her God-given leadership capabilities by pursuing a master’s degree in school administration. She later also completed an Ed.S. degree in educational administration from Andrews University.

Similar to how reluctant Patricia was about being an Adventist teacher, she was also reluctant about being a school principal. One day she was approached by her head master about a teacher who was going on maternity leave and was encouraged to apply for the job. Patricia reflected and thought, “Oh, that’s great, and went along her merry way” because she was just not interested. She thought about how much she loved her classroom and how she did not want to leave her children. On three separate occasions, the head master approached Patricia and finally in frustration asked, “Don’t you have an administration degree? Why aren’t you interested in this position?” Patricia responded, “Well you know, honestly, I really didn’t even think about it.” Yet after much prompting and urging, she applied and was offered the job. From then on without any more hesitation, she has been an Adventist school principal because Patricia believes God specifically called her to do so.
The Role and Expectations of the Principal

When asked to describe how the role of and the expectations associated with the principalship were first defined to her she looked quite stymied and noted, “Absolutely none were ever defined to me.” She emphasizes:

The principal at the time said, “Here are your keys; Good luck.” So I came into this position, although I had formal training, with no clarification of my role or any expectations defined and with nothing to build on. I’m sure there was a lot there; yet no one ever sat me down and said, “Okay, here is your job description or here is what will be expected of you.”

Patricia formulated her own job description once she was on the job. At first she did not know what she was supposed to do aside from supervising teachers and all the other things people think principals must do. She chuckles and remembers the conversation with her headmaster, “What’s the job description of my job?” she inquired. He responded, “Well I don’t think we have one. Why don’t you put one together?” With great dismay she notes, “That’s how I arrived at a job description.”

Having no other recourse then to develop her own job description, Patricia soon realized the position encompassed so much more than what she thought. She basically did everything she thought she should do. She learned to define her role based upon her own on-the-job experiences like making mistakes at times and correcting those mistakes and by learning not to do them again. She also depended heavily upon her experienced staff for direction and guidance. If she forgot to do something, they would say “remember to do this, not that you have to do it if you do not want to.” Because of their skill set and experience, Patricia always sought their help and advice, and it was always readily available. She credits the success of her first year as principal to all of the help she received from her faculty and staff in helping her to define her role and the expectations
associated with the principalship. “My success was not just in my own strength but in working collaboratively with my experienced team members.”

Patricia learned to clarify her role by the “informal and formal training” experiences she received. She defines “informal training” as the things principals learn through experiences; such as evaluating teachers subjectively, putting schedules together instinctively, and balancing budgets when there is no money. She defines “formal training” as the professional types of experiences that fine tune administrative responsibilities, such as academic preparation, workshops, and in-services. Patricia acknowledges that while she had received a lot of formal training because of her two advanced degrees in school administration, the principalship goes beyond the formal training. The combination of the formal accompanied by the informal training she acquired through the years was what helped her to become an effective school administrator.

Patricia defines the primary role of an Adventist principal as a spiritual leader with great faith who prays a lot. She explains that, during the current school year, her school was considered a campus of prayer because of how deeply passionate the staff were about prayer as a school family. As they faced huge struggles like parental illness, cancer, unemployment, and death, the entire school family embarked upon an intentional focus on prayer and had the faith to heavily rely upon it.

The spiritual leader should establish a culture at the school in which the spiritual development of others is fostered. For example, she describes the experience of a parent who met the Lord as she was on a field trip with her students at an assisted living facility. The parent was visiting a sick relative and noticed a group of students singing, praying,
and visiting with the patients. He was so impressed with the behavior of the children and the activity they were engaged in that when the performance was over, he followed their bus all of the way back to school. The parent entered the school and enjoyed what he observed, the way in which all could articulate the mission of the school, how warm the staff was, and how eager to learn the students were. He was so impressed he immediately enrolled his son.

Soon after, as the boy returned home from school in the evenings he would share delightful Bible stories, sing Christian songs, pray, and praise God. The son’s behavior caused extreme curiosity for the parent and one Sabbath he slipped into the church next to the school where his son was enrolled to see what was going on. After his first visit at the church, he continued to visit because his life was so deeply impacted by the worship experience he observed. He enrolled in Bible studies, developed a new-found relationship with Jesus, and was baptized. The most inspiring thing about this experience for Patricia is this very same parent was a district judge who later became heavily engaged in the governance of her school.

Patricia believes the role of Adventist principals is to be transparent. Therefore, all of her parents know who she is and they also know what she stands for. They never need to ask because she is extremely transparent as a leader and works hard to be one. Towards that end, she makes it clear to the parents how very much she loves them and their children. However, if they err in any way Patricia immediately points it out by lovingly sharing, “This is unacceptable and inappropriate and thus she cannot at any point accept this.” This kind of transparency has fostered a strong sense of trust and confidence from the parents she ministers to. She explains that the parents know immediately that
what she says and does is congruent. “It doesn’t matter who you are, whether you’re the pastor’s daughter or the president’s son, you’re all under the same banner in the eyes of the Lord and in my eyes.” That’s the very principle she lives by and because it is very important, she models it by example.

According to Patricia, Adventist school principals need to learn to listen more and speak very little. Most of the time, she talks little and listens intently. At times her teachers do not understand her philosophy and will say at meetings, “You gave that parent so much time to talk.” Patricia responds, “Well, its better they talk to us than somebody outside.” Her practice for many years is to always give parents the option of expressing how they feel. Whether they are angry, upset, or whatever the issues are, she listens. She then addresses the issue and always seeks to offer a possible solution by the end of the day. Patricia reasons because the students spend the bulk of their time at school and they are the parents, her goal is for them to be happy parents. She postures, “How can we work together to resolve a problem if we are not even working together or listening to each other.” Hence, Patricia strongly believes in effective listening.

Adventist principals must also cultivate and develop relationships with all who compose the school family. According to Patricia, a principal needs to know who the families are in their school. For example, she yearly learns the names of all of the students and of every parent at her school. She knows what is happening with them such as happy occasions or when they are facing a huge crisis in their lives. When she is told a parent has lost their job, she goes to the business office, and informs them that a parent has lost their job. She then inquires about what if anything can be done to help the family financially for the rest of the school year.
Patricia believes strongly that the relationships she has cultivated go beyond academics. It is a holistic approach that conveys the message that everything matters; “Everything to the students, to the teachers, to the families, absolutely everything matters.” It means the principals as leaders will always have their fingers on the pulse of what is going on at their schools and use it as a compass for the direction of leading. It also encompasses the gift of Godly discernment:

I think part of it is the gift of discernment, being able to have the personality to deal with all types of people; the irate parent, the parent you can’t find, the students, the teacher. I mean it encompasses so much more than teaching. It calls for so much more wisdom and discernment to do a decent or successful job at it. That you just simply don’t get in a degree.

Complexities of the Principalship

One of the difficulties Patricia encounters with the principalship is the fact that she works and worships in the same community with the same people she works with. The difficulty lies in the fact that parents have a hard time separating the two roles; the parents can’t seem to separate the fact she is their church member and their child’s principal. Sometimes, if she is having a hard day and is being reserved and for some unknown reason forgets to greet a parent, they automatically assume she is not being “very friendly and it’s personal.”

The challenge of worshipping with her school community is also an easy part of the job for Patricia. For example, she emphasizes having the opportunity to worship with her school family affords her the ability to share the same spiritual values. An environment is created where she can pray with her students, she can transmit her church principles and her school principles, and she does not have to be afraid to do it publicly like in a public school where you can’t pray, mention God, or do any of the spiritual
kinds of things that are so important for the Christian leader. By worshipping with the students “she is free to share not only our Adventism but our God as well.” Patricia strives really hard to do this by not telling the children they have to be Adventists or attend the church. She wants the students to get to know Jesus Christ personally. If in the process, they choose to be an Adventist by the way the team models Christianity, by the way they live, and by their example, then that is just “great.”

Another difficulty of the job is the lack of respect and boundaries parents have for principals. She explains, “There are some parents who have no boundaries whatsoever.” When Patricia greets a parent and refers to them by their last name, some respond, “You can just call me, Phillip.” Patricia answers, “No, I cannot, you are my parent, and I try to always maintain a professional relationship with all my parents.” Patricia believes it is an easy temptation to break the professional relationship into a personal one and when this is done, one’s leadership becomes ineffective because “familiarity breeds contempt.”

Patricia identifies the easiest part of the principalship as the children. She smiles and gets really giddy when she shares that she simply loves all of her students. She values and holds in high esteem the relationships she has with them. Her students know that even when they are in trouble, they are loved; “When they’ve done something wrong, I can say to them, You know what, I love you, but I just didn’t love what you did so we’re going to have consequences for this.”

Professional Growth Opportunities

Patricia has experienced many professional growth activities. She has served on committees for her local conference, union, and the North America Division Department of Education. She also participates in conference-sponsored as well as locally sponsored
workshops and seminars. All of her professional growth activities are paid for by her employing organization. She also participates in national organizations and is currently a member of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP).

What Patricia enjoys the most about attending professional growth opportunities is her ability to return to her campus, teach her team members, and observe them grow as they embrace their newfound knowledge. Her team members are encouraged to participate in professional growth opportunities outside of the school. She uses staff meetings to provide learning snippets for her team. Recently they engaged in a DVD learning experience on the topic of discipline. At the end of the session, all who participated were encouraged to try a new strategy they had learned from the session and implement it in their classroom. Patricia believes this type of exercise allows her team to stay accountable for the skills they have learned and will eventually master with practice.

Support of the Principalship

When Patricia first became principal, the only support offered to her as a leader was from her faculty and staff. While she still continues to receive support from them, her sphere of support has expanded. She now experiences “wonderful support” from students and parents. For example, her parents volunteer to assist her on many tasks and the students are always readily available to assist by being her minutemen.

Patricia considers the support she receives from the constituent pastors as lacking. While she would like to believe all the pastors within her constituency are supportive, there are some who are more supportive than others. Her school constituency is composed of 60 churches, and support for her is demonstrated in the form of enrollment
numbers. According to Patricia, the pastors who strongly support the school have a large amount of students represented from the local church. Those who do not support the school as strongly have fewer students represented in the student body from their churches. She believes there is also a communication issue which hinders the support of the pastors of her constituency. Many times the pastors do not really know what is going on at the school and appear to be indifferent.

Some pastors do not have a clue about what is going on in the school. So it is not like they are not supporting the school, they just have an attitude of indifference regarding the school. I find that in a lot of situations.

This lack of communication and indifference can be interpreted as lack of support because of how disengaged the pastors are perceived to be.

However, there are some pastors in her constituency who do support her. They demonstrate their support by conducting chapels, giving Bible studies to the students, participating at board meetings, and involving Patricia and the students in their regularly scheduled church programs.

Patricia experiences support in the form of mentors. She identifies the head master who encouraged her to become a principal in the beginning as her first mentor. She describes her mentor as a very calm man. If there was any type of crisis going on at the school, like if the whole school was falling apart, nothing would faze him. He was always extremely positive about everything. Patricia learned so much from him that, to this day, she still models the lessons he engraved upon her life. For example, he would always tell Patricia, “Don’t worry about it; come let me pray with you” and he would. She recognizes that even as a teacher, when she faced challenges, she always remembered her mentor’s advice and simply turned it over to the Lord in prayer. She still
uses this simple advice and recognizes it has made a big difference in her administrative practice. Her mentor has always been and continues to be supportive even though he is no longer at the school. There are many days he drops by out of the blue and says, “I just came to see how you are doing. Are you getting your rest? Are you doing this or that?” Patricia reflects warmly, and says, “In terms of a mentor, he’s just been like out of this world.”

Patricia’s school board members are supportive although she does not see them regularly. Because the constituency is so large, they do not have monthly school board meetings. Board meetings are held once every 3 months, or once every 2 months, and the principal is not expected to attend school board meetings. She experiences support from them in the form of prayers, encouragement, advice, and their time when available and needed.

The greatest support she receives from her board is from the executive committee of her school. This group of select school board members composed of representatives from the different regions of the city is the ultimate governing body that handles all of the day-to-day operations of the school. They support her in all of the decision-making processes of the school, budgeting issues, areas of conflict, and strategic planning. The school board chair visits quite frequently and is engaged in the school. He is always available to discuss important issues, inquiring about how things are going, and how he can best serve Patricia. She considers her school board chair “a fabulous man.” Recently, a teacher had surgery with life-threatening complications. The entire school family participated in a season of prayer on behalf of the teacher. The school board chair made the time to attend the special prayer session. Patricia felt the school family was
appreciative of his kind gesture and heartfelt sentiment. In essence, Patricia feels more supported than not as a leader although she explains there are always challenges:

You will always have people who don’t support you, who think Christian education is not as good as another system, or our buildings don’t look as nice as other schools. You will always have those people, yet we have a good core group of people that do support us.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Patricia sadly acknowledges balance in her life is quite the challenge. She had always reasoned it would get easier to maintain balance when her children got older; however, it has actually become a lot more difficult because the boys are 4 years apart and are engaged in different activities and interests at their developmental stages.

It is also challenging for her to maintain balance because her husband is the Development Officer of the school. On most days, his schedule is just as grueling as Patricia’s. On days they have joint evening meetings, their workday hours are extended. On those days, the boys just sit and wait around for the meetings to end before they can all go home as a family. Patricia believes her family has been deeply affected by the demands in her schedule, although they do not ever complain about it. She considers the reason for her children being so tolerant of her schedule is because the children are just great kids.

Recently the realization set in that all along she had been neglecting her husband and children for “the sake of ministry.” The pace of working until 9 each evening could not continue because her family needed to become her top priority. She is now committed to being at home by 7 each evening. She is also curtailing her extracurricular activities like being the Adventurer and Pathfinder director at her church by submitting her
resignation to her pastor, and effective December will no longer lead out in those church-sponsored activities.

Patricia has vowed to take control of her life by learning to say “no” more often. Prior to this experience, it had always been easy for her to say “yes” when asked to do something. She would always indicate, “I can do this, not a problem, yes, yes, yes . . .” However, she has painfully realized “you can’t do all of that and still have a vibrant personal and spiritual life.” Consequently, most times when she gets home in the evenings and picks up her Bible to read a text, she cannot even focus on what she is reading because she is so tired. She considers this practice a dangerous spiral effect in her personal and spiritual life.

Since making a concerted effort to maintain balance, she believes she has become an even stronger leader as affirmed by some. Patricia explains she would be a lot more effective as a leader if she were to drop more of the things which encroach upon her personal and family time.

Patricia handles stress well because of her even-tempered personality which does not allow her to get easily flustered or frazzled. She has high expectations and standards for the way she handles the unforeseen accompanied by administration. She believes every problem has a solution and for every challenge there is a victory. She takes things in stride because she is confident things will get better sooner or later. Patricia goes about her day without worrying about the things she cannot control; “When it comes to the stresses associated with school, yes, they’re there, but they don’t ever take over me.” She considers these stresses as part of what comes along with school administration.
Why I Stay as Principal

The main reason why Patricia stays as a principal for consecutive years in the Adventist system is because she vowed to God she would remain until He indicated to her it was time to leave. There are times she wonders whether she needs to reconsider because of the challenges she may be facing and soon realizes it is only her human side getting the best of her. During these times, she redirects her thoughts to remembering why she is in Adventist education in the first place. Undoubtedly, it is because God called her:

I’m not here because I want to be here, I’m here because God called me to be here. If he wants me to go someplace else, He will show me the way and He will provide that way for me.

Patricia stays because of her love and devotion to the students. “What makes me stay are the students; that’s it.” She emphasizes that if the job just entailed the mundane and routine things accompanied by school administration, perhaps she would not be interested in the job. However, she believes her work entails so much more; “it is really all about the students.” Every day Patricia has the opportunity to impact the lives of her students and emphasizes, “The students make it all worthwhile for me.”

She remembers when a little boy forgot his baseball uniform on the day of a huge playoff game. He knew Patricia would know the solution to his problem and showed up at her office visibly upset. Immediately she helped find a uniform from the stack of extra uniforms in her office for emergencies like these. The boy was confident Patricia would help him and she did, and off he went to play the game. Yet before he left her office, he said, “Miss, isn’t God good? I was thinking I wouldn’t be able to play and look, now I have a uniform because of you!” She still remembers the boy calling out, “Nothing is too
impossible for God or for Miss Patricia.” She shared several similar stories with the same outcome: students having defining moments in their spiritual journey because of their direct relationship with her.

Patricia wants principals across the Adventist system of education in North America to know they need to be strong leaders. They need to understand their jobs are a direct calling from God.

When you come to an Adventist school as an administrator you have to start saying, “This is my calling and ministry.” The work of evangelism and education are one. And sometimes, they are separated because the job appears to be an 8-5 or an 8-4 job. Yet it is not a job, it is a calling and ministry. It is really a ministry. When something is a ministry, the way you approach it, it’s totally different than thinking of it as a job.

According to Patricia, Adventist principals are at their schools because God has placed them there, not because the school board chair got them there. They are called to serve because that is where God wants them to be until He decides they need to be somewhere else. She encourages principals to embrace the call faithfully and determine each day to make a difference in the lives of the students they minister to.

Adventist principals must lead by principle and conviction not for the sake of power or popularity. They must determine they cannot be popular. If they are popular and everybody likes them, there is a problem according to Patricia. She believes it means they are trying to please everybody and for sure something is not right. Not standing up for the principles and values of your school is always detrimental for a school leader. Thus, Patricia stands by principle and conviction at her school and never wavers. Parents can always “bank” on the fact she will abide by the rules. For example, there is a policy at her school pertaining to missing work when students go on vacation while school is in session. She communicates the policy, how she will enforce it, and encourages parents
not to take vacations while school is in session. She admonishes them not to expect teachers to give their children any homework they have missed while on vacation or expect extra time to do the assignment as per the policy. The policy is enforced for everyone with no exceptions and there are no repercussions because she is quite clear. Patricia encourages Adventist principals to be consistent in all they do. “You have to have consistency about what you do and never show you have favorites because it’s easily discernable by others.”

**Phillip: The Too-Good-to-Be-True Principal**

Phillip is the principal of a secondary school in the Adventist system of education with an enrollment of 209 students and 20 faculty and staff members. It is considered an average size school within the Adventist school system. Phillip has served in education for the last 40 years. He worked for the public-school system for 6 years before devoting the rest of his professional career to the Adventist system of education. Out of the 25 years he has been an Adventist school administrator, he has spent the last 18 at his current building.

He was exposed to Adventist education from his primary until adulthood years because his parents were deeply committed to Adventist education. He attended elementary, secondary, and college years in the Adventist system of education. To assist his parents with tuition, Phillip worked at a local print shop for 8 years at both the academy and college he attended. While in college, Phillip majored in elementary education.

After completing college, Phillip was invited to join an Adventist hospital to work in their public relations department. Phillip accepted and was thrilled to find out the
hospital he was going to be working at was connected to an academy right on the grounds of the hospital. Soon after, he was told they were in need of an academy physical education teacher. While teaching PE, the school administration learned Phillip had a background in education and offered him a full-time position.

After his initial introduction into Adventist education, Phillip realized he felt more comfortable teaching students than being in public relations. He resigned his position at the hospital and became a full-time teacher at the school. His passion for Adventist education has enabled him to serve as an academy dean, guidance counselor, PE teacher, and dean of men at the college level before becoming an Adventist principal.

Phillip was invited to become an Adventist school principal by the superintendent of schools at the local conference. While working as the Guidance Counselor and the Vice Principal at a junior academy, the superintendent urged him to interview for the job because of the skill set he developed through the years and his keen people skills. He consented to submit a resume, interview, and accept the job. Phillip has never regretted accepting this position and thoroughly enjoys every aspect of the principalship.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Phillip received no formal training to be an Adventist school principal. He used the experiences he attained while serving as a school dean to define and learn how to be an effective school principal. He explains:

It really wasn't very different from running a dormitory and from operating even a classroom because being a principal is simply working with a team of people to obtain some kind of goal or objective in a way that will be good for everybody.

He learned to use team work by defining and working towards the same goals with his school team. Phillip notes teamwork is one of the characteristics which define
his leadership style to this day. If he is facing a huge challenge in the area of school finance, he gathers his financial team and they process and develop strategies for handling the problem. If he is having a difficult time with a student, he will process it with his team by doing everything within their power to resolve it. If there is a faculty issue needing resolution, as a team they collectively do so.

The most significant thing Phillip learned was the principal is the spiritual leader of the school, one who establishes the spiritual tone and climate of the school. As the spiritual leader, he was directly responsible for making a difference in the lives of the people he came in contact with on a daily basis. He had opportunities to introduce them to Jesus, help them develop a personal relationship with Him, and cultivate relationships built on Christian principles.

According to Phillip, the spiritual leader of the school has the responsibility of modeling Christian principles in all of their practices. They must live the kind of life that young people, parents, teachers, or whoever is associated with the school would be able to perceive them as living that which inspires them to live an Adventist lifestyle. He explains that the spiritual leader of an Adventist institution needs to be committed to God and able to develop their individuality by being transparent. They must be able to demonstrate who they really are and say they are whether it is on Sabbath or any other day of the week. He emphasizes that an Adventist principal needs to be committed to God, committed to ministry, and, above all, deeply committed to students.

Phillip learned that as the principal, he was the chief executive officer and leader of the school. The buck always stopped with him, and if a hard decision needed to be made, he was the one who had to make it. He learned he was the chief financial officer of
the school and was responsible for all aspects of the financial management of the school. When finances did not allow for an additional faculty member, as the principal he had to step up to the plate and teach the class. He was the chief operating officer of the school and was responsible for all aspects of the day-to-day operations of the school including building maintenance, grounds, and facilities. He was also the instructional leader of the school and was responsible to help direct and guide the academic progress and development of the students by helping teachers along the way to become exceptional instructional leaders for the sake of the students.

Phillip begins each day at 4:30 a.m. The first thing Phillip does when he arrives in the building is to have devotional time with God. His devotional time is concluded with a season of prayer for his school family. At the end of the year everyone at his school has been prayed for. He accomplishes this by praying on behalf of four students, two families, his wife, kids, and grandchildren daily. As the day progresses, Phillip attempts to accomplish the tasks he has identified the previous day as needing to be completed:

You know I love my job and I just do whatever to accomplish my job. Whatever comes across my desk, whatever people need, I always try to meet those needs and try to take care of things as they occur. While at times I may not know what a typical day looks like, I know for 25 years I've accomplished the goals of the day while thoroughly enjoying doing so.

Complexities of the Principalship

Phillip enjoys being a principal in the Adventist system of education so much he cannot identify any complexities associated with the principalship; “I don't find anything very hard about being an Adventist principal.” While he does not like completing mandated forms or attending meetings, Phillip does not consider his job difficult; “I don’t find anything hard about the job at all. I mean, for me, I'd rather do this, than have to
work for a living.” He explains that he has not experienced any real difficulties with his board, faculty, parents, students, or the community. In 26 years of being a school principal and 40-plus years of being a teacher, “I can count on one hand the number of days I have not wanted to come to work.” Phillip considers “everything” about the principalship easy because he loves and enjoys his job so very much.

He ponders and struggles to identify at least one complexity and responds with “perhaps the parents?” He describes the struggle he sometimes encounters helping parents understand that when they have a problem with a teacher they must resolve it with the teacher before involving the principal.

The challenge according to Phillip is that there are parents who believe they are experts when it comes to educating their children because at one time they were students. They feel entitled and empowered to be demanding parents. Some parents believe they can actually teach a class better than the teacher and rationalize they may even be able to conduct the class effectively. Phillip worries about these parents because they “already know they are right.” He explains that when parents bring the baggage of their past experiences to the teaching environment, it impedes their ability to resolve issues in an appropriate manner. Phillip has established a protocol for expressing parental concerns and has reaped only small milestones in helping parents practice it.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Phillip credits the generosity of his school board for his ability to participate in several professional growth opportunities. If he wants to attend any professional growth activity, attend a national convention, or enroll in classes, a professional growth budget has been established for him to use at his discretion. This budget enables him to
participate in several professional growth activities throughout the year. He chooses wisely, so he never takes advantage of the generosity of the people who are so intent in growing him as a leader. Before engaging in an activity, he always confers with his vice principal of finance to ensure that the funding available is not needed for anything else.

He is a member of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP), as well as a number of state-level organizations. For the last 8 years, Phillip has served on the board of education in the state where he is principal. He is also a member of the Association of Adventist School Administrators (ASDASA) and participates on various conference, union, and college boards within the Adventist system.

Phillip is an avid reader who enjoys reading about different things even outside of his area of expertise and appreciation. He encourages his teachers to read as well and to share any good books they come across within their field so he can also read them. This practice allows him to familiarize himself with the interests of his teachers. Likewise, if there is a book he enjoys, he shares it with his faculty and they always enjoy his suggestions.

Support of the Principalship

The greatest support Phillip receives as a leader is from his wife. He becomes visibly emotional when he begins to speak about her because of her unyielding support. He indicates:

I've been blessed by a good God and with a loving wife who has been willing to work alongside with me. Not only agreeing with what I do but a wife who works alongside of me and supports my work.
Phillip insists he will be eternally grateful to God for the amazing woman he bestowed on him and will always do his best to honor her.

He experiences tremendous support from his colleagues. They support him professionally and personally as well. For example, recently Phillip was having a difficult time with his youngest son and the choices he was making. One evening while at home, he received a visit from a colleague who handed him an envelope and said, “If you need to go see your son, my wife and I will absorb all of your expenses so you can see him.” Phillip and his wife were deeply touched by the generosity of their colleague. They would have never been able to visit their son without the gift because the funds within the family budget were short.

Phillip experiences support from his conference and union educational leaders. This support is demonstrated in the form of advice and affirmation. Many years ago a superintendent advised him to always allow a 24-hour period to go by before processing or handling a challenging situation to avoid making a hasty administrative decision. He still uses this practice every time he encounters a delicate situation. From another superintendent he learned to find out what was working for other principals and use their ideas. The superintendent advised, “When leading one does not have to reinvent the wheel.” Whatever he can find that is working successfully for other principals he observes and applies it at his school; “I snag every idea and assess it to see if it works for me. Then I try it.” Phillip explains, “There is always something to learn from another leader and you should never be afraid to try it.”

