THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN OPENING NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

by

KAREN CALDWELL BRYANT

(Under the direction of C. Kenneth Tanner)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation was conducted to describe the leadership experiences of elementary school principals who led the opening of new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. Six participants -- experienced elementary school principals-- were interviewed and asked to describe their leadership experiences related to: (1) bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities and (2) the challenges faced during the process.

The findings of the study indicated that communication and collaboration were essential to the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities. Additional strategies used to lead the formation of new learning communities within new schools included bonding and outreach activities. Challenges that principals faced in the process of opening new schools included physical and emotional stress, staffing, technology, and facilities.

Implications for K-12 school systems suggested that consideration be given to the following: (1) Provide release time for elementary principals who are assigned to open new schools. (2) Open the staffing process for new schools to allow all interested staff members to apply. (3) Involve stakeholders in the school planning and design process. (4) Provide professional development activities for school leaders to help them improve the leadership skills needed to
build new learning communities. (5) Plan to provide the technology infrastructure and flexibility for new schools in a timely manner.

INDEX WORDS: New schools, Opening new schools, Learning communities, New school design, New school construction, Communication, Collaboration, School staffing, Educational facilities, Educational technology
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Wayne Bryant,
our children, Kate Bryant and Amy and Paul Cowan,
and my parents, Fay and Ed Caldwell,
with love and gratitude
for your unfailing support and encouragement
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project was completed with the support of family, friends and professional colleagues. You kept me going when my energy was waning, and I will be forever thankful.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee for your scholarship and leadership throughout my program of study. Dr. C. Kenneth Tanner, Dr. Thomas Holmes, and Dr. Sally Zepeda provided expertise and critical advice for this work. Dr. Tanner, committee chair, guided the study and sparked an interest in the impact of educational facilities on the people who inhabit those buildings each day. Dr. Zepeda kept me focused on the scholarly details of the work and the methodological design of the study. Dr. Holmes helped me from the moment I began this program of study. I remember his first question, “Are you sure you know what you are getting into?” All three professors are not only outstanding academicians, they remain teachers who inspire their students to achieve academic excellence.

It was an honor to follow the distinguished principals who participated in this study. Their openness in sharing their leadership experiences made this study possible. Their work not only made this dissertation possible, it inspired me to become a better principal. It is our collective hope that the results of the study will inform principals and school system leaders as new schools open in the future.

To my sister, Laurie, and my best friend, Ann, thanks for always listening, for laughing and crying with me, and for encouraging me to keep going.
The overwhelming majority of professional educators that I have had the privilege to work with over the past thirty years have led lives of dedication to the learning of their students. Your influence on my life and work has been immeasurable.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

More than two million teachers will be needed in America’s classrooms over the next decade as more students enter the nation’s school systems (United States Department of Education, 2000). While the national teacher shortage is widely recognized, a corresponding need that has not received as much attention, the need for effective school leaders, is beginning to make its way into the national consciousness (Educational Research Service, 1998). School leaders in the 21st Century are expected to guide school improvement efforts in an age of higher academic standards and increased accountability for student learning (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2000).

A study conducted by the Educational Research Service on behalf of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1998) reflected the growing need for school leaders. A survey of 403 school district superintendents included a national geographic distribution and represented elementary, middle and high school levels. Half the respondents reported a shortage of qualified candidates for school principalship openings. Principal retirements were cited as the major cause for the growing shortage. Statistics provided by the United States Department of Education (1997), based on the most recently available federal data, indicated a steady rise in the average age of principals in recent years.

Regional reports support findings at the national level. According to Sheldon and Munich (1999), the challenge of filling principal positions with qualified candidates was rated as difficult or very difficult by 86% of Minnesota superintendents. The University of Minnesota study also cited retirement as a cause, with the prediction that 75% of Minnesota’s principals will
be lost through retirement or attrition by 2010. Williams (2000) stated that Georgia’s current principal attrition rate of 8.1% is expected to increase dramatically within the next five years as 665 principals become eligible for retirement. Due to new school construction during that time period, Georgia Department of Education projections anticipate the additional need for 205 principals.

Statement of the Problem

Current public school construction in the United States is attempting to keep pace with a rapidly growing school population (Abramson, 2002). Quality leaders are essential to the success of our nation’s schools. Statistics indicate these leaders will be needed in ever increasing numbers over the next decade (United States Department of Education, 1997). While significant research on the principalship is available, research on the principals of new schools is limited. Further examination of the leadership strategies that principals of new schools use to bring people, ideas, and resources together is warranted in light of the projected need for new school buildings and new school leaders. This study sought to add to the knowledge base of information on the process of opening a new school and the challenges inherent in that process by chronicling the leadership experiences of six principals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the leadership experiences of six (N=6) elementary school principals who opened new schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. The work of principals as they sought to bring people together to form new learning communities was examined. The process of forming the identity and culture of each school was an area of particular interest. The researcher sought to identify the challenges principals faced while opening new schools. Results of the study were intended to provide a descriptive, comparative account of the leadership
experiences of bringing students, staff, parents and community members together to shape the identity, vision, and mission of a new elementary school. The principals who participated in the study provided recommendations for principals who will open new schools in the future.

Background of the Study

National

New school construction in the United States has grown steadily since 1983. The year 2002 closed out as the third consecutive year in which national school construction expenditures surpassed 20 billion dollars (Agron, 2002). The year 2000 saw the highest expenditures for school construction in history, with a record 21.2 billion dollars in expenditures. An uncertain economy may cause some school systems to adjust construction plans; however, current projections indicate strong growth in school construction projects through at least 2005 (Abramson, 2002).

Much of the new construction is in response to dramatic increases in enrollment due to the baby-boom echo (National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 1998). Additionally, national and state standards affect facilities as well as curricula (Earthman & Lemasters, 1998). Reduced class size requirements serve as a catalyst for the construction of additional classrooms and school buildings. Aging school buildings also contribute to the need for renovation and replacement construction; the average age of public school buildings in 1999 was 40 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

The physical condition of public school facilities in the United States has been an issue among educators, citizens, and legislators over the past two decades (National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 1998). Recent newspaper articles (Nakamura, 2000) and research studies (United States General Accounting Office, 1995a) have reported crumbling facilities and overcrowded conditions which have fueled concerns about the relationship of the quality of
school facilities to student academic achievement. Student and teacher safety are also issues of concern (Kozol, 1992; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 1998).

In September 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics released a report entitled, *The Condition of America’s Public Schools*. The report, based on a survey conducted in 1999, provided information about the condition of school facilities, the costs to bring them into good condition; school plans for repairs, renovations, and new construction; the age of public schools; and overcrowding and practices used to address overcrowding.

A wide range of conditions exists in America’s public school facilities. Some districts have schools deteriorating with age and lack of maintenance, while other districts invest millions of dollars in new buildings. The condition of individual schools within districts also varies widely (Kozol, 1992; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 1998). Approximately three-quarters of schools reported that all school buildings were in adequate or better condition. However, this situation leaves over 11 million students in the remaining one fourth of schools to study in less than adequate learning environments. Four percent of schools reported closures ranging from one to nine days due to problems with school facilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

The average dollar amount for schools needing to spend money to update school facilities and infrastructure was projected at $2.2 million per school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The National Education Association estimated the cost of modernizing the nation’s schools at $268 billion for infrastructure and $54 billion for new technology (National Education Association, 2000). The average cost per student across all public schools to put school facilities into good overall condition was $2,900. Correcting the condition of public school facilities that are in poor and overcrowded conditions will be expensive. The United States General Accounting Office estimates the total cost to repair, renovate and construct new
schools at $122 billion. However, the cost of deferred maintenance and construction is likely to be even more costly (Lawrence, 2002).

State

New school construction in Georgia aligns with national trends. During the five-year period from 2000-2005, Georgia was predicted to need 205 principals due to new school construction, in addition to the 665 principals needed based on retirement and attrition (Williams, 2000). Currently, Georgia has 180 school systems comprised of 159 counties and 21 cities. These school systems operate over 1,800 public schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2003).

Like other states in the southeastern and southwestern sections of the United States, Georgia has experienced significant population growth over the past 20 years, which has impacted public school enrollment. Since 1998, the kindergarten through 12th grade public school enrollment in Georgia has grown from 1,370,555 to 1,412,665 (Georgia Department of Education, 2003). Given this pattern of growth, new schools buildings and additions to existing buildings will be needed in Georgia for the foreseeable future.

System

A large, metropolitan school system in Georgia provided the setting for this study. The county in which the school system is located has changed from a rural community to a suburban community and is now experiencing changes that indicate an increasingly urban environment. The transformation from rural to suburban bedroom community began in the 1970s as farmland was sold for residential subdivisions of single-family homes for commuters to Atlanta. The affordable price of homes and convenient commute made the county an increasingly popular bedroom community throughout the decade of the 1980s. Business and industrial development
followed. For the first time in 2003, more residents will live and work within the county than commute outside of the county for employment (MacDonald, 2003).

In 1995, the school system’s population of students was 80 percent Caucasian. For the school year 2002-2003, Caucasian students comprised 54% of the K-12 population, and if the current annual 4% drop in the Caucasian population continues, the school system will have more minority race students than Caucasian students during the 2003-2004 school year (MacDonald, 2003).

The school system has experienced explosive growth in the student population over the past decade. The current system-wide student enrollment is approximately 125,000 and projections for the next five year period predict steady growth to an enrollment of over 152,000 students in grade K-12 for the 2007-2008 school year. The need to provide classroom space for the burgeoning number of students in the system has served as a catalyst for an aggressive building program. The school system will open eight new schools during the 2003-2004 school year and nine new schools will open during the 2004-2005 school year. The five-year building plan also includes 39 additions to existing schools and two replacement structures. The need for effective leaders of new schools in the system is clear.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities?

2. What challenges do principals who are leading the opening of new schools face during the process?
Theoretical Framework

Theoretical perspectives guide researchers in the process of inquiry and analysis by providing an underlying structure of concepts, assumptions, and propositions (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This theoretical framework constitutes the worldview of the researcher (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionism was used as the theoretical basis for the study of experienced elementary school principals who were opening new schools. Researchers influenced by symbolic interactionism are motivated by an interest in getting close to human beings and describing how they understand their own activities and social worlds (Travers, 2001). This study examined the complex relationships among people, ideas, and the physical environment as it chronicled the leadership experiences of six principals in opening new schools.

The term ‘symbolic interactionism’ was introduced by Herbert Blumer, a social psychologist, in the 1950s and was based on the work of George Herbert Mead, a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and philosopher Charles Horton Cooley (Travers, 2001). The original theory was based on observing the conversations and actions of human beings in their natural environment. Symbolic interactionism draws on the theories of Charles Darwin and emphasizes the unique role of human beings in nature. Human beings act on their environment rather than passively respond to it. A critical component of the theory of symbolic interactionism is that other people influence individuals, but they are also active in interpreting and responding to the people and objects they encounter in the world (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interaction is an appropriate theoretical basis for this study because this study will examine the perspectives of principals as they bring people together to form new learning communities with the opening of new schools.
Significance of the Study

This study added to the limited body of research on principals who open new schools. In a case study of four principals who opened new schools in Georgia, Johnson (2000) stated that more studies “would substantially increase the knowledge base needed to inform policy development” (p. 177). In an autobiographical case study of the principal’s role in opening a new middle school, McGhee (2001) recommended further case studies of principals opening new schools at the high school and elementary school levels.

The results of the study provided a source of information for individual school leaders and school systems about the expectations for leaders of new schools. It is hoped that the detailed description of the experiences of leaders of new schools will assist school systems in the process of opening new schools.

Information about the process of opening a new school from the principal’s perspective was gained. New school leaders, or those considering such an assignment, may learn from the experiences of the participants in this study. As public school systems continue to construct new schools to accommodate growth in the student populations, results of the experiences of study participants have the potential to influence decisions made by leaders of public school systems and by leaders of new schools.

Assumptions of the Study

The six principals who were interviewed for the study were assumed to have given factual information about the process of opening a new school and their personal experiences with that endeavor.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were adopted for use in this study:

**Elementary School** - The six schools in the study contained grades kindergarten through fifth.
**Learning Community** – For the purposes of this study, a learning community is defined as a group of people who come together to learn.

**National Design Principles** – Six principles adopted by the National Symposium on School Design under the sponsorship of the United States Department of Education in 1998 to promote school designs that meet the needs of students and serve as centers of communities.

**New School** – New schools are built to accommodate growth in student enrollment. The term new school in this study does not refer to buildings that are erected as replacement structures or to renovated buildings.

**Opening a New School** – The process of serving as the leader to bring students, staff, parents, and community members together to shape the identity, vision, and mission of a new school.

**Principal** – The administrative head of a school, responsible for leading the learning community and for facilitating all of the programs and activities of the organization.

**Limitations of the Study**

The researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted the results of this qualitative study. Therefore, researcher bias was a limitation of the study. A written statement of biases was developed prior to the collection of data and reviewed throughout the study. The sample size of six (N=6) principals also limited the study. However, the comparative case study design and the in-depth analysis of the process of opening a new school over an eight-month period provided detailed results. The findings of the study were not normative nor were the findings necessarily generalizable to all principals who open new schools. All of the participants in the study were Caucasian females and all worked in the same school system, thereby further limiting the generalizability of the results.
Overview of the Research Procedures

A comparative case study design was used for this study, which sought to identify leadership practices that contribute to the successful opening of a new school. Focused interviews served as the primary data source for the comparative case study of six \( N=6 \) principals who were opening new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia for the 2003-2004 school year. Field notes and artifacts collected during school system meetings and visits to school sites provided multiple sources of data for triangulation. Artifacts included handbooks, vision and mission statements, staffing plans, facilities maps, photographs, newspaper clippings and administrative memoranda.