He receives unyielding support from his school board members. He considers the relationships with his school board members as extremely loyal. He indicates that the
entire time he has been principal, they have never experienced a disagreement or fight. Even during some of the most challenging administrative years, the support of his board has been unwavering.

Phillip has had three mentors who have supported him greatly. They have all deeply impacted his educational ministry in striking ways. These men were deeply committed to ministry and served with a passion for people. They shared their wisdom, advice, best practices, and affirmation in a myriad of ways and it was consistent and ongoing. One mentor was humble and led by example. He picked up the garbage when it was full rather than waiting for the maintenance crew to collect it. Another mentor was extremely forthright in guiding Phillip along the way. Inspite of his candor, it never came across as though he was being critical or undermining. This mentor shared how deeply he cared for Phillip by genuinely taking a special interest in enhancing his leadership abilities. Another mentor taught him how to treat the people entrusted to him. He was taught how to speak kindly, how to listen intently, how to respect people wholeheartedly, and how to genuinely show people you deeply care about them. He learned these lessons by observing his mentors and by being inspired by their leadership styles.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Phillip indicates he does not do a very good job of maintaining balance in his life. This is an area which is a tremendous “downfall” for him. With deep remorse he describes the story of one of his sons. One day Phillip found a note on his desk at school that read, “Dear Dad, may I have an appointment with you?” At a very young age, his son figured out the only way to see his father was by making an appointment because of his hectic schedule, so the boy requested one.
Because of his failure to maintain balance, he acknowledges his wife solely was responsible for raising their children. When the children were small, his wife took care of all of the needs of the children. Through the years, Phillip worked for long periods of time and consecutive days. Because he is at school daily at 4:30 a.m. and does not leave until 7:00 p.m. on most evenings, he has not had the opportunity to spend quality time with his wife for several years either. Yet Phillip believes because his wife is so loving and generous, she has patiently learned to adapt to his lifestyle through the years and does it with great understanding and no complaining or nagging.

One of the reasons why Phillip spends so much time at the school is because he firmly believes adults are important in the lives of young people. He is a firm advocate for young people. Therefore he believes he needs to be where the students are and attends at least 90% of all school activities.

I try to say yes to kids as much as I can because I think that when you say yes to kids it gives them an opportunity to understand an adult believes in them. That somebody who is trying to live the example of a Christian life will help them have the opportunity to see that person in real flesh and blood.

He is on every field trip, senior class trip, basketball game, musical performance, recital, debate, and student association activity the school offers. On the days two activities are held at the same time, his wife assists him by going to the one he is unable to attend in order to support the students. He explains that students, parents, and colleagues truly appreciate his efforts of always being there for his young people. Phillip notes he does not have any stress. To avoid having any stress, he vacations to get away from the day-to-day routines of the job.
Why I Stay as Principal

Phillip has stayed in the Adventist system of education in North America for more than 10 consecutive years because of his deep commitment and passion for Adventist education. As a product of Adventist education, he is deeply rooted in it. His parents went through the Adventist school system, their children were enrolled in the Adventist system, and all of his children are in Adventist education. Phillip affirms that he stays in Adventist education because he loves it so much he does not ever feel he is working for a living since Adventist education is his life.

He stays in Adventist education because he has a chance to make a difference in the lives of the young people. Phillip shares an example of a student in her senior year who was very distraught one day. She lost the ring her boyfriend had just given her and was in absolute despair. While Phillip was in the hallway, she approached him and shared her dilemma. Upon hearing how distressed she was, he suggested they pray together. In the prayer he pleaded with God to help them find the ring which was somewhere on campus, though he did not know where. The young lady responded that perhaps she would not find the ring for not abiding to the school policy on jewelry. Admittedly, she lost the ring because she was trying to hide it from the faculty. Phillip told her he thought God wanted her to have the ring and asked her to stop worrying and sent her back to class.

The young lady returned to class and Phillip continued to look for the ring. He looked for it for quite a while but could not find it, so he returned to his office. He continued to pray for God to help him find the ring for the student’s sake. Three days later, the maintenance man found the ring. Phillip was so excited he quickly proceeded to
find the student. He found the student in study hall and walked directly towards her.

When he was finally by her side, Phillip dropped to his knees and asked, “Is this your ring?” With tears in her eyes, she responded, “Jesus really does care, doesn’t he?” He has stayed in contact with the young lady through the years and whenever she sees him, she always shares, “Mr. Phillip, Jesus still cares doesn’t He.” He notes, Jesus cares and I care for the students:

I stay in Adventist education because I get the chance to touch kids’ lives. There are opportunities when they can see the power of God moving and I just hope they look back and remember that. I stay in this business to touch and simply to try to help kids see that God is good.

Phillip was able to recount story after story of how God had used him to make an impact on the lives of students. He explained that what students fail to see is how they bless him more than they will ever know when he sees them growing in Jesus.

In concluding the interview, Phillip wants me to share with principals across the Adventist system of education in North America that it is important to remember that the reason they have been called to serve is to help kids grow, mature, and learn. He wants them to teach young people that God loves them, to model Christianity by living a life which exemplifies the principles we as Adventists espouse.

I think if principals can get into the principalship realizing what they’re doing is not pushing paper, not going to committee meetings, not filling out forms, not giving chapel talks necessarily, not even disciplining; that what they’re doing is valuable and that they are in this business because of the kids, then it would be really worthwhile.

Phillip reiterates, “It’s all about the kids and their future.” His goal has always been to help his students accept Jesus Christ by urging them to “keep leaning towards Jesus.”
Rachel: The Tiny School With the Big-Hearted Principal

Rachel is the principal of a small elementary school with 18 students, two teachers, and many volunteers. She has been an Adventist school administrator for 38 years and has served at her current school for 37 of those years.

She majored in elementary education because of her interest in teaching. Upon graduating from college, her first job was as head teacher of a one-room schoolhouse in New England with an enrollment of seven students. Rachel automatically became the principal. The practice within most Adventist schools is that if you are the head teacher of a small school, you are also the administrator. She believes she has done an admirable job sustaining both roles throughout all those years.

To stay close to her fiancée who was a student at Loma Linda University, Rachel enrolled in graduate school as well and obtained a degree in school administration. While at Loma Linda University, she developed the strong conviction that school administration was a good fit for her. “It was such a good fit for me because my desire was to be in charge and oversee the entire operation of a total school program.” While Rachel recognized the principal’s job had challenges, her advanced degree adequately prepared her to handle them.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

When Rachel first began her administrative experience, the role and expectations associated with the principalship were not clearly defined to her since her primary responsibility was being a classroom teacher; “I was the only teacher so the principalship took on a role all of its own.” Through the years, she became more comfortable with her dual responsibilities because she got used to “being in charge.” Rachel developed a
professional confidence stemming from her experiences as a teacher which she applied to her administrative role. For example, she learned lessons about caring, compassion, understanding, organization, negotiation, and being on task from her classroom experiences and carried them into the principalship. As the principal, she applied her new-found knowledge in dealing with parents, board members, educational leaders, and her constituency.

Based upon her experiences, Rachel defines the role of the Adventist principal as one who gives back to their constituency. The principal must be a strong supporter of the constituent church. She believes this can be accomplished by the principal’s total support of the church which has consistently sustained the school through the years. By being engaged in the church and underscoring the collaboration between the school and the church, contributions can be made which are rewarding for the members and the constituency. Rachel emphasizes that the responsibility of the principal is to stay in constant communication with the constituents by underscoring the mission and purpose in the value of Christian education:

Principals need to establish a relationship with the parents, constituencies and community by conveying the message that the most important thing for them is their children. It is also important to educate the students not only through Christian education but to meet societal challenges.

Once this message is fully conveyed by the principal, according to Rachel, everything else will fall into place because of the confidence and trust you have fostered as a leader.

Rachel considers organization as an essential role of the small-school principal. As a teaching principal in a two-room school, she has to be extremely organized in fulfilling both roles. Currently, Rachel teaches students in Kindergarten through Grade 4. She notes that organization is especially crucial in a multigrade situation because of all of
the risks involved in not being prepared. She places great emphasis in communicating the importance of organization to both the students and parents: “I not only organize my students, I organize my parents as well, so they know what's expected of me, what is expected of the children, and what I expect of them.”

While there is no such thing as a typical day in any school system, Rachel describes the typical day for her as one in which she arrives right as classes begin, and on most days she does not return home until after 6 each evening. At the beginning of the day, she proceeds to greet and visit with the students before they do their worship; then they jump right into the lessons of the day. Rachel has no release time during the school day to fulfill her administrative responsibilities. She waits to complete those at the conclusion of the day, before school begins the next day, or on the weekends. She completes all administrative tasks on her own since she does not have a secretary. When the responsibilities are many, she counts on the help of volunteers to assist her. The volunteers not only help with administrative responsibilities, they help with the facilities, the safety of the children and building, and the cleanliness of the school building. She acknowledges that the demands of maintaining dual responsibilities require her to adhere to a 24-hour, seven-day workweek.

Complexities of the Principalship

Rachel struggles to identify anything difficult about the principalship because she truly loves her job. She considers that perhaps finances can be difficult, as most schools struggle in this area. She notes that while finances may be a struggle for many principals, it’s never been one for her because God always takes care of their needs. For example,
recently she experienced a major hurdle in the area of finances and within a month “God had worked it out.”

Over several months, the school accumulated a $30,000 deficit. The pastor suggested they write a letter to all the parents detailing the dilemma. Rachel felt it was better to visit each parent in their homes and share the financial difficulty in person. The pastor agreed with Rachel and after much prayer, she began the journey of visiting each family in the evenings and pleading for their help to resolve the debt. Within a week and a half she received $22,000 from the parents as a direct result of her prayerful visits.

We have a new treasurer and he said “Praise the Lord, What are you doing to get the money? What are you doing out there alone?” I simply said because of my relationship with the parents, I did not have to pressure them. I know the parents; a lot of them wait for their income tax checks to pay their school bills. Then something else comes up and they fail to pay. I just prayed, then gently reminded them about the commitment that we talked about and made.

According to Rachel, “The personal touch can never be underestimated.” She humbly recognizes this experience as a modern-day miracle by giving the credit directly to God and not to anything special she did.

Another difficulty associated with the small-school principal is the lack of time to fulfill the administrative responsibilities accompanied with the job. Rachel struggles to complete administrative tasks which include reports to the school board, reports to the conference, district and county mandates, and letters to parents in a timely manner because there is never enough time in the day to fulfill these responsibilities.

The easiest part of the principalship for Rachel is the bonds and the relationships she has developed through the years with her school family. Because she has been at the school for so long, the students and the parents know and trust her. The parents know
what kind of person she is, they know what her interests are, and they know her number one priority is to educate the students through the ministry of Christian education.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Rachel belongs to several professional organizations and associations. She is a member of The New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) and the Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP). She also serves as a member of The Association of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators (ASDASA).

She participates and leads out in several conference-sponsored workshops, trainings, and seminars. Rachel was on the steering committee which developed the new reading series for Adventist elementary-school teachers across North America. This experience has enabled Rachel to lead out in reading training sessions for administrators, to provide reading workshops relating to balance literacy for teachers, and to sponsor pathway reading series and differentiated instruction in-services to educators across her union.

I've been asked to do workshops and it's been really eye-opening. It’s also been really rewarding to share with them my successes and to hear their stories and tell where they are at this point in their lives and the difficulties they are facing. I've been very fortunate to have been able to share my experiences with these teachers in and out of my Union.

What is especially gratifying for Rachel is to recognize that even though she is the principal of a small school, she is afforded the opportunity to make a significant impact across the Adventist system in North America because of the professional growth opportunities she has experienced. In return, she chooses to readily share these experiences with other educators.
Support of the Principalship

Small-school principals are totally dependent and reliant upon administrative support. For Rachel, administrative support is never lacking as she receives support in many ways. The primary support she receives comes first from her church pastors. There are two pastors in particular, a current and a retired minister, who are extremely supportive of her leadership. They have a “hands-off approach” about how best to support her because she has been the principal for so long and they trust her as a leader. They feel the best way to support her is by readily being available and always asking, “What can we do for you?” The retired minister performed Rachel’s wedding ceremony and was her pastor for many years. They have developed a bond rooted in mutual respect, loyalty, and admiration for each other, which she describes as unyielding.

The other pastors in her constituency are also firm supporters of Christian education. Pastors in her conference are not hired unless they are supportive of the school program and demonstrate it by enrolling their children in the local church school within their district. Every church in her union has to adopt a local school and be fiscally responsible by contributing to the financial management of the school, its operation, and its enrollment. In her attempt to make the relationship with the pastors reciprocal, she accommodates the needs of the churches. For example, she readily allows the local churches to use her school gym for church activities and invites them to all school-sponsored programs.

The church constituency is also supportive of Rachel’s leadership. They demonstrate their support by attending school functions and programs. They pray on her behalf and affirm her by frequently sending notes or cards of encouragement. She
reciprocates by having her bell choir perform at all eight constituent churches within her district. The students are always engaged in regularly scheduled church programs. The constituent churches are very supportive financially. Out of the eight constituent churches in her district, four do not have students enrolled at her school. However, they still support the school financially by contributing a monthly subsidy. As a small token of her appreciation, Rachel goes to these churches and engages the students in work bees, musical programs, and church-sponsored activities. She keeps open lines of communication between the school and the church by constantly communicating updates about the school and being intentional and consistent about visiting all of the churches on a regular basis:

You just have to get your faith out there and be consistent doing it, not for a one-time deal but often. If you don’t, the members will say “oh yeah, she came because she needs our money.”

This intentionality and consistency have enabled her to receive strong support from the eight church constituencies. She emphasizes that consistency “plays a big part for the successful administrator; it’s really all about consistency and organization.”

Rachel receives strong support from all of her school board members. There are 12 board members in all who represent the eight churches in her district. She shares that she has never had any conflicts or confrontational issues with her board. Their strong support simply conveys the message that “whatever she says goes” as they are in full support of her leadership at all times. She considers the support she receives from the board as “excellent.”

Rachel feels strong support from the parents at the school. She believes the parents support her because they trust her. The bonds they have developed through the
years are strong, and even though they may not agree on a certain issue, the parents always know and trust she has the best interest of the children at hand because of her track record. The parents also support Rachel by remaining in or relocating to the community so she can teach their children when they are of school age. There are five students currently enrolled at the school whose parents were once Rachel’s students and desire the same exceptional educational experience for their children.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Rachel sadly recognizes that she has very little balance in her professional life. She notes, “I do not have a whole lot of balance in my personal life as well.” She considers her “work life” as her “life” since she is able to combine her personal and professional life at school. Rachel explains that her husband is the second teacher at the school, and they have no small children in the home to care for as their only son is in medical school.

While one-on-one time is a struggle for Rachel and her husband, she feels she at least gets to see him throughout the school day. She describes their relationship as if they were two passing ships. For example, her husband arrives at school very early each morning and she arrives later as school is just beginning. In the afternoon, he leaves shortly after dismissal and she leaves later in the evening. While they do not have much time to do anything outside of school, their relationship is developed at school. Rachel considers it a blessing to work alongside her husband and believes this arrangement has worked well for them for over 15 years.

Rachel handles stress with “a lot of prayer” and the strong relationships she has developed with her school family; “I don’t have a whole lot of stress because I have a
really good relationship with the parents and with the school board.” She considers herself the “steady factor” at the school. While school board members, faculty, and staff come and go, she is still at the school. Rachel believes her longevity in the school does not minimize the stresses of her job; she is simply able to share her stresses with her school family and with their help “they always help her get through anything.”

Why I Stay as Principal

Rachel stays as a school principal in the Adventist system of education in North America because of her strong relationship with God. She is deeply convicted and believes “God has chosen her to be at her school at this particular time, place, environment, and in this particular area of the country.” During the last 30 years, she has been offered several job opportunities, but Rachel has chosen to stay at her school because she believes God has a work for her to do there and her work is not yet completed. Occasionally people ask, “Aren’t you burnt out yet?” Rachel responds, “No, God continues to ask me to be the effective administrator I am and I never get tired of doing my job really well.”

Rachel stays because of the students. She describes inspiring experiences of students who have influenced her decision to stay, of former students who are now college graduates with professions of their own. On any given day, they will just send a note of thanks, an invitation to a graduation, a party for their children, or wedding. One of these students recently sent a “save the date” card for her upcoming nuptials.

If former students are within the school area, they will drop by for a visit with Rachel and her husband. What is most striking to Rachel is that most of the students who return are the non-Adventist students. “It's really, really rewarding when you see or hear
from them because you know you have really touched their lives.” She thinks of the young lady who just graduated from her third year of residency at Phillip Hopkins University, and another young lady who just graduated from the Mayo Clinic whom she taught for all 8 years of her elementary-school years. Both young ladies, now medical doctors, credit Rachel and their elementary-school experiences for their academic successes. “You know the consistency of the faculty and program keep them coming back as they have roots here. While a lot of our Adventist schools are disappearing, our students have roots.”

Rachel stays because in recent years she has assumed a greater parental role in the lives of her students. Because of the many challenges they face with their parents due to peer pressure, societal issues, and divorce situations she believes students have become quite the burden for some parents. According to Rachel, the economy forces parents to work multiple jobs and extended hours. Most students return to empty homes at the end of the day with no adult present for several hours. “Parents are not there for their children like they used to be because they have to work.” Rachel has had to redefine her role to meet the needs of these students:

We have to step into the place of the parent and it is becoming harder and harder. My role has become more extended, not just in the role of a teacher and principal; but as a mother who cares deeply for her children.

She describes the experience of a girl in her class whose mother recently died. Rachel has assumed a “motherly” role for this student by helping her through the adjustment period. For example, on Tuesdays and Thursdays Rachel takes the girl to her riding and horseback lessons. She is fortunate because the stable is just a mile and a half
down the road from the school. She does not consider this experience a burden because she strongly believes the girl needs her to be more of a mother than a teacher at this time.

Rachel wants principals across the Adventist system of education in North America to know that in order for them to be effective leaders they must first have a commitment to God:

It’s not just a commitment to the children, their parents, and the community but to God. It’s a commitment that makes you feel this is your calling. God has placed you in this particular position to make a difference in the lives of these children. Even if it’s just one life and you make a difference, it’s worth staying just for that one child or that one family. It makes a difference and it’s worthwhile!

Adventist principals need to develop a personal and intimate relationship with God to be spiritual leaders. According to Rachel, this begins by developing a stronger prayer life which starts with personal devotions each morning. She encourages principals to give their problems, their students, their families, their teachers, and themselves to God in prayer daily.

Rachel believes Adventist principals need to develop personal relationships with their school families. This personal touch can be done by directly dealing with each situation, student, family, and teacher. The personal touch cannot be underestimated, as it goes a long way with all relationships; “A principal cannot lock themselves in their office and do everything over the phone. They need to cultivate relationships personally and be visible in the lives of all.”

Principals need to handle conflict immediately and head on. They should not try to appease the entire community. They need to use discretion by identifying, managing, and resolving the issue. According to Rachel, they should not let the school board, the pastor, or the staff handle the problem, the principal must do so. She believes principals
should discourage “pastor to pastor” debriefings until the problem has been dealt with accordingly by the principal. “The most important thing as the principal is to handle conflict by conveying the message you care for all involved deeply.”

Rachel wants educational superintendents and directors in the Adventist system of education in North America to visit the classrooms of small-school administrators. She suggests all educational leaders should spend a day in the shoes of their teaching principals. “It would be a tremendous source of support for them and a real eye-opener for the leaders.”

At the conclusion of the interview, affirmation is expressed to Rachel for the dedicated service she has invested in the Adventist system of education. She becomes emotional and says “Well, thank you, I needed to hear that. As a principal, you never hear it enough.” Rachel proceeds to plead convincingly, “Please let educational leaders in the Adventist system of education know principals need affirmation as well.”

**Rebecca: From Public to Adventist Administration**

Rebecca has been the principal of an urban Adventist middle school for 19 years. Prior to her current position, she served as an assistant school principal in public-school education in another state. Through the years, Rebecca has been a guidance counselor and a teacher. Her introduction into Adventist school administration was never a part of what she envisioned for herself. It came as part of God’s unique design for her. Rebecca explains she had just accepted an early retirement package from the public-school district in which she worked due to major cutbacks they were experiencing. As Rebecca contemplated her future options, her desire was to go back East to be with her family. At one point, she considered being bicoastal, working out West and living on the East Coast.
with her family. One day Rebecca received a phone call from a friend who shared about an Adventist middle school in trouble back East. The school needed a strong administrator with her skill set, experience, and expertise. The challenges of greatest needs were in the same areas Rebecca was an expert in such as strategic planning and assessment. She consented to travel back East and observe the school by visiting with the faculty and evaluating their existing curriculum with no commitment or promises. She even participated in a “quasi” interview for the job, which to her amazement was offered her. The assignment was extended for a 3-year appointment. Rebecca considered this assignment odd as she was just a new Adventist church member and had no formal training or background in Adventist education. She accepted the invitation because of the gratitude she felt towards God’s goodness and felt it was now time for her to give back to the Lord for all He had done for her. It was with this very strong conviction that she recognized God had been preparing her all along to be in the Adventist system of education. With her vast administrative experience in public-school education, God was calling her “for such a time as this.”

Upon reflection, she describes how God used her to improve the school immediately. Within a year there were improvements in the areas of school culture, curriculum planning and development, student scores, enrollment, test scores, and funding. After a lot of planning and hard work, the first curriculum improvement initiatives were measured and found to be significant at the conclusion of her third year as principal. These areas of growth have always been consistent, intentional, and always with an objective for measured improvement in all curriculum areas.
The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Once Rebecca accepted the principalship, her role or the job description was not clearly defined. She explains, “When the position was described to me it sounded like they wanted me to make bricks without straws.” There were very few resources, no funding, and very little to draw on yet they expected her to make the school great. Everything the school needed to be done had to be done internally. Therefore, if a teacher needed to have something done, they had to figure out how to do it themselves.

Rebecca emphasizes the job is not clearly defined because educational leaders have not experienced the life of a principal. Her responsibilities are many as she considers herself as the cook, custodian, bus driver, accountant, bookkeeper, secretary, administrator, pastor, counselor, and a myriad of other different roles. Rebecca explains there is no other way to get around this as the resources are simply not available and you are expected to get it done. “As an Adventist educator whatever the position calls for, you don’t mind rolling up your sleeves, and making things happen because it’s your responsibility to model what you expect others to do.”

To define her role and the expectations associated with being an Adventist principal, Rebecca drew on the experiences she acquired and the skills she developed while in the public-school system. She attributes all of her work in counseling, guidance, and curriculum planning with the preparation she needed to do her job effectively. “There is nothing that prepares you for the work force like the kind of training you receive while on the job.”
Complexities of the Principalship

In her 19 years of administrative experience, Rebecca has encountered many challenges and has used every one of her “valleys” as the foundation for becoming a stronger leader. She explains that every time she encounters a difficult challenge, she attacks it head on and then uses the experience upon reflection “to climb over the valley and prepare her for future challenges.” Notwithstanding, Rebecca considers her job as extremely difficult; “at all times, you are expected to be all things, to all people. You are expected to wear many hats and there are always so many different expectations.”

Rebecca experiences difficulties with the constant turnover of board members on her board. Because most members are selected by the local church and serve as volunteers, their dependability is not always reliable. Some board members complete their term in the middle of the school year and this hampers momentum and continuity. Every time there is a transition with a board member, there are huge learning curves for the new member as most times they begin their term with no knowledge or a strong foundation in Adventist education. Rebecca explains this creates a lag time with the goals and the direction of the existing members as they must now engage the new members and garner support for the previously set goals.

The expectations and pressures associated with the different constituencies of the school are extremely challenging. “Their expectations and constant demands are draining of the principal.” This is extremely frustrating because there is very little help or resources available, yet the expectations continue to rise. The constituency expects quality, yet they are not willing to provide it. She explains that in public schools the expectations and demands are just as great, however there is always help and funding
provided. In Adventist schools the expectations are there but the principal must figure out how to fulfill them; “there are just so many things public schools have we don’t have, but we’re still expected to make the same school system and child even better.”

The lack of resources in Adventist schools is a huge hurdle for principals. For example, Rebecca has tremendous need of a school psychologist, a guidance counselor, a social worker, a teaching specialist, a nurse, and a special education teacher. She considers the inability to provide special education for students with various exceptionalities as a weakness across the Adventist system of education. She believes special education means more than hiring another teacher, it means being able to attend to the needs of the students on different levels and modalities. Because Rebecca is unable to provide special education to her students, she refers them to the local public-school district where help is provided.

Each area, each handicap and condition calls for a different kind of specialist and of course since we don’t have the kind of money that would allow us to be able to accommodate for student needs, I refer them to the public school. We need to become dependent on outside resources to meet the needs of special education students.

Rebecca does not use lack of funding or resources as an excuse for handicapping her leadership. For example, Rebecca is unable to recall a situation where lack of resources or funding has ever hindered her from achieving or reaching a child or doing the kinds of things necessary to create an environment of learning for all her students. She describes the spiritual development of the children as the easiest part of being an Adventist principal in the Adventist system of education. “It is simply observing children learning and growing in their personal experience with Jesus Christ.” Rebecca considers it really inspiring to watch students the moment they make their first spiritual connect by noting, “The spiritual light comes on, enabling them to capture the true
meaning of what it means to develop a relationship with their Lord and what attending church is all about.” She shares, if it were not for the fact she daily reminds herself about the joy it is to serve the children, there would be “nothing” easy about the principalship.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Rebecca had a master’s degree in curriculum with a concentration in supervision and evaluation and a master’s degree in guidance and counseling before she became an Adventist school principal. Within the Adventist system of education she has been provided with many professional growth opportunities. For example, she holds memberships in the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP), The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and some church-sponsored organizations such as the Association of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators (ASDASA). Rebecca is thankful for the value on professional growth and funding provided by her conference, union, and local Adventist university to engage in such activities. Whether the learning is sponsored by the Adventist system or she chooses a different venue or learning opportunity, her local conference always provides the funding and she participates in these yearly.

She credits the resolve of her superintendent of education of always being interested in learning strategies and initiatives to improve curriculum, which he readily shares with his administrators and teachers. As they collectively engage in a dialog regarding new thinking in education, they develop a plan for what is important at her school. Rebecca shares that her local conference also takes great interest in helping their school administrators to grow professionally. For example, they sponsor principal orientations, workshops for principals, seminars for principals, and collaboration
opportunities for principals. Because of the strong emphasis on professional growth at her previous public-school district, she values and appreciates the professional growth opportunities that are so readily available to her in the Adventist system of education.