Three face-to-face interviews with each of the six participants took place over an eight-month period. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for purposes of comparative analysis. Study participants had an opportunity to review the transcripts of each interview for clarification and extension. Emerging themes from transcripts, field notes, and artifacts were coded. Three fellow doctoral students conducted a peer review of the findings.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study and includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and background information to aid in understanding the context of the study. Specific research questions and the theoretical framework for the study are also included in Chapter 1. The significance of the study, assumptions of the study, definitions of terms used in the study, and limitations of the study precede an overview of research procedures to conclude Chapter 1. A review of related literature is provided in Chapter 2. The literature review is divided into four major areas and examines characteristics of effective school leaders, leadership preparation programs, learning communities, and new school design and construction. Chapter 3
describes the research methodology used for the study. Details of data collection and analysis as well as systematic procedures to enhance reliability and validity are delineated in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides a summary of findings from the research. Chapter 5 presents conclusions and recommendations for K-12 schools systems and principals.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the leadership experiences of six \(N=6\) elementary school principals who opened new schools in a large metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. The study examined the perspectives of principals as they brought people together to form new learning communities with the opening of new schools.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities?

2. What challenges do principals who open new schools face during the process?

The purpose of this review was to survey the literature that supported the research questions. Studies on the role of the principal in opening a new school are limited. The questions for this study were drawn from literature in the areas of Standards for Effective School Leaders, Leadership Preparation, Learning Communities, and New School Design and Construction.

Standards for Effective School Leaders

Expectations for educational leaders have undergone a massive shift over the past two decades. The role of school principal has shifted from the ‘benevolent dictator’ (DuFour, 1999) to collaborative change agent. One of the first publications to provide a road map for the complex task of leading educational reform was *Guidelines for the Preparation of School Administrators* (Hoyle, 1985). The guidelines, which were first published in 1983, were influential in the preparation of school leaders across the nation and delineated eight major areas of competency for school administrators:
1. Positive school climate
2. Building support for schools
3. Developing curriculum
4. Strengthening instructional management
5. Evaluating staff
6. Enriching staff development
7. Allocation of resources
8. Using research, planning and program evaluation (p. 6)

Several organizations began to develop lists of standards for school leaders.


1. Leadership, Vision, and District Culture
2. Policy and Governance
3. Communications and Community Relations
4. Organizational Management
5. Curriculum Planning and development
6. Human Resources Development
7. Values and Ethics of Leadership (Hoyle, Glass, & Oates, 1992, p. 3)

The AASA standards were widely considered to be a breakthrough in establishing a body of knowledge about effective school leadership. However, other organizations continued to develop lists of standards for school leaders.

In 1996, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, which represents states, professional associations, and universities, adopted new standards for the accountability of school leaders. The six standards were developed from research on school improvement and school leadership and revolve around three central tenets:
1. There is a single set of standards that applies to all leadership positions.
2. The focus and ground of the standards should be the core of productive leadership.
3. The standards should not simply codify what is; they should help elevate the profession to a higher level. (Shipman & Murphy, 1996, p.1)

The ISLLC Standards that were developed in an attempt to strengthen the profession of school leadership are:

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision by learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interest and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

- A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. (Shipman & Murphy, 1996, pp. 10-21)

The standards are accompanied by 200 indicators with the headings; Knowledge, Dispositions, and Performances. The standards were intended for use by school districts, state agencies, and professional associations. There is increasing evidence of their use by local school systems in their Leadership Academies, professional development for school leaders, and principal evaluations. In addition, the standards are part of the equation for program accreditation and certification. Over 30 states are using the ISLLC Standards as the basis for developing their own standards (Murphy & Schwartz, 2000). In keeping with the focus of the No Child Left Behind Act, the ISLLC standards are based on the results of student learning as the central
measure of educational success. The standards are not without critics. Achilles and Price (2001) contended that the ISLLC standards omit a research-based body of knowledge that helps educational leaders understand what to do.

The chorus of standards for leadership points to the recognition that school leaders face increasingly complex and demanding expectations. The concept of distributed leadership is beginning to appear in school improvement literature. Distributed leadership is more than delegating responsibilities; it involves the empowerment of teachers as professionals who are collectively responsible for the results of student learning (Elmore, 2000). Ash and Persall (2000) proposed the Formative Leadership Theory that is based on the belief that faculty and staff must be developed into leaders who can contribute to the enhancement of learning. Among the principles of formative leadership, the recognition of teachers as leaders and principals as leaders of leaders is key. The primary function of the principal is to serve the faculty and staff. Leaders must have the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and rising expectations.

Leadership Preparation

The notion that strong leaders are vital to the efficacy of schools is not new. Goodlad’s (1984) study of a cross section of schools in the United States revealed that effective principals were key components of the more effective organizations. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed 15 years of research on how principals impact their schools. Their synthesis stated that principals exercise measurable effects on school effectiveness (p. 21-39). Two landmark studies in the 1980’s, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Report on Teaching, 1983) called for wide-ranging improvements in leadership preparation, from financial assistance for graduate education to experimentation with different models of organization. However, leadership preparation has been largely ignored in the standards based school reform movement.
Olson (2000) quoted Gerald N. Tirozzi, Executive Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and former United States Assistant Secretary of Education, “While we seemed to involve every other group and organization, the principalship pretty much seemed to be left out of the discourse” (p. 8). Olson pointed out that a plethora of factors have brought leadership to the forefront. The expectation of increased student achievement has increased the pressure on principals and has placed them under unprecedented public scrutiny. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that high standards alone will not turn a school around without strong leadership that brings students, staff, parents and the community together.

The 1997 study, *Public and Private School Principals in the United States*, commissioned by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, enumerated several factors that discouraged educators from applying for administrative positions. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that compensation was insufficient when compared to responsibilities. The national mean salary for elementary school principals in 1999-2000 was $69,407 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Other discouraging factors that were cited by a high number of respondents included job stress and the amount of time required. A typical principal works ten hours a day with eight additional hours per week devoted to extracurricular school-related activities. One in ten has been named in a civil lawsuit (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2000).

In spite of job conditions that are unlikely to make the principalship attractive to applicants, only 25% of the school systems surveyed had programs in place to attract and train aspiring leaders. Fewer than half of the districts reported the existence of a formal induction or mentoring program for new principals (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2000). The developing dichotomy is an unprecedented need for quality school leaders at a time when those positions are less attractive to educators. Colleges and universities, school systems,
communities, private businesses and foundations are beginning to respond to the need for a cadre of competent and dedicated leaders for America’s schools.

Olson (2000) highlighted concerns about traditional leadership preparation programs at the university level. “They have not been able to move from the theoretical to the practical issues that principals face in a manner that’s been as effective as they need to be” (p.8). Colleges and universities are beginning to change in response to similar concerns.

Baruch College in New York City runs a yearlong program for aspiring school leaders in a partnership with Community School District 2. A corresponding collaboration between school districts and a college is a program that Teachers College conducts with Westchester and Putnam Counties to recruit and to train excellent teachers in preparation for the principalship. A value added component of the Teachers College program is a lengthy internship. Similar programs are being developed across the country from Greenville, South Carolina and the Leadership Institute partnership with Furman University to the cooperative Administrative Training Program, an alliance with Mesa, Arizona Public Schools and Arizona State University. The Greenville South Carolina School Leadership Institute was made possible by a grant from the Danforth Foundation. Participants are designated as Danforth Fellows and receive training to build skills necessary for effective leadership. The Mesa, Arizona program offers courses on the principalship and school law. School district personnel serve as instructors. Professors at Ohio University are trying out an experimental training program in which students enter the program in cohort groups of about 20. They take courses and an internship seminar together. The heart of the program is a two-year internship (Olson, 2000).

Universities are increasingly offering options for on-line course work. The University Council for Education Administration (1998) has developed the Information Environment for School Leader Preparation [IESLP]. The innovative software program is web-based. It can be
used to teach university courses and to provide continuing education for practicing administrators. The program uses computer technology as an integral part, but it is not a simulation. Participants work on problem based learning exercises in face-to-face groupings and use the computers as they will in their actual work life.

While many universities are reconfiguring the organization, curriculum, and delivery models of their traditional educational leadership programs, private businesses, foundations and interstate and interagency consortiums are offering competition. The Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund has initiated a $150 million project to foster and retain outstanding educational leaders. The first round of grants, awarded in the spring of 2000, went to both traditional and nontraditional leadership preparation programs. Recipients ranged from Teachers College, Columbia University to Dennis Littky, the founder of a non-traditional principal-preparation program based in Providence, Rhode Island. Grant recipients will design leader-preparation programs that emphasize field-based training. One grant was awarded to the Council of Chief State School Officers to examine state level obstacles to achievement in poor neighborhoods (Gewertz, 2000). One of the recipients, Dennis Littky, designed an apprenticeship model for preparation of future principals. The program bypasses traditional university programs that have controlled entrance to the profession. Littky’s goal was to identify the best practitioners in the field and have students train with them. He began by gathering 10 distinguished principals for his program. He asked the principals to find promising candidates in their schools, and then to design a program that revolved around projects and demonstrations of mastery, including exhibitions at gatherings of the aspiring principals and their mentors three times a year (Gewertz, 2000).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2000) offers a program by the same name. The Aspiring Principals Program offers membership in the association at a reduced rate as well as a series of workshops for future school leaders. *Previewing the Principalship* is a
one-day workshop that gives participants an inside look at the day-to-day life of a principal through in-basket activities and analysis of a principal’s daily log. Participants also have the opportunity to interact with a panel of successful principals who share their own experiences as administrators and respond to questions from workshop participants. A second workshop, *Getting the Job—Done Right*, provides a simulated interview and an interactive debriefing session.

Bowman (2000) wrote about a former Clinton administration official who established a nonprofit organization with the goal of putting well-qualified principals in urban schools. The New Leaders for New Schools Program resembles the Teach for America Program and plans to recruit experienced teachers as well as outstanding candidates from outside the field of education and groom them for school leadership. The program will rely on corporate sponsorships with experienced administrators as mentors. The plan to recruit managers from outside education has caused concern among educators who believe that classroom experience is a prerequisite for the principalship. New Leaders will also require schools and districts to give principals authority over hiring and budgets. Managers from outside the field will be paired with experienced educators.

Several states have initiated school improvement efforts that focus on strengthening leadership. One such effort, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, surpasses state boundaries. Organized by the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium has brought together dozens of states and education associations to voluntarily develop model standards, assessments and licensing procedures for school leaders. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium remains focused on the central mission of helping create leaders for student learning by grounding criteria and standards for school leaders’
professional practice in a deep knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning (Shipman & Murphy, 1996).

In May 2000, the consortium took an additional step. In addition to raising the bar for school leaders through model standards and assessments, it released a report that helped link Standards for School Leaders, now used in more then 30 states, to professional development for school administrators. Standards Based Professional Development for School Leaders recommends strategies, provides models and promotes collaboration in the professional development process (Murphy & Schwarz, 2000).

The Texas Principals Leadership Initiative advocates for and facilitates access to meaningful professional development and assessment opportunities. Created in 1995, the uniqueness of the program stems from the inclusive nature of the board members. They are a diverse group of stakeholders dedicated to principal quality in Texas. The Texas Principals Leadership Initiative assists a variety of entities in providing ongoing, seamless, reflective and collaborative professional development opportunities directly linked to school administrators’ main role of facilitating high quality teaching and learning. The Texas Principals Leadership Initiative has collaborated with regional service centers, colleges and universities, professional associations, school districts, and other education stakeholders to provide educators with ready access to high-quality professional development (Olson, 2000).

While only 25% of school districts reported any type of systematic leadership preparation or new leader induction (University Council for Education Administration, 1998), ambitious programs do exist at the system level. The Orange County Public School System in Orlando, Florida conducts a system level Leadership Institute. Courses are offered in leadership, supervision and performance management. A portfolio and completion of the Educational Leadership Appraisal System are required for certification eligibility. Another Florida system,
Indian River County offers a Human Resources Management Development Program. The program consists of two levels, beginning with Administrative Awareness in preparation for the Leadership Academy. The academy is a two-year program designed to prepare candidates for the principalship. Other public systems that offer Leadership Academies or Institutes include; Wake County, North Carolina; Fairfax, Virginia; Nashville, Tennessee; and St. Louis, Missouri (Murphy & Schwarz, 2000).

School systems, universities, businesses and communities are beginning to respond to current and projected needs for capable and committed school leaders. While awareness has been raised about the importance of school leadership, great disparity of opinion exists as to appropriate practices and strategies for preparing school leaders. Some experts believe that all school leaders must come from the teaching ranks, while others call for a fresh perspective from leaders who have been trained in business or the military. Educators are not the sole proprietors of this conundrum. Susan Travian, director of education initiatives at the Business Roundtable, pointed out, “If you look at very successful corporate leaders, there isn’t one leadership model” (in Gewertz, 2000, p. 2). Some suggestions for promising practices can be gleaned from a review of the literature on leadership preparation programs.

Leadership programs that allow participants to maximize the time they spend learning in a collegial environment fit the needs of adult learners. Cohort programs help students to build relationships and networks while mastering course material. Apprenticeship programs give interns the rare opportunity to learn on-the-job with experts. Peer coaching and mentoring, when conducted in a non-judgmental fashion, give future and current leaders the time and opportunity to enhance their leadership skills.

The availability of on-line course offerings makes leadership training possible for a larger number of students who may face time constraints that make a traditional program impossible.
Interest related study groups promote concentrated attention on the development of specific skills, therefore encouraging reflection and focused dialogue. Improved salaries and financial incentives for graduate study hold the potential to make school leadership positions more attractive. Redefined responsibilities, with clearly defined roles could make a seemingly impossible job more manageable.