Support of the Principalship

The greatest support Rebecca receives is from the pastor who baptized her. It was the same pastor who encouraged her to become an Adventist principal 19 years ago. She recalls how she was a new Christian when she began her ministry in the Adventist system of education, yet her pastor guided and always remained connected to her. He still calls to encourage and pray with her, and visits her back East. Rebecca occasionally makes time to visit and process things with him out West. Through the years he has always unconditionally believed and invested in her.

Rebecca receives strong support from the members of her local church. She considers their support as invaluable. The members love her students and pray for them daily. They deeply care about Christian education and reflect it in their actions towards the school and the children. “Their support has been tremendous and I don’t know what I would do without them.” She also finds great support and encouragement from her prayer group. Whether it is about her personal or her professional life, her prayer group is always there for Rebecca. She describes the experience of knowing her prayer group is praying for her as “priceless.”

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Rebecca observes she has no balance in her personal or professional life. It is compounded by the fact that she attends church in the same building the school is at. The
same people she works with are the same members she worships with on Sabbaths. “Adventism is my life.” I go to church here, my job is here, I worship here, my family worships here, and I have an active role in church as I’m an elder.” Recognizing her school and church life occupy most of her waking hours, Rebecca tries very hard to mesh both.

Rebecca makes time to recharge and refocus and defines it as “Me time.” When there is a lot going on, whether in her personal or professional life, she seeks “Me time.” She may stay home and cut herself off from all technology. She may just curl up in her warm bed and read a great book or perhaps she may take a hot aromatic bath. “Me time” always allows for personal meditation and reflection opportunities. She acknowledges there are times she will go over the top with her “Me time” and then even gets her hair done professionally. Rebecca values her “Me time” so much she makes it a point to have one at least once per month. She reasons, “I think its imperative you find the things you enjoy doing and make time to get them done.”

Another way Rebecca creates balance in her personal and professional life is by traveling. Several close friends live out of State and she visits them as an opportunity to refuel by sharing her feelings with them. Through the years, her friends have become her accountability partners. Rebecca enjoys visiting her family because they always regenerate her. Family time allows her opportunities for reflection and renewal by getting away from the daily routine of life.

Rebecca enjoys the networking relationships she has developed with other principals within her school district. Their relationships serve as an opportunity to create balance in her life because she is able to be herself in the safety of their company. These
relationships are deeply rooted in respect and confidentiality and have evolved into supportive mentoring relationships where they talk, share, and mentor each other in their administrative journeys.

On many occasions Rebecca has sought the help of a professional counselor outside of the Adventist Church in processing challenges she is encountering. It allows her the opportunity to express herself freely and without any inhibitions or fear of retribution; “I felt seeking professional help out of my local environment was a safer place and I could talk about the things I needed to talk about and get some balance and a reality check without getting in trouble.”

Why I Stay as Principal

Rebecca says emphatically that she stays because of her grandson. She describes her devotion to her grandson as perhaps a bit selfish, however she is not apologetic. She considers this an obligation and responsibility because the boy’s mother is not a Seventh-day Adventist. While her grandson lives right next door to a very modern private school, with a swimming pool, a modern gymnasium, and all kinds of “bells and whistles,” what she wants for him is to know Christ. Rebecca emphasizes,

What I want for him is to be reared in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I want him to be able to pray. I want him to be able to have the advantage of the eternal, the eternal advantage through the people who care and nurture him. I want him to know about community service. I want him in the kind of environment our school offers.

Her grandson enrolled in the school as a little boy and is now thriving as an upper-grade student. He was baptized recently and is involved in Pathfinders. He sings in the choir and is excelling academically and in sports. Rebecca stays because she firmly
believes that since her daughter has no ties to Adventism, it is her obligation to ensure that her grandson has one.

Rebecca stays because the same devotion she has for her grandson she has for her students. One of her most exciting experiences is when students return for homecoming; yearly the number of children and adults who return for homecoming weekend increases. They share how the school has made an everlasting impression upon their lives and it is always inspiring and amazing for Rebecca. These former students are now doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other occupations. They attribute their successes in life with the study skills, zest for learning, self-esteem, and values they received at the school.

What a wonderful reputation and legacy we have developed because the students are surrounded with a group of people who are dedicated to the mission of Adventist education. The teachers come and roll up their sleeves to make education happen. They come early and they leave late. It’s wonderful to be a part of an educational system you know is “kissed by God.”

Rebecca wants educational leaders in the Adventist system of education to respect and support their principals because they are not respected as professionals. There is a perception that everyone knows how to do the job better than the principal. She believes principals are vulnerable and are not protected. While teachers have an advocate in their principals, where does the principal go when he or she needs protection or advocacy, Rebecca questions? She describes the inability of the system to develop support services for the principal as a systemic problem across the Adventist educational system in North America. She urges, “Principal support must urgently be addressed by educational leaders within the Adventist system of education.”

Rebecca believes educational leaders need to develop ways to teach principals how to market their schools. They need to train principals in the area of marketing,
development, and recruitment. They need to help principals recognize that their students must be retained within their systems to have successful schools with healthy and vibrant environments. The inability of principals to have this kind of training causes tremendous added pressure upon the principal. Rebecca explains that it actually takes the principal away from being able to fulfill their routine responsibilities because the principal is constantly worried about whether they will have enough students to meet enrollment demands. “While one could have the best program in the world, if the parents can’t afford the tuition and are not able to pay, and if there are financial challenges like subsidy not being paid, then how will principals get students enrolled?”

Educational leaders in the Adventist system of education need to develop formal principal training programs. Principals need training in supervision and evaluation, in resources available, in budget preparation, in the types of support services provided, in dealing with difficult parents and students, in conflict resolution, and in governance. According to Rebecca, these are essential areas educational leaders in the Adventist system of education must address.

She believes educational leaders need to carefully look at restructuring the Adventist Christian education system. Rebecca strongly feels evangelism and education should be a combined ministry in the Adventist system; “I really believe it needs to be a part of evangelism and whatever monies are designated for evangelism should be allocated to education.” She explains that principals need to be able to take note of when pastors baptize their church members and hold them accountable for the number of students they enroll at the school. The pastor needs to be challenged to ensure his own children are enrolled at the local Adventist school. Rebecca suggests pastors must be
intentional about advocating the importance and value of Christian education in the sermons. They must be the greatest advocate of the local school in their area by promoting the school and making Christian education available for all school-age children at the church.

Because there is so much emphasis placed upon baptizing members for pastors in the Adventist Church, pastors need to focus on baptizing the students at the school. The baptismal classes the pastors would provide for the students may result in greater engagement between the pastors, the school, and the students in a more tangible way. According to Rebecca, student baptism could be a part of a formal evaluation of the pastors, which is something foreign to many pastors as they are not evaluated formally as principals are.

Educational leaders in the Adventist system of education should consider a different funding source for principals’ salaries. Rebecca suggests salaries need to be reevaluated to increase principal remuneration. A solution would be to use the tithe dollar to offset teacher salaries; “The tithe dollar needs to go to pay teacher salaries and all evangelistic monies need to be allocated to our schools.” She ponders and notes perhaps that this may be “pie in the sky,” yet suggests “this conversation is certainly something worth talking about!”

**Dr. Rick: A Product of Adventist Education**

Dr. Rick is the head principal of a large primary to secondary educational facility with an enrollment of over 1,540 students. There are three schools on the campus: an elementary, middle, and senior high school. Each school has its own principal and as head principal, Dr. Rick functions as the Executive Director of all three schools.
After serving as a pastor in Jamaica for a couple of years, Dr. Rick made a dramatic professional decision and left pastoral ministries to become an Adventist school principal. While many did not understand his decision, it was an easy one for him. He was a strong advocate of Adventist schools as he was reared in the system from his elementary grades to university level. His love for Christian education was developed from his positive experiences in Adventist education. Accepting the principalship was the beginning of his 33-year career in school administration within the Adventist system of education; he has served at his current school for the last 14 years.

Dr. Rick’s formal training in school administration began when he earned a master’s degree in leadership and administration. He went on to become an educational specialist in leadership and administration by attaining an Ed.S. degree. He continued his studies by completing a cognate in counseling, which enabled him to become a credentialed counselor. He then took a leave of absence from his administrative responsibilities to complete a doctoral degree in leadership and administration. Upon completing his doctoral degree, he returned to the realm of school administration within the Adventist system of education.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Dr. Rick painfully recalls how the role and expectations associated with the principalship were never defined to him.

There was never really a school where I was principal I got any clear definition as to my role. In terms of a formal explanation and outline of my duties, never have I met a board that has understood what the role was, let alone to go and explain it to me.

Dr. Rick used lessons he learned while on the job to define his role. He relied on experiences acquired by allowing the flow of the school year to naturally develop. The
routines of the day-to-day activities became the prescribed agenda as he forged his way of becoming an effective leader. He capitalized on the things that really worked and eliminated those that didn’t. He repeatedly engaged in this practice until he could clearly define his role. While Dr. Rick learned his role through his on-the-job experiences, it was not until he participated in university-level administrative courses that he really understood the scope of his role and the responsibilities accompanied with the expectations of the job.

Based upon his experiences, Dr. Rick defines the role of the Adventist principal as the spiritual leader of the school. He explains the principal must have a deep conviction that God has called them. Adventist principals must have a personal experience with God. They must serve by doing “God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.” The spiritual leader knows and understands God’s plan for their lives because of their connection to God. According to Dr. Rick, an Adventist principal will not be able to succeed in ministry unless they are grounded spiritually. “No matter how the leader tries to measure success, it will never happen unless their call is directly from God and they are in tune with Him.” Adventist principals should begin their educational ministries by having an experience with God and accepting God’s assignment, fully trusting He will help them do their jobs.

Adventist principals need to be visionary leaders. In collaboration with the board, they are to design a plan for the school based upon the mission and philosophy of Adventist education. They can do this by developing concrete goals and objectives to the extent they can be translated into the mission of the school over a period of time. He defines this as “strategic planning,” which has been the focus of his administrative skills.
for many years. “I develop strategic plans to help my organization wherever I serve to fulfill whatever is perceived to be the mission for the immediate and long-term goals the school wants to attain.” Unless principals grasp the value of strategic planning, it will be difficult for them to be successful because they “will have no direction and will wander as they lead by chasing a thousand different goals rather than focusing on the set ones a few at a time and getting them done until all have been fulfilled. Adventist principals need to be focused on the mission and goals of the school or oriented towards the things that need to be done until they are completed.”

Adventist principals need to develop an organizational culture of excellence. Dr. Rick believes “our schools were established to be the best schools” and they should at no time be left to just drift along without actually undertaking specific goals in terms of excellence. He has made it a point throughout his administrative years to develop an organizational culture typified by excellence. The culture is developed, implemented, cultivated, and communicated, and the employees understand what is expected of them and are able to perform at the expected level of excellence.

Dr. Rick believes it is essential for Adventist principals to work closely with their church constituencies in role clarification. He remains keenly aware of the expectations of the constituency and values mutual collaboration because he firmly believes that if as a school we are pursuing goals that are not in alignment with the expectations of the constituency, then both of us could be going at cross purposes and this could spell a lot of problems for all involved.

Complexities of the Principalship

There are many complexities associated with the principalship according to Dr. Rick, such as its time demands which “literally uses most of your waking hours and
consumes you even during your non-waking hours when you are asleep.” The intensity of the job coupled with dealing with the different personalities and motivating teachers to take education to the next level are compounded difficulties associated with the principalship. The most difficult challenge Dr. Rick experiences is managing parents. He describes it as challenging because he feels “we now live in a day and age when parents do not trust school leadership anymore.” Dr. Rick explains that parents are not able to give as much quality time to their children as they used to and transfer their fears to educators and leaders. When decisions are made different from how they would have processed a situation, they become very defensive. Of greater challenge for him, and one he addresses head on, lies in moving parents along so they are in partnership with the school rather than in opposition about how to educate their children.

Dr. Rick does not believe there is anything easy about the principalship. After 33 years of ministry, he has not found “the easy part of the job yet.” He ponders, reflects, and struggles to articulate anything easy about the principalship and after a while simply says, “I really don’t know.”

Professional Growth Opportunities

Dr. Rick participates in several professional growth activities. He is a member of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP), The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and then some church-sponsored organizations such as the Association of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators (ASDASA). In addition, he participates in as many professional growth opportunities as he is able to because he is firmly convicted that participating in these organizations and
workshops avail him of the opportunity to continue to sharpen his administrative skills from year to year.

Support of the Principalship

Dr. Rick receives great support from his school community. This kind of support allows him to serve for consecutive years without having to make many transitions in his life. For example, in his 33 years of ministry he has only been in five buildings because of the strong support he receives from his school community. At three different schools he served for over 5 years, at one school for 6 years, and at his current school he has been the principal for 14 years. He also credits his school board, fellow administrators, and his faculty and staff members with unyielding support and confidence. Collaboratively, they operate all interactions in a very nonthreatening environment, which fosters a great degree of openness.

Even though he feels parents have become increasingly difficult, he receives strong support from most of his parents. He explains this by applying the 95%/5% rule: “95% of your parents are very supportive and there are no issues with them, but the 5% that tend not to be supportive take 95% of your time and make it feel overwhelming.” The support he continuously receives from the majority of the parents allows him to feel valued and appreciated.

Dr. Rick experiences great mentoring support from his former university professors. They have stayed in contact with him even after he graduated and became a school principal. They have become more than his educators because of their keen interest in him as a colleague and friend. They always share practical ideas and approaches to help him enhance his leadership skills. As their mentoring relationships
grew through the years, Dr. Rick became comfortable and shared his own ideas with his mentors, which were supported and well received by his mentors. There are many occasions when he presents at a conference and finds one of his mentors presenting at the same conference. He credits his mentors with preparing him appropriately to participate in these activities together.

Dr. Rick does not consider the relationships he has with his peers and colleagues as mentoring relationships, nor does he welcome them as such. Because of his advanced degrees and preparation, he believes the “vastness of his experiences is equal to or more than any superintendent I’ve ever worked under.” While his peers and supervisors have been helpful in clarifying issues, keeping him motivated in ministry, and on the cutting-edge in terms of best practices, the relationships have always been more supervisory than mentoring ones.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Balance in both his personal and professional life is tough for Dr. Rick to achieve. When his daughters were younger and living at home, it was even harder to achieve. His daughters are now adults and have moved away, yet it is still difficult for him to maintain balance in his life. By being intentional about balance he tries to do a better job at maintaining it in his life. For example, he adds repeated vacation times in his planner when he first gets the calendar for the new school year. “I try to take vacation time and not allow work to crowd it out to the point I would never get a break from work or for myself.”

Another practice he uses to create balance in his life is to make it a rule to never take work home with him at the end of the day. He purposely leaves it all at the office.
When he is at home, he does not even open his school email unless there is something extremely pressing. He never discusses his school life with his wife and family. His wife barely knows much of what happens at school because many of the issues are confidential. He may not be able to openly discuss them with her and chooses not to talk to her about the rest of the issues. By the mere separation of his school and home life, Dr. Rick has been able to maintain balance in his life.

The stresses accompanied with the principalship have caused Dr. Rick to develop stress-related high blood pressure. He is currently on medication to reduce his blood pressure and uses recreational activities such as walking or playing a round of golf to release stress. By engaging in these types of activities he is able to rejuvenate himself and return to work with a new resolve by giving it everything he has.

Why I Stay as Principal

Dr. Rick stays as a principal for consecutive years in the Adventist system of education in North America because of the students and the opportunity to help them develop a relationship with Jesus. “Every year I am thrilled to see our students get baptized some time during the school year or at graduation, where a host of them get baptized.” He conducts Bible studies to prepare the students for baptism and has personally baptized others. Dr. Rick believes:

Baptism is the summation, the ultimate objective, and ultimate goal of Adventist education which is to lead students to Christ in a way where they make that final commitment that says, “Yes, I want to follow the Lord and I’m going to consummate my experience through baptism.”

The student baptismal experience has been replicated many times in his professional career and is the main reason why he has stayed this long on his administrative journey.
Dr. Rick wants principals, educational directors, and supervisors in the Adventist system of education in North America to focus on developing principals as spiritual leaders. He believes the focus needs to be “on building a cadre of born-again Adventist educators in order for Adventist schools to grow and become successful.” The value of the spiritual development of principals cannot be underscored. “What makes Adventist schools grow and makes them successful is having a cadre of born-again, Christian principals. Outside of that, school is just a game.” He believes a paycheck may be an avenue for educators to pay their mortgage, their car note, and other bills, yet it should not be the reason why principals stay if they are not focused on making a spiritual difference in the lives of the students.

Adventist principals must be provided with opportunities for spiritual reform. As enrollment in the Adventist school system continues to see dwindling enrollment trends in North America, what it will take to reverse this downhill spiral is to have spiritual reform for all educators. While wishing not to offend or judge educators and leaders reading this study, he believes spiritual reform is what is needed to get Adventist education to the next level and increase enrollment.

Once the spiritual development of all educators has been enhanced, the next focus for educational leaders is to improve instruction. Dr. Rick explains that the Adventist system of education has many teachers who are well qualified and can deliver curriculum with excellence. However, educational leaders fail to underscore the impact an exceptional instructional leader has upon their students. Quality teaching makes a lifelong difference in the lives of the students. He defines quality teaching not so much by the education of the mind but of the heart. He strongly believes “affective teachers make
effective teachers because these teachers are able to reach the hearts of students and are able to reach their minds.” For this reason educational leaders need to look at educators who are deeply committed and passionate about Adventist education. “Educators who are really vibrant in their faith and are ‘gung ho’ about loving and serving the Lord and making it known by the tremendous difference they are making in the lives of the young people in offering quality instruction.”

Dr. Rick wants principals in the Adventist system of education to be encouraged, and stand firm in their call. To know that the outcomes on earth are not the determinants of whether or not one is a successful principal, he observes that the principal in the Adventist system is like a meat grinder: “Many principals go in and get chewed up and spat out.” Yet that is not the outcome of how they should be the measurement because ultimately it is only God who measures their work. Dr. Rick believes “as administrators, we are accountable to God for being successful and man’s measurement is always different from God’s.” He wants to affirm school administrators by sharing that when they question their worth or value, they are to consider the leadership of Christ:

Christ was the only perfect leader that ever walked this earth. There never was a flaw in his personality; there never was a flaw in the practice of his profession nor as a teacher and or a preacher. Yet after 3½ years he was hung from a cross by the very people He came here to serve and save. By any standard that could be regarded as a failure and a lot of principals today after two and a half years to three years, are dismissed or terminated. They are hung out to dry and that does not determine whether or not they were successful or a failure.

He explains that because we live in an imperfect world filled with sin, “I would like principals not to blame themselves when someone fails under their leadership.” People have and make choices and must be held accountable for doing so. He would like to encourage fellow principals around the nation by emphasizing, “Don’t attach the
measurement of your success to what happens here on earth or around you. As long as the principal is conscientious, does his work well and faithfully, and is doing God’s will on earth as it is done in heaven, it is God who should determine, ultimately, whether or not the principal is successful.”

Steven: The Pragmatic Principal

Steven is the principal of a secondary boarding Adventist school. Steven taught secondary education for 13 years before becoming a school principal. He credits the academic preparation he acquired with his advanced degrees in school administration as the main reason he became a principal. He served as principal for 4 years in his first assignment before being called to his current school where he has been the principal for the last 20 years.

Steven has faithfully been an educator in the Adventist system of education in North America for 37 years. Because of his strong academic and professional experience, he has received several invitations to work at the university, union, and conference levels. However, he has always declined the invitations because of his deep conviction that as a principal, he has a direct impact upon affecting school change and reform.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Steven does not believe the role and expectations of the principalship were ever clearly defined for him when he first became a principal. He was given a Union and a Conference Principal handbook and told to read it. The handbook had guidelines pertaining to the school calendar, school responsibilities, and tips for running an effective school year, yet no guidelines about how to do the job. Steven explains, “Principals were
required to familiarize themselves with the contents of the handbook and define their role as they embarked upon their journey.”

Because of his vast academic preparation, Steven did not feel he needed role definition or clarification; he simply needed to understand the expectations associated with being the principal of an Adventist school. He read and studied the handbook and used it as an assessment tool. From the things he learned, he developed a rubric to measure things accomplished and things still needing to be done. At the end of the year, Steven would use the feedback from the rubric to determine areas he needed to focus on for the ensuing year.

Steven relied heavily on the concepts he learned in his academic preparation and applied those to situations as they developed. For example, if there were legal issues, he drew on the lessons he learned in his school law course; if there were faculty issues, he applied the lessons learned in his supervision of instruction course; if there were issues regarding improved instruction, he used the lessons he learned in his curriculum and development course; and if there were budgetary issues, he applied the lessons he learned in his school finance course.

To fully master the concepts of what Adventist principals do, Steven surrounded himself with good role models, a practice he learned in high school. He surrounded himself with principals who were experienced, savvy board members, influential pastors, dedicated and committed colleagues, and friends. As he observed the things they did well, he “stole” their ideas and implemented them at his school. These areas included: developing a positive school climate, creating a spiritually focused campus, dealing with
conflict resolution, implementing curriculum strategies, preparing school budgets, improving school governance, and enhancing student discipline.

Based upon his on-the-job experiences, Steven now defines the role of the principal as first and foremost to be the spiritual leader of the school. As the spiritual leader of the school, the principal is in charge of all spiritual programming on the campus and establishing the spiritual atmosphere of the school, resulting in a safe place for kids to learn spiritually. He believes this spiritual environment should be one that is “obvious and transparent.” According to Steven, there should be no apologies about running Adventist schools in a very focused and intentional manner when it comes to spiritual beliefs as they should be deeply grounded in Adventist beliefs and practices.

Spiritual leaders in a boarding-school setting are directly responsible for the spiritual transformation of the lives of the students they serve. Through the years, Steven has been extremely intentional in developing transforming experiences for the students. He defines a transforming experience as when a student accepts Jesus as his personal friend and Savior for the very first time. The weeks following are the most exciting for him as he observes the student making lifestyle changes which have a direct impact upon the dorm and school life. Another transforming experience in the life of a student is when they acknowledge for the very first time their calling for life. Whether it is through a course, faculty advisement, or spiritual journey, when a student returns to campus and shares with him that while enrolled at his school it was indeed an invaluable and productive experience for them and lives were transformed forever, Steven is overcome with emotion. He describes this experience as an unforgettable and transformational one not only for the student but for him as well.
The role of an Adventist principal is to be the instructional leader of the school. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal develops the academic climate of the school and builds a reputation of academic success measured by student scores and progress. The instructional leader is responsible for the success of his faculty and staff. They should be able to provide adequate training, preparation, and networking for the teachers. The principal should always convey to the teachers he is deeply committed to them and the success of the overall academic program. Steven is inspired and energized when he sees staff members continually growing and motivated to improve instruction. When Steven sees his faculty and staff fully engaged in improving instruction, he believes he is being an effective instructional leader.

Complexities of the Principalship

Steven views systemic growth as one of the greatest complexities of the principalship, the growth which comes as a result of growing a church constituency or a growing school program and the pressures associated with it. For example, when you are involved in a single church district, the challenges associated with the principalship may be complex, yet you are able to resolve them in a simpler manner. When the constituency is expanded, the issues associated with conflict, ownership, and control are magnified. These include issues pertaining to allocating funding appropriately and fairly to the local school by recognizing the church has many ministries other than the school to serve. Steven believes that “whether the school is large or small, the distribution of the resources should be mutually agreed upon in an equitable and fair manner for all involved.”
The political pressures associated with the principalship add to the complexity of the principal’s job. Steven admonishes principals “to develop a very keen sense of perception in running their schools.” He defines this kind of perception as allowing them the opportunity to have a very real pulse on areas that warrant immediate attention and at the same time void themselves of political pressures that sometimes cloud the issues at hand. He believes only through this finely tuned perception will the principal be able to recognize the political situations that may arise with the school and the best way to garner support.

Another complexity associated with the principal’s job is working with difficult parents and their hands-on approach to parenting. According to Steven, parents have a problem recognizing boundaries. He believes at times “parents can be occasionally more difficult” than dealing with the challenges of educating their children. He considers some parental expectations as unreasonable, for example, the parent who wants an immediate conference with a teacher, while the teacher is in the middle of class, the parent who wants a grade change, or the parent who complains to the conference education office without first giving the teacher or principal the benefit of being heard. Most times these parents want immediate results to their concerns without the benefit of understanding the other side of the problem.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Before Steven became an Adventist school principal he already had an extensive academic preparation. He has an undergraduate degree in education, a master’s degree in administration and counseling, a Ph.D. in leadership theory, and a multidisciplinary degree in leadership. The courses he took at the university were multidisciplinary. He
engaged in classes from the college of business, the school of psychology, the communications department, the counseling department, and the educational leadership department. This vast exposure and broad scope of school administration enabled him to fine-tune the skills he would need in his future endeavors as a principal.

Once he became an Adventist principal, Steven became involved in several professional organizations. He views participation and membership into these organizations as the “key” component to his administration. He is a member of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP) and serves in the local chapter of NASSP for his home state. Steven thoroughly enjoys the annual meetings of the chapter for the state group because he finds the meetings “are pretty practical and very affordable.” As a member, he receives daily e-mails about hot topics in education, research-based learning initiatives, and various resources and strategies in measuring school success. He feels he always reaps the professional benefits of the new-found knowledge that he acquires and implements it readily into his curriculum. Steven introduces these new strategies into “anything from math to other curriculum content material to improve instruction.”

Steven is an avid reader. He has developed “a very broad and wide range” of reading topics for his professional development. He taps into monthly journal reading in the areas of school administration, leadership development, on marketing strategies, and school board governance.

He is a firm believer that professional growth opportunities should not only be provided for school leaders but for the faculty as well. His goal is to help his faculty to grow professionally. Steven regularly conducts local in-service workshops for his team in
new instructional strategies and in improvement areas identified by the teachers. Steven is appreciative of all conference and union in-service opportunities provided and available to benefit him and his team in growing professionally.

Support of the Principalship

Steven’s greatest source of support as a principal comes from his faculty and staff. They have generally been cooperative as they embark upon new initiatives and programming because they trust him as a leader. While this has not always been the case with all of his faculty members, he feels he is at a point in his tenure as principal whereby support is fostered because of the mutually trusting relationships. He attributes his many years of experience and the respect his team members have for him as a leader as the reason they support him.

Steven feels strong support from the members on the many committees he serves on. The wealth of knowledge they have to offer is invaluable to him. Because there are so many committees, they have the potential “to drive him nuts.” Currently he serves on the building, the curriculum, the finance, and the personnel committees at his school. The input of committee members to advise, guide, instruct, and help him lead effectively has been motivating for him. While some administrators may consider this type of support as an intrusion, it has always been helpful for Steven. He believes the support he receives from his committee members is an invaluable asset to the principalship.

Steven attributes the mentors he has had along the way as extremely supportive and beneficial to his leadership. He considers these mentors as people he could always count on. He would feel safe and contact his mentors for advice and guidance. He would share challenges and seek advice from the skilled leaders. As a rookie principal, he
sought the help of more experienced educational leaders and principals who became his mentors and always provided him with support. On many occasions, Steven sought mentors who were readily available to him at the conference or union level to support and sustain him.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Steven attributes the fact that he is “good and relatively successful” at compartmentalizing both his personal and professional life with the reason he maintains balance in his life. When he is at school, he is able to focus 100% on the tasks at hand; when Steven is home, he can easily separate himself from his workload and focus 100% on family time. Steven considers this juggling of both his personal and professional life as a trade-off and he never mixes the two. He attributes the discipline he has acquired to compartmentalize all areas of his life as the reason why he is masterfully able to create balance in his life.

To relieve stress, he credits his ability to be disciplined enough to leave challenges and stresses that cannot be fixed at school as part of the reason why he manages stress well. Steven shares there are times when, as a principal, “you cannot accept or own all of the stress.” There are other times, according to Steven, when you need the help of others on your team to reduce stress. While the pressing issue may be vitally important and needs the immediate attention of the principal, there may be other individuals on the team who may be able to generate ideas and solutions to the issues at hand with a better solution than the principal. This type of help may assist and relieve the many stresses associated with the principalship. He always seeks a spiritual perspective when dealing with stress. He looks to the Lord for guidance and direction in handling the
stresses associated with the principalship. Whether it is through prayer, personal reflection, or his devotional time, he never fails to depend on his strong relationship with Jesus to handle the stresses accompanied with his job.

Steven urges principals to acknowledge the importance of managing stress based upon a painful personal experience. He shares the story of an uncle who was an exceptional Adventist principal. His uncle died a relatively young man because he never recognized the stress he was under or the impact stress would eventually have upon his life. This experience caused him to resolve that the same thing would never happen to him because he would work hard to manage stress.

Why I Stay as Principal

Steven has stayed in the Adventist system of education in North America for more than 10 consecutive years because of his passion for the students. This passion stems from a deeply rooted conviction that it is truly all about the kids. All of his decisions, actions, and goals are always based upon what is best for the students.

He stays in the Adventist system of education because of his ability to grow and develop people spiritually and professionally. He uses his academic and on-the-job experiences to enhance the lives of those around him. Steven has a deep fascination with the “breadth of things” and wants others to experience the same fascination. Steven stays because of his ability to mentor and network with others. He describes that most times when he helps others, his life is more enriched than it was before he started the process.

Steven wants educational leaders in the Adventist system of education to develop and provide training programs for principals. He believes this type of training should consist of principal preparation programs and mentoring and networking opportunities
that develop a viable pool of potential candidates to lead our schools. Steven emphasizes principal training should be conducted in a focused and intentional manner and not be done in a frivolous or haphazard way. Because of his experiences, Steven is “real big” on the proper training and appropriate networking of all school principals. He longs for the same kind of value he placed upon his professional training to be the same passion educational leaders place upon school leaders in the Adventist system.

Educational leaders need to develop, establish, and implement mentoring and networking opportunities for principals. He believes principals need to develop and cultivate safe relationships with mentors. They need to be provided with opportunities to brainstorm and process with fellow colleagues in their quest to thrive as leaders. Steven emphasizes, “While educational leaders have not been wise or smart enough to do so, establishing a formal networking system and making it easy for principals to participate, would enable principals to thrive.”

Educational leaders need to provide principals with security as leaders. Steven suggests, “If somebody is smart enough to want to know the secret to retain principals, it would be for conference presidents and appointed education directors to somehow figure out how to provide more security for the principalship.” Principals need to feel protected and safe enough to recognize they can’t do it all on their own; they must delegate. According to Steven most principals do not know how to delegate. He cites delegation theories and uses biblical examples of great leaders who delegated responsibilities to be effective leaders, leaders like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and the Disciples. He believes if principals did a better job at delegating, they would not become so overwhelmed when confronted by challenges. They would not become so insecure about their decisions and
constantly second-guessing them. Steven contends that if principals felt more secure to delegate responsibilities, they would have the latitude to lead without the fear of failure and would thrive.

Educational leaders in the Adventist system need to provide professional growth opportunities for principals with a strong knowledge base and an emphasis on theories of leadership. Steven suggests every principal should acquire some level of mastery in sound leadership theory. While he recognizes there is some really “awful stuff out there,” principals need to have some level of leadership theory undergirding them. Steven pleads with Adventist universities to offer courses and mandate education administration majors to participate in courses on leadership theory and recognize the value these theories are to their particular leadership style. Other professional growth courses that need to be developed are courses that focus exclusively on legal issues pertaining to the principalship. According to Steven, “there is a tremendous need for a working knowledge base on school law.” He suggests the training should include legal background and knowledge in the area of contracts, liabilities, termination policies, and other legal aspects associated with the principalship.

**Valerie: The From-Loss-to-Prosperity Principal**

Valerie is the principal of a large primary to secondary day academy with an enrollment of 318 students and 20 faculty members. Valerie has been in the Adventist system of education for 33 years and has served as principal at her school for the last 29 years.

Valerie pursued her passion for teaching when she enrolled in college to achieve a degree in elementary education. Upon graduating from college, Valerie accepted her first
teaching assignment as a teacher in Grades 1 through 10. In that capacity she taught all elementary-level subjects as well as history for all upper-grade students. After teaching for only 1 school year, she was asked to be the vice principal of the school and served in that capacity until she was asked to be the principal 12 years ago.

Valerie credits the fact that she was always willing and available to do what was asked of her, her ability to get along with most of her teachers, and that she always led out in all school activities as the key reasons why others recognized her leadership abilities and asked her to serve as interim principal when principals left repeatedly throughout the years at her school. She continued to decline offers to become the principal when a vacancy became available, because she truly loved being a classroom teacher and did not want the “headaches” associated with the principalship. The more she refused to accept the position, the more attractive as a leader she became to her superiors. After much prodding, pleading, and urging, Valerie finally accepted the principalship at her school.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Valerie chuckles when asked to describe how the role and the expectations associated with the principalship were defined to her when she first became a principal and responds:

You really aren’t told anything about your role or the expectations associated with your job. You kind of just have to find your way. You don’t really get any kind of training. You learn the job on your own while you are on the job. You just have to go and find your way, read for yourself, study for yourself, ask questions, ask more questions and then, you have to be able to feel your way through. So there’s not a lot of preparing you for the position. It’s on-the-job training.
Valerie learned about her role and the expectations associated with the principalship through the experiences she encountered on the job. For example, she learned about scheduling, finances, governance, staffing, and conflict resolution as she encountered and handled each experience.

Today, Valerie defines the role and the expectations associated with the principalship as someone who is deeply engaged in the overall management of the school. This includes not only the school community but her constituency as well. She emphasizes that if as a principal “you are not involved with your churches and with your pastors and develop a relationship with your pastors, you will not be successful.” Valerie currently works with a constituency composed of 12 different churches. In working with the pastors who comprise her constituency, she has learned to allow them to express their concerns, listen to them, and be informed about what is happening at their churches and how she can assist them in their churches in order to serve them more effectively.

According to Valerie, principals need to learn how to be fiscally responsible. You have to do all you can to remain above water financially. Because as principals you don’t get a lot of help financially; therefore, you have to be innovative with different ideas of how you can keep your school afloat financially. You must be very frugal. You cannot be a spender in order to be a successful Adventist principal.

Because most Adventist schools do not have resources outside of their school constituencies to sustain their budgets, being a prudent financial manger is an essential role of the principalship.

Complexities of the Principalship

The greatest complexity associated with the principalship for Valerie is the financial piece. She explains that the challenges relating to finances are huge. There is
never enough money as principals constantly have to struggle to make ends meet. She emphasizes that as private institutions they are not eligible for government funding and simply have to rely on the income that comes from the parents or the constituent churches. Principals are always facing some type of financial difficulty when it comes to providing for the all of the needs of the students and the things they deserve. Valerie laments, “Without having to go out there and be on the streets to solicit funds, principals need to do whatever they can to get money to sustain their schools.”

The financial picture is compounded by the fact that school board members do not see themselves as fund raisers or financial managers but as policy-making members. Thus, having no other way to get money for her school to do the things she desperately needs, she recently resorted to hiring a Development Director. The goal is for the Development Director to assist her with all of her financial challenges. Valerie welcomes the day when the results of their combined financial efforts will be realized.

The easy part of the principalship for Valerie is working with her staff. She believes if she did not have the exceptional staff she works with, she would not be able to do all she does and be the effective leader she is. In addition, Valerie believes she would not have lasted as long as she has as a principal if it were not for her “good and receptive staff.”

Professional Growth Opportunities

Valerie participates in various professional growth activities on a regular basis. She believes her growth as a leader occurs predominantly when she collaborates with her fellow principals across her conference and her union. She describes the opportunity to
listen, network, debrief, and share with fellow principals as an extremely worthwhile experience.

She participates in various seminars and workshops and believes that achieving her master’s degree in school administration many years after she became a principal fully prepared her professionally to meet the demands associated with her job. She values any growth opportunity and takes advantage of any that apply to her and those that will best serve the needs at her school.

Valerie is a member of several national organizations and holds memberships in the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP), the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). She feels extremely fortunate to have the ability to work in a conference in which all of her professional growth opportunities are supported as well as funding is readily available for her to participate in them.

Support of the Principalship

Valerie receives support in many ways at her school. For example, she receives support from her constituent pastors. However, she is careful to explain that while the support is there, it is not always demonstrated in full by all of her pastors. She explains the support is hindered because of the challenges associated with the diversity she experiences within all 12 constituent churches. The diversity is displayed not only in language but in culture and ethnicity.

Many times the pastors believe they are being supportive and are not. For example, they offer their services but fail to conduct chapels, share Bible studies with the
students, or attend regularly scheduled board meetings because there is always something more pressing. When the pastors do make time to engage in the school program, most times it is done in a haphazard and rushed manner, Valerie explains. While she recognizes that this may not be the ideal way of demonstrating pastoral support, she welcomes the support in whatever way it comes and tries not to complain.

Valerie receives great support from her school board and in particular her school board chair. Whatever she needs and however he can be of help, he is always available to support her. She emphasizes this level of support has been demonstrated by all of her school board chairs and not just by her current chair.

She experiences strong support from her parents and students. She describes parental and student support as humbling, inspiring, and overwhelming. Students at her school graduate and then return to school to offer their services to her and to share with the students how the Lord used Valerie to help them become thriving young adults. The parents are quite supportive of Valerie as well. They demonstrate their support most by the time they invest to make a difference at the school. For example, the parents volunteer, fund raise, substitute teach, and organize activities on a regular basis for her. Quite often, Valerie shares that a parent will walk into her office just to ask her how she is doing or to simply to offer prayer.

Valerie experiences support in the form of mentors. She describes these mentors as skilled, caring, compassionate, and above all spiritually motivated. These mentors modeled for her what it is to address the needs of all the students, how to budget appropriately, and how to deal in the area of conflict resolution and governance. Each mentor dedicated time to her and was always available when she needed them. She uses
the experiences she has learned from her mentors and applies them to her day-to-day experiences. Valerie credits the support she has received from the pastors, school board members, parents, students, and mentors as an overall “good experience.”

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Valerie recognizes that when she first became a principal she did not have balance, nor saw the need to maintain it in her life. It was not until years later after the death of her 11-year-old son that she realized she needed to put her administrative responsibilities aside and dedicate time to grieve. Valerie had to refocus her priorities by helping her husband and surviving son through the grieving process. While the journey was difficult, she believes the time they invested as a family made all of the difference. More importantly, the grieving process helped her recognize how very much she needed to maintain balance in her life.

Valerie credits her husband with helping her to maintain balance in her life. She believes the Lord has gifted her with an incredible husband who is always there for her and their remaining son. No matter what is pressing in his life, her husband always prioritizes her needs and avails himself to assist her. He also helps her remember she needs balance in both her professional and personal life. When she is unable to do so, he picks up the load at home to help her:

The Lord saw the principalship was what I was going to do and he provided me with a wonderful mate. He provided me with someone who is understanding and able to work along with me. When I wasn’t home many times, he was always there for the children.

Today she credits her supportive husband, her surviving child, and her school board members with helping her to maintain balance in her life. They remind her to do
so, plan activities for her, encourage her to make time for her family; they make her take time away from school for restoration, and make her schedule vacations throughout the year.

To relieve stress, Valerie does all within her power to leave all the stresses behind her at school. Her rule of thumb is to never take any work home with her at the end of the day. There are times she has difficulties removing her principal hat when she gets home, and immediately her husband gently reminds her she is home and to relax.

Valerie takes long walks to relieve stress. After her long brisk walks, she always has a clear level head which enables her to process challenging situations in a more focused manner. She also enjoys shopping at the mall as a huge stress reliever. Valerie describes her mall experiences as adventures that allow her to completely get away from the mundane things in life as she escapes into the shopping experience. She emphasizes she absolutely enjoys walking and shopping as her best stress relievers.

Why I Stay as Principal

Valerie emphatically shares that she has stayed in the Adventist system of education in North America for more than 10 consecutive years because of the “young people.” She believes, as principal, she has a direct impact upon the lives of all of her students. For example, once there was a young lady who was accepted at her school because of a financial scholarship awarded to her. This young lady did not have the grades she needed to be enrolled in the school and was accepted on probationary status by the admissions committee. Because of the time Valerie and the rest of the team invested in the student, by the end of first semester, the student had a 2.8 grade point
average. She proudly shares that by the time the student graduated from high school she had a 3.8 GPA.

To see her behavior change and to see her mature as a student was great! We used her as our model child; the model student who gets a financial scholarship and still succeeds. You know, these kinds of experiences make your life fulfilling and just so very happy. Therefore, I stay, basically, because of the students and just seeing them progressing to do well.

Valerie shares story after story in which a student’s life has been deeply impacted because of the direct influence she has had upon their lives. Without a doubt, she stays simply because of the students.

Valerie wants principals across the Adventist system of education in North America to know they must lead in a positive manner. She feels strongly that school administrators already have a lot of challenges to deal with, and it really hurts the system when principals speak negatively and have negative attitudes about their jobs.

As principals, do all you can to help the system become the best it can be. Please stop being negative or tearing the system down. Do all you can to help the whole system because Adventist education is not easy and it is not easy for our parents to afford it. We need to do all we can to help build up our schools and be positive in every area. I think if we do so, our schools will continue to grow and we’ll be doing what the Lord asks us to do.

Valerie would like educational leaders across the Adventist system of education in North America to better prepare principals by making an intentional focus on the training of principals. She believes because principals do not get sufficient training, they are not prepared to handle all they encounter as principals. Most resort to on-the-job training experiences, which may not be sufficient preparation and training needed for principals to lead effectively. She challenges educational leaders and supervisors to develop principal preparation programs that will train, build, equip, and empower
principals to be better leaders. She believes this type of training will enable principals to be retained in the system for many consecutive years.

**Victor: From Nonbeliever to Crusader for Students**

Victor is the principal of a rural Adventist elementary school. Victor has served at his current school for 11 years. He served as a manager of a civil engineering landscaping company for 6 years, then enrolled as a pre-law student at a university in a large East Coast city. Victor was an atheist and, upon attending an evangelistic series by Mark Finley, became converted and joined the Adventist Church. It was at this point that a passion for service developed within Victor. When prodded to comment on why he chose education, he states:

The thought I would have to be ready for Jesus Christ’s return and the thought children would have to be ready was a huge burden the Lord put on my heart. I wanted to help children prepare to be ready to meet the Lord when he returned.

This heavy burden caused Victor to leave the university in Boston and become an Adventist elementary-school teacher. After teaching for 10 years in different schools, Victor accepted the principalship at the school where he currently serves.

**The Role and Expectations as Principal**

The role or the expectations associated with the principalship were never clearly defined to Victor when he became an Adventist principal. Describing how the principalship was first defined to him is rather amusing to him:

Basically when I first became the principal, they told me to read the codebook and that was about it. I read the codebook and the school handbook and still could not figure it out. On several occasions I called the conference to ask for role clarification, yet there was no training per se.
According to Victor, the role was defined as rather “nebulous with the subtle but strong message you are in charge of the school.”

Victor learned to define his role using his previous administrative experience as a business manager at an engineering company for 6 years. He used his on-the-job experiences to also learn his role. He explains that the job evolved as he recognized what the pressing needs or the demands of the school day were. Victor soon learned to define his role as the treasurer, the human resources director, the financial officer, the recruiter, the marketing director, the facilities director, as well as the principal on any given day.

Today, Victor defines the role of the principal as one who builds relationships with people. He firmly believes people skills are paramount for Adventist school principals. As a principal, he works hard to develop and cultivate relationships with his students, parents, faculty, board, pastors, and church constituencies. He values their input and keenly listens to their concerns no matter how busy he is.

Adventist principals need to have a strong foundation in methodologies at the elementary level, a foundation that would enable a principal to recognize good methodology across all curricula. By doing so Victor believes the principal becomes the instructional leader of the school.

Complexities of the Principalship

The greatest complexity of the principalship for Victor is the unreasonable parent: parents who expect principals to get rid of teachers they are having difficulties with, parents who want a problem immediately resolved, and parents who expect special favors because they worship with you at church. Victor works hard to help parents understand
processes for expressing concerns, yet he believes once they are emotionally charged, most lose proper judgment.

Maintaining good relationships with the many church constituencies in his district is another challenge for Victor. There are large and small churches in his district, there are many different ethnicities and cultures represented, and there are churches with no school-age children yet they must all be treated fairly and with respect. Victor considers this as the “tricky part of his job” because he believes he has to remain deeply entrenched and fair to those he serves.

The easiest part of the principalship for Victor is the children. His passion and commitment to the children are unyielding. He is deliberate about his interaction with the children. Every day he greets each student as they arrive at school; throughout the day he visits them in their classes, and at the end of the day, he bids them farewell. He describes the joy he receives from the students as extraordinary.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Victor already had a master’s degree in education when he became a school principal. After he became an Adventist principal, he completed a second master’s degree in business administration. He expresses gratitude to his local conference for their generosity and funding provided for him to do so. Recently, he has been working on a third master’s degree in international business, which his school board is fully funding and supporting. It will take him another 2 years before he completes the degree, yet Victor feels his board will continue to stand beside him through the entire process.

Victor holds membership in several national organizations. He is a member in the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National
Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP), and the Association of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators (ASDASA).

For the past decade during the summers, Victor has been a presenter at the Micro Society National Teachers Conference. He was a presenter at Daniel Goleman’s emotional intelligence seminar, which was funded in full by the foundation of the Micro Society of Teachers. At these conferences Victor gets an opportunity to mingle with people who are making educational inroads across the country such as Daniel Goleman has on emotional intelligence, Bernice King’s (Martin Luther King Jr.’s daughter) on social education, and Carol Tomlinson on differentiated instruction. These individuals have deeply impacted his professional development in a positive way. All expenses for Victor to participate and attend professional conferences sponsored by the national organizations he belongs to are funded in full by his employing organization.

Support of the Principalship

Victor experiences support in many ways. He describes his school board as very supportive. In his tenure as principal, he has only had a few board members who have ever wanted to micromanage at the school. For the most part Victor finds board members to be extremely supportive. They are engaged at the school, attend meetings regularly, and support him in all decision-making processes. Victor especially affirms the support he experiences from his school board chair. He emphasizes that “every board chair I’ve had has been great and supportive; we have had super relationships. Life would have been miserable without the board chair, always being on my side.”

Victor receives great support from his faculty and staff. He describes his relationship with his team as collegial and supportive. The feedback he receives from
them is always affirming. Regularly he distributes comment and survey forms for people to express appreciation and concerns. There are just as many affirmations as there are concerns. The majority of the affirmations come from the faculty and are directed to Victor. He believes this openness is a result of the safety he and his team have created. “If you leave yourself open and allow people to complain when they need to complain, and know that you’re really listening and will respond to their concerns they will share openly.”

The pastors within his constituency are very supportive of him. While there are many principals who have had negative experiences with their pastors, Victor’s have always been “great.” He explains that in 11 years he has worked closely with three to four different pastors and all of them have been very supportive of him as a leader. They engage in the school, share Bible studies with the students, conduct chapels, and pray on behalf of Victor and his students.

The pastors support Victor from their areas of strength. If the pastor is strong in finances, he helps Victor in finances; if he is strong in spiritual leadership, he helps him with developing the spiritual culture of the school; and if the pastor is a good planner, he helps him with strategic planning. While he believes all pastors have “flat spots,” these weaknesses can become strengths and complement the work of the leader if used effectively. Victor believes the support he receives from the pastors is congruent to their strengths. He firmly believes while support is not always demonstrated in the same way from the pastors, pastoral support is always there for him.

Victor receives support in the form of mentors. He describes a mentoring relationship he currently has with an individual who was the principal of his school for
over 20 years. Their relationship has grown out of the mutual respect and admiration they share for one another. This mentor now serves as a board member at the school and Victor considers him the “wise sage” of the school. Victor has three mentors who currently serve as board members at his school. They share good advice, they suggest new ideas, and they guide him along his administrative journey. For example, Rick recalls advice he received from one of his mentors. He shared that the first thing he recalls his mentor saying to him was,

The first year is not your year; it’s the last person’s year. The next year you’ll see a drop in the population because things start to change and it starts becoming your school. By about the third year it all starts to kick in as far as what you’re doing.

Victor agrees with his mentor based on the experiences of his administrative journey.

He remains in contact with his mentors for advice and direction, or in conflict or in good times. He identifies the relationship he has with his mentors as one that is candid and honest, a relationship which started from the mutual respect they have for each other and have developed into a strong bond of friendship. Victor chuckles when he recalls he and his mentor are so close they speak so often the mentor’s wife was starting to get jealous. The bond between Victor and his mentor is so strong he considers him as a father figure. He shares that “no matter where I go, he and I will always stay connected.”

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Victor sadly recognizes no balance in his life. This imbalance presents a constant challenge to him. When he tries hard to maintain balance in his life, Victor has guilt over doing so. He explains that no one who is associated with him professionally considers him as one who has a life outside of school because of the long hours he puts into his job and the demands that are so huge upon him. Victor has to force himself to put on the
brakes and establish clear boundaries to stay within the framework of balance. Unfortunately, he believes this framework has yet to become a consistent reality for him.

Many years ago he was counseled by a former superintendent of schools to set personal time aside by adding it to his schedule regularly. He suggested Victor not even consume a lot of time doing so but to simply add initials by a date and then stick to the appointment, an appointment with his family. Victor regrets that because of his inability to maintain balance in his life, he has missed the opportunity to spend quality time with his children as his children are now grown and have moved out of the home. This was a difficult lesson for Victor to learn.

Victor handles stress with a lot of prayer and worship. He emphasizes that his deep-rooted faith is a major factor in allowing him to handle the stresses associated with the principalship. He surrounds himself with people of sound judgment and high Christian morals who have become his confidants. He identifies some of the people in his trusted inner circle as board members, colleagues, and faculty members.

Another stress reducer for Victor is reading. He especially enjoys reading professional journals and research-based books. He enjoys recreational and leisurely activities like the great outdoors and nature, yet sadly recognizes he is hardly ever able to do so because the scope of his responsibilities is so demanding. “I really need to go to do more things out there, but I’m never able to do so because there is never enough time in the day.”

Why I Stay as Principal

Victor unapologetically shares that the reason he stays as principal in the Adventist system of education is because of the children. He is revitalized daily just by
being with the kids. “My energy always revitalizes when I am around the children, regardless of how tired I am.” His passion for the students drives him to remain in educational leadership for many consecutive years. All of his decisions are based upon what are the best outcomes for the students. He longs for the day Jesus returns so he can be with the students forever.

Victor wants educational leaders in the Adventist system of education to develop strategies to retain school principals. He believes that to retain school leaders, educational directors must be intentional in doing so:

We need to be developing principals and providing support and resources for them. They are the one key person who will make or break any school. I have seen that in the Adventist system, and I have seen that while consulting in public schools.

Educational leaders need to address the issue of principal salaries. According to Victor, the pay structure needs to be addressed for principals to remain as leaders in the Adventist system of education. He shares with frustration that he has never understood or can explain the pay structure established for denominational principals. He explains in the business setting in which he was a part of for many years, compensation was based upon skill set. In the Adventist system, pastors, teachers, and principals receive similar pay with no allowances for merit pay. “It’s a strange business when the organization pays the boss the same amount as the employee.”

Walter: From Physical Education to Principal

Walter is the principal of a large secondary day school with an enrollment of 358 students and 30 faculty members. Walter has been in the Adventist school system for 41 years and has served in his current capacity as principal for the last 12 years.
His passion for Adventist education developed as a small child since he is a product of Christian education. His parents, while of meager income, were deeply rooted in Adventist education and sacrificed greatly so Walter and his siblings could attend Adventist schools from their elementary to their college years.

While in college, Walter pursued a degree in physical education because of his love for all types of sports and games. It was also in college that Walter met his wife and together the passion to serve others in educational ministry ensued. Upon graduating from college, he began his career in Adventist education as a physical education teacher.

Walter served as a PE teacher at all grade levels and at many different schools within the Adventist school system. Together with his young family, he went to whatever location and wherever he was needed to teach students at elementary, middle, and senior high schools because of his passion for Adventist education.