As in the business world, there is no one size fits all model for effective leadership preparation. The current and projected need for school leaders requires proactive, innovative thought and action in order to produce school leaders who are capable of juggling the complex and increasingly demanding expectations for school leadership in the 21st Century.

New School Design and Construction

A significant part of the landscape of changing circumstances for school leaders is the rapid growth in enrollment projections and the consequent new construction and renovation of schools that will take place. While the standards make general reference to organizational, operational, and resource management, the leadership dimension of facilities management and its impact on student achievement is not specifically mentioned in the research literature on standards for effective leaders. However, with systems across the country spending over 20 billion dollars a year on school construction, the ability to lead schools in the midst of building projects and the opening of new schools will be a prerequisite for principals. In addition to instructional leadership, school leaders in the 21st Century must be knowledgeable about school facilities planning and management (Agron, 2002).

Construction Managers Association of America have subsequently endorsed the design principles (United States Department of Education, 2000).

The first design principle states that the learning environment should enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners. There are more than 86,000 public school buildings currently in use in the United States. The majority of those buildings were designed to accommodate a teacher-centered model of instruction. Current best practices research points to the benefits of interdisciplinary, project-based learning. The space needs and physical arrangement of this type of learning environment are quite different from the traditional school building. Spaces for small group and independent work are needed. Students also need space to move about as they are actively engaged in the learning process. The symposium also recommended research on the impact of the physical learning environment on student achievement (United States Department of Education, 2000). Environmental psychology supports the notion that there is a relationship between human behavior and well-being and the socio-physical environment (Stokols, 1995).

The field of environmental psychology offers elements that help to define this relatively new area of research. The environment affects the capacity for restoring and enhancing a person’s ability to direct attention. People tend to seek out environments where they feel confident and competent. Creating these types of preferred environments can increase behavioral effectiveness in human beings. Environmental stress such as noise, physical crowding, or climatic extremes can produce negative responses including physical illness and attentional fatigue (DeYoung, 1999).

The recommendation that the learning environment should serve as the center of the community is design principle number two. The symposium envisioned the school facility serving as a type of old fashioned town center to serve a wide variety of civic needs. Inviting
recreational and civic groups to use the school facilities after hours is one way to accomplish this goal. The establishment of a parent center within the school encourages parents to be actively involved in the learning program. The design and maintenance of the school facility should reflect the character of the community it serves (United States Department of Education, 2000).

The third design principle states that the learning environment should result from a planning and design process involving all stakeholders. The fulfillment of this recommendation requires the involvement of representatives from all groups that will use the school facility including students, parents, teachers, community members, and members of civic and business organizations. Such participation requires adequate time in the planning process.

The learning environment should provide for health, safety and security according to design principle four. First and foremost, schools must meet all building and safety codes. The symposium recommended that schools be kept small enough to allow personal relationships, thereby promoting a safer environment. The availability of after school programs also accommodates this design principle. A growing body of research supports the benefits of small school and class size including improved grades and test scores, decreased dropout rates, and increased involvement in extracurricular activities (Lawrence, 2002).

Design principle five states that the learning environment should make use of all available resources. Inherent in this design recommendation is the need for the school infrastructure to support the latest educational technology. Teachers should have adequate technological resources to allow them to integrate technology with instruction. Access to outside libraries and other information resources should be made available through the Internet. Flexible spaces allow for varied learning activities. The school campus should not be ignored as a learning environment. Tanner (2001) illustrated examples of effective interdisciplinary
instruction utilizing outdoor learning environments to teach academic subjects in a natural setting.

The learning environment should allow for flexibility and adaptability to changing needs according to the sixth design principle. School spaces should be designed with multiple potential uses in mind. Districts are also urged to update facilities plans at a minimum of every five years. Christopher (2001) envisioned a future school that is quite different from current school buildings. The school includes a technology center, fitness center, museum, gardens and several virtual reality advanced simulation rooms. All buildings are built of environmentally sensitive materials. The school generates its own power and has a closed water system. Students come and go according to their schedules and needs. Such forward thinking emphasizes the need for school facilities to be constructed with an eye toward change.

Exemplary schools across the country illustrate the value of the National Design Principles. Discovery Middle School in Vancouver, Washington incorporates flexible and unique learning spaces including high tech labs, wet and dry lab areas, areas for art projects and fabrication and access to outdoor areas for environmental studies. Crow Island School in Winnetka, Illinois demonstrates the enduring qualities of effective design. The school opened in 1940. Furniture, plumbing and fixtures are scaled to the child’s level. Classrooms are L-shaped and provide for a wide variety of learning groups and activities (United States Department of Education, 2000).

Tanner (2000) developed a Design Appraisal Scale that allows the researcher to evaluate schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels according to specific design features that align with the National Design Principles. The scale examines movement patterns and the ability of students and teachers to enter the school and to move freely inside and outside of the building. Other components of the Design Appraisal Scale include architectural design, large
group meeting spaces, intimacy gradients, the availability of natural light and views, color
schemes, building on the student’s scale, the location of the school, instructional neighborhoods,
laboratories and outdoor learning areas. Environmental factors such as acoustics, climate, and
the roofing system are evaluated. Design elements are rated on a scale of zero to ten.

Building quality, better lighting, new school buildings, and improved air quality have
been linked to higher student achievement by McGuffey (1982) and more recently by Earthman
exists to state that school facilities impact student learning. More refined studies will help
facilities planners to adjust learning spaces, acoustics, and climatic factors to optimal levels for
student learning. The National Design Principles and the Design Appraisal Scale hold potential
for the principals of schools that are currently in the planning and/or construction phase.

**Professional Learning Communities**

The term learning community has been frequently used in education to refer to a variety
of practices, from extending classroom activities into the community to simultaneously engaging
students, teachers, and administrators in learning. For the purposes of this study, professional
learning community refers to a learning environment in which the teachers and administrators
continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is
to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that students benefit. A synonymous term for
professional learning community is ‘community of continuous inquiry and improvement’ (Hord,
1997).

The professional learning community has been described as a powerful staff development
approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997). During the
1980s, Rosenholtz (1989) brought teacher’s workplace factors into the discussion of teaching
quality, maintaining that teachers who felt supported in their own learning and classroom
practice were more committed and effective than those who did not receive such confirmation. Support by means of teacher networks, cooperation among colleagues, and expanded professional roles increased teacher efficacy in meeting students’ needs. Further, Rosenholtz found that teachers with a high sense of their own efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom behaviors and also more likely to stay in the profession.

McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) confirmed Rozenholt’s findings, suggesting that when teachers had opportunities for collaborative inquiry and the learning related to it they were able to develop and share a body of wisdom gleaned from their experience. Adding to the discussion, Darling-Hammond (1996) cited shared decision making as a factor in curriculum reform and the transformation of teaching roles in some schools. In such schools, structured time is provided for teachers to work together in planning instruction, observing each other’s classrooms, and sharing feedback. These and other attributes characterize professional learning communities. Hord (1997) summarized, “The literature on professional learning communities repeatedly gives attention to five attributes of such organizational arrangement: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice” (p.8).

Louis and Kruse (1995) identified the supportive leadership of principals as one of the necessary human resources for restructuring staff into school-based professional communities. Sergiovanni (1994) also defined characteristics of principals in schools that undertake school restructuring: a willingness to share authority, the capacity to facilitate the work of staff, and the ability to participate without dominating. Sergiovanni further explained, “the sources of authority for leadership are embedded in shared ideas” (1994, p. 214). Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, and Snyder (1996) asserted that it is also important that the principal believe teachers have the capacity to respond to the needs of students.
In schools, the learning community is demonstrated by people from multiple constituencies, at all levels, collaboratively and continually working together (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Zepeda (1999) further emphasized the importance of collaboration, “A major tenet in learning communities is that an interconnectedness exists among members of the community” (p. 60). Such collaborative work is grounded in what Louise and Kruse (1995) label reflective dialogue, in which staff conduct conversations about students and teaching and learning, identifying related issues and problems. Participants in such conversations learn to apply new ideas and information or problem solving and therefore are able to create new conditions for students. Key tools in this process are shared values and vision; supportive physical, temporal, and social conditions; and a shared personal practice (Zepeda, 1999).

In a professional learning community, staff members are encouraged not only to be involved in the process of developing a shared vision, but also to use that vision as a guidepost in making decisions about teaching and learning in the school (Isaacson & Bamburg, 1992). Louis and Kruse (1995) maintained that a core characteristic of the vision is an undeviating focus on student learning in which each student’s potential achievement is carefully considered. These shared values and vision lead to norms of behavior that the staff supports.

Several kinds of factors determine when, where, and how the staff can regularly come together as a unit to do the learning, decision-making, problem solving, and creative work that characterize a professional learning community. In order for learning communities to function productively, the physical or structural conditions and the human qualities and capacities of the people involved must be optimal (Boyd, 1992). Louis and Kruse (1995) identified the following physical factors that support learning communities: times to meet and talk, small school size and physical proximity of the staff to one another, independent teaching roles, well-developed
communication structures, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment. An additional factor is the staff’s input in selecting teachers and administrators for the school.

Boyd (1992) presented a similar list of physical factors that result in an environment conducive to school change and improvement: the availability of resources: schedules and structures that reduce isolation; and policies that encourage greater autonomy, foster collaboration, enhance effective communication, and provide for staff development. Watts and Castle (1993) emphasized the importance of times as a resource: “time, or properly lack of it, is one of the most difficult problems faced by schools and districts” (p. 306). Lack of time has been cited as a barrier to collegial work and time to meet and work together is listed as a supportive factor by staffs engaging in school improvement.

Summary

The review of the related literature in Chapter 2 examined findings regarding standards for effective school leaders, leadership preparation programs, new school design and construction, and professional learning communities as they relate to the opening of new schools. Figures 2.1-2.4 summarize these findings.
### Findings

Guidelines for the preparation of school leaders were developed in response to the national school reform movement. Eight major areas of competency for school leaders included:

1. Developing positive school climate
2. Building support for schools
3. Developing curriculum
4. Strengthening instructional management
5. Evaluating staff
6. Enriching staff development
7. Allocation of resources
8. Using research, planning and program evaluation

Research on school improvement resulted in the development of standards for school leaders. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium adopted standards for school leaders in 1996. The standards describe a school administrator as an educational leader who:

1. Facilitates the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. Advocates, nurtures, and sustains a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
3. Ensures management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. Collaborates with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. Acts with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. Understands, responds to, and influences the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Critics of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders contend that the standards omit a research base.

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Figure 2.1 Findings Regarding Standards for Effective School Leaders
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<td>University programs for educational leaders were examined and revised to include cohort, apprenticeship, and on-line opportunities for learning.</td>
<td>University Council for Education Administration (1998)</td>
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<td>States and local school systems began to develop in-house leadership preparation and enhancement programs.</td>
<td>Bowman (2000)</td>
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Figure 2.2 Findings Regarding Leadership Preparation

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<td>School leaders must be knowledgeable about school facilities planning and management.</td>
<td>Agron (2002)</td>
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Figure 2.3 Findings Regarding New School Design and Construction
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<td>Physical factors that facilitate the development of professional learning communities include structures that reduce isolation, availability of resources, and small school size.</td>
<td>Boyd (1992)</td>
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<td>A clear, shared vision that is focused on student learning leads to norms of behavior that support decisions about teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Isaacson &amp; Bamburg (1992) Zepeda (1999)</td>
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Figure 2.4 Findings Regarding Professional Learning Communities
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the leadership experiences of six (N=6) elementary school principals who opened new schools in a large metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003–2004 school year. The work of principals during the construction process and the first six months of occupancy were examined.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities?

2. What challenges do principals who are opening new schools encounter during the process?

The study used qualitative research methodology. A case study of six principals who opened new schools was conducted. Data included transcribed interviews, field notes, and artifacts collected at each site. Three interviews with each participant were conducted over a period of eight months.

Research Design and Rationale

A case study approach was selected because the research objective was to describe and explain the leadership experiences of six elementary school principals in opening new schools in a large, metropolitan school district in Georgia. Yin (1994) stated that “the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (p. 8). Hakim (2000) gave credence to the case study as one of the most flexible and potentially powerful research designs with specific advantages for research on social groups with strong associations and common pursuits. “Using a variety of data collection techniques
and methods allows a more rounded, holistic study than with any other design,” according to Hakim (2000, p. 59).

Case studies have been widely used since the 1960s to study organizational, legislative, and social factors that affect the work of groups. The focus may be on patterns of relationships and activities or on processes of change surrounding an event. Case studies have also been useful in examining specific events, roles, and relationships (Hakim, 2000). Researchers in the field of social work, law, medicine, education, counseling, sociology, psychiatry, and economics have made extensive use of the case study (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1985).

A wide range of methods is associated with case study research. The case study is not limited to any particular type of data collection; it is a comprehensive research strategy. Yin (1994) defined the case study as an empirical inquiry that:

1. investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
2. the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
3. copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
4. relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
5. benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p.13)

Qualitative methods that are frequently employed in case study research include, but are not limited to, interviews, observations, conversational recording and analysis, photographs and videotaping, and documentary analysis (Travers, 2001). Various aspects of an important current issue can be studied by using a variety of data collection techniques. Interviews are a key strategy for collecting case study data. Kvale (1996) summarized, “the use of the interview as a research method is nothing mysterious: An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (p. 6). Interviews are essential for case studies, which explore the
feelings and attitudes of people. These attributes, as well as the meaning constructed by individual participants, cannot be directly observed.

Observation of participants in their natural settings is well suited to case study research and allows the researcher, after gaining access, to function as a reporter. The researcher watches people at work, observes interactions, and takes notes. This fieldwork may include recording conversations, as well as, taking photographs and videotaping. It is a systematic way of looking at what is happening, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting results (Davey, 2002).

All of the previous methods involve some level of intrusion on the social situation. Analysis of documentary records differs in that the documents already exist for other purposes and are subsequently employed as data by the researcher. Documents that can be used for case study research include personal records, official statistics, legal documents, publicity material, indexes and directories, financial records, and memoranda. Datta (1990) pointed out that documentary evidence could generate a great deal of data requiring extensive analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of symbolic interactionism served as the framework for the design of the study due to the emphasis symbolic interactionists place on the observation of human actions in the natural environment. A critical component of the theory of symbolic interactionism is that individuals are influenced by other people, but they are also active in interpreting, and responding to, the people and objects they encounter in the world. Symbolic interactionism recognizes the interface between social interaction and an individual’s perception of current reality (Travers, 2001). Blumer suggested that researchers should, “approach the study of group activity through the eyes and experience of the people who have developed the activity” (1969, p.139).
Charon (1998) outlined five core ideas of symbolic interactionism:

1. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the nature of social interaction, the dynamic social activities taking place among persons, instead of focusing on the individual and his or her personality characteristics.
2. Human action is caused not only by social interaction but also results from interaction within the individual. We act according to how we are thinking in the specific situation. Our own thinking always matters.
3. Humans do not sense their environment directly, but instead define their situation as they go along in their action. We respond to reality as we define it.
4. We are not controlled by what happened to us in the past: we are not simply playing out personality traits we developed early in our lives. Our actions are always caused by what happens in the present situation, more specifically, how we are defining what is happening there.
5. Humans, unlike other animals in nature, are able to take an active part in the cause of their own action. (pp. 27-29)

Symbolic interactionism describes the human being as one who thinks, defines, applies his or her past, imagines the future, and selects objects in the environment for his or her own use.

Figure 3.1 depicts Charon’s conceptualization of the human being as a “complex, contradictory, situational, and dynamic” actor as opposed to the passive, predictable reactionary depicted in traditional social science theory.

![Figure 3.1 A conceptualization of human interaction](image-url)
Symbolic interaction was an appropriate theoretical basis for this study, which examined the perspectives of principals as they brought people together to form new learning communities. Face-to-face interviews, field notes, and artifacts, including documentary evidence, were collected at each site. These data were used to analyze the experiences, thoughts and actions of principals as they opened new schools.

*Researcher’s Subjectivities*

Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in a qualitative study, it is important to identify researcher biases and subjectivities to monitor their potential effects on the interpretation of data (Merriam, 1998). While researcher subjectivity is most often viewed as a limitation, Peshkin (1998) argued that subjectivity could be “the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected” (p. 18).

The researcher identified the following experiences and biases:

1. The researcher brought to this study 26 years of experience in education. The researcher had worked as a teacher for thirteen years including experiences at the elementary, middle school and college levels. She had worked as an elementary school assistant principal for six years and as an elementary principal for seven years.

2. The researcher is a Caucasian female. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education, a Master of Education degree in Early Childhood Education, and an Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. She is currently pursuing a terminal degree in Educational Leadership.

3. The researcher was a principal in the same geographic area as the research subjects and had a pre-established professional working relationship with each of the six principals.
4. The researcher had experience in opening a new school as an assistant principal in 1990, 13 years prior to this study.

5. The researcher believed in the critical role of the principal as the organizational and instructional leader of an effective school.

Participant Selection

Subjects selected for participation in case study research are most often examples of a social entity such as communities, work teams, social groups, or organizations (Hakim, 2000). This study used purposeful sampling, a procedure by which a sample is built based on cases that are deemed appropriate for illuminating the purpose of the study (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1985). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to make use of special knowledge about some groups to achieve a particular goal. The purposeful sample is a nonrandom sample and is, therefore, subject to bias. Therefore, generalization beyond the findings is not recommended.

Merriam (2002) contended that random sampling is not necessary in a study that seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants and argued for the importance of selecting a sample from which the most can be learned. Patton (1990, p.169) emphasized the importance of “information-rich” cases to increase the depth of a research study.

Participants for this study included six (N=6) elementary school principals who worked in the same large, metropolitan school system in Georgia. All six were experienced principals within the school system who applied for and were assigned the task of opening new elementary schools for the 2003-2004 school year. The subjects were in a unique position to shed light on the leadership challenges of principals who open new schools and to reflect on their individual and collective experiences. The six participants in this study included:
Six females
A range of experience in the principalship from 2 years to 12 years
Degree levels from master’s to doctorate
All subjects were Caucasian

A sample of convenience was employed by the researcher, who worked in the same geographic area as the study participants. This allowed for convenience and accessibility to subjects (Adams & Schevenaldt, 1985). The researcher already had a professional rapport with the subjects that was helpful with issues of trust. The researcher gained entrée by personally asking principals to take part in the research study. All seven principals who were opening new schools in the 2003-2004 school year agreed to take part in the study and approval was granted through the school system research approval process. One principal was eliminated from the pool of study participants to protect confidentiality because he was the only male. Participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Limitations of the convenience sample are discussed later in this chapter.

Numerous professional organizations, including the American Psychological Association, have published codes of ethics for the conduct of research. Two central themes emerged from a review of code of ethics statements for research: the right to privacy and the relationship between individual cost and scientific benefit (Adams & Schvandevelt, 1985). Subjects are likely to balance the perceived benefits of the research project with its personal effects on them. Participants may feel threatened by the possibility of public exposure of sensitive information (Payne & Charnov, 1987).

Subjects in this study were not personally identified. Pseudonyms were used for the principals in the study to ensure confidentiality. Subjects were assured that all information was privileged and confidential in an effort to encourage open and honest responses to interview
questions. Participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. While the study did not involve physical risk, psychological stress could have resulted if participants had feared that their answers would potentially result in reprisal. Information that personally identified a principal or a school was removed from all artifacts.

A comparative case study design involving a sample size of six (N=6) elementary school principals was selected based on availability, consent, and the unique situation of six elementary schools opening within the same school system in a given year. According to Yin (1994), each individual case is studied as a whole and convergent evidence is sought by examining results and conclusions across cases. The experiences of individual principals in leading the organization of a new school were chronicled, results were compared, and emerging themes were reported. The opportunity to study six principals opening elementary schools with identical architectural plans in the same year provided the researcher with sufficient detailed information to provide a detailed portrait of that particular phenomenon (Hakim, 2000).

Data Collection

Interviews

Focused interviews were used as the primary source of data for this study. Bogdan and Biklen (1998, p. 93) defined the interview as “a purposeful conversation…that is directed by one in order to get information from the other.” Kvale (1996) outlined 12 aspects of effective research interviews:

1. **Life World.** The topic of the interview is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.
2. **Meaning.** The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said and how well it is said.
3. **Qualitative.** The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language, it does not aim at quantification.
4. **Descriptive.** The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subjects’ life worlds.
Specificity. Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.

Deliberate Naiveté. The interviewer exhibits openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation.

Focused. The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized question nor entirely non-directive.

Ambiguity. Interviewee statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives in.

Change. The process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change his or her description and meanings about a theme.

Sensitivity. Different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.

Interpersonal Situation. The knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interaction in the interview.

Positive Experience. A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation. (pp. 30-31)

The focused interview as a source of data is compatible with symbolic interactionist theory because of the emphasis on descriptive accounts from the principal subjects. Patton (1987) outlined three types of interviews in a discussion of qualitative inquiry. Spontaneous conversational interviews are the most naturalistic and give rise to questions that occur during the course of the interview. This is, perhaps, the most time-consuming interview approach and data can be difficult to analyze. The interview guide approach uses a list of issues to be considered; however, questions may differ across interviews. The focused interview questions are designed around themes and a list of questions is administered to each interviewee. The focused interview was selected in an attempt to minimize the influence of the researcher and to facilitate data analysis. However, built into the interview process was time to ask probing questions. Following each interview, transcripts were developed and individual follow-up questions were developed to ask each participant during subsequent interviews.

Three, face-to-face, focused interviews were conducted with each principal. Sixty to ninety minutes was the anticipated length of each interview. Interviews took place in June 2003,
September 2003, and January 2004. The researcher traveled to the subjects’ current school sites to conduct interviews. Interview sessions were tape recorded and transcribed after the fact.

Specific interview questions for each of the interviews were selected in an attempt to answer the overall research questions:

1. How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities?

2. What challenges do principals who are opening new schools encounter during the process?

Questions for the first face-to-face interview were designed to establish a rapport with the subject within the interview setting, to gain biographical information, and to obtain an understanding of the principal’s motivation for opening a new school. The first interview was also an opportunity to begin to explore the first overall research question: How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities? The first interview took place in June 2003 before the official move in date for the principals to their new schools (see Appendix B).

The second interview took place in late September 2003 after the school had been open for approximately two months. Questions for the second interview were designed to continue the examination of the process of building new learning communities (see Appendix B).

The third interview took place in January 2004, after the school had been open for six months. This interview was an opportunity to reflect and extend previous responses to questions and to examine the second overall research question: What challenges do principals who are opening new schools face during the process? (see Appendix B)
**Artifacts**

Artifacts from school principals and school sites were collected during the course of the research. Relevant artifacts included the school system’s *Handbook for Opening New Schools*, local school faculty handbooks for new schools, vision and mission statements, staffing plans, facilities maps, campus plans, photographs of each new school building, newspaper clippings and administrative memoranda. Individual principals also shared their organizational and action plans for accomplishing the myriad tasks associated with opening a new school. Planning tools ranged from scribbled handwritten lists to computer generated charts with target dates and lists of persons responsible for tasks. Artifacts were coded for each school to provide a measure of anonymity and were analyzed as part of the larger data set. The artifacts supported principals’ accounts of the leadership practices they employed while leading the opening of new schools. Artifacts also presented evidence of the challenges faced by principals during the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities.

**Data Analysis**

Yin (1994) described data analysis as “examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 102). Merriam (2002) explained that an inductive process is used as the researcher begins with a unit of data and compares it to another unit of data while looking for common patterns across the data. Researchers must organize, manage, and retrieve the most meaningful units of data.

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested various organizational techniques that facilitate data analysis:

- Putting information into different arrays
- Making a matrix of categories and placing evidence within categories
- Creating data displays—including flow charts and graphs—for examining the data
- Tabulating the frequency of different events.
Merriam (2002) stated that grounded theory could be built within a case study. Grounded theory is defined as “one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 25). Travers explained that grounded theory research strives to produce a set of categories that describe or explain some phenomenon (2002). The primary focus of this research study was to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of opening a new school as a principal. Therefore, the constant comparative method of data analysis, including grounded theory, was employed. The findings of an initial case were compared to the results of a second, third, and more cases (Yin, 1994). The strategy of making a matrix of categories and placing evidence within those categories will be useful in organizing the large volume of data collected from the participants, six principals, who will individually be interviewed three times over a course of eight months.

Interviews were audio taped and transcribed immediately following the interview sessions. Units of data revealing information relevant to the study were highlighted and notations were made in the margins of the transcript. As subsequent interviews were transcribed, data units relating to the same category were coded and analyzed across cases as central themes emerged. Artifacts were also analyzed across cases for key information, which helped the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the leadership process of opening a new school.

Reliability, Validity, and Triangulation

Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which the findings of the research study can be replicated with the same results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceived the idea that reliability in qualitative study should mean that the results are consistent and dependable. In other words, results of data collection and analysis should make sense. Regarding reliability, Yin (1994) suggested strategies for conducting case study research. The general guideline was to conduct the research
as if someone were always looking over your shoulder. More specific tools to ensure reliability include a case study protocol and a case study database.

A case study protocol consisted of the interview instrument and procedures and general rules that were followed in using the instrument. Yin (1994) stated that the protocol “is a major tactic in increasing the reliability of case study research and is intended to guide the investigator in carrying out the case study” (p. 63). The protocol should contain the following:

- An overview of the case study project (project objectives and auspices)
- Field procedures (credentials and access to the case study “sites”, general sources of information, and procedural reminders)
- Case study questions (the specific questions that the case study investigator must keep in mind in collecting data)
- A guide for the case study report (outline, format for the narrative, and specification of any bibliographical information and other documentation). (pp. 64-65)

Yin (1994) stipulated that the case study database should contain notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives. A formal database allows investigators to review the evidence directly. This database becomes part of a chain of evidence. An external observer could trace steps backward to the initial research question. Both a case study protocol and a database were developed for the purposes of this study.

Validity

From the positivist point of view, research is valid if it measures what the researcher intends it to measure (Kerlinger, 1979). Validity addresses the truthfulness of the findings. For the purposes of qualitative research, requirements for validity include: “(1) correspondence with reality, (2) appropriateness of focus, scope, and intensity, and (3) understandability” (Dawson, 1980, p. 55).

Merriam (2002) detailed strategies that qualitative researchers can use to enhance the validity of a study. The first and most well known is triangulation. Foreman (1948) first
promoted the procedure of triangulation when he recommended the use of independent investigators and outside sources to validate case study materials. Denzin (1978) identified four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. For the purposes of this study, triangulation was achieved through multiple sources of data that included interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts.

Validity was further enhanced by the use of member checks. Study participants were provided with transcripts of interviews and copies of preliminary findings for the purpose of review and clarification. Three fellow doctoral students also reviewed findings and provided feedback through the process of peer examination.

Limitations

Limitations considered in a review of the findings of this study include researcher bias, limited sample, and generalizability. The researcher reflected on existing biases and assumptions and provided a written statement that was reviewed periodically during the course of the study. While the purposeful sample was limited to principals who work within the same school district, a comparative case study of six (N=6) principals allowed for the study of the experience of opening a new school in six different neighborhood communities. The opportunity to follow the principals over an eight-month period provided adequate time for engagement in the research. The convenience of the sample allowed the researcher to collect sufficient data to provide an adequate description of the phenomenon of leading the opening of a new school (Merriam, 2002).