His career in school administration began after a dramatic turn of events in his life. After several years of teaching PE, Walter suffered from many severe and painful physical ailments that resulted from several sports-related injuries. After numerous surgeries, he came to the realization he could no longer continue to serve as a physical education teacher. He accepted an administrative job as a college development officer. After a couple of years, he went back into the high school to serve as a guidance counselor and school vice principal. His administrator felt strongly that through the teaching of PE, Walter had learned many lessons that would equip him to be a great administrator. He learned lessons about team work, collaboration, and coaching, all of which would be skills he could easily transfer into the principalship.
Walter served in various administrative roles until he was asked to serve as the school principal. He shares that he reluctantly contemplated the decision and went as far as trying to coerce the existing principal to stay by vowing to be his assistant for as long as he was the principal. His superintendent was relentless in his quest to make Walter the principal, and he finally agreed to assume the role. Several years later, Walter continues to serve as principal at this very school.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

Walter is unable to clearly articulate how the role or the expectations associated with the principalship were ever defined to him. He believes he basically taught himself the job. The job evolved for him as he was always “learning under fire.” He explains,

There was no one program mapped out for me. There were things out there but there was not something that was just sort of laid before you that defined what the expectations were.

He capitalized on the lessons he learned during the 20 years he served as a physical education teacher to become an effective administrator. He shares that while it was never his desire to be a principal, as he thoroughly enjoyed being a physical education teacher, he felt he could use the experiences he attained as a PE teacher to learn his role. He used lessons on team work, collaboration, coaching, failure, goal setting, and perseverance and applied them to his leadership.

To define his role and the expectations associated with his job, Walter shares he modeled the things he learned from mentors, former and current principals:

I just gleaned from each of those principals and saw how they lead, what their leadership style was, how they ran the school, and then as I stepped into the position I took their experiences and took pieces and parts of it and used some of their ideas. What didn't fit my personality, obviously, I didn't use. But I think it all came together to help me become the type of principal I am. While you can't please everybody, you
have to lead by what you feel comfortable with and how the Lord impresses you to move forward.

Today, Walter fully understands his role and the expectations associated with the principalship and can clearly articulate that his number one role is to lead young people to Christ. His daily goal is to ensure that by the time his students graduate from school, they have seen Jesus in the school, the teachers, his life, and have developed an intimate relationship with Christ. Walter believes once this relationship is intact, they will be successful because the source of true success is in Jesus.

Another aspect of the principalship vitally important for Walter is his ability to build relationships. “It's all about relationships,” he shares. Walter believes a principal should be able to develop good relationships with the students, the faculty, parents, board members, and their constituencies. A principal needs to develop these auxiliary relationships such as with the crossing guards, maintenance personnel, and food services providers in addition to the faculty. “If those relationships are not built, it will be hard for the principal to be successful.”

Principals need to have the ability to deal with a myriad of situations that arise daily such as dealing with a difficult parent, letting a teacher go because of finances, board issues that may arise, handling all school finances, and maintaining the school and the physical plant in an expedient and appropriate manner. The principal is responsible for the overall operation and management of the school according to Walter. They must always have a plan in fulfilling their job. Walter seeks to plan ahead so he is always prepared to accomplish his goals.
Complexities of the Principalship

The greatest complexity associated with the principalship according to Walter is terminating team members. Whether it is due to finances, insubordination, or conflicts that arise, dismissing a colleague will never become an easy part of the job for Walter. While he has had to dismiss very few colleagues in his administrative career, it is always a painful and arduous task for him.

In recent years the challenges accompanied with the job have caused Walter to experience the results of burnout. He described a time in his administrative career when he was not sure he wanted to continue his role as the principal. He shares that he felt no motivation to go to work or desire to continue his role as principal.

Over a couple years I started questioning whether I was in the right place. I felt burned out and could no longer cope. Those were a couple of hard years I was just struggling with. Do I want to keep doing this? It was just drudgery to go into work. I realized I could not continue to be the principal for the rest of my life. I even considered retirement, yet I still had a ways to go to get to retirement age. I thought “Oh, I want to retire early but I can’t, do I just give up or endure until I am able to retire?”

Walter recognizes he had to do some prayerful reflection before realizing he was burned out, yet he was still needed at the school. He felt with God’s help he could still make an impact in school administration and chose not to walk away from his job. Through a lot of prayer and determination, things turned around for him. Whenever he is overwhelmed, he recalls this experience and uses it as an example and motivator to feel rejuvenated and establish clarity for a renewed sense of purpose.

What is really easy about the principalship for Walter are the young people. He indicates, it’s just the students. He feels really blessed by the Lord who has given him the opportunity to be gifted with “such a bunch of good kids.” He emphasizes that while
there may be some challenging students, there is never a day, even when he has experienced an extremely difficult time with the students, that he feels the kids are not worth doing the job for.

Professional Growth Opportunities

Walter identifies the professional growth opportunities he participates in as the conventions and union-sponsored meetings he regularly attends. While he values the wealth of information he acquires from these meetings, he believes what is most invaluable for him professionally is the time he gets to network with his fellow administrators when they get together. Walter feels strongly that he learns a lot when he has an opportunity to share with fellow principals. He identifies their relationship as a reciprocal one in that principals can always learn from each other.

When principals have an opportunity to meet together, they get to socialize and that’s a really good thing as they are rarely able to do so regularly. Walter would rather save the expenses incurred when principals are flown in and out of state for meetings to have the opportunity to network or learn from other colleagues and peers. By collaborating, principals can be so much more efficient than working alone. He enjoys the camaraderie developed with the principals when they are allowed to network and describes the experience as “immeasurable.”

Walter participates in accreditation evaluations as required by his conference for professional growth. He enjoys learning from teachers their new and improved learning strategies. He learns about cutting-edge instructional strategies and absorbs as much as he is able to then transfer the latest and newest best practices available to his program.
Support of the Principalship

Walter believes he has been really blessed by the kind of support that he receives. He believes the support a principal receives is rooted in their longevity as a leader. He emphasizes that when principals are supported, an avenue is created for them to lead for longer periods of time. Walter shares he does not like to move once he arrives at a new assignment, so he works hard to win the confidence and support of his peers to engender support, which will allow him to remain in the position for a very long time.

He indicates he receives support from those who matter most to him as a principal, like his school board members. He considers he would not know what to do if he and his school board members were constantly at odds. Because his relationship with his board members is important to him, he works really hard to be sensitive to their needs. There are times when he is challenged by the board and during those times, he takes a courageous risk by suggesting perhaps he should step down as principal and allow them to run the school if they believe they can do a better job at it than he is doing. Always, upon board member reflection, they recognize they were overstepping their bounds and continue to trust and support Walter as a leader.

Walter identifies the tremendous support he has received from his mentors. He identifies three: a former superintendent, principal, and colleague. Each of these men has molded him into the leader he is today. They have prayed with him, encouraged him, taught him, and modeled to him what it means to be a great leader. He shares some of the ways in which he leads today; he credits directly to the men God put into his life as mentors who have helped him shape and develop his spiritual leadership style.
Walter feels support from the pastors, although it is not evidenced in their actions at times. While they are supportive and encouraging of him as a leader, seldom do they visit the school, conduct worship services for him, or spend one-on-one time with the students. The pastors cite they are too busy within their own congregations to extend themselves any further. However, they are warm, respectful, and caring of Walter as a leader.

He experiences support from his colleagues, parents, and the students. He believes the support he receives from them is grounded on the trusting relationship they have built through the years. He emphasizes:

I’ve had a lot of good support from them. It’s important if you are going to be in it for the long haul to build a team up because it is a team effort. As a principal you can’t stand alone in this thing or you’re going to fail. There’s just no way to be successful if you don't have that kind of support and build the type of support you need. The only way you’re going to do it is through people trusting you.

One of Walter’s daily goals is to continue to build relationships with his team members in a manner that yields tremendous support because of the trusting relationships they have built through the years.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Walter acknowledges he has no balance between his personal and his professional life simply because as a principal one is consumed with responsibilities, and there is just not enough time in the day for anything else, much less a personal life. While he has learned to live with this grueling schedule, it has caused great pain for him. Earlier on when he first became an administrator, he would get home after a long day at the school and would find his wife crying because she was “lonely.” While his heart ached for his wife, he still did not make balance a priority in his life. Several years later, his wife was...
diagnosed with cancer. Recognizing he was responsible for taking care of her, he had no choice but to make balance a priority in his life. When his wife went into remission, Walter went back to his grueling schedule and has not maintained balance ever since. He recognizes the value of maintaining balance in his life; however, he always feels guilty when he attempts to do so. He explains, “When I try to make time for myself, there is always something that gets neglected.” Walter notes that because of the guilt he feels for making time for himself, he cannot get himself around to do it.

Walter acknowledges he is not very good at handling stress as well. He emphasizes:

I'm not good at handling stress. When I say not very good I mean, I deal with it but it eats me up inside. I haven't found a good way, and I guess it's my personality. When I go home, I live it and it chews me up inside and, it's taken its toll. The stresses in my life have caused some health issues and yet I don't have the answer for it. Every individual has to deal with it in their own skin. Some seem to do better then others; I'm not good at it. Handling stress is probably my weakest area.

Despite the fact that Walter recognizes he does not have balance in his life and does a poor job at handling stress, he has learned to cope and does not make excuses but chooses to forge ahead in his quest to be an exceptional leader.

Why I Stay as Principal

Through the years Walter has had the option of making several career changes because he has been invited to be a superintendent of schools on the conference level and the principal at many public schools. He always declines the invitations and chooses to stay in the Adventist system of education. He enthusiastically shares that he stays in educational administration because of the students. Walter considers the young man who peeps into his door just to check to see if he is okay, or the student he is able to pray with
who is going through a major challenge, or the young man who had a chip on his shoulder every time Walter approached him until he realized they both enjoyed driving fast cars and they became friends. He describes his connection with the students as recognizing without a doubt you have touched someone’s life in a good way and there is no better job; “it is all worth while.” Walter shares that the students are the single most important reason why he has stayed in the Adventist system of education for more than 10 consecutive years in North America without hesitation.

In concluding the interview, Walter shares his insights for educational leaders across the Adventist system of education in North America. He suggests they must develop school principals who are passionate about the students and not their salaries. While he believes principals should be appropriately compensated for their hard work, the focus should be on developing the young people and not their salaries.

Educational leaders need to hire principals who are deeply committed to their relationship with the Lord and must develop and model it to the students. Walter believes the only way an Adventist principal can be successful is by being deeply in tune with God and His will. A principal who is spiritually in tune with God will then be able to reflect their spirituality and build on their relationships with the students, colleagues, and the parents.

Have that relationship with God; develop the relationship with the young people. Then, you will have a relationship with the parents. Because if the parents know you have a relationship with their children they’ll love you for it. Parents do not want to give their kids, or send their kids off to school if they feel like those relationships are not being built spiritually by the leaders they entrust the children to.

Walter contends that educational leaders have to develop mentoring programs for school administrators. He believes the system has a flaw when it comes to developing
and training school principals. “I think we have a weakness in our mentoring programs and in our programs for developing new principals” when leaders are not trained appropriately. Walter believes it is a little scary to think principals are not being adequately trained as far as reaching their highest potential and in terms of identifying new administrators. Educational leaders within the Adventist system of education in North America need to focus on building a cadre of principals who want to do the job in an exceptional manner.

**Xavier: Infinite Possibilities as a School Principal**

Xavier serves as the principal of a senior day academy for students in Grades Preschool through 12. His school has an enrollment base of over 200 students and a staff of 20 members. He has been the principal at his current school for the last 24 years. In total, Xavier has invested the last 38 years of his professional life in the Adventist system of education in North America.

As a teenager he was introduced to Adventist education when his elderly father converted to Adventism. As a newly converted Christian his father was convicted about the importance and value of Adventist education. After Xavier’s high-school graduation, his parents enrolled him at an Adventist university. He recalls being a rebellious young man who had a difficult time acclimating to the very strict rules in an Adventist dorm. To vent and fend off some of his frustrations, he played baseball everyday.

While playing baseball, he met a coach who developed a special interest in him. They became friends and a bond was established like none he had ever experienced. Xavier learned great lessons unlike any he had ever learned from another teacher before. For example, he was introduced to the concept of developing a personal relationship with
Jesus. This was a very difficult concept to comprehend as he did not know how to look to a God as a personal friend and Savior. He could not grasp the concept that salvation was a free gift available to all who were willing to accept it. He learned great lessons from beyond the baseball field. He learned lessons about kindness, compassion, patience, and, above all, being caring of others. His coach resembled the Jesus he had now come to know and love. Before long, because of his coach’s example he too was converted and baptized as an Adventist. This coach convinced him a life of service was better than living a life rooted in making money.

While in college, Xavier was introduced to a young lady who had been an Adventist from birth. She was reared in Adventist churches and schools and was devoted to educational ministry. He could not understand the loyalty and commitment she had for Adventist education, yet because of his love for his soon-to-be-wife, he followed along. The young couple married with the conviction that they would lead a life of service in educational ministry from then on. Xavier went on to serve as substitute teacher, classroom teacher, small-school head teacher/principal, assistant principal, and principal in the Adventist system. He has been the principal at his current school for the last 24 years.

The Role and Expectations of the Principal

The role and expectations of the principalship were never defined to Xavier when he was asked to be a school principal. “When I first started, there were no clear-cut job descriptions or anything like that. We were pretty much on our own out in the field.” On his very first day of work as a new principal, he was given a list of things needed to be done and he was instructed by his superintendent to complete them. The list consisted of
a lot of paperwork such as reports for the State Department of Education, the conference, or the local school. There was a timeline for completing the tasks, but no instructions for doing so. He explains that superintendents were able to visit new principals only about two to three times a year because there were not many associates to aid the superintendent back then. When they did visit the principal, most times it culminated with a list of requirements of things needing to be accomplished. Many new principals were conflicted because they were afraid to ask for help or clarification of roles for fear of being perceived as inept. Most times when there was communication or feedback from the superintendent, it was in the form of negative feedback.

Xavier taught himself how to define his role and the expectations associated with the principalship by developing the leadership survival skill of “self-motivation.” He described it as “pretty much you motivated yourself to fulfill your responsibilities.” Whatever was most pressing on his “to do” list, Xavier motivated himself to accomplish the goal. For example, if there was a faculty issue, a student issue, a parent issue, or a constituency issue, Xavier was always motivated to address and resolve it.

Xavier attributes the skills he developed and the experiences he attained in trouble-shooting as a head teacher in a small-school setting to help him define his role. He had experiences in completing vast amounts of paperwork associated with state regulations, experiences in doing everything from janitorial services to nursing functions, and the experiences in multitasking. Xavier was familiar with many of the buzzwords associated with school administration, effective school leadership, and best practices. While he did not know the pedagogical terminology of what he was doing, he understood the concepts in terms of their practicability. For example, he was engaged in team
teaching as he paired off with his colleagues in his one-room school to deliver quality instruction, he was involved in peer tutoring with his teachers and students, in cooperative learning with his colleagues and learning community, and finally in mentoring and coaching with his faculty and staff as he developed and nurtured each staff member. He learned the value of communication and used communication that was student and parent focused in establishing a climate that was valued by all. He practiced good customer service for parental satisfaction and made happy students as he realized that happy students translated into new happy students to be in the future.

Xavier considers his main responsibility as being the spiritual leader of the school. As the spiritual leader of the school, he tries to be the kind of role model to his team Jesus would be. He believes as the spiritual leader he is responsible for building relationships with his staff, parents, students, and the community in the same manner Jesus would:

I’m very much a believer in relationship-type building. Relationships based on the style and example of Jesus Christ because I believe all of us want to be treated with value and respect. How can we be valued and respected if we don’t give to others the way Jesus would? I always believed each student is special and unique and when you see how the Savior has treated each one of us individually, how can we do anything less?

As the spiritual leader intent on building relationships, he makes it a point to learn the names of each student on a yearly basis. Daily he greets each team member and student by name. He visits the students in their classrooms and works hard to convey the message that he is not only their principal but a principal who cares. Xavier acknowledges relationship building can be challenging and at times it is not an easy task. Because of the dynamics of working with student, parents, staff, and the community, the task can be quite daunting. Xavier has learned through the years to fulfill the role and
expectations associated with his job; he must do so with a high energy level, a high level of commitment, and a high level of willingness to make the time and effort it takes to fulfill one’s responsibilities.

Complexities of the Principalship

According to Xavier, the principal’s job is difficult. He identified one complexity associated with his job as the constant accountability factor associated with his responsibilities. “The fact you have to be accountable 24 hours a day 7 days a week is one of the toughest things I deal with.” He likens these ongoing accountability factors to that of a physician who is constantly on call and has to be ready at any given time to meet the needs of his patients. Similarly, Xavier has to always be prepared and ready to handle and process whatever problem needs to be resolved.

Time commitments are an additional complexity Xavier experiences. A typical day can easily turn into a 12-15-hour workday because of late-night meetings. He believes if an administrator is not careful, the time commitments associated with the job will consume you. “You have to be able to be good with time management for priority adjusting and for the delegation of the task at hand or you will be consumed.”

When Xavier served as a boarding-school principal, the time commitment was a tremendous challenge for him. He consistently worked 7 days a week, had supervision duties several nights per week, and ran an industry on campus requiring him to work during home leaves and major holidays such as Thanksgiving day, Christmas day, New Year’s day, Easter, and Spring break. Soon this grueling schedule became a daily routine until he realized one day the impact the long hours were having upon his family.
Recognizing the impact the long hours had upon his personal life, Xavier decided to leave the boarding-school environment and return to a day-school setting. He made the decision after he painfully realized he had been neglecting his family all along. The irony was that while he was trying to minister to 250 students, his wife was home alone raising three small children—the same three children God had entrusted to him.

Xavier realized his long workday was not fair to his wife and children and requested a job transfer at the conclusion of the school year. Upon leaving the boarding-academy environment, Xavier promised his family he would never adhere to such a grueling schedule and if he were ever at risk of doing so, they were to help him put a halt to it at once. Many years later, he still tries to keep the promise by always making his family his top priority.

Xavier is passionate about describing the students as the easiest thing of being a principal. He is energized, invigorated, and stimulated by working with them:

I am so invigorated while I’m with the kids. I’ve been offered lots of opportunities to do desk jobs and do other things, but I just can’t bear the thought of not being on my campus with my kids. They invigorate me so much. To be able to come on to the campus and to interact with them each day, to celebrate their happiness, to work with them on issues they may have, energizes me. They give me so much more than I can ever give them. My wife often says, “You’re so happy to go to work, it’s kind of like your going to play.” Well lots of the time, I do play. I play ball with them and do all of the kinds of things the kids know that I care.

The work is never boring as he has the privilege of working with 4-year-olds in preschool to the 18-year-olds in high school. He believes each student brings their own uniqueness, challenges, and fun. This excites Xavier because every day provides him new opportunities to have fun, serve, and to never be bored with the students. Xavier loves his job simply because of the students.
Professional Growth Opportunities

Over the last 12 to 15 years, Xavier has seen a more intentional focus on the professional development of school administrators and teachers. Xavier currently holds memberships in several professional organizations such as the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP), and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

The opportunity to be a member of these professional organizations has enabled him to learn and develop some of the best cutting-edge practices in education. For example, Xavier was first exposed to block scheduling by attending a conference sponsored by the NASSP. Recognizing the value of block scheduling, he presented the idea to his faculty, board, and parents and they adopted the concept. Today, 17 years later, the secondary classes offered at his school continue to be done in blocks. He believes this enables the teachers to provide the best instructional practices for their students and allows the students to have the time needed to master the skills being taught.

Xavier serves on various professional public- and private-school organizations. He believes our knowledge of education and best practices is limited when we look at these strategies from only an Adventist perspective. While he fully supports and believes academic initiatives presented by Adventist educational leaders need to be the best, he firmly believes that as a school-wide system, we do not have all of the answers. He encourages all school leaders to be open and willing to learn new concepts and skills from professional organizations outside of the Adventist system of education.
Xavier is responsible for financing his memberships in the organizations he engages in. Until recent years, there was never any funding provided for the professional development of educators or leaders with the Adventist system of education in the areas in which he worked. If you wanted to be a part of a professional organization or development, you just had to pay for it. Yet money has never been an issue for Xavier as he considers professional growth and development critical to sharpening his administrative skills. “I’m a firm believer you have to participate in professional growth and professional development, or you’ll certainly grow stagnant right away as a leader.”

Support of the Principalship

In the early years of his administrative experience, Xavier had no formal support in fulfilling his responsibilities. This reality caused him to seek the wisdom and guidance of his then pastor, a young man new to pastoral ministry. They developed a bond because there was safety in the bond they shared. They would share each other’s successes and failures as well as personal challenges and difficulties they were both experiencing. To this day, they still maintain a friendship which began more than 30 years ago.

Later in his administrative career, he encountered several union directors of education and educational superintendents who were inspirational and supportive of his leadership. One superintendent saw endless leadership possibilities in Xavier and never inhibited him from trying something new at his school. For example, once while they were at camp meeting, Xavier approached the superintendent for approval to begin a new teaching initiative. It was quite the risk because an associate superintendent felt the money for this initiative needed to go for textbooks at his school.
Upon consideration, the superintendent gave his approval by suggesting the initiative be identified as a pilot program. “You either sink or swim with this. Call it a pilot program; and let me know what’s happening.” With the blessing of his superintendent, Xavier could now afford the textbooks and the conference would pay the cost for the new initiative as a “pilot program.” The new initiative became a winning situation for them. Twenty years later, his school is the only school in the conference with a reputable archeological curriculum and program. This incredibly successful program is recognized across the entire North America Division of education as one of the finest. It has been featured in magazines, they have been interviewed, and they have had teachers from many states visit the school to observe the program and how it works.

School board members have been supportive of Xavier. “One of the things I really love is my school board members because they really let us do some off-the-wall stuff.” The support he has received from his school board members has enabled him to get involved in a school-wide community service initiative called Eagle Eye. On the last Friday of every month, four students go out to the local community lake and pond to pick up trash. Besides the heat and humidity the students go through when picking up trash, they see this as a positive activity to benefit the community. Xavier shares that when students are interviewed regarding the project, they say, “I see it as an opportunity to help the environment as well as perform a community service for the well-being of others.” Another student noted, “Waste Management is good because it helps keep the lakes clean and it’s healthy for the fish and the environment.”

Xavier also finds tremendous support and encouragement from his colleagues. In the past, principal colleagues have stood by his side during difficult times. They have also
been there to support him during times of great triumph. He believes his faculty and staff continuously support him with kind words, prayers, and their loyalty.

He experiences unconditional support from the parents of the students. Whether it is a happy parent or a disgruntled parent, he always knows without a doubt they are there for him. Recently, a disgruntled parent visited his office for a conference. Observing the parent was visibly upset, Xavier decided to just allow the parent to share his thoughts without any interruptions. Suddenly, the parent diverted from the conversation and asked, “You like baseball?” He responded, “Yeah, can you can tell?” Quickly the conversation turned to baseball. For about 30 minutes the parent and Xavier just talked about baseball and their different experiences in the sport. When the conversation was over, the parent was no longer overbearing as they had just established a common bond and friendship. Xavier noticed as the conversation continued, the rest of their business was as if they had been buddies for years. Whether a parent is upset or satisfied, he always feels deep respect and support from them.

Balance Between Personal and Professional Life

Xavier learned about the importance of balance in his personal and professional life as a direct result of not having balance, sacrificing his family, and staring at death right in the face. Several years ago, he developed cancer. Suddenly, he realized there were a lot more important things in life than just making sure your desk was totally cleared on Friday afternoons or making sure certain tasks were finished. He explains, “You have to delegate as a principal and recognize when you come back in the morning your work will still be there.” His illness made him realize he had kids and a wife at
home. It was at this time he recognized how critical it was to have a more balanced life, not only professionally but in his personal life as well.

Upon extreme cancer surgery and many bouts of chemotherapy, Xavier’s whole perspective changed. “When you face the reality maybe you won’t be around next week, your outlook on life takes a different spin.” He made dramatic life changes that immediately had positive benefits upon his life. Today, he considers “each morning as a precious new gift, even more than maybe he thought about the night before.” He now feels as if he has more balance and contentment in his life than ever. “I’m even happier with what I’m doing and I think I’m a better principal because of it.”

When he reflects on the lifelong lessons he has painstakingly had to learn about balance in his life, Xavier cannot over-emphasize the importance for educators and administrators. He believes school leaders must be intentional about balance. “One must make the choice to have balance in their lives because the work will never stop; it will always continue and you will have things put on your plate constantly.” It is at this point that the leader just has to intentionally say, “This is all I’m going to do today,” to avoid burnout.

It can be just maybe stopping what you are doing and just walking around campus or saying hello to somebody, it might be reading a chapter in a book; it might be looking at a selection of Scripture that is especially important to you. It might just be to call somebody on the phone. Just the change of pace, especially if you are dealing with a hard problem or an issue; just stepping away from it, may help you when you come back to it. Sometimes when I have had the opportunity to step away, when I return, I notice the answer was right there all along because I simply stepped away.

To maintain balance, Xavier spends personal time with God strengthening his spiritual relationship through Bible study, reflection, and prayer. He also spends a lot of time with his best friend, his wife of many years. He enjoys fishing even when he doesn’t
catch anything. “If I catch any, it’s a bonus, but I just like looking at the water because it is very peaceful to me.” He is an avid reader who loves to study the American Civil War and loves to go to battlefields just to walk around. He is not ashamed to admit some people think of him as quite the geek because of his interests. Yet, he makes no apologies because he believes his interests are fun for him to partake of.

Xavier maintains balance in his life by developing stress-releasing skills. His favorite stress releaser is spending family time with his immediate family. “We are a very tight-knit family and stress relief to me is first of all to be with my family.” Just being with his family especially now that he has his first grandchild is extremely gratifying for him. “Grand-parenting is the greatest job in the world; it’s really outstanding.” In fact, he believes just being with your family is the greatest experience in the world.

Xavier encourages administrators to develop hobbies for stress releasers that will help them forget the things on their desks or meetings they must attend. Hobbies will take their mind away from the pressing issues of the day, and bring physical and emotional restoration, just as fishing does for him.