Merriam (2002) underscored the importance of trustworthiness, “To be trustworthy, a study needs to be valid and reliable and conducted in an ethical manner” (p. 30). The researcher used a case study protocol (Yin, 1994), a case study database or audit trail,
triangulation through multiple sources of data, member checks, and peer review in an effort to conduct a thorough case study that would yield data that were consistent with the overall research questions of the study.

Chapter Summary

This study sought to describe and explain the leadership experiences of six (N=6) elementary school principals who were opening new schools and to identify the challenges those principals encountered while opening a new school. Case study research methodology was used. Interviews, field notes and artifacts were inductively analyzed from the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism. Coding and constant comparison were used in the analysis of the data. Systematic procedures, multiple sources of data, member checks, and peer evaluation bolstered the reliability and validity of the study.
The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the leadership experiences of six \((N=6)\) elementary school principals who opened new schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. This research sought to answer the following research questions: How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities? What challenges do principals who are leading the opening of new schools face during the process?

This chapter presents findings and reports them as data from the individual participants, and as common themes. Each of these levels of findings will be discussed as it relates to the establishment of new learning communities as well as to the challenges principals faced during the process. Data revealed by the individual participants will be discussed first with regard to building new learning communities and then with regard to challenges. By way of introduction, information on each participant will be presented.

**Individual Participants**

*Susan Johnson*

Susan Johnson was a veteran educator who had worked as a public school administrator during 17 of her 28 years as an educator. She had opened two new schools as an assistant principal and described her decision to open a new school as a need for a “kick in the career” stating, “I knew how much work it was, but I also knew how exciting and invigorating it could be”. She was especially interested in opening a new school that served students with high levels of poverty and diversity.

Nine themes arose from the series of interviews with Ms. Johnson. Five themes addressed the process of establishing a new learning community and four themes addressed challenges
faced during the process of leading the opening of a new elementary school. Table 4.1 outlines the themes that emerged during the series of three interviews.

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Ms. Johnson emphasized the importance of communication as the key vehicle for bringing people together to establish a new learning community. She said:

To help the new people who were coming on board, I sent out an electronic newsletter once a week. It didn’t take very long, wasn’t very extensive, but it was really so they wouldn’t lose touch with what was going on. People would e-mail me questions and if they could kind of get a hook in it and feel more comfortable it was really trying to make them feel a part of the school so that they would feel better about coming on board.

The majority of staff members hired to open Cross Elementary had been assigned as the result of displacement from other schools in the system, so Ms. Johnson saw herself as a salesperson for the school.

Bonding activities helped to establish the identity and culture of the new school. A two-day staff retreat called “Creating Cross” launched the process of forming the learning community. Staff members were asked to write down where they came from on a note card. Then, they listed three things that they would miss and three things that they would not miss.
from their former schools. Ms. Johnson led the faculty to the parking lot where they burned the
cards, a symbolic release of the past. Staff members returned to the cafeteria of the school to the
strains of the song “We are the Champions”. A large Welcome to Cross sign, balloons, and
plants completed the energetic atmosphere.

The staff drafted collective commitments during the two-day retreat. Interestingly, Ms.
Johnson decided not to lead this process. She worked-side-by-side with staff members as a
participant, calling on system colleagues who had led the opening of new schools to facilitate the
work. Johnson stated, “I didn’t want to lead it because I wanted to be part of it”.

From the beginning, collaboration has been a cornerstone of work at Cross Elementary.
Johnson detailed the collaborative work:

I think one of the things we did very well was to build in time for the grade levels and the
teams to collaborate before school started. I paid them a stipend to come together during
the summer. I know they worked a lot more than that, but there were some things that
needed to be done. I feel like the grade levels have really come together on their
instructional focus.

Ms. Johnson believes that collaboration has empowered teachers as professionals to make
decisions based on their collective beliefs and commitments.

Ms. Johnson held a personal belief that low class sizes and common planning time were
priorities for the promotion of student academic achievement in an elementary school with a
highly diverse, high poverty level student population. This belief influenced instructional
program offerings at Cross Elementary. She explained:

I thought what these kids probably need more of and I thought they need more reading,
writing, and math and they need more access to computers. So, in addition to the
traditional art, music, and physical education specials, we have literacy, math, and
technology specials.

She noted that being a Title One school provides additional money and personnel to provide
programs like Reading Recovery for student academic support.
Ms. Johnson found that she had limited opportunities to interview and hire staff members for the new school. The school system made it a priority to take care of people who are already employed by the system. “I think we all appreciate the fact that they need to take care of the people who are already there”, remarked Johnson. She outlined the process:

So the first step is anybody that volunteers and the second step is displacement. The two feeder schools have to get their numbers to a certain number. So we all got together with Human Resources and moved people into available positions. I did not have very many volunteers and that, to a certain extent, has kind of driven some of the other things I have done, decisions I have made to kind of help hook people into Cross because it was not a choice they made. Many of the people who are displaced are coming with only one or two years of experience so I tried to balance that, when I have had an opportunity to hire, with experienced people and people with experience in guided reading and writer’s workshop.

The issue of displacement also affected administrative assignments. Johnson was appointed as principal of Cross in November, yet was unable to assemble an administrative staff until April. Assistant administrators were not officially on duty at the new schools until August.

Ms. Johnson reported minimal input on facility issues, “It was all predetermined”. She had some suggestions for the involvement of school leaders in the design of new schools:

I understand that we are not going to be there as long as the building and that there has to be some flexibility plus there are state and federal regulations, I am certainly aware of that. If they were too far down the road before we were named to have gotten our input there are two schools that are already in existence that have been open for several years that are based on our design and I would like to think that they went back to the people that have been in those buildings and have gotten some feedback. I wish they would get that input, especially from people who have lived in the buildings.

While Ms. Johnson expressed overall satisfaction with a beautiful, functional school building, she noted ideas that she believed could save the school system money. She noted that the media production room contains an unnecessary sink that could be omitted from the design. The need for drains in primary restrooms was also an area of concern.

Ms. Johnson reported that the most stressful time during the process of opening a new school was the period of time after her appointment in November through June, when she was
still the principal at Ashford Elementary, yet was charged with all of the planning and hiring for
the new Cross Elementary, “So that was probably one of the most stressful times, while still
doing both of them”. Ms. Johnson did not report physical symptoms as a result of job related
stress. She reported taking a vacation between the school opening and the dedication that she
believed helped her to keep a physical and emotional balance.

The issue of getting technology up and running in a new school was less of a concern for
Ms. Johnson than it was for the other principals who were interviewed for this study. She
credited her technology team with serving as a buffer for her. She did report that when she
started officially working at the new school on July 1st, she did not have a usable computer in the
school. She was able to use one laptop that was connected to the server at her previous school.
When administrative computers were installed, docking stations for administrators did not work
properly. Classroom computers and labs were up and running by the time that students reported
for class in August.

Finally, Ms. Johnson expressed that she found her greatest support from her principal
colleagues who were also opening new schools. They met monthly to plan and to commiserate.
Her reflection on the entire experience was positive, “There is so much good will. You bring
experiences to a new school, but you don’t have traditions. We have the opportunity to build
those traditions.”

Anna Elliott

Twenty-five years in education and five years as principal of an established school
brought Anna Elliott to the point of fulfilling a lifelong dream, opening a new school. She shared
her thoughts:

I have always wanted to do this – open a new school. At one point in my life I had
actually thoughts about leaving public education and actually helping to establish a
school, a charter school or a private school, whatever it was because I really wanted the
experience of opening a new school. This was right in line with something I had always wanted to do. It fit perfectly. If I had not gotten the opportunity to open a new school this year, I would have applied next year. It was something I really wanted to do.

Ms. Elliott applied specifically for the principalship of Montfort Elementary because of the proximity of the school to her home.

Nine themes arose from the series of interviews with Ms. Elliott. Four themes addressed the process of establishing a new learning community and five themes addressed the challenges faced during the process of leading the opening of a new elementary school. Table 4.2 illustrates the themes that emerged from the series of interviews with Anna Elliott.

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Ms. Elliott viewed communication as the most critical function of building a learning community. She quickly implemented an electronic newsletter that staff members received weekly upon their assignment to Montfort Elementary. A website was established in May, before the building opened. It included pictures of the school building and pictures of faculty members with statements about what they believed about teaching and learning. Ms. Elliott is a
reflective practitioner, constantly asking herself questions about the results of professional practice. She said:

I try and look at the different audiences. Do I have a place for students to have feedback? Parents? Community? Teachers? Is everything in place so that communication – I really feel that communication is the number one job I have in coming in here, other than teaching and learning which is always there, but in order to have effective teaching and learning you must have good communication.

Communication also served as the springboard for bonding activities and the initial collaborative learning that took place in the spring and summer before the opening of school.

The first staff meeting was a picnic in May. Staff members met in grade level teams and drafted grade level philosophy statements that could be posted on the new school website. A shared leadership retreat in June included learning from the book, *17 Qualities of a Team Player* by John Maxwell. Ms. Elliott purchased a copy of the book for each staff member. Elliott explained that the book helped to set the stage for the organizational structure of the new school:

My whole structure for getting things done is through teams, grade level teams. We meet here twice a week, every Tuesday and Thursday, for 45 minutes, every grade level does, all through the day. My assistant principals and I meet with them all day long. On those Tuesday and Thursday sessions they take one of those 17 qualities a week and they instruct their grade level. It really builds leaders, too, because people do not have a chance just to sit back.

Traditional business concerns are not part of the twice-weekly team meetings. Each person on the grade level serves as an expert on a subject area and teachers develop their own curriculum pacing charts for all grade level curriculum areas.

A March outreach meeting with parents served as a valuable communication and public relations tool early in the process of opening the new school. Ms. Elliott asked the principals of the feeder schools to provide the names of particularly influential parents in their school communities. She invited those parents to a breakfast meeting to discuss their vision for the new school. Elliott charged those parents with recruiting involved parents from each of the feeder
schools. The result was 140 volunteers for officer positions on the new PTA. Some type of service position, from committee chairperson to classroom tutor, was found for each of the volunteers. Montfort Elementary opened with an army of involved parents.

Meetings were also held with prospective students from each feeder school in the spring. Montfort was associated with a new high school and the decision was made to take on the same colors and mascot to build continuity within the new school cluster. Students were excited at the prospect of attending athletic events at the new high school and this seemed to help build enthusiasm for the new elementary school.

Ms. Elliott found that she had less input on staffing the new school than she had expected. In her words:

It (the staff) was readymade. We were brought into a room with the feeder school principals and myself and I felt like I probably could have stayed home that day because it was more like “You are getting this person and this person” and it wasn’t necessarily what I needed at the school. I was more in a defensive position than a part of the planning.

Ms. Elliott was able to select the assistant principal of her choice, which she viewed as crucial to the success of opening a new school.

The need for additional system level support was another challenge encountered by Ms. Elliott. She summed up the desire for additional support from the central office as follows:

I would have liked more assistance from the county. From the county level we had a notebook that we could use, but I really felt like we needed to have more meetings with them as far as interacting with contractors and staffing and things like that. I think there could have been more support other than just a notebook. I think that to a certain extent I would have liked to have someone actually come to each of those meetings we had monthly. The few times someone did come to our meetings, they got things done. It was wonderful. It just wasn’t often enough.

Her main support group consisted of the six other principals that were opening new schools at the same time. Elliott remarked, “We had support from each other. Without that I think it would have been much harder”.

Ms. Elliott identified the month of May as the most stressful time in the process due to the requirements for closing out school while doing things for the new school that could not wait. “People say that you start your new school on July 1, but that does not work”. Frustrations with technology added to the stress.

Technology was not available to the principals opening new schools when they officially began their duties on site. Ms. Elliott had no computer and no telephone until the middle of July. Stricter central level control over software programs was also a source of frustration. Many instructional software programs that were available at the previous school were not allowed at new schools. Ms. Elliott gave an example of technology-induced stress:

The IMD (Information Management Division) people would come on a Friday afternoon. In fact, I had the goodbye faculty meeting at my former school on Friday morning and we had a meeting with IMD at 1:00 here at Montfort. They had to have it on that day. They said by Monday morning I had to have this enormous organizational structure due to them and then they did not show up when they said they would. That happened over and over again.

Ms. Elliott described the computer hardware that was eventually installed in the new schools as top of the line. She sees the challenges as issues of timing and communication.

The Montfort Elementary School building was 90% complete at the time of Ms. Elliott’s appointment in November. Correspondingly, her input into facilities issues was minimal. An example of a facilities challenge was the signage in the school. Ms. Elliott asked for signs to be moved because they were not where a particular person would be working. The request was denied.

Joan Smith

Joan Smith had teaching experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels during her 17-year career as an educator. She moved from the principalship of an existing school to lead the opening of Grove Park Elementary.
Ten themes, as addressed in Table 4.3 emerged from the series of interviews with Ms. Smith. Six themes addressed the establishment of a new learning community and four themes addressed challenges faced during the process.

Ms. Smith considered open communication a vital tool in building the relationships necessary for establishing a new learning community. In her words:

Everything comes down to relationships. If you concentrate on the relationships - you can have the expectations and the rules and that kind of stuff – but you take care of the people first. When you really look at forming the school, or improving the school, you’re talking about what the people do inside the building. Changing the color of the paint or even having a new building doesn’t really change what happens to the children in the classroom.

An open door policy characterizes the communication flow at Grove Park Elementary. Staff members are encouraged to bring their concerns to the table and talk about those concerns, as well as possible solutions, before the concerns fester into larger problems. To date, this policy seems to have worked well. According to Ms. Smith, “With staff members and parents we ask what we can do to solve this together.”

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Bonding activities were designed to help new staff members identify with Grove Park Elementary. The first staff meeting in May began with the song “We Are Family” and ended with everyone dancing around the room in a train. The school’s vision and mission were drafted during a two-day retreat over the summer. Colors training was conducted during the retreat to help staff members see differences in personalities. The summer retreat concluded with a bus tour of the community and a trip to a nearby dairy for ice cream.

The opportunity to select the school colors and mascot helped students identify with their new school. Spring visits by the principal to each of the feeder schools for meetings with prospective students served as the setting for those decisions. Children submitted nominations and a held a vote. Students also had an opportunity to ask questions about the new school.

Collaborative work and learning are emphasized at Grove Park Elementary. Staff members collaboratively wrote the initial vision and mission statements for the school. Those statements will be revisited each year. Faculty meetings are used for staff development, or Common Learning Time as it is titled at Grove Park. Faculty members discuss instructional strategies and expectations for themselves as well as students.

Student learning is the number one priority. Procedures that are consistent with this academic focus have been a difficult adjustment for some of the parents in the school. Ms. Smith described:

I do not allow parents to go down to classrooms during the day unless they have a previously scheduled appointment with the teacher or unless they are volunteering and they are on a schedule and that seems to be very different for some parents. I have had the teachers thanking me saying “I’ve never taught so much in my life, my time is protected.” Then, I have the parents saying, “It is a public school and I pay tax money and I’ll go down to that room anytime I want to.”
Administrators have had success with winning disgruntled parents over one at a time. Upset parents are invited to come in for individual conferences and are usually appeased when the instructional reason behind a policy is explained.

Staffing the new school proved to be one of the major challenges facing Ms. Smith. In her words, “I really did not get to hire anyone, or very few people”. Grove Park received staff members from three different schools and followed the process of accepting volunteers from the feeder schools, followed by displacement. There were many more volunteers than there were teaching slots at the new school. Smith explained:

Supposedly that meant that I got to interview, but they had to have my answers in like two days and they knew there was no way I could interview sixty something people in two days.

Ms. Smith visited the feeder schools and asked volunteers to sign up for interviews. Miscommunication had caused these teachers to think they were guaranteed a position if they volunteered and they were offended about the need for interviews. Senior human resources staff had to intervene to appease teachers. It was agreed that teachers could consider themselves involuntarily transferred to the new school with the option to transfer after one year, if so desired.

In Ms. Smith’s words, “Technology is a big concern.” She reported beginning her new job without a networked computer. Principals were disconnected from the servers at their former schools in May and were not reconnected at their new schools until mid-July, at the earliest. Assistant principals had no access to computers at a time when staff and student handbooks and school calendars were being created from scratch. Computer hardware was in the building, but the network was not up and running. The new schools used a new platform that had not been installed in other schools.
The most stressful time for Smith during the process of leading the opening of a new school was the period of time when she was balancing the leadership responsibilities of her current school with the tasks of opening a new school. She was determined not to let the new assignment affect her current school. She would begin work on the new school at 4 or 5 o’clock each day and work all weekend on the new school. Physical symptoms resulted from this strain.

A discovery for Ms. Smith has been the variety of expectations that staff members bring with them to a new school. Some people are seeking a fresh start; others expect the new school to be a new version of their former school. Staff members also bring expectations of the principal based on their prior experiences. Ms. Smith is spending time in small and large group staff development meetings working to develop a common language about shared leadership, professionalism, and teaching and learning.

*Deborah Long*

Deborah Long brought 26 years of experience at both the elementary and middle school levels as both a teacher and an administrator to her position as principal of Skyland Elementary. She had worked as principal of an established elementary school for five years prior to the new assignment. She described her decision to apply for the principalship of a new school as the desire for a new challenge.

Eight themes arose from the series of interviews with Ms. Long. Five themes addressed the establishment of a new learning community and three themes addressed challenges faced during the process of opening a new elementary school. Table 4.4 delineates the specific themes that emerged from interviews with Ms. Long.

Ms. Long stressed the importance of open communication in the process of opening a new school. She said:
We want to communicate an open door policy that they (staff) can walk into any administrator’s office at any point in time and have conversations. Of course, we organized committees and we have a weekly newsletter that goes out to the staff each Friday to share information, share the calendar. We realize how important communication is and we’re certainly trying to focus on that to make sure that we have communication flowing.

Parent communication has also been a focus for Skyland Elementary. Each classroom teacher sends home a weekly newsletter. Teachers also communicate with parents through e-mail, phone calls, notes sent home, and conferences. Ms. Long has emphasized the importance of a positive initial communication in opening the doors for continued dialogue.

Table 4.4 Emerging Themes from Interviews with Deborah Long

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<tr>
<th>Establishing a New Learning Community</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>Communication</td>
<td>Stress</td>
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<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
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<td>Bonding activities</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
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<td>Collaboration</td>
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Outreach has been an ongoing part of the establishment of the school identity at Skyland Elementary. It was one of the first of the seven new elementary school buildings to be completed. Principal Long visited the feeder schools, like her colleagues, and gave students a chance to vote on the school colors and the school mascot. The early completion allowed her to plan a community soc-hop in May that served as a public relations event to get people excited about the new school. With the assistance of a business partner, the school held a community cookout in the fall that helped to build a sense of community.
Purposeful team building activities were used during spring and summer planning meetings to help the staff members bond as a group. Collaborative work on collective beliefs and values formed the groundwork for the development of vision and mission statements for the school. Cross-functional teams at the school continue to conduct the work of the school collaboratively.

Ms. Long described the process of opening a new elementary school as a stressful experience. The pressure of leading one school while opening another resulted in physical symptoms. She was treated for two stress related medical conditions during the spring. “I think it was a combination of the stress from what was happening plus the emotion of making that separation”, explained Long.

The expectations of parents also served as stressors. Parents expressed resentment of the requirement to sign in and schedule visits to the classroom. Long stated:

I think that the biggest challenge that we have had is with parents making the change. It is just about making the change from another school to a new school and feeling ownership of that. We are trying to protect instructional time and they act as if that is a new theory.

Careful communication and a willingness to listen to parent concerns helped to ease the situation. Ms. Long believes that parents will adjust to expectations for an academically focused school.

Ms. Long had virtually no input into facility issues given the early completion of the building for Skyland Elementary School. She chose to look at this challenge as a positive situation that allowed her to focus on building the identity and culture of a new learning community.

Lisa Dawson

Lisa Dawson began the journey of leading the opening of Colonial Hills Elementary School during her 26th year in education. Her experiences included teaching and administrative
experiences at both the middle school and high school levels. She moved from an existing school to open the new school with the specific goal in mind of building a new learning community.

Eight themes arose from the series of interviews with Ms. Dawson, as outlined in Table 4.5. Five themes addressed the process of establishing a new learning community and three themes addressed challenges faced during the process.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing a New Learning Community</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detailed Planning</td>
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Ms. Dawson began the leadership process by conducting extensive research on the history of the community that would be served by the new school. She found documents at the county historical society and the public library. She reached out to community leaders early on to listen to their expectations for the new school. She also invited those community members to visit her current school so that they could gain an understanding of her leadership style.

Collaborative work on the collective beliefs and expectations at Colonial Hills Elementary included students. Dawson said:

Our student council has been charged with creating the norms for a Colonial Hills student and that is something they are going to be working on. What is a Colonial Hills student
and what do we expect from each other? What can the children expect from each other? That is something we are doing to try to develop the school culture.

Formal communication structures include school newsletters and teacher newsletters. The organizational work of the school takes place through committees including a Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, Staff Development Committee, and Grade Chairs. Parents are involved and present at the school, both as volunteers and as visitors for lunch and other activities. Dawson remarked, “We are very aware that the huge number of parents who come into our building each day are there to make sure that things are going well”. She recognizes that informal communication with and between parents is a key to the success of a new school.

Ms. Dawson was unique in stressing the importance of attention to detail when planning for the opening of a new school. She explained:

I think that planning for deliveries has been the best thing that I did. I thought that once I got over here I was going to be absolutely overwhelmed by the deliveries. How am I going to make sure that everything gets out? I have been surprised in that we have been able to make it so smooth. We had a plan and we took care of it. Teachers chose two days to come in and their task has been to unpack everything and get it put away. That has worked beautifully.

She added that taking care of the little details keeps her from feeling overwhelmed when last minute things come up.

Working with the Information Management Division of the school system to have appropriate technology up and running for the new school was a challenge at Colonial Hills Elementary as described by the principal:

The Information Management Division did not keep to their schedule and they made promises they couldn’t keep. We have had continual problems with our technology. We have very little software and I think that is by design, I think we’re moving toward standardization and that the individual schools will have less and less flexibility.

Ms. Dawson also expressed the opinion that Technology Support Technicians in the local schools are being asked to do more than they are capable of doing.
For the process of staffing the new school, Ms. Dawson described a meeting with a Human Resources director and the principals of the feeder schools. She said:

We went down the list of people who had voluntarily transferred then we moved on to the involuntary list and there was another group of those teachers and we just went right down the list and they were placed. They were placed. That is how it happened.

Each principal who opened a new school was allowed to take seven people from their previous school and Ms. Dawson reported, “I hired seven people”.

Ms. Dawson reported physical symptoms of stress. They manifested themselves in the spring during the period of time when she was working as principal of two schools. Dawson related, “There is never a time, there is really never a time when you’re not under a tremendous amount of stress, there is never a lag time”.

**Katherine Benson**

Katherine Benson led the opening of the new Thompson Elementary School with a background of 22 years of experience in education. All of those years were as an elementary teacher or administrator. She moved from the principalship of an existing school to open the new school.

Table 4.6 depicts the nine themes that arose from the series of interviews with Ms. Benson. Five themes addressed the establishment of a new learning community and four themes addressed challenges faced during the process.
Table 4.6 Emerging Themes from Interviews with Establishing a New Learning Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonding Activities</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of beliefs, vision, and mission</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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Katherine Benson held individual face-to-face meetings with each staff member after their assignment to Thompson Elementary. She believes that this outreach effort was critical to the success of bringing people on board at the new school. Teachers and staff members had an opportunity to share their beliefs about teaching and learning and to get to know their new principal. Following the individual meetings, grade levels met to begin their collaborative work. Grade level chairpersons next organized grade level dinners as a social activity designed to help grade levels bond as teams.

Visits to feeder elementary schools were also a part of the outreach program in the spring. Students had an opportunity to vote on the school colors and mascot and to realize that some of the teachers they knew at their current schools would be going with them to the new school. Question and answer sessions rounded out the agenda for the student orientation meetings.

Teachers received decorative invitations to their first faculty meeting in May. The meeting was held at the cluster high school because the new building was not yet available. The enjoyment of a pizza party set the stage for comfortable conversation among teachers who had already had several opportunities to get to know each other.
These conversations formed the basis for a first draft of collective beliefs, vision, and mission statements. Benson said:

I believe that the drafting of our vision and mission truly reflected our collective beliefs because teachers had previously developed a level of understanding and trust by meeting in small groups. Of course, we will review our statements each year and revise as needed.

A summer staff retreat at the cluster middle school saw teachers working collaboratively to put together student and staff handbooks, calendars, and instructional supply orders.

Open communication was mentioned by Ms. Benson as the hallmark of the new learning community at Thompson:

Communication, communication, communication. That is what it is all about. Shared learning and shared leadership will not take place without it. I think that we are off to a good start in that regard.

Stress was identified by Benson as the major challenge that she faced in the process of leading the opening of Thompson Elementary. Physical symptoms resulted from the stress and even involved one trip to a hospital emergency room. She explained that she believed part of the admittedly unavoidable stress of such a task was the time element of working as principal of an existing school while trying to organize a new school community from scratch.

The only staff member officially assigned to work with Ms. Benson as she started the summer at the new school was a custodian. Assistant administrators were not under contract until August. The same expectation held true for clerical staff. “Flying solo for a few weeks with such an overwhelming task at hand surely added to the stress,” said Benson. Technology was not available to Benson when she began her work at the new school. She was able to use one laptop that was attached to the server at her former school. The timeline for getting technology up and running was a challenge for Benson, but she is pleased with the technology in the new school.
In summary, each of the six participants has been discussed individually. The strategies that each principal used to bring people, ideas, and resources together to form a new learning community and the challenges they faced during the process have been revealed through a series of interviews. The data they revealed during the course of their interviews was corroborated by the data derived from artifacts that were available at the new school sites.

*Individual Findings Derived from Artifacts*

Findings from memos, maps, handbooks, newspaper articles, county documents, and system handbooks supported the data revealed in interviews. Handbooks revealed the result of collaborative work on beliefs, vision, and mission statements. Maps supported the principals’ statements that they had endeavored to place working teams near each other in the building. Memos indicated efforts to communicate in writing with all audiences and stakeholders including system level leaders. Newspaper articles chronicled the development of schools’ identities as portrayed in the media. The system level handbook documented system level efforts to support the principals who were charged with opening new schools.

**Common Themes**

Nine common themes were noted as a result of interviews with six \((N=6)\) principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. Five of these themes addressed the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities and four of the common themes addressed challenges faced in the process. Figure 4.1 provides the reader with an overview of the categories and the themes related to each category.
Category – Establishing New Learning Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Bonding</th>
<th>Beliefs, Vision, Mission</th>
<th>Outreach</th>
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Category – Challenges Faced During the Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
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Figure 4.1 Common Themes Arising from Interviews with Study Participants

Table 4.7 indicates the nine common themes as well as the participants upon whom those themes were determined. Participants’ names are noted on the left side of the table. The bottom line indicates how many participants emphasized that particular theme.