Why I Stay as Principal

Xavier stays in Adventist education because he lives by the motto he read from his favorite author, Ellen White, many years ago, which states, “Jesus looks at us and discerns infinite possibilities.” Through the years, he has shared this statement thousands of times by reading it, preaching about it, sharing it at worships, and at faculty meetings. Every time he shares the thought, it still impacts him greatly because of all Jesus has done for him personally. As he reflects, he acknowledges he was really going nowhere in
life until he enrolled in an Adventist college and obtained a degree in education, which has brought so much happiness and fulfillment to him.

Xavier stays because he believes he makes a difference in the lives of the people he serves daily. He feels so blessed by the many people in his life who are so close to him like his special friends. He is reminded of the impact he’s had upon the lives of the students he ministers to and is humbled. A principal colleague friend of his, whom he had not seen in a long time approached him recently and shared, “You had my nephew at your school many years ago as a sixth grader. The boy was only able to attend the school for a year due to financial reasons resulting in relocation for the family. The boy is now a young man and is currently serving our country in Afghanistan, the principal continued. Recently, the principal spoke to his nephew, and he shared, “Please tell Mr. Xavier I said hello. He probably doesn’t remember me but he always said hello to me and knew my name and he showed me Jesus.” Xavier did remember the boy and was overcome with emotion on hearing the story because this was one of the young men he had “looked upon and had discerned the infinite possibilities within him.”

Xavier stays in Adventist education because he continues to build lasting relationships with all whom he serves. He stays because he is allowed to be very creative, to press the envelope, to step outside the box, and to do what he thinks needs to be done to provide the best school program for all of his students. He stays because “it’s a job that is challenging, yet it’s a job that allows me to grow spiritually.” It is also a job “that just provides a new excitement for me each day.”

As we came to the conclusion of the interview, Xavier wants to share with principals across the Adventist school system in North America that to encourage
anybody who wants to be a principal the friendship and the relationship they have with the Savior is what will determine their success. Their relationship with Jesus will allow the principal to measure the rate of their success, the happiness associated with the job, and whether they are going to be able to stick with it through their administrative journey.

Xavier contends that school leaders who do not have a spiritual connection with God will eventually burn out. “The job will not only be challenging, it will not be fun as well.” The first and foremost thing a school principal can do is to prayerfully maintain a friendship with God and then ask Him to present you with opportunities to serve effectively. When Xavier has prayed this prayer, he has experienced amazing results. He believes school principals should ask God to put them in a place that will allow them to be used by Him to be effective school leaders.

School principals need to stay fresh in terms of best practices and stay in a state of mind where they always want to keep learning and try new things, to experience the sheer joy of watching a student grasp something new and participate in the joy one gets in learning something new themselves. He wants to encourage all school administrators to explore the kid within themselves by keeping the connection to the students by always thinking creatively.

Xavier wants to appeal to those who aspire to become administrators to try the principalship because of the exciting challenges associated with the job. He assures others that “if you want to get in a job that is going to keep you alive and on your toes and moving forward, this is the job.” He believes practicing principals need to help members on their team who aspire to be educational leaders to do so. The best way to develop educational leaders according to Xavier is by training interested team members
to be replacements for principals or through internships and the development of mentoring programs for school leaders. He shares, “We are willfully short in mentoring teachers and leaders and it’s quite interesting that most principals who have been administrators for many years have never been mentored.”

He suggests that educational directors within the Adventist system of education in North America develop a plan to mentor and train current and future school principals. He warns that current principals cannot develop mentoring initiatives on their own as their work load is already too heavy with simply being expected to be instructional and spiritual leaders within their local school communities.

Xavier believes that educational leaders should be able to choose the professional growth areas they want to grow in and participate in the activities that will best assist in accomplishing their goals. Currently, in-services, seminars, webinars, conferences, and conventions are planned with little to no input from the principals.

In closing, he wants to share two of his favorite Bible texts: Phil 15:5, “I am the vine and the branches, apart from me you can do nothing,” and Phil 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” These verses sum up the reliance all school principals need to have upon God as they effectively lead in our Adventist schools. It is this reliance upon God which dates back to his early college years that Xavier correlates to the blessings he has received from the Lord as an educator, administrator, husband, father, and now a new grandfather. He assures that “there is no credit to Xavier, the principal, especially as he tries to lead on his own. The blessings flow directly from God.” He praises God for the privilege to serve and all of the blessings he has received
from students, parents, and schools as well as all of the milestones he has experienced in the ministry of Adventist education.
CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study tells the story of 14 school principals in the Adventist education system in North America who stayed in one location for at least 10 consecutive years. A cross-case analysis was used to obtain a deeper understanding of how Adventist principals describe the experiences that helped them stay in the same school building for consecutive years. In the process of the cross-case analysis, some of the categories from the previous chapter were combined. For example, professional growth opportunities were combined with the support section. A difficult challenge in doing the cross-case analysis was figuring out how to communicate the tension between opposing ideas. For example, parents do tend to add to the complexity of school life, but they also provide support for the principals. These dilemmas will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter.

The following major themes will be discussed in this chapter: (a) the role and expectations of the principalship, (b) the complexities associated with the principalship, (c) the support principals experience, (d) the challenges of balance between the principal’s personal and professional life, and (e) why the principals stay.
The Role and Expectation of the Principal

*The role of the principal is to become the main educational facilitator of the learning community.* (Wilmore, 2002, p. 5)

The role and expectations associated with the principalship were never clearly defined for the principals when first asked to assume the responsibility of school principal. They were either given a code book and told to read it, given keys and told “just do it,” or simply assigned a building to administrate. Educational superintendents, school board chairs, or immediate supervisors were not helpful in clarifying the role. When one principal asked her superintendent for a job description, her superintendent responded, “That’s a good idea, why don’t you put one together?” Another principal stated, “The principalship cannot be explained to you because educational leaders are not aware of all that the job entails.”

For some, the principalship was defined in a nebulous manner within a spiritual context. Statements were used such as “God is calling you for such a time as this,” “How would God want you to lead,” or “God needs you to impact the lives of the students.” These statements created great ambiguity for the principals. One of the principals maintained that “it sounded like they wanted me to make bricks without straw.”

The principals learned to define their role and the expectations associated with the principalship as their job evolved. Most used the term “self-taught” in describing how they learned their job. They incorporated skills attained at previous work experiences, strategies learned by observing other principals, and knowledge they obtained through on-the-job-learning while under fire. A principal asserted, “I grasped on all of my professional experiences to define my role as a principal.”
However, the principals are now able to articulate their role and the expectations associated with the principalship. They believe their primary role as an Adventist principal is to be the spiritual leader of their school. Several emphasized the importance it is for a principal to establish, foster, and develop the spiritual climate of the school. When the principal is the spiritual leader, everything else falls into place.

Another important role of Adventist principals is to build transforming relationships. One principal acknowledged, “Relationship building is the main responsibility of the principal.” Another added, “Small-school principals need to build relationships with others on their school team in order for the school to continue to be viable.”

Several principals defined the role of the principal as the chief operating officer of the school. The principal needs to be the instructional leader of the school. According to the principals, they are responsible for establishing the academic climate of the school. Thus, the principal must have a vision and a strategic plan for the school. They are the chief financial officers of the school and are responsible for the physical plant of the school as well.

Other responses associated with the role and the expectations of the principalship included that the principal is one who is deeply committed to his students, is responsible for the staffing and training of the faculty and staff, must be transparent and willing to listen more and talk less, be an effective communicator, and deal with conflict resolution. The principals indicated they must be savvy and creative in giving to their local school community and in being a part of the larger constituency of the school.
The expectations associated with the principal’s role are quite challenging. The job is difficult because of the demands from students, parents, staff, board, constituency, and church members. Principal responsibilities go beyond the scope of their regular administrative tasks. A principal explained, “It’s everything from fixing and unclogging toilets to painting, repairing and maintaining buildings.” Other principals contend their responsibilities include being the cook, custodian, bus driver, accountant, bookkeeper, secretary, nurse, pastor, counselor, and a myriad of other different roles. Yet most principals performed their tasks admirably as they share the mind-set that “whatever the position calls for, you simply roll up your sleeves and make it happen.” Several indicated the job is never-ending as it is composed of a 24-hour, 7-day workweek. Some principals begin their work as early as 4:30 a.m. and some never get home until late into the evening because of the various meetings they must regularly attend after the working day. Most of the principals recognize they are constantly held accountable to fulfill the expectations at hand, using whatever sacrifices necessary to accomplish them.

**Complexities of the Principalship**

*There is no question that the role of the principal has become more complex and in many ways undoable.* (Fullan, 2008, p. 3)

The principals identify the principalship as complex. This section discusses the complexities associated with school culture, types of schools, finances, and boundary issues. Often the different sections describe challenges faced by the principals. Their job is not only complex, but just plain difficult!
School Culture Complexities

School culture is comprised of the relationships required to maintain an effective school. The principal must establish positive relationships with many different types of personalities in order to reach their own goals and those of the school. These relationships include those with faculty, parents, students, and board members.

The principals recognize that motivating the faculty to catch the vision, mission, and purpose of Adventist education impacts school culture. Most of the principals sense that their colleagues can clearly articulate the mission; however, some fail to model or live by it. Adventist education is unique because it goes beyond the typical earthly desires for the students, to a hope they will be part of God’s kingdom because of educational ministry. The challenge for school administrators is helping teachers catch the vision and look beyond what the children are to what they will become when they have a relationship with Jesus.

Dealing with the many personalities of the faculty to develop a team approach to teaching was another dilemma identified by the principals. While some teachers remain current with educational trends and innovative strategies, there are some who do not take the initiative to get involved with best practices. Thus, the inability of principals to motivate their teachers to take instruction to the next level becomes a challenge. A couple of the principals shared that this lack of instructional motivation becomes grueling for those leaders who want their schools to be “cutting-edge” institutions.

Hiring or terminating an adequate number of employees to sustain a school program is rather complicated. The financial ramification associated with staffing a school program appropriately and still remain within the budget is increasingly difficult.
These principals have never before experienced the kind of faculty turnover they have witnessed over the last 3 to 5 years. Where there is constant faculty turnover due to finances, the faculty themselves seek employment opportunities elsewhere before they are asked to leave due to lack of job security. Terminating employees is “painful” whether it is due to performance issues, downsizing, or conflicts. The termination impact has huge negative ramifications for the school because it results in larger size classes and may incite disgruntled employees for those who stay. One principal noted that if the termination is not handled properly, it has the potential to divide an entire school family as those who stay lose confidence in their administrative team.

Behavioral issues relating to students are increasing. Students are more brazen, distracted, talkative, and less academically prepared than in years past. In addition, because of how students are engaged with technology and the media, the principal and teachers are always vying to capture their attention towards academics. Downward-enrollment trends continue to mystify principals year after year. Few Adventist schools have formal marketing strategies for recruiting students. Yet the principals are still expected to sustain or increase enrollment to meet budgetary needs.

Because parents invest large amounts of money for their children’s private education, they tend to have a more hands-on approach to school. They believe they know better than the educators what is best for their children. A principal identified demanding parents as unreasonable parents who feel it is their right to be crusaders. Another principal indicated that while some parents may have good intentions, they become overbearing and sometimes become “a real pain in the neck.” The principals agree that “hands down the parents are the most challenging aspects of my job,” while
others complain that “parents can be occasionally more difficult than dealing with the challenges of educating their children.”

Many parents are not aware, choose to not be aware, or do not understand that there is an established protocol or process they must adhere to before concerns are expressed to the principal. The challenge for principals is to encourage parents to abide by the protocol, which at times may be easier to side-step; “trying to help parents move towards being willing to go and talk to a teacher before going to the principal is a big problem.”

Board members often lack engagement for the total school program. They are not visibly supportive of the students, school activities, parent activities, and the teachers except for monthly board meetings. Some would rather micromanage, have their own personal agenda, undermine the principal, become a hindrance to the ministry, fail to understand the importance of their role and the responsibilities than to be engaged with the school. Board members are part of a team that develops strategic plans, mapping out the school’s direction and being responsible for the marketing and development of the school program. If board members do not accept their responsibility, principals have no other alternative than to hire professionals to help them.

Perceptions have a striking impact upon school culture. The perceptions of the constituency, board, faculty, parents, and students at times seem unrealistic and unreasonable to the principals. Whether the perception is the principal can handle it all and does not need any help, or they have unjustly punished a child, unfairly terminated a faculty member, or is arbitrary, wrong perceptions add to the complexities associated with the culture of the school.
School-Type Complexities

While the complexities of the principal’s job were experienced across all school types by the principals in this study, the challenges of small-school principals appear to be compounded by the fact that the principals are also teachers. One of the small-school principals lamented the fact that she had no release time to accomplish all that was expected of her. When she has administrative deadlines to meet, it is difficult to fit everything she has to teach the students. The principal explained that when faced with a conference deadline, her plan is usually to “put her students on individual mode while she completes the pressing tasks.” This principal has trained the students to expect these kinds of interruptions and she describes the students as “very, very receptive to my needs as a principal and a teacher.” Therefore, when confronted with a deadline, the teacher simply announces, “Ok, work on your vocabulary for a couple of minutes while I get this paper ready.” The students then drop everything and go right to an assignment while she finishes the tasks. The principal proudly noted she is always amazed at how the students remain on task during interruptions; she emphasizes that she is always able to refocus the students when they regroup because they really respond well to the interruptions because they are used to the routine by now.

For the small-school principals the day never seems long enough to accomplish the many responsibilities accompanied with teaching and leading a school. One principal bitterly resented the fact that the lack of time in the school day resulted in working into the late evenings, on weekends, and during vacations.

Small-school principals lack administrative help to complete their tasks. Most of the time, they resort to relying on volunteers who are not dependable since they receive
no compensation. There is never another adult to brainstorm or process a situation with. One principal lamented, “It’s very difficult for me because I have no bouncing board, no sound board where I can say ‘What do you think?’” Small-school principals have to make decisions on the spur of the moment such as calling a snow day or more importantly dealing with a pandemic like the H1N1 virus. Principals in small schools deal with isolation as they are constantly alone in their one-room schools and relish any opportunity to engage with other adults. One principal shared, “It’s kind of lonely for an adult” to be the only grown up in a building day after day. This same principal notes that when her violin teacher comes in or when the UPS delivery man comes into the school to deliver a package, she seldom lets them leave without engaging them in conversation.

The need for privacy is another complexity associated with a small school. For example, if a parent comes in for a conference, the principal cannot just tend to the needs of the parent because the students cannot be left unattended or unsupervised in a one-room setting. This challenge causes the small-school principal to carefully schedule such conferences before or after school or on the weekends to avoid sensitive or touchy situations. All this adds up to long hours for small-school principals.

Financial Challenges

Most principals expressed frustration about the lack of funding available to appropriately operate their schools. One principal noted, “There is never enough money so principals constantly have to struggle to make ends meet.” This creates stress when there is not enough money to pay all the bills. For example, they shared, “It is like standing on the edge of a precipice and always looking into bankruptcy.” Another principal noted, “Principals are always facing some type of financial difficulty when it
comes to providing for the all of the needs of the students and the things they deserve. Without having to go out there and be on the streets, principals need to do whatever they can to get money to sustain their schools.”

The principals recognized that as private schools, they are not eligible for many of the resources their counterparts in the public schools experience. One of the principals shared, “There are just so many things the public schools have that we don’t have, but we’re still expected to create the same whole child or do even better.” The resources the principals identified as lacking in their schools are: special services to accommodate for all exceptionalities, inclusive education, school counselors, nursing services, and guidance education. Several principals indicated that having the opportunity to provide these services would enable them to create stronger educational programs.

However, many of the principals just make do with what they have to make their programs work. One principal noted, “We have not had any situation where resources have hindered us from achieving or reaching a child or doing the kinds of things necessary to create an environment for learning.” Thus, some of the principals have developed creative coping skills to survive financially. A principal acknowledged:

You have to be innovative with different ideas of how you can keep your school afloat financially. You have to be very frugal; you cannot be a spender and be a successful Adventist principal.

Boundaries

A dilemma most of the principals experience is the lack of boundaries between their work and worship experience. The dilemma stems from the practice within the Adventist Church that educators must belong to one of their supporting constituent churches. The purpose of this practice is to reciprocate support and model to the
constituents that the principal is a member in good and regular standing. On Sabbaths, the principals worship with the same people they work with, serve on committees with, and spend most of their day with. The principals do not always consider this a positive experience. Several principals identified extreme isolation while at church because of failure on behalf of the members to make the distinction between the work and worship experience. While attempting to worship, principals are forced into conversations relating to the workweek by students, parents, colleagues, board members, church members, and pastors.

In summary, the job of Adventist principals is complex and difficult. The challenges relating to the demands of the job, school culture, finances, and maintaining positive relationships are daunting.

Support of the Principals

*It is essential that all principals have a well developed network of colleagues and friends that will support them through thick and thin.* (Young, Sheets, & Knight, 2005, p. 69)

All of the principals feel supported as school administrators. The types and levels of support they receive vary and are demonstrated in different ways. However, they generally feel supported by family members, faculty and staff, parents and students, mentors, education directors, board members, pastors, and church members.

Family Members

The majority of the principals named their spouses and children as a tremendous source of support for them. The principals identified the faithfulness of their families and the many ways their spouses pick up the load at home. Some spouses care for the
children and prepare meals for them. Other spouses maintain the home in the absence of the working principals and still others become responsible for all areas where a gap is left by the principal who is fulfilling their responsibilities at school. When the spouse also works in the school or is the pastor of the constituent churches, they collaborate to carry out school responsibilities.

Spouses are a tremendous source of support in providing the strength needed during difficult personal and professional times. Whether in the loss of a family member, conflicts at school, or the nonrenewal of their own contract, it was the strong support of the spouse that sustained the principals during their challenging experiences.

Faculty and Staff

The principals feel great support from their faculty and staff. One of the principals explained, “My faculty and staff support me because they respect me.” Another principal noted that had it not been for the support of her faculty, she would not have been able to survive her early administrative years. “It was my supportive faculty and staff that really worked along me and carried me during my first year as principal and that made it a successful year.” Many principals agree that they seek the help of their colleagues in solving problems at their schools. One principal shared, “Whenever I am in a bind, I simply turn to the teachers and say, okay, help me guys.”

The principals mentioned the keen interest the faculty members have for their well-being on a personal level. One of the principals described a difficult time when his teenage son was making life-devastating choices in another city. One day a faculty member walked into his office and handed him an envelope with a note and money. The note read, “Your son needs you now! Go and trust that our hearts and prayers will be with
Parents and Students

Parents demonstrate support for the principals by giving them respect and encouragement. One principal noted, “What touches me the most is that the parents make it a point to greet me each morning and always convey encouragement for the challenges of the day.” The principals believe parents are supportive because they are deeply engaged, satisfied, and happy with the school. One principal stated that in a “recent parent satisfaction survey, 98% of the parents indicated they are supportive of the school.” Another principal proudly shared, “I have one of the best home and school associations in the entire Adventist world of education.”

The principals receive support on a personal level from the parents. The parents are committed to their spiritual development and are dedicated to praying on their behalf. At times, parents walk into their offices just to pray for the principals. Other times they receive letters of encouragement or birthday and anniversary acknowledgments.

Several principals identified their current and former students as supportive. Current students are always willing to help and assist the principals with anything that is necessary. Alumni return and share life’s experiences with the student body. One principal described experiences in which year after year students who graduate return to the school and offer their services to the current student body. She described the support that she receives from these returning students as “inspiring.”
Mentors

Many of the principals identified relationships with mentors as a primary source of support. One principal shared that the strong mentoring relationship he developed with his mentor is maintained many years later; “to this day our bond and friendship is still going strong after 30 years.” Another principal advised that “all leaders should have a strong support system in the form of a mentor that enables them to grow in a safe and nurturing environment.” Principals receive help from mentors in decision making, role clarification, and spirituality. The adjectives used to describe their mentors included spiritual, caring, effective, nurturing, strong, humble, skilled, knowledgeable, awesome, and wise.

Networking with other principals and colleagues is a strong source of support to the principals. They identified fellow principals and experienced administrative leaders as a safe and consistent source of support. The candid and open relationship with other principals gives them opportunity to troubleshoot and brainstorm without being perceived negatively.

Union and Conference Leadership

One of the goals of educational directors and leaders within the Adventist system is to help their principals grow professionally. From the NAD, the unions, and the local conferences, opportunities for professional development are readily available. The principals expressed appreciation for the generosity of their organizations for the funding made available for them to participate in professional growth opportunities. “I feel extremely fortunate to work in a conference where all of my professional growth opportunities are supported and funding is readily available.”
The principals find professional growth opportunities to be rewarding and central to their work. Several shared by noting the benefit that professional growth opportunities have for them. One principal stated, “I participate in as many professional growth opportunities as are afforded to me because it enables me to sharpen my administrative skills.” Because the principals value professional growth opportunities for themselves, they are quick to encourage their teachers to take advantage of these opportunities also.

Union, conferences, and boards primarily provide three types of professional growth opportunities for the principals: membership in national organizations, denominationally sponsored workshops, and advanced degrees. Most principals hold memberships in the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Association of Elementary-School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (NASSP), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS), and various other local and state chapters of national educational organizations. Benefits from holding memberships in these organizations include the conferences and reading resources made available.

Surprisingly, the small-school principals did not hold memberships or see value in belonging to national organizations. One indicated that her graduate degree in curriculum and instruction sufficed to meet her need to participate in any professional organization. Another principal only saw the value in serving in various denominationally-sponsored union and conference workshops. They expressed contentment and satisfaction professionally and felt no need or benefit to expanding their horizons.
The principals find support in their union and conference educational leaders. Whether through wise counsel, advice, guidance, or starting a new initiative, the principals rely on their educational leaders for the support needed to effectively lead. One principal insists, “Whatever I need and however he can be of help, my superintendent is always readily available to help me.”

School Boards

Besides the kinds of support provided by boards mentioned in the previous section, school board chairs and board members were identified by the principals as another great source of support for them. While most school boards are not perceived as “yes” boards by their principals, many indicated that the support they receive from their board members is very strong. The principals feel valued, appreciated, affirmed, and supported by their boards and chairs. There are a myriad of ways in which school boards support the principals, including assisting principals in crisis situations, dealing with major facility issues, and furthering the overall mission of the school. A principal acknowledged, “Life would have been miserable without my board chair being on my side.”

The principals experience support in their personal lives from their board chairs. A principal expressed deep appreciation for the manner in which her school board chair is always concerned about her well-being. For example, if she has missed several meals, he will remind her of the importance of proper nutrition, and if she is consistently working late hours he reminds her about “burning the light at both ends.”
Pastors and Church Members

Pastors were identified by some of the principals as demonstrating support for their leadership. A few indicated, “I've had a lot of good support from them, and “pastoral support is always there for me.” One principal remarked, “The pastors are pleasant, helpful, engaged, and deeply committed to the mission of the school as indicated by their prayers, loyalty, and support for 14 consecutive school years.” Other principals emphasized, “The pastors in my union are firm supporters of Adventist education and demonstrate it by their support.” They demonstrate support by visiting the schools, and conducting chapels and Bible studies no matter how busy they are.

The most supportive pastors are those employed by union and conferences that have a non-negotiable policy of hiring pastors unless they are committed and strong advocates for Christian education. A principal noted, “Pastors are not hired unless they are supportive of SDA education and demonstrate it by enrolling their children in the school.”

However, many of the principals sense a lack of support from their pastors. While some were very careful and guarded about describing pastoral support, others were less reserved and shared that at times the pastors appeared to be uncaring and indifferent.

While there are some that are supportive, resourceful, helpful and willing to join me in ministry, there are others who simply could not care less. There appears to be a stereotype in terms of pastoral support. I believe I have experienced both kinds of pastors: supportive and non-supportive ones. Therefore, I believe and have experienced that the stereotypes are accurate and true.

The pastors are often not engaged in the school, aware of what is happening, are too busy to get involved, do not consider education as part of ministry, and do not have the time to support the school. The challenges that keep pastors away from the school,
while somewhat monumental, are then perceived as not supportive of the principals. A principal shared, “The pastors indicate that they are too busy within their own congregations to extend themselves further at the school.” Thus, these pastors are seldom available to visit or support the school. This perceived lack of support on behalf of the pastors is somewhat troubling for the principals. The principals strongly urged that in order for pastors to be supportive of them as leaders they must first make a conscientious effort to do so. “One of the things for pastors to do is to work together with the principal and stop shooting from the hip when it comes to principal support.”

The principals experience mixed support from their constituent churches. When there are a large number of constituent churches, the issue of equitable financial support can become politicized. The principals recognized the need to develop a very keen sense of perception regarding the political pulse of their constituent churches to determine the best way to garner support.

One principal lamented, “You will always have people who don’t support you who think that Christian education is not as good, or our buildings don’t look as nice. You will always have those people within the churches.” However, the principals believe there is “a good core group of people that support us” from the constituency churches. A principal assured, “The support of my church members has been tremendous. I don’t know what I would do without them.” Some principals benefit from the intercessory prayer groups in their churches.

In summary, the Adventist principals in this study are sustained in their work by support from their families, faculty and staff, parents and students, mentors, and
educational leaders, school board chairs and members, students, and pastors and church members.

**Balance Between Personal and Professional Life**

*Principals must learn how to balance their job and personal time before they realize they have nothing else to give physically, mentally or emotionally.* (Wilmore, 2004, p. 141)

While the majority of the principals in this study admitted rarely having the luxury of any type of balance in their lives, two maintained they make balance a high priority and choose not to overextend themselves. The principals recognize the importance and benefit of balance. However, for most, maintaining balance is difficult because of all that is required of them and the long hours necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. The principals indicated that the time demands on the principal literally use most of your waking hours and consume you even when sleeping.

This lack of balance creates stress for the principals and their families. They acknowledge the devastating impact their lack of balance has caused their families. Several sadly recognized, “I was neglecting my family for the sake of ministry.” One principal shared with deep remorse:

One day I found a note on my desk that read, “Dear Dad, may I have an appointment with you?” At a very young age, my son had figured out that the only way to see his father was by making an appointment. Because I was so busy, my little boy requested one.

Another principal admitted not being good at handling stress. He said, “When I go home, I live it and it chews me up inside and it has taken its toll.” Most of the principals did not realize how devastating the damage was until perhaps it was too late: problematic children, the children were grown and had left the home, the death of a child, failed
marriages, or health concerns. While the principals believe the family unit was greatly impacted by their imbalance, they also admit the ones hurt the most have been their spouses. One of the principals regretted the experience of working consecutive days for long periods of time and going home at the end of the day to find his wife “crying because she was lonely.” Another principal resented his inability to spend time with his spouse “because of my long days, I have not had any quality time with my wife in years.” Several principals described their relationships with their spouses as “hit or miss.” A principal complained, “My husband and I are like two passing ships.”