Table 4.7 Common Themes as Reported by Individual Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Bonding Activities</th>
<th>Beliefs, Vision, Mission</th>
<th>Outreach</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan Johnson</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Elliott</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan Smith</td>
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<td>Deborah Long</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Dawson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katherine Benson</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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Following the table, each of the nine themes is described and listed as a strategy for bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities or as a challenge faced
during the process. This section of the chapter will discuss these themes as they relate to leading the opening of a new elementary school. Each theme will be presented along with supporting examples from the data.

Establishing New Learning Communities

Establishing New Learning Communities – Theme One - Communication

Six of the six principals who participated in this study of principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year indicated that communication was a vitally important tool in the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities. All six principals indicated that effective communication was the fulcrum on which all of the other processes turned. Well-developed communication structures were consistently mentioned when principals were asked to reflect on key strategies that had enhanced the success of launching a new school. Anna Elliott stated:

The absolute best thing that we did was communication – pure and simple. We kept students, staff, parents, and community members informed about the progress of the new school in the spring and we involved all of them in the planning process through effective communication. From early meetings with parents, to our website, to newsletters, everything was geared toward effective communication and it really paid off.

Principals developed their own communication system with an informal support group. In January 2004, the newly appointed principals decided to meet monthly to share ideas and to commiserate. Five of the six principals reported that monthly meetings with colleagues were their primary source of support during the process of building a new learning community. Susan Johnson described how they worked together to streamline communication procedures:

I guess why the support group, the principals’ support group, is so important is that we are the only other people that have the big picture. One of the smartest things we did early on and we’re still continuing to do is if we had questions and one of us would e-mail and get the answer instead, which meant you get information without having to
write five e-mails, you only wrote one for the question you said you’d get and you copied everybody and let them know. That has been really, really helpful.

Johnson added:

The other thing that we did early on that was very helpful is that we met with principals who had recently opened schools and got their advice. I hope that next year’s group will draw on us, our experiences, because I know we’re going to continue probably at least until the first year is up, to meet periodically.

The monthly meetings of the principal support group continued for one calendar year.

Open communication and establishing lines of communication were mentioned repeatedly by all of the study participants. Communication vehicles included websites, newsletters, meetings, conferences, written notes, and personal interaction. Individual and small group meetings formed the foundation for productive work sessions for the initial organizational work of the school. School leaders used communication to work collaboratively with staff members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to establish a common language and to development the vision, identity, and culture of each school. In the words of Katherine Benson, “communication, communication, communication - Shared learning and shared leadership will not take place without it.”

Establishing New Learning Communities – Theme Two- Collaboration

One hundred percent of the study participants indicated that collaboration was essential for bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning community. Interviews with principals indicated their common belief in collegial leadership, with shared power and decision making. Principals described purposeful nurturing of the entire staff, student body, and parent community as an organization collaboratively focused on learning. In the words of Deborah Long:

First of all, I did some activities with the staff which were purposeful team building activities and also we had some activities where we worked together to talk about what were our beliefs and values and what was important to us and we worked to use that
Ms. Long also mentioned collaborative work as a consideration in the assignment of classroom space.

What I tried to accomplish was to have grade levels close to each other so they could collaborate, but also I had to consider those classrooms that had curtains and who will be most interested in sharing that space. I had to seek input from teachers to determine would this be a classroom that you would want because you might at times want to do some teaming and that sort of thing.

Anna Elliott echoed the focus on collaborative work as the basis for classroom assignments:

We do everything in teams, grade level teams. So, it was very important for the grade levels to be together. We tried to fit everyone close enough to have proximity to each other not only for the aspect of the teamwork but because they did not really know each other. I was pulling from three different schools.

Common planning time for teachers was mentioned by the six principals as a prerequisite for collaborative work. Susan Johnson described collaboration among grade level colleagues at Cross Elementary:

It came from them and it was in that context of professionalism that we had been discussing. We are doing CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement) and we have provided common planning time daily for them to work on the instructional focus and the scoring of the frequent, brief assessments. What has been really nice is that today we were looking at what each level is going to do next time for their instructional focus. Where the first time it was things that weren’t very rich, you know, it might be verbs, now it is sequencing, main idea, to compare and contrast. It just feels like things are beginning to come together.

Collaboration for instructional purposes at Montfort Elementary takes place on Tuesdays and Thursdays as explained by Anna Elliott:

During their planning time every Tuesday and Thursday we operate in grade level teams where each person on the grade level serves as an expert in a subject area and they bring what the grade level needs to be working on for the next couple of weeks. It is all instructional, we are not allowed to do anything business and they actually come up with their curriculum pacing charts. It has gone very well.
Student learning was mentioned as the primary focus of collaborative work at all six of the new elementary schools examined for this study.

The six principals worked collaboratively for the purpose of procuring needed fiscal and physical resources for the new schools. Monthly meetings and a notebook provided by the school system helped them to stay on track with the ordering of needed furniture, instructional supplies, and other supplies. Joan Smith explained:

We divided up responsibilities for e-mail requests so that each department in the school system didn’t get six identical requests for information about language arts textbooks, for example. We each took an area and that worked well for us. I think it helped the system, too. We kept each other on track with timelines for ordering.

Five of the six principals characterized the monthly meetings with colleagues as beneficial in terms of support for bringing ideas and resources together as they worked to establish new learning communities.

Collaboration with students, parents, and community members was also viewed as an essential part of the process of opening a new school. The student council at Colonial Hills Elementary worked together to draft a statement about the ideal Colonial Hills student along with discussion about what students should expect from one another in their new learning environment. Lisa Dawson met with the Colonial Hills neighborhood Education Committee in the spring to begin the process of collaborative work to make Colonial Hills an outstanding school for student learning, the number one goal as expressed by the community.

All six schools held Local School Council elections in the fall as required by Georgia Law. School councils serve as an advisory group to the principal with some limited decision-making authority. Each council is comprised of two teachers elected by the staff, two parents elected by the parents, and two representatives from the business community. One of the business representatives is appointed by the Board of Education and one is elected by the
members of the Local School Council. Local School Councils bring the perspective of all stakeholders to the table. The principals of the new schools utilized this organization as a venue for truly collaborative work. Katherine Benson described the work of the council at Thompson Elementary:

> Our council is in the process of analyzing student achievement data for our students. The new START (Student Assessment Reporting Tool) computer program allows us to do this for our current students even though they are feeding in from different schools. We are looking at strengths and weaknesses in order to collectively formulate our Local School Plan for Improvement.

The Parent Teacher Association was another organization with built in structures for collaborative work through committees. The state and county level PTA served as a resource for the establishment of new PTAs at each school. Lisa Dawson stated:

> I have been working very hard with our PTA. They have become a tremendous fund raising machine. We have tremendous, tremendous parent support.

The work of the Parent Teacher Association at each school reflected that coming together of people, ideas, and resources to establish new learning communities.

*Establishing New Learning Communities – Theme Three – Bonding*

Six of the six principals who participated in the study described bonding activities as essential to the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together in the establishment of new learning communities. Each principal designed activities that were unique to their particular community and that fit their individual leadership style. Bonding activities helped to shape the identity and culture of each new school. Deborah Long described a spring soc-hop for students and parents to make their first encounter with the new school building exciting and fun:

> We had the advantage of having access to our building ahead of time. At the end of the year we were able to have a soc-hop which brought the community together and we unveiled our school colors and mascot at that point in time. Everyone seemed to have a great time and I think it made the children feel a special bond with the school because they had nominated and voted on the school colors and the mascot. From that night on, it was their school.
The process of planning Dedication ceremonies for each new school building has also been a bonding experience. Lisa Dawson discussed the planning of the Dedication ceremony for Colonial Hills Elementary School:

We believe that the focus of the Dedication needs to be on building the community and the children. The teachers and the planning committee for all this, we have teachers and parents, we really involved a lot of folks and this is what they want.

Whenever possible, planning committees for each Dedication recruited former students from that community to speak to current students, their parents, and school staff. In some cases, the new school name corresponded with a school that existed in the community many years ago. This helped current members of the school community to develop an understanding of the existing education heritage in that community.

Community Open Houses were conducted at each new school when the building was completed and before teachers moved in to give the entire community an opportunity to view the new school as tangible evidence of their tax dollars at work. Katherine Benson related the experience:

Our community Open House was held on a Saturday afternoon in hopes of bringing in as many people as possible. I was thrilled to meet many community members who do not have students in school, but who wanted to get a glimpse of their neighborhood school. It was a perfect time to invite them in to volunteer. Of course, our students and their families loved the beautiful, new building. I think it helped them look forward to the first day of school.

Traditional Open Houses for students to visit their classrooms and to meet their new teachers were also held at each of the six new schools.

First faculty meetings in the spring presented the first opportunities for bonding activities with staff members. Food, music, and fun were common denominators reported by the principals who hoped to bring people together. From pizza parties, to bus tours, to trips to the
local dairy for ice cream, first faculty meetings had bonding as the primary objective. Joan Smith stated:

We said we wanted to share our expectations of the way things were going to work and kind of acted real serious, no smiles, but that there were some things that were given and that were just non-negotiable. Then we put on that tape, “We are Family” and got everybody up and had them prancing around the room, doing a little train and just said again the importance of those relationships.

Faculty members also had an opportunity to bond through collaborative work beginning with the first faculty meeting.

Summer and fall staff retreats helped members of the fledgling learning communities continue to bond. Skyland Elementary staff members spent a fall weekend at a resort in the mountains. Their principal outlined the plan:

We are going to Sunshine Mountain Resort and we are meeting up there Saturday morning and staying until Sunday night and we are going just purely for fun. We don’t have any scheduled activities except for meals.

Cross Elementary teachers had an overnight party at the school in preparation for its opening. Principal Johnson said, “We are going to have a gazillion people spending the night at the school. There are some really fun things you can do in terms of time and resources”.

In summary, six of the six principals interviewed for the study detailed specific bonding activities that they believed help them to bring people, ideas, and resources together to form a new learning community. Building collegial relationships among staff members, with parents and community members as partners and allies, was seen as a precursor to the collaborative work of planning for student learning and shared leadership.

*Establishing New Learning Communities – Theme Four – Beliefs, Vision, and Mission*

Communication, collaboration and bonding allowed staff members at each of the six new elementary schools to develop a shared mental image of what is important to that school as an organization. Through collaborative work, the members of each new learning community drafted
collective belief statements and the beginnings of vision and mission statements before the school building opened to students in August. Four of the six principals indicated that crafting beliefs, vision, and mission statements was critical to bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities.

Susan Johnson worked side by side with staff members at Cross Elementary to draft collective commitments, a purpose statement, and a picture of the ideal school during their two-day summer retreat in July. These drafts formed the basis for more formalized beliefs, vision, and mission statements that were completed in the fall. Johnson outlined the process:

Dr. Ruth Morrison is so good at bringing people together. She came in and talked with us about collective commitments. Then, in the afternoon we talked about our purpose, and what did we see as our purpose. We divided into small groups and one group worked on a purpose statement, one group worked on collective commitments, and one group worked on ideal school. We came back together as a large group and shared the statements. Later, staff members kind of word crafted in small groups and came up with a final copy. As situations have come up this year, we have been able to refer back to our collective commitments and it is not what Susan believes, it was what we believe as a faculty. That has been empowering for all of us.

Joan Smith detailed a similar process for developing vision and mission statements for Skyland Elementary:

I had Dr. Ruth Morrison come in during our summer retreat. She is just so incredible at pulling people together. Also, Debbie Smart came in to do colors training. She used to be a counselor in the system. I know that some people do not like colors training, but it helped us to look at differences in personalities. Ruth led the pulling together of ideas that turned into our vision and mission. We really spent a lot of time brainstorming because we really, I mean we haven’t even been in the school yet.

The principals of Skyland Elementary and Cross Elementary elected to use consultants to lead the process of writing beliefs, vision, and mission statements so that they could be equal participants in the process. They reported the desire to send a strong message about shared leadership and shared responsibility with this activity.
A review of the vision and mission statements for each of the six new schools revealed six unique statements that reflected the shared ideas and collective beliefs of each particular staff. None of the six principals mentioned including community members or parents in the process of writing vision and mission statements. A focus on student academic achievement was evident in all six statements. A goal of measurable, continuous improvement was acknowledged in five of the six statements. Four of the six principals who participated in the research study indicated that the process of forming the beliefs, vision, and mission statements for their school was essential to the success of establishing a new learning community.

*Establishing New Learning Communities – Theme Five - Outreach*

Four of the six principals who participated in the study viewed their efforts to reach out to students, parents, and the surrounding community as major contributing factors in the success of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning community. Outreach activities ranged from social events such as sock-hops to meetings where parents and community members shared their expectations for the new school.

A community wide cook out was a successful public relations tool for Skyland Elementary in the fall. Deborah Long described the event:

> We had a cookout this fall for the entire community. Our business partner donated a cooker and their representatives cooked hamburgers and hotdogs and brought soft drinks and cookies and chips. Our point was not to make money but to create a sense of community. We had a huge turnout from the surrounding community and everyone seemed to have a great time.

Similar events at other schools included sock-hops, bingo nights, and fall festivals.

All six of the principals who participated in the study visited feeder elementary schools so that students could get to know their new principal and begin to feel a part of the school by selecting school colors and the school mascot. These meetings sometimes held some surprises as related by Susan Johnson:
It was really funny because the first one I went to we had a translator, but the teachers said these kids understand English well enough so you will be okay. At the second school we had the translator and there were lots of students who did not understand English. I realized quickly that I needed to cut to the chase because at any given point in time almost half of the students were not going to understand one of us during the translation process. I let them ask questions and that was hilarious, “Are we going to have a jump rope team? Are we going to have fun?” I had a pencil for them and as they went out the door I said, “Welcome to Cross”.