The consequences of their imbalance have affected the principals personally. Most had to do with health-related issues such as obesity, stress disorders, cancer, heart disease, and high blood pressure. A principal shared, “I developed stress-related high blood pressure because of the imbalance in my life.” Another principal described the experience of being diagnosed with cancer and realizing the imbalance in his life:

It took me staring death right in the face when I was diagnosed with cancer and suddenly realized that there were a lot more important things in life than just making sure your desk was totally cleared on Friday afternoons.

Another acknowledged, “When you face the reality that maybe you won’t be around next week, your outlook on life takes a different spin.”

The principals admit the imbalance affects their daily walk with the Lord. One principal insists, “You can’t do it all and still have a vibrant personal and spiritual life.” One principal recalled arriving home late one evening and, consumed by the events of the day, she proceeded to read her Bible for personal meditation and fell asleep doing so. Another principal recounted that she was praying on her knees only to awaken the next day fully clothed and still kneeling. The principals believe if they are not fed spiritually
because of their imbalance, they will not be able to have the spiritual discernment needed to be the effective leaders they have been called to be.

There are some principals who feel they do not have any stress because of their inner strength which helps them be resilient through their fears and challenges. But most of the principals experience challenges that increase their stress levels. Their inability to handle the stress leads to burnout. One indicated:

I started questioning whether I was in the right place. I realized I was maybe a little burnt out. I don't know what it was. Those were a couple of hard, hard years that I struggled with. It was drudgery just to go into work and I thought, I can't do this the rest of my life, and as I reflected I still had a ways to go before retirement, I considered whether I should retire early? Do I just give it up, I thought. During that time I had to do some serious soul searching and praying.

Rationalizing the Lack of Balance

Rationalization (or making excuses) is used in psychology and logic as a defense mechanism in which perceived controversial behaviors or feelings are explained in a rational or logical manner to avoid the true explanation (Simon, 2009). According to the research, people rationalize for various reasons. Often it is to differentiate from the original deterministic explanation of the behavior (Cherry, 2011). Other times it is to defend the feelings in question (Niolon, 2011). Wikipedia (“Rationalization,” n.d.) defines rationalization as an informal fallacy of reasoning.

In this study, many principals rationalize why they do not need to maintain balance in their lives. Some explain the urgency of the ministry as an excuse for not having balance. Imbalance for them has become a way of life:

My life is lopsided mostly because I am steadfast on the school and keeping it afloat; I am finding new and exciting things for the kids to do and that takes a lot of my time. Then there are times when I get backlogged too, there just is no personal life when that happens.
A principal reasoned that since “most of my life is the school during the school months” there is no need for balance. Other principals justified their imbalance by making the following statements: “Adventism is my life. I go to church here, my job is here, I worship here, and I have an active role in church as an elder, that is all the balance I need”; “My husband and I work at the same school thus our relationship is developed at school”; “I do not have a need for balance because my husband is an interstate transporter. If my husband were home more frequently perhaps I would have had a need for balance”; “Not having children allows me to work the long hours that I do without needing any balance”; “My wife ends her work day by joining me at school to help me finish off my day, that’s how we experience balance together”; and “My personality does not allow me to get frazzled so I do not need balance.”

Some principals deny a need for balance while others feel guilty about trying to maintain balance in their lives. The guilt the principals experience impedes their ability to attempt to maintain balance:

I struggle with maintaining balance because when I make the time to do so, there is always something that gets neglected. I simply cannot get myself to make the time because of the guilt.

Strategies for Maintaining Balance

Many of the principals have developed intentional strategies for maintaining balance in their lives. Some of the principals learned to say no to responsibilities outside of the normal working environment. One principal resigned his church offices, another stopped teaching the children’s Sabbath school classes, and one principal resigned her duties as Pathfinder leader at her church.
The principals learned to “compartmentalize their lives.” One principal explained, “When I am at school, I am 100% on task with the things at hand. When I am at home, I can easily separate myself from my workload and focus on family time.” A principal insisted, “Unless there is something that is extremely pressing, I leave all unfinished work at the school.”

Several of the principals seek help from their spouses in maintaining balance in their lives. The spouses assist the principals with their work at school through their constant support, by sharing advice and counsel, and by frequently reminding them of the need for balance. The principals expressed gratitude to God for having a patient and loving wife or husband who spends times with them doing things together.

Most principals maintain balance by traveling and vacationing. They have developed hobbies which include, fishing, walking, recreational and historical reading, hiking, mountain biking, golfing, and photography. Several principals maintain balance in their lives by personal renewal and restoration. A principal explained, “I was counseled by a former superintendent of schools to set personal time aside and to add it to my schedule regularly.” They create “me” time by finding the things they enjoy doing and make time for shopping at the mall, getting massages, doing their hair professionally, joining health clubs, or by having “alone” time.

Some of the principals have developed coping skills for handling the stressors in their lives. One principal explained, “I developed coping skills for when I am personally wounded by the things that happen and when stress tries to overcome me.” The majority of the principals seek the Lord’s guidance in dealing with their stresses. A principal remarked, “I always look to the Lord for guidance and direction in handling the stresses
associated with the principalship.” The principals ascribe to an unwritten motto which says, “I’m not even going to worry about it; I mean I let it go and trust that God is just that amazing to fix it.” Whether the stress is related to conflicts, finances, enrollment, relational issues, or being overwhelmed, the principals believe that God will carry them through. The majority of the principals seek prayer as a stress releaser. They present their burdens and stresses to the Lord in prayer, “then wait patiently upon the Lord for His direction and guidance.” The principals spend personal time with God engaged in prayer, praise, Bible study, and reflection, in strengthening themselves when dealing with stress.

Many principals rely on relationships with others as stress releasers, most importantly, their families. They spend time with family members, seek their advice, do things together, and create memories. They rely on relationships with friends, church members, fellow administrators, and colleagues to bolster them. During stressful times “every leader needs to have shoulders to cry on that are safe, provide wise counsel, and will protect your confidentiality when dealing with stress.”

One principal seeks the help of a professional counselor to handle the stresses associated with the principalship. She underscores the value of seeking a professional counselor outside of the Adventist organization for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality. “I felt seeking professional help out of my local environment was a safer place and I could talk about those things that I needed to so that I could get some balance and a reality check in my life.” In addition, the principal stressed that she has always felt safe, affirmed, and valued in seeking professional help.

Those principals who make maintaining balance a top priority celebrate dramatic life changes. They consider each morning as a precious new gift because of their new
outlook on life, have more balance and contentment in life than ever, are happier and think they are better principals because of the balance they have learned to maintain.

In summary, Adventist principals struggle to maintain balance in their lives. This lack of balance has had devastating effects on their families and personally. There are many reasons the principals cite for their failure to maintain balance. The most notable reason is they strongly believe it is acceptable to lead imbalanced lives for the sake of educational ministry. They use denial, guilt, and rationalization as reasons to justify this imbalance. To reduce stress, several principals have developed coping skills grounded in their spiritual beliefs. They have also learned to handle stress with the help of their relationships, professional counseling, recreational activities, hobbies, alone time, vacationing, and traveling.

**Why Principals Stay**

*All the trials and tribulations that go with being a principal do not outweigh the joys and triumphs of trying to make a difference in the lives of young people everyday.*

(Wilmore, 2004, p. 6)

This section discusses the reasons principals in this study have stayed in the Adventist system for more than 10 consecutive years. They have a passion for students, feel called by God, and enjoy many opportunities for spiritual growth and service.

**Passion for Students**

The primary reason why the principals stay in Adventist education for more than 10 consecutive years is because of their passion and commitment to the students they are entrusted to. While the responses were quite similar, when the principals referred to their students, their intonations and body language portrayed deep commitment and passion for
each of their students. One principal noted, “I live by the motto which states, ‘Jesus looks at us and discerns infinite possibilities.’” The principals feel they have a direct impact on the lives of their young people. They consider their work with the students of inestimable value and stay because they realize the work they do with the children is critically important.

The passion for the students extends beyond the school building for most principals. They view the students in the community and their local constituencies with the same responsibility; “I stay to provide opportunities for all school-age students who wish to attend an Adventist school the benefit of enrolling.” The principal shared the joy that he feels each fall when classes begin and the very students that he has prayed over and recruited are now enrolled in his school. The principals love and are devoted to their students, demonstrating it through their unselfish service to the ministry year after year.

Commitment to Calling

Adventist principals stay because they feel directly called by God, accept God’s calling, and commit their lives to educational ministry,

I have dedicated my life to this ministry because I believe the Lord called me to it. Because I could see the circumstances when I look back which have led me to this and I think no amount of grief will run me out of this, I’m here for the long haul.

The commitment to God’s calling is so evident to the principals that their deep conviction to remain in educational ministry is unyielding. One of the principals described it as a vow to God and shares, “I stay because of my vow to God that I would remain in Adventist education until He indicated that it was time to leave.” Another principal explained, “I’m not here because I want to be here, I’m here because God wants
me to be here. If he wants me to go someplace else, He will show me the way and He will provide the way for me.”

This commitment to God’s calling is demonstrated by the number of years they have served in their schools. One principal who had been in the same building for 30 years said, “God has chosen me to be at my school at this particular time, place, environment, and in this particular area of the country.”

The commitment to God’s calling is so strong that most principals model it in their personal lives. Several principals indicated that while they have choices as to where to enroll their children, undoubtedly they always choose Adventist education because they know about its value and power to transform lives, spiritually, mentally, and physically. One principal is so emphatic about her passion for Adventist education that not only have her children been educated in Adventist schools, but her grandson is now enrolled at her school. The principal transports her grandson daily past two distinguished “A” level school districts to arrive at her school. Because the principals feel genuinely called by God to educational ministry, the hardships they face become more tolerable.

Spiritual Growth and Service Opportunities

The principals stay in Adventist education because of their need to serve others through educational ministry. Most principals expressed great joy in helping others develop a personal relationship with Jesus. Towards that end, principals have conducted Bible studies for students, parents, community members, and neighbors. A principal described the joy of others in ministry as, “It’s wonderful to be a part of a ministry that you know is ‘kissed by God.’"
Several principals experienced the joy of witnessing individuals they introduced to the Lord accept Him through baptism and emphasized:

Baptism is the summation, the ultimate objective, and ultimate goal of Adventist education which is to lead students and parents to Christ in a way where they make that final commitment to say “yes,” I want to follow the Lord and I’m going to consummate my experience through baptism.

The principals described the experience of witnessing the baptism of someone they have brought to the Lord as a humbling and inspiring one and second to none.

Most principals recognize that their passion for ministry is not only to the people they serve but for their own personal spiritual growth as well. A principal explained, “I stay because of the strong relationship that I am able to develop with my God.” Another principal noted, “I stay because my job allows me to grow spiritually.” Throughout the interviews, the principals shared stories that clearly depicted experiences that strengthen their faith through educational ministry. Whether it was through an answered prayer, God’s protection, God’s provision, God’s intervention, or God’s guidance time after time they shared unbelievable ways in which their faith was increased and remained intact because of God’s faithfulness.

Adventist principals stay because of their passion to serve others. A principal noted, “I stay because of my need to serve others.” Most stay because of their ability to teach and nurture the people they serve. They nurture people in the areas of life skills, professionally, and in parenting areas. One principal shared the experience of developing a team approach to leadership even though he was in a hostile environment.

Adventist principals are passionate about training adults. Whether it is in best practices or parenting skills, the joy of teaching is unquestionable. One principal explained, not only is she helping parents become better parents; at times, she has
become the parent when necessary. While this experience is not unique, they never expressed any regrets in extending themselves in their passion to serve others.

Several principals mentor people. A principal remarked, “I stay because of my opportunity to mentor people.” From mentoring a new teacher to an experienced one, to mentoring parents, church members, or colleagues, the principals recognize the value of mentoring relationships. Several of the principals explained they mentor others because they were mentored and are now able to stay in Adventist education because they were mentored effectively.

A benefit of serving others is that lifetime relationships are built. One of the principals shared, “I stay because of the lasting relationships that I have built with the people I serve.” The principals maintain relationships with the people they have served several years after they have left the place in which the relationship began.

Summary

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.* (2 Tim 4:7)

Principals in the Adventist system of education in North America who have stayed in one building for 10 or more consecutive years are resilient spiritual leaders. They thrive in spite of the fact that the role and expectations associated with their jobs are undefined and quite complex. The demands of the job, personnel issues, parent and student issues, board issues, financial issues, constituency and community issues, all contribute to overwork and imbalanced lives. Yet because of their strong relationship with God, they are able to be resilient even when faced with adversity. Most rely on
prayer to sustain them through many difficult and challenging moments. They stay because of their passion for the students, commitment to God’s calling, passion for ministry, and passion to serve others.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Introduction

Adventist principals in North America stay an average of 2.5 years at the elementary level, 3.6 years at day secondary schools, and 4.0 years at secondary boarding-schools. Many studies have identified reasons why school principals leave their jobs (Cushing et al., 2003; L. Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Hoffman, 2004; Kennedy, 2000; Peterson & Kelley, 2001; Potter, 2001). However, few studies have been conducted to understand why principals stay. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of school principals who have remained in leadership at the same school building for 10 consecutive years in the Adventist system of education in North America and to discover why they stay.

Research Design and Sampling

A qualitative, multiple-case-study design using narrative inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate method to uncover the lived experiences of the principals in this study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 1998). The criterion used for this sampling directly reflected the purpose of this study and guided the identification of information-rich cases (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Ross, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The
primary criterion used for the study was (a) the principal had served as an administrator for 10 consecutive years or more in one school building, (b) they were identified by their union education directors and approved to participate in this study by their local education superintendents and (c) the principals were chosen with every effort to reflect a balance between gender, ethnicity, and a balance of service time, school size, and types of schools. Table 1 describes the demographics of the 14 principals and the type of schools they represented.

Every attempt was made to represent all nine unions in the Adventist educational system of North America. However, two unions did not have any principals who had stayed in one building 10 or more years.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was resiliency and spiritual leadership theory. The review of the literature demonstrated there is a direct relationship between the stress of the principal’s job and their capability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cash, 2001; Copland, 2001, L. Greene, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Isaacs, 2003; Patterson et al., 2002). I assumed resiliency theory would help provide a framework whereby the staying power of the principals in this study could be explained.

The literature suggests a number of internal and external variables that characterize resilience and thriving. The internal variables include positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, and a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk taking, low fear of failure, and a high tolerance of
uncertainty, determination, and perseverance (Bonanno, 2004; Carver, 1998; Masten, 2005; O’Leary, 1998; Patterson et al., 2002; Ungar, 2004).

External variables also influence a person’s ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity. Of the external variables defined, the most compelling and most consistent finding indicates the centrality of relationships as a critical component to resilience (Beardslee, 1989; Masten, 2005; O’Leary, 1998) and social support (Bonanno, 2004; Carver, 1998; Nishikawa, 2006; Park, 1998; Saakvitne et al., 1998). At the core of a person’s ability to be sustained during adversity is their intimacy with others. These relationships serve as the major catalyst for the transformation in one’s life and within oneself. Beardslee (1989) indicated individuals who handle adversarial experiences the best are those who have the presence of close confiding relationships during trying times.

Spiritual leadership theory was used to obtain a better perspective in the study of how Adventist principals remain in the system for 10 consecutive years. Fry (2003) defines spiritual leadership as “the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (pp. 694-695). There were two dimensions of spiritual leadership described in the literature: to create a vision for the organization whereby leaders and group members experience a sense of calling, and to establish a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby people have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others (Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005). Fry (2003) referred to these dimensions as the “calling” and “membership” of the spiritual leader.
Findings

In this section, I describe the major themes which provide insight to the research question: How do principals in the Adventist system of education in North America describe their role and the experiences that helped them stay in one location for 10 or more consecutive years? The five themes emerging from the study were: (a) the role and expectation of the principal, (b) the complexities associated with the principalship, (c) the support the principals receive, (d) the balance between the principal’s personal and professional life, and (e) why the principals stay.

The Role and Expectation of the Principal

The role and expectations associated with the principalship were never clearly defined for the principals in this study. This ambiguity caused the principals to define the roles and the expectations associated with the job by themselves. They used the term “self-taught” as they explained how their work experiences helped them define the role and expectations of an Adventist school principal. The principals drew on experiences from their academic preparation, previous work experiences, and mentors who helped clarify their roles and outlined the expectations associated with their jobs. A principal shared, “I surrounded myself with good people like trusted friends and colleagues and learned how to do my job.”

Other principals learned to define their role in terms of their spiritual intuition. They prayed for divine guidance and then depended upon the Lord for direct guidance in fulfilling their jobs. One of the principals remarked, “The principalship was defined in terms of what God would have me to do.” The principals are now able to define their role as the spiritual leader of the school—the one who establishes, fosters, and develops the
spiritual climate of the school. They believe they are responsible for developing and cultivating relationships with the school family as well as the community they serve, and they view themselves as the chief operating and financial officer of the school as they oversee and manage all of the fiscal responsibilities of the school. They also consider themselves the physical plant manager of the school.

The principals are deeply committed to their students, faculty, and staff. They are intentional about the overall professional development of their team and using best practices to drive instruction. In addition, the principals feel they are effective communicators by being transparent, willing to listen, and resolving conflict. In essence, several acknowledged, “The principal is responsible for doing all that is needed to run an effective school.” This includes being the teacher, cook, pastor, counselor, custodian, bus driver, accountant, bookkeeper, nurse, and secretary.

The Complexities Associated With the Principalship

The irreducibility of the principalship is quite compelling for the Adventist principal. They find themselves in an extremely complex profession. Because most Adventist schools are supported by constituent churches, they constantly experience political pressures and demands from the pastors and the constituent churches. The principals are in a continual battle to establish and maintain positive relationships that foster positive school cultures. They are challenged to do so based upon the unrealistic demands they encounter from the people they work with, including board members who are disengaged and lack accountability.

Grappling with issues relating to school finances is monumental as most principals are directly responsible for the overall financial management of the school.
The principals experience difficulties in the area of staffing, support or lack of support, lack of time to accomplish goals and tasks, being a teaching principal in the small school, and terminating and retaining employees.

Worshipping with parents and others within the school community creates tension because often there is a lack of boundaries as people expect the principal to discuss school issues in church. Their need for privacy is not respected.

Principal Support

The primary source of support the principals receive is from their families. They describe the support of their families as faithful, caring, understanding, and one that provides strength in times of great need. The principals depend on the strong relationships they have developed and cultivated through the years as another source of support. These include relationships with their faculty and staff, parents, students, mentors, networking with other principals, union and conference leadership, school board, pastors, and church members.

Adventist principals are generously bolstered in many ways by their employing organizations. They are provided with opportunities to hold memberships in national organizations, participate in denominationally sponsored workshops, and receive funding to complete advanced degrees. They value and appreciate professional growth activities they partake of and readily encourage their teachers to do the same. The types of support the principals experience is through their professional, personal, mentoring, and networking relationships. Strikingly, several principals do not perceive they are supported by their pastors. They believe the pastors do not consider educational ministry as
evangelism. Thus, the principals view the pastors as never having enough time to support the school, uncaring, indifferent, unengaged, or too busy to do so.

**Balance Between Personal and Professional Life**

Work-life balance is defined as an individual’s ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities. Work-life balance, in addition to the relations between work and family functions, also involves roles in other areas of life (Delecta, 2011). Other researchers defined work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict; as the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets; and as fulfilling the demands satisfactorily in the three basic areas of life, namely, work, family, and private (Felstead et al., 2002, as cited in Delecta, 2011; Greenhaus, 2002, as cited in Delecta, 2011; White et al., 2003, as cited in Delecta, 2011).

According to Lowe (2005, as cited in Delecta, 2011), work-life imbalance affects the overall well-being of the individual causing such problems as dissatisfaction from life, prolonged sadness, and the use of drugs or alcohol. Work-life imbalance creates undue tension when one of the roles of the individual at work or in the family causes stress on the individual and this stress affects the other roles of the individual. The stress behaviors then exhibited are a direct result of the dissonant and conflicting imbalance at their work and out of work (Delecta, 2011).

There is a large amount of work-life imbalance in the lives of Adventist principals. They struggle to maintain balance in their lives because of the demands of the job, lack of time to do so, believe it is acceptable to lead imbalanced lives for the sake of
educational ministry, and the stresses accompanied by imbalanced lives. Unfortunately, this lack of balance is evidenced in the devastating impact it has upon their families, personally, and in their spiritual lives. As they struggle to maintain balance they use denial, guilt, and rationalization as reasons to justify this imbalance.

Some principals developed strategies for maintaining balance. These strategies include taking control of their lives, being intentional about balance in their lives, never taking work home at the end of the day, spending time with their spouses and children, and dedicating time for personal renewal and restoration.

The principals have developed coping skills to deal with the stresses accompanied by the disequilibrium in their lives. They seek the Lord’s guidance through prayer and depend on relationships to sustain them. They also have hobbies, travel, and vacation. Some seek the help of professional counselors or life coaches outside of the organization. A principal shared, “I felt seeking professional help outside of the Adventist organization was a safer place for me than within the system; as I could talk freely about the things I needed to and get some balance and a reality check back into my life.”

Why Principals Stay

Adventist principals stay because of their passion for the students, their commitment to God’s calling, their passion for ministry, and their passion to serve others. They endure the course inspite of the difficulties and the demands of the job, which are undefined and quite complex because of their strong relationship with God. They endure hardship and are able to thrive even when faced with adversity because they rely on God’s guidance and prayer to sustain them through hardship.
Discussion

Researchers of workplace spirituality contend leaders bring unique and individual values to their jobs and are highly motivated by their spiritual need to experience a sense of godliness and community in their work. Spiritual leadership theory involves motivating and inspiring others through a transcendent vision and a culture based in altruistic values to produce a more motivated, committed, and productive team (Braham, 1999; Fry, 2003; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Grzeda, 2003; Kanungo, 2001; McCormick, 1994).

The principals in this study bring unique value to their ministry based upon spiritual leadership principles. They feel passionate about their call because they are convicted God has called them to make a difference at their schools. They go through great lengths to engage with their students. They genuinely care about their school families and seek to listen and understand the concerns of their school communities. The principals affirm and express their appreciation to those they serve in their quest to impact their schools spiritually. They believe they are ultimately accountable to God for the gift of ministry entrusted to them and responsible for faithfully heeding the call.

The principals lead with a sense a spiritual urgency in making sense of their jobs. For example, while the role of the principalship was not clearly defined to the principals in this study when they first became school leaders, most learned to define their jobs while on the job through their lived experiences and their strong reliance upon God. They view themselves as the spiritual leader who establishes the spiritual climate by modeling Christian principles. My findings agree with Hansen’s (1983) study in which he defined the Adventist school principal as the primary individual who establishes and develops the
spiritual climate of their school based upon their own personal relationship with God. He emphasized:

The Adventist principal must be a dedicated Adventist and believe in the philosophy of Adventist education. He should be trained in theology and have a personal relationship with God, and a love for his fellows, especially the students and teachers under his supervision. He should have faith, and trust that God will lead in all activities under his leadership. (p. 26)

The principals view the spiritual climate of the school in high regard. They plan chapels, conduct Bible studies, and provide spiritual growth opportunities and guidance for their school families. Because they have a deep-rooted conviction that the scope of their job is beyond the mundane day-to-day activities, it is a higher calling from God.

The principal’s job is difficult because of the myriad complex responsibilities they face on an ongoing basis. While the principals in this study were adequately prepared to deal with the challenges associated with their jobs because of their training, skill set, and experiences, they depended on God to do their work. They prayed earnestly and sought the Lord’s guidance when faced with difficult challenges. Their strong reliance upon the Lord was evident in their decision-making process and in their resolve to seek the Lord’s direction for major decisions at their school. Whether the issue was expanding their facilities, budgetary issues, or staffing issues it was evident the principals always relied upon God’s leading for direction.

Spiritual leadership theory is a causal leadership theory for organizational transformation designed to create intrinsically motivated learning organizations resulting in organizational commitment and productivity (Fry, 2003). Through their spiritual leadership, the principals have been able to transform their schools. They do not view their accomplishments or the improvements in their schools as anything innate but upon
the deeply rooted core values and principles they live by as spiritual leaders. They transform their schools in meaningful ways. The principals are able to collaborate with their teams to create a vision and add value to their schools with their empowered teams through buy-in, commitment, and productivity (Fry, 2003). It is my belief that the ability of principals to transform schools in meaningful ways establishes confidence for their leadership whereby they are invited to serve as leaders year after year.

Spiritual leadership theory espouses that hope and faith in the organization’s vision keeps followers looking forward to the future and provides the desire and positive expectation that fuels effort through intrinsic motivation (Fry, 2003). Research indicates spiritual values and practices are related to leadership effectiveness (Reave, 2005; Sears, 2006) and organizations that have higher levels of employment commitment, productivity, and customer satisfaction when employees’ spiritual needs are met are aligned with organizational vision and values (Duschon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; P. F. Malone & Fry, 2003). The principals in this study have hope and faith in the Adventist system of education. They are dedicated and hard working and seek continuous improvement for themselves and their team. They believe in the organization’s vision and will do “whatever it takes” in pursuit of the vision to continuously improve and be more effective as educational leaders because of their calling.

Spiritual leaders establish a social and organizational culture based upon values of altruistic love whereby the followers have a sense of membership and feel understood because they are loved, appreciated, genuinely cared for and concerned about, and feel appreciated (Fry, 2003). The principals establish a social and organizational culture based upon the principles of building community as defined by spiritual leadership theory. This
is evident in the value they place upon developing and cultivating relationships with their school communities. The relationships established were identified by the principals as dependable, caring, long-lasting, and loyal.

These relationships engender the much needed support the principals need on an ongoing basis. The principals are sustained in their work by the strong support they receive from their families, faculty and staff, parents, students, mentors, union and conference leadership, school boards, pastors, and church members. These relationships create a sense of membership and social connections that empowers teams:

People need something to believe in, someone to believe in, and someone to believe in them. A spiritual leader is someone who walks in front of one when one needs a friend. Spiritual leaders lead people through intellectual discourse and dialogue and believe that people, when they are involved and properly informed, can make intelligent decisions, that will appropriate information, and can assume responsibility for decisions that affect their lives. (Powers, 1979, p. 7)

The relationships the principals have established with their school communities are deeply grounded in their Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. As a team, they work towards the common goal of hastening God’s imminent return through the ministry of Christian education.

Fry (2003) extended spiritual leadership theory by examining the concept of positive human health and well-being. He contended that those who practice spiritual leadership and their followers have a higher regard for one’s self and one’s past life along with good quality relationships with others. This creates the sense that life is purposeful and meaningful, the capacity to effectively manage one’s surrounding, the ability to follow inner convictions, and a sense of continuing growth and self-realization.

Adventist principals struggle to maintain balance in their lives. This lack of balance creates stressors in their lives. To reduce stress the principals have developed
coping skills grounded in their spiritual beliefs. They daily spend time alone with God in prayer, worship, and personal reflection. They worship on Sabbath and build a sense of community with those they work with. On Sabbath afternoons, they spend time with their families and engage in activities that bring physical restoration and spiritual renewal. For the researcher, the ability of the principals to maintain balance in their lives perhaps may add to meaning and purpose to their calling.

For the Adventist principal, spiritual leadership is viewed as essential. It is more than being viewed as a spiritual leader or having a deeply committed relationship with God. It is recognizing that the strength and wisdom needed to be effective leaders is beyond them. It is found in someone bigger than themselves and bigger than the organization; it is in God. The principals recognize that their ability to lead effectively and stay in the Adventist system for consecutive years is in the strength God gives them. Thus, by examining the relationship between Adventist principals and spiritual leadership theory, valuable insight was gained about their calling, their relationships, compassion, humility, motivation, their character and the values which have helped them stay in the system for consecutive years. The principals in this study stay in the Adventist system of education in North America for consecutive years because they intrinsically believe their calling is directly from God. Thus, as the spiritual leaders of the school, they are passionate about their students, their commitment to God’s calling, their passion for ministry, and their passion to serve others.

Research indicates educational leaders must be able to survive a system filled with profound responsibilities, dwindling resources, and growing public scrutiny. Although some stress motivates peak performance, too much stress causes skilled
administrators to burn out (Brock & Grady, 2002). Thus, resilience skills are critical for school administrators to survive, recover, and thrive. In the context of leadership resilience, protective factors that increase an individual’s chance of overcoming adversity must be considered. External support systems and the presence of supportive, confiding relationships have commonly been found in resilient individuals (Beardslee, 1989; Janas, 2002; O’Leary, 1998; Perry, 2002). I maintain that these relationships must protect the principal against the effects of stressful occurrences and should thus be given a considerable amount of attention by school systems seeking to retain qualified leaders.

In times of need and hardship, a key factor to building a principal’s capacity for resilience is in their social network of support. Thus, the common practice of isolating educational leaders at school sites must be reevaluated. Principals need to be provided with access to trusted colleagues, time to reflect and collaborate with professional peers, and transformational development that allows for more opportunity for partnerships, are all critical aspects to recruiting and retaining resilient leaders (Nishikawa, 2006).

This study focused on 14 resilient principals in the Adventist system of education who have not succumbed to adversity but were able to withstand the challenges of leadership and prevail during many difficult experiences. These principals may be defined as thriving leaders who are succeeding in today’s high stress and difficult school climates and are a tremendous resource to the field of Adventist educational leadership. The skills and perceptions of these principals were studied closely to capture a better understanding of how they were able to be resilient in the face of the complexities associated with the principalship.
When resiliency theory was compared with the complexities associated with the role of the principal, it was evident that Adventist principals are resilient leaders. They utilize the two critical areas pertaining to the protective factors of resiliency theory in leading their schools: the internal and external variable.

The most significant protective internal variable that the principals demonstrate as resilient leaders is that they possess higher levels of optimism and hope as a result of their strong spiritual beliefs. They expect positive outcomes when faced with adversity because the principals believe they have the ability to achieve a favorable outcome with God’s help. Therefore, because of their strong reliance upon God, even when faced with challenges, they are able to experience growth in the midst of the stresses associated with the principalship.

Other internal characteristics of resiliency that the principals demonstrate are in their temperaments. Thus when leading, the temperament of the principals is one that capitalizes on their leadership modes of thought, response, action, positive self-esteem, a sense of being effective, and being in control of their surroundings. The resilient principals also use self-factors such as optimism, empathy, insight, intellectual competence, direction or mission, and determination and perseverance when dealing with the complexities associated with the principalship.

The principals transmute traumatic experiences by gaining wisdom, personal growth, positive personality changes, and meaningful and productive lives as was shared in all of their personal narratives. Therefore, the principals use the negative experiences they encounter in their roles as reflective opportunities to gain wisdom and grow personally and professionally.
One of the most significant external variables to resiliency is an individual’s social support network. The majority of the principals identified their social network as the relationships they have with their mentors, fellow principals, and colleagues who nurture and sustain them not only in their quest to be exceptional leaders but in difficult times as well.

All of the principals have supportive, confiding, and strong relationships that help them be resilient. Primarily the strong support they receive is from their families. The families of the principals bolster them in significant ways under the most challenging of circumstances. They also rely on their relationships with their pastors, faculty, staff, parents, mentors, students, union, conference and educational leaders, spouses, constituency church members, and with other colleagues and principals when experiencing hardship. Many of the principals shared that the relationships they have developed and cultivated have not only sustained them through very difficult times but through the years as well.

Most of the principals demonstrated the three dimensions of hardiness defined by Bonanno (2004) as they were all (a) committed to finding meaningful purpose in lives through the ministry of Christian education, (b) they believe that they can influence their students and the outcome and events at the schools, and (c) they believe that they can always learn and grow from both the positive and negative experiences associated with the principalship.

Current research on spiritual leadership and resilience theory helped framed this study and worked well together to explain how Adventist principals stay in the system for consecutive years. They are resilient leaders who have a commitment and passion for
their students, their calling from God, their passion for ministry, and their passion to serve others. Adventist principals stay in the system because they believe that (a) they directly create a vision for the system based upon their sense of calling, (b) they establish a social and organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby they have a sense of membership, feel understood, appreciated, and (c) they have a genuine care, concern, and appreciation for themselves and those they serve inspite of the complexities associated with the principalship.

The 14 principals stay in the Adventist system of education for consecutive years primarily because of their passion and commitment to the students they serve, their commitment to God’s calling, their passion for ministry and their passion to serve. The principals are extremely spiritual and resilient leaders. I believe their spirituality helps to develop their resiliency because of their complete faith and commitment to their sacred calling. As spiritual and resilient leaders, they know they are not in their work alone; they are all clear that with God, all things are possible.

**Recommendations From the Principals to the NAD/Union and Conferences/Principals/Pastors and Constituent Church Members**

At the conclusion of each interview, the principals were asked to share advice and recommendations to educational leaders in the Adventist system of education in North America. I analyzed all of the advice and recommendations from the principals and a summary follows. However, the complete data set is found in the appendix section of the study. The principals recommend and share the following advice with the educational systems below:
Recommendations for Division/Unions/Conferences

1. Explore a different funding source for principal salaries by revisiting their pay structure. The tithe dollar needs to be reevaluated to consider paying teacher salaries directly with no percentage distribution. “All evangelistic monies need to go right to the schools.”

2. Conduct formal pastoral evaluations with measureable benchmarks based upon student baptisms and engagement with their local church school.

3. Develop training programs for principals that include: legal training, evaluating, marketing schools, available resources, support services, conflict resolution, governance, and dealing with difficult parents and students.

4. Collaborate with the NAD for Adventist universities to establish and develop courses on the value of Adventist Christian education for theology students.

5. Develop and implement a mentoring program for school administrators in order to nurture and train aspiring, current, and future school principals.

6. Visit the classrooms of educators on a regular and consistent basis.

7. Support principals in a way that very clearly conveys the message they are valued, appreciated, and cared for—that the educational system is heavily invested in growing them as leaders.

Recommendations for Principals

1. Remember the reason they have been called to serve is to help kids to grow, mature, and learn. They need to embrace the call faithfully and determine each day to make a difference in the lives of the students they minister to.
2. Ask God to put them in a place that will allow them to be used by Him to be effective school leaders.

3. Stay fresh in terms of best practices and stay in a state of mind where they always want to keep learning and try to learn new things.

Recommendations for Pastors and Constituent Church Members

1. Tie evangelism closely to the ministry of the local school.

2. Closely align the goals of the church and school so their ultimate mission is to help children grow spiritually.

3. Create a safe and nurturing place for the principals to worship at on a weekly basis by respecting and supporting their need for privacy.

4. Encourage church members to establish boundaries to help ensure the ability for the principals to worship and not have to engage in school work during Sabbath hours.

5. Help church members recognize that constituency church pressures are extremely draining to the principal. They are to refrain from involving them in the political tug of war associated with the principalship.

Recommendations From the Study

This study provides several questions warranting more study. Thus, the following recommendations have emerged that:

1. Educational leaders in the Adventist system in North America should facilitate the process of engaging Adventist universities in a dialog focused on developing and implementing collaboration for internship, preparation, and mentoring programs for
school administrators built on the foundations and principles of supporting the educational leader.

2. Educational leaders should develop professional growth opportunities focused on growing principals on a personal basis (health clubs, massages, therapists, trips).

3. School principals who participate in principal preparation programs should receive monetary incentives attached to their salaries and benefit package.

4. School principals should consider the benefits of implementing spiritual practices into their daily routines.

5. School principals are encouraged to develop attributes of spirituality and resiliency through deliberate practice.

**Implications for Future Research**

Several themes emerged in this study with implications for future research on the retention of principals in the Adventist system of education in North America. It is recommended that the following future studies be considered:

1. A study exploring the complexities of small-school principals with their multiples roles as they relate to job satisfaction and resiliency. It appears small-school principals seem to be more content and are harder than their counterparts.

2. A study describing the isolation of school principals as a result of the lack of boundaries they perceive. The study should address the impact on principals when educational systems require school principals to attend the local church as a reflection of their support.

3. A study that contrasts the benefit of principals who maintain professional and personal balance with those who do not with the variables in this study.
4. A study exploring the impact of pastoral support on school systems by comparing ministers who are actively engaged in educational ministry and those who are not.

5. A study comparing the variables in this study with the impact mentoring and networking opportunities have upon Adventist principals.

6. A study predicting the variables in this study with how long principals stay.

7. A study measuring the longevity of principals who were involved in a principal preparation program and those who are not.

8. A study predicting the variables in this study with the relationship between spirituality and job satisfaction.

9. A study comparing the variables of resiliency theory of Adventist principals with principals of other denominations.

10. A study using the variables in this study to investigate the relationship between the spiritual leader and its effect upon school climate.

11. A study on principal longevity that includes perspectives from educational supervisors, board members, teachers, parents, students, pastors, and constituent church members.
APPENDIX A

CORRESPONDENCE FROM LARRY BLACKMER
October 27, 2008

Institutional Review Board
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

Re: Janet Ledesma

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Janet Ledesma has my permission to send out the letter to the NAD Union Directors of Education for the purpose of her study on “Principal Retention among Successful Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators in North America: A Multiple Case Study.” It is an exciting study. Please let me know how I can help.

Cordially,

Larry Blackmer,
Vice President for Education
North American Division
October 27, 2008

Janet Ledesma
716 Muirfield Circle
Apopka, FL 32712

Dear Janet:

You have my permission to send out the letter to the union directors. It is an exciting study. Please let me know how I can help.

Cordially,

Larry Blackmer,
Vice President, NAD
APPENDIX B

LETTERS SENT TO UNION DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION
Copy of letters sent to Union Directors of Education:

March 26, 2008

Dear Superintendent,

Greetings! My name is Janet Ledesma. I am the principal of the Forest Lake Education Center (FLEC) in Longwood, FL. I am currently pursuing a PhD in Leadership and Administration from Andrews University. My study is on SDA Principal Retention. I am requesting your approval in contacting the principals in the Atlantic Union who fit the criteria for my study below. The central question of my study is how do principals describe the experiences that helped them stay in a leadership role in the SDA system of education? The criteria that I will use to identify the principals are:

- The principal has served for 10 years in one or multiple buildings.
- The principal is recognized as a successful leader because they have consistent enrollment trends, positive school climate, genuine teamwork is evidenced, operate a strong financial program and standardized test scores are within the normal to above average range.

Would you assist me by completing the attached form and returning it to me? Your involvement in identifying such principals from within your Union will enable me to identify the principal that I will then select for my study. My goal is to select one principal who fits the criteria from each Union. Your involvement in this preliminary phase will make a huge contribution on the framing of this invaluable study for our school administrators.

If you have any questions about the study, I encourage you to contact my advisor, Dr. Shirley Freed, Chair of the Leadership & Administration program at Andrews University (269-471-6163).

Please find attached the interview questions that I will be using to conduct my study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return the attached form to janetledesma3@aol.com or Janet Ledesma, 716 Muirfield Circle, Apopka, FL 32712

Blessings,

Janet Ledesma
Principals Eligible to Participate in Principal Retention Study

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<th>Years of Service at Current School</th>
<th>Principal’s Contact Information</th>
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Completed by (Name & Union):

Kindly return completed form by March 31, 2008
APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO NAD PRINCIPALS WHO FIT THE CRITERION
Email to all NAD Principals who fit criterion:

July 25, 2011

Dear (Principal by name):

You have been referred to me as a principal with longevity in the Adventist system of education. As you know, for many years we have been concerned about retention of Adventist school principals. According NAD employment trends, principals usually serve no longer than 2-3 years. However, you are an exception!!

Here’s what I need from you: please respond to the following questions:

1. Total years of service
   __________________
2. Total years as principal
   __________________
3. Total years as principal at current school
   ________________
4. Please describe why you stay on as an Adventist principal?
   (Share a story)

5. What do you think would help the problem of Adventist principal retention?

6. Would you be willing to be interviewed to share your experience as Principal in more depth?
   ❑ Yes  ❑ No

7. If you have time, I would really appreciate if you would send 3-5 digital photos that capture the essence of being an Adventist principal or that symbolize your leadership.
APPENDIX D

SECONDARY PRINCIPAL YEARS OF SERVICE
### Secondary Principal Years of Service

(In APA Format)

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APPENDIX E

LETTER REQUESTING SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION
TO INTERVIEW PRINCIPALS
Letter requesting permission from the Superintendent of schools of principals to be surveyed and interviewed in the study:

October 9, 2008

Dear Education Superintendent (personalized)

Greetings! My name is Janet Ledesma. I am the principal of the Forest Lake Education Center (FLEC) in Longwood, FL. I am currently pursuing a PhD in Leadership and Administration from Andrews University. My study is on SDA Principal Retention. I am requesting your approval in contacting your principal(list by name) who was identified by your Union Director of Education as an individual who fits the criteria for my study below. The central question of my study is how do principals describe the experiences that helped them stay in a leadership role in the SDA system of education? The criteria that I will use to identify the principals are:

- The principal has served for 10 years in one or multiple buildings.
- The principal is recognized as a successful leader because they have consistent enrollment trends, positive school climate, genuine teamwork is evidenced, operate a strong financial program and standardized test scores are within the normal to above average range.

The granting of your approval in this preliminary phase will make a huge contribution on the framing of this invaluable study for our school administrators.

If you have any questions about the study, I encourage you to contact my advisor, Dr. Shirley Freed, Chair of the Leadership & Administration program at Andrews University (269-471-6163).

Please find attached the interview questions that I will be using to conduct my study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return the attached form to janetledesma3@aol.com or Janet Ledesma, 716 Muirfield Circle, Apopka, FL 32712

Blessings,

Janet Ledesma
Principal Retention
Interview Questions

Please share with me a little about your service in Adventist education (years of service in Adventist education, years of service in this school).

1. Please share how you got started in Adventist education?

2. Describe the training that you have received to be a school principal? Describe how the role and expectations of the principalship were defined for you?

3. What does it mean to be an Adventist school principal and what do Adventist school principals do? What is difficult or easy about being an Adventist school principal?

4. What professional growth opportunities have you experienced as a school principal?

5. Describe how you maintain a balance between your personal and professional life as a school principal. How do you handle the stresses associated with school leadership?

6. Describe the support you may have received as a principal that has enabled you to stay in leadership within the Adventist system of education for consecutive years (Probe support from pastor, parent, school board, mentor, passion for students’ commitment to SDA education).

7. Please share an experience that captures “why you stay” in Adventist education.

8. Are there any other things you would like to talk about? Are there any other question I should have asked?
Table 3

Advice to Educational Leaders

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<td>Educational systems need to provide for the legal training of principals</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to encourage anybody who wants to be a principal that the friendship and the relationship they have with the Savior is what will determine their success.</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to encourage all school administrators to explore the kid within themselves by keeping the connection to the students by always thinking creatively.</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to appeal to those who aspire to become educational leaders to try the principalship because of the exciting challenges associated with the job.</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to develop educational administrators by training aspiring leaders to be replacements for principals.</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to develop educational leaders through internships and the development of mentoring programs for school administrators</td>
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<td>Educational directors within the Adventist system of education in North America need to develop a plan to mentor and train current and future school principals.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to address the professional growth opportunities of their educational leaders.</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to know that principals must never see their position as a job but as a direct calling from God.</td>
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<td>“Educational leaders in the NAD need to better prepare principals by having an intentional focus on training as most principals are exposed only to on-the-job training.”</td>
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<td>Educational systems need to allocate more funding towards education principals who would be able to build something that is spectacular.”</td>
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<td>Effective educational leaders must first have a commitment to ministry.</td>
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<td>Educational superintendents and directors in the Adventist system of education in North America should visit the classrooms of their educators.</td>
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<td>All educational leaders should spend a day in the shoes of their teaching principals.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to know that principals need affirmation.” Principals need to develop a personal and intimate relationship with God.</td>
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<td>“Educational leaders need to develop support services and resources to train school principals.”</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to look at educators who deeply are committed and passionate about Adventist education.</td>
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<td>The pressures of the different constituencies associated with the pressures of the school, the expectations, and their constant pulling are draining of the principal.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to develop ways to teach principals how to market their schools.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to carefully look at restructuring Adventist Christian education.</td>
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<td>Pastors need to be closely tied with evangelism within the local school.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders across the Adventist system of education in North America must develop school principals who are passionate about the students and not their salaries.</td>
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<td>“Educational leaders need to hire principals that are deeply committed to their relationship with the Lord and must develop and model it to the students.”</td>
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<td>Educational leaders to know that they have to develop a mentoring program for school administrators.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders within the Adventist system of education in North America need to focus on building a cadre of principals that want to do the job in an exceptional manner.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders within the Adventist system of education in North America need to develop aspiring leaders who can be trained to become exceptional principals.</td>
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<td>I urge and encourage all Adventist systems and constituent church members to join in my passion to provide educational opportunities for all students by establishing resources and funds that make these dreams a reality.</td>
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<td>Educational leaders need to support their principals with the kind of support that very clearly conveys the message to the principal that they are valued, appreciated, and cared for; that the educational system is heavily invested in growing them as a leader.</td>
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<td>Pastors need to become supporters of principals so that they may be retained.</td>
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<td>Educational superintendents need to identify the areas of professional growth needed from principals and provide adequate training for principals in the area of governance, conflict resolution, finance, dealing with constituent churches, school law, and dealing with unhappy students and parents.</td>
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<td>There must be a focused intent from educational superintendents in the Adventist system of education to recognize future leaders.</td>
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<td>Adventist educational leaders within the system can send their principals to Hawaii for a much needed vacation and perhaps this will insure that they will stay.</td>
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<td>The NAD needs to revisit the pay structure of their school leaders.</td>
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<td>The NAD needs to be focused on building a cadre of born-again Adventist educators in order for Adventist schools to grow and become successful.</td>
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<td>NAD leaders need to recognize that the principal’s job is a difficult one.</td>
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<td>The NAD needs to provide training in governance for school board members.</td>
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<td>The NAD needs to conduct formal pastoral evaluations that are benchmarked and measurable based upon student baptisms and engagement with their local church school.</td>
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<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD, Union and local conferences need to train the principals in the area of recruitment and to recognize that students need to be retained within their systems to have a successful school with a healthy and vibrant environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>“The NAD needs to reevaluate the tithe dollar. The tithe dollar needs to go to pay teacher salaries directly with no percentage distribution. Accordingly, all evangelistic monies need to go right to the schools”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD needs to develop training programs for principals to include: training, evaluating, resources available, support services, conflict resolution, governance, dealing with difficult parents and students are all areas that educational leaders in the Adventist system of education need to address.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A different funding source for principal salaries needs to be reevaluated by the educational leaders within the Adventist system of education in North America.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD division to know that principals in the Adventist system of education in North America can be retained if they had the sufficient support needed to perform their responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD ministerial department must have an intentional focus on the adequate professional training of the pastors on the university level.</td>
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<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD needs to develop formal principal preparation programs to retain school principals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>The NAD needs to develop a plan for recruiting, training and providing internships and mentorships in administration for such educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>It is important to remember that the reason that principals have been called to serve is to help kids to grow, mature and learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>“School principals should ask God to put them in a place that will allow them to be used by Him to be effective school leaders.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>School principals need to stay fresh in terms of best practices and stay in a state of mind where they always want to keep learning and try and learn new things.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>School principals need to experience the sheer joy of watching a student grasp something new and participate in the joy that one gets in learning something new themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Current principals need to help members on their team who desire to be educational leaders to do so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to be strong leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to know that they must lead by principle and conviction not for the sake of power of popularity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to be consistent in all that they do</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to embrace the call faithfully and determine each day to make a difference in the lives of the students that they minister to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need more support from fellow principals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need nurturing and support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>“Principals must lead in a positive manner because a positive attitude will go a long way in sharing the message and mission of Adventist education for those who are willing to hear about it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>“There is a lack of passion for students by many school administrators.”</td>
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<td>“School principals must be motivated by their passion for the students and not for money or prestige that they must serve.”</td>
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<td>School Principals</td>
<td>“The sky’s the limit” on what principals could do if they could get together and be innovative leaders.</td>
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<td>“Principals need to just keep heading in that direction and find other ways that they can really produce and advertise excellence in all areas of their school programs.”</td>
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<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to cultivate relationships personally.</td>
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<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals should not try to please the entire community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to know that they must handle conflict head on and directly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals in the Adventist system of education need to be encouraged, and stand firm in their call.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals in the Adventist need to know that the outcomes on earth are not the determinants of whether or not one is a successful principal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals should be appropriately compensated for their hard work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>Principals need to be encouraged to just keep their eyes on the Lord and the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>“Principals need to know without any hesitation that the students are the sole purpose of their entire existence in a school and as such it is their responsibility to make sure that those eyes are smiling and wanting to be there every day.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
November 18, 2008

Janet Ledesma
716 Muirfield Circle
Apopka, FL 32712

Dear Janet,

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 08-100  Application Type: Original  Dept: Leadership
Review Category: Exempt  Action Taken: Approved  Advisor: Dr. Shirley Freed
Protocol Title: Principal Retention among Successful Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators in North America: A Multiple case Study

This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for research. You have been given clearance to proceed with your research plans.

All changes made to the study design and/or consent form, after initiation of the project, require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions. In all communications with our office, please be sure to identify your research by its IRB Protocol number.

The duration of the present approval is for one year. If your research is going to take more than one year, you must apply for an extension of your approval in order to be authorized to continue with this project.

Some proposal and research design designs may be of such a nature that participation in the project may involve certain risks to human subjects. If your project is one of this nature and in the implementation of your project an incidence occurs which results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, such an occurrence must be reported immediately in writing to the Institutional Review Board. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to University Medical Specialties, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We wish you success as you implement the research project as outlined in the approved protocol.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Joseth Abara
Administrative Associate
Institutional Review Board
Cc: Dr. Shirley Freed

Institutional Review Board
(269) 471-6360 Fax: (269) 471-6246 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355
REFERENCE LIST


Andersen, A. (2000). *Maryland task force on the principalship: Recommendations for redefining the role of the principal; recruiting, retaining, and rewarding principals; and improving their preparation and development*. Annapolis, MD: Maryland State Board of Education.


Hoffman, J. N. (2004, September-October). Building resilient leaders: Many universities and school districts are creating support mechanisms that increase administrator resiliency and lead to greater retention. *Leadership*, 34(1). Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HUL/is_1_34/ai_n6358525/


Curriculum Vitae
Janet Ledesma, born January 1, 1960

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

• Spiritual leadership with excellent planning, organizational, and negotiation strengths in the ability to lead, reach consensus, establish goals, and attain results as a school administrator.

EDUCATION

• ABD, Educational Administration and Leadership, May 2011
  Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
• Master’s of Arts in Teaching, Major in Elementary Education, August 1986
  Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
• Bachelor of Science, Major in Elementary Education, May 1982
  Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, MA

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AWARDS

• Inducted, National Association of Professional Woman, 2009
• Recipient, Pi Lambda Theta Award, 2008

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2006-Present Principal Grades Pre-K to 8th, Forest Lake Education Center, Longwood, FL
2005-2006 Marketing and Mentoring Coordinator, Andrews University, Educational Administration Department, Berrien Springs, MI
2001-2005 Principal Grades 9-12, Garden State Academy, Tranquility, NJ
2000-2001 Grant and Proposals Specialist, New Jersey Conference, Trenton, NJ
1989-1999 Principal of Grades 1-10, Waldwick Seventh-Day Adventist School, Waldwick, NJ
1985-1989 Principal of Grades 1-8, 1982-1985 Teacher, Grades 3-4, Jackson Heights Seventh-Day Adventist School, Woodside, NY

PRESENTATIONS

• National Summit on Adventist Education, Riverside, CA, October 2010
• “Grant Writing 101 for Adventist Educators,” New Jersey Conference Teachers and Administrators In service, March 2000
• “Educational Opportunities for SDA School Administrators Presentation”, Columbia Union Secondary Administrators’ Council, March 2006
• “Mentoring Resources”, Andrews University Leadership Orientation, July 2005

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

• American Educational Research Association
• International Mentoring Association
• Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
• National Association of Secondary-School Principals
• Association of Seventh-day Adventist School Administrators
• National Association of Independent Schools
• AERA Convention, New York, NY, 2007