Principal visits to the feeder schools were reported as one of the most positive activities in which principals who were opening new schools participated. They had the goal of helping students begin to feel connected with the new school. However, they also helped the principals visualize the real live students who would be entering that school in August. “In everything that we did, I kept that picture of those students in my mind and we worked to create an excellent school for them”, said Katherine Benson.

Lisa Dawson reached out to a parent community with very high expectations for education. A large subdivision in the Colonial Hills Elementary school district has an education committee. Ms. Dawson requested a meeting with the committee in an effort to be proactive. She recounted:

I invited myself, yes I did. I invited myself to the education committee. I was told that maybe three people were going to show up. There were 35 that night. I sat and I listened and that gave me a very good idea of where they were coming from and what they were looking for and what they were expecting.

Ms. Dawson followed up the visit with an invitation for parents to visit her current school.

In summary, four out of six study participants reported that outreach activities aided significantly in the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form a new learning community.
Challenges

What challenges do principals who are leading the opening of new schools face during the process? Four common themes relating to the challenges of opening a new school will be discussed.

_Challenges – Theme Six – Stress_

All of the principals who participated in this study reported symptoms of stress. Five out of six of the participants developed physical symptoms that required medical treatment. Three of the principals experienced symptoms resembling a heart attack that ended up in visits to the hospital emergency room. Two experienced high blood pressure that was difficult to bring under control. In the words of one principal:

I think it is the amount of time. The stress is incredible beginning in about February when we start the staffing, when all that starts and then it just builds, builds, builds, and builds and then you just don’t get a break.

Another principal explained:

Starting over with a staff, trying to pull people together, who have had different expectations at their school and knowing the importance of accountability. Just one example, at one of the feeder schools they did not teach math every day and it was six weeks into the school year before I realized that we have some teachers that weren’t teaching math every day and that, oh my gosh, we’re not teaching math every day! That worry of lying in bed at night with everything on the chest, oh gosh, our math.

The period of time when principals who were opening new schools served as the principal of an existing school while leading the opening of a new school was reported as the most stressful. In principals’ words:

I think the most stressful time in all of this was in May, definitely in May. You are trying to close out the year at one school and people say that you start at the new school on July 1, but that does not work. There are so many things that have to be done. It just does not work that way.

The time when I thought I was having a heart attack was when I was doing both schools. I remember being at the hospital having the tests done and thinking this job is going to kill me. It was frightening. It was truly frightening.
I am at this building early and I am working until after 9:00 p.m. since being named last year. I have not had a vacation. I am tired. Certainly the stress has been a major, major factor and hopefully my blood pressure will get under control.

The most stressful time was trying to balance both schools at the same time last year, doing both of them. I did not want the current school to think or feel like I was neglecting them. So struggling, trying to work on the new school at night and on the weekends. So probably the balancing of the two and I would say in my mind if I can get to the first day of the new school, but that is when all of the managerial and the nuts and bolts and the parent stuff hit.

I felt that I owed my current school my best as long as I was officially principal there. The stress of trying to do both jobs at once was absolutely incredible. At one point I actually thought I was having a heart attack and ended up in the emergency room.

Probably one of the most stressful times was while still doing both schools, especially in June. I was trying to help the new principal come on board and I could not get into the new school. It was very frustrating.

In summary, all six of the principals who were participants in this study experienced symptoms of stress. The months when principals were working as leaders of both schools were reported to be the most stressful.

Challenges – Theme Seven - Staffing

The process of staffing the new elementary school was revealed as a challenge by five of the six study participants. Principals indicated that they had limited opportunities to interview and hire staff members for the new schools. The displacement of contracted faculty members from feeder schools created readymade faculties for five out of the six principals. A principal explained, “I knew going in that most of my staff would come from the feeder schools. We were able to take seven from our current school”.

Volunteers from feeder schools were accepted for the new schools as a first step. The principals who were opening new schools attended faculty meetings at the new schools along with a Human Resources Director who explained the transfer process. One principal described
the meetings, “I stood up and essentially tried to sell myself, you know in five minutes or less
and then they passed out the forms”.

If volunteers for transfer did not sufficiently bring down the staff numbers at a feeder
school, teachers were involuntarily transferred to the new school. Principals of new schools were
in a situation of accepting staff members who were not in a grade level or subject area that they
needed for the new school. “We just went down the list and they were placed, that was it”,
according to one principal. Another principal said:

I felt like a dumping ground for my fellow principals. I had about 130 teachers volunteer
to transfer here from other schools in the system and I could not take even one of them.
That is a shame. Unless people work in a crowded school that may feed into a new school
they will not be in the right place to feed into a new school. They do not ever have that
chance.

Another source of frustration was the fact that the displacement process was also in effect for
assistant administrators. One of the participants expressed concern:

Because of the displacement and the number of slots you may not get the administrative
team that you need or that your want. I think that piece is so vital that I wish that it
weren’t handled the same way as the teachers.

Given the limited opportunities to interview and hire staff members, the leadership
challenge of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning
community was even greater. A positive approach to the challenge was expressed by the
principal who said, “While in some cases you don’t have as much flexibility as people think as to
who exactly comes, you do in terms of what they will be doing”.

Principals also expressed understanding of the limitations faced by the school system. A
principal said:

I realize that there is no perfect system. Our system is large and some structure and
control are needed. I appreciate the fact that we take care of displaced employees.
In summary, five out of six principals who were participants in the study indicated that the process of staffing the new elementary school was one of the major challenges.

**Challenges – Theme Eight - Technology**

Five out of the six principals who participated in the study indicated that technology was a challenge during the process. Specifically, the timeline for the installation and networking of technology and controls on available software programs were areas of concern as related by principals. One principal explained:

June and half of July I was operating off of a cell phone because we did not have phones here, either. I had no e-mail because they had cut me off from my previous school. The technology really was difficult – not having it ready when it was supposed to be ready. I can’t change little things on my machine that I want to change. The teachers are frustrated in that only certain software was imaged and they want more software.

Another principal echoed concerns about technology:

The most challenging thing has been dealing with technology. We are a whole new operating system, the system has not been tried out before it went live with us, so any kinks and things along the way, no one knows how to fix them, because they’ve never experienced it before and no one knows what to do. And also the level of support isn’t there, there seems to be a communication barrier.

A third principal stated, “The technology piece is the one. They are biting off more than they can chew. We have had continual problems with our technology.” In the words of a fourth principal:

Getting everybody up and getting everybody on line, getting things plugged in, getting people access to stuff and the right access has been an act of Congress. So I guess it has been less the hardware than the function that has been a frustration.

The fifth principal stated, “They are trying to standardize everything and you can’t standardize the needs for each school and still meet the needs of students”.

In summary, five of the six principals who were interviewed for this research viewed technology as a challenge during the process.
Challenges - Theme Nine - Facilities

Four of the six principals who were interviewed for this study experienced challenges related to facilities. Principals for the new elementary schools were appointed in November 2002 for an opening in August 2003. At the time of the principal appointments, the majority of the new schools were over 75% complete. While all of the principals viewed this as an opportunity to concentrate on people and organizational issues, four of the six principals desired more input on the completion of the facility.

Principals did not have the opportunity to give input on the facility prior to the opening of school. They did have the opportunity to select the colors of cafeteria trays and the upholstery color for office furniture. Reactions to this situation were varied. One principal spoke:

I was asked not to come in. It was very evident that they did not want me roaming around the building during construction. I felt it was just best to wait and when they were ready for me they would call me and they did. I think that to me that was fine. For other people I know they had to get in and they wanted to see everything. They have been very good about fixing anything that I found needed to be fixed. So, I was fine with that, where other people might not have been.

Four of the six principals desired more involvement with the facilities aspect of opening a new school. The signs within new school buildings came up as an issue repeatedly in interviews with principals. A concerned principal said:

I actually thought I would have input into the finishing off kinds of things. But it turned out I really had input into nothing, even to the point that signs were put up in the school. I knew they were not in the place where that person would be working. They would not move them because the plan said for them to go there and so it was a bit frustrating. If a room has a certain program name on it and that program is assigned to a trailer then the teacher starts out thinking, “That is my room and the principal kicked me out”. I think it would have been possible to change the signs.

The six principals who participated in the study reported making signs to cover the preinstalled signs.
All six of the principals reported excellent communication with the Facilities and Operations division of the school system. They were asked to complete a survey about the positives and negatives of the school facility and the opening of school process in the fall after the building opened. They were also invited to a meeting to discuss ideas for improving the school design and methods for improving the process of opening a new school building. A principal described the process of working with Facilities and Operations:

Opening a new school has been extremely hard work, but the easiest thing has been working with Facilities and Operations. They are so customer focused. They ask, “What can we do to support you and how can we help you”?

The six principals also acknowledged that they were working in beautiful, well-designed facilities. “People are so thrilled with the building we are in”, said one principal.

Design improvements that were suggested during the fall meeting with the Facilities and Operations department included the addition of drains in primary restrooms, more student restrooms, the addition of a back hallway for evacuation and security purposes, and more storage.

Four of the six principals who participated in the study experienced challenges relating to the school facility during the process of opening a new elementary school.

Nine common themes emerged from the series of three interviews with each of the six principals who participated in the study. Data and artifacts supported these common themes. This chapter discussed individual findings and common themes with regard to the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities and with regard to the challenges principals face during the process.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership experiences of six (N=6) elementary school principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. This research was conducted in order to answer the following research questions: How do principals who are leading the opening of new schools bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish new learning communities? What challenges do principals who are leading the opening of new schools face during the process?

This chapter presents a summary of the study. Discussion and implications for further research and practical applications, based on this study, are then presented, followed by a final commentary.

Summary of the Study

A multiple case study design was used to examine the leadership experiences of six principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. A series of three in-depth, face-to-face interviews was conducted using the initial guiding questions: How did you go about the work of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning community? What challenges did you face in the process? The study created opportunities for principals to express their experiences and perceptions. Strategies that principals found effective for bringing people, ideas, and resources together to form new learning communities included communication, collaboration, bonding activities, the development of collective beliefs, vision, and mission statements, and outreach efforts. Challenges faced by the principals who opened new schools included stress, staffing, technology, and facilities issues.
Discussion

This section discusses major findings in the context of current research.

_Effective communication and collaboration are essential to the process of bringing people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning community._ One-hundred percent of the principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year perceived communication to be critical to the success of the process. In the words of Katherine Benson, “Shared learning and shared leadership will not happen without communication.”

Research on learning communities supports principals’ assertions that communication is key. Shared learning and shared leadership take place in an atmosphere of open communication (Louis and Kruse, 1995). In a learning community, the principal accepts a collegial relationship with teachers to share leadership and decision-making. Staff members join together questioning, investigating and seeking ideas for school improvement. All staff members view themselves as playing on the same team (Hord, 1997).

Zepeda (1999) emphasized the importance of supportive physical, temporal, and social conditions. As the principals who participated in the study discussed assigning work spaces and scheduling, the work was done with an eye toward facilitating communication among faculty teams. “The grade levels need to be near each other so that they can meet to discuss what is and what is not working in terms of instruction”, said Anna Elliott. Teachers from all six schools were involved in selecting classroom spaces and designing the schedule. This staff involvement is evidence that communication is a priority for each of the new learning communities.

Communication is critical to the collaborative work of a professional learning community. In schools, the learning community is demonstrated by people from multiple constituencies, at all levels, collaboratively and continually working together (Louis & Kruse,
Collaboration was also viewed as one of the most effective ways for principals of new elementary schools to bring people, ideas, and resources together.

Principals described collaboration on every aspect of planning for and organizing the work of the new elementary schools. The faculties of each of the six schools worked together to draft vision, mission and belief statements. “I did not lead the process because I wanted to be a part of the process”, stated principal Susan Johnson as she recounted the process of writing collective commitments.

The ongoing instructional work of the six new elementary schools is also collaborative. “We do all of our work in grade level teams”, explained Anna Elliott. Darling –Hammond (1996) suggested that teachers should spend more time planning, conferring with colleagues, and visiting other classrooms as a means of professional development to improve instruction for students. The principals who participated in the study described their desire to create supportive conditions for teachers that would improve the quality of instructional programs for students. Katherine Benson described the goal:

We are all working together in a desire to provide an optimal learning environment for students. I don’t believe that environment for students can exist without a supportive environment for teachers. It is our collective responsibility to create both.

Boyd (1992) pointed out the highly interactive nature of people and physical factors within a school. This research supports the idea of reducing staff isolation mentioned by the six principals in their efforts to foster collaborative work.

Bonding activities and outreach efforts enhance the establishment of new learning communities. Principals who participated in the study worked purposefully to help students, staff, parents, and community members begin to feel a part of the new learning community. They were attempting to build what Zepeda (1999) called an interconnectedness among all members of the school community. Early activities saw the principals reaching out to students, staff, and
community members through a series of introductory meetings. Open Houses and community social activities sent an open invitation for everyone to become a part of the new school community.

Bonding activities for the new school faculties included food, music, and fun. However, the heart of each activity, as described by the principals, was meaningful, collaborative work. As teachers worked together to develop the beliefs, vision, and mission for the new schools they were engaging in what Sergiovanni (1994) called inquiry:

Inquiry forces debate among teachers about what is important. Inquiry promotes understanding and appreciation for the work of others.....And inquiry helps principals and teachers create the ties that bond them together as a special group and that bind them to a shared set of ideas. Inquiry, in other words, helps principals and teachers become a community of learners (1994, p.154).

The six principals used creative strategies to promote bonding among staff members and outreach efforts to bring others into the new school community.

The process of leading the opening of a new school is challenging and extremely stressful. One hundred percent of the principals who participated in the study reported high levels of stress. Five of the six principals detailed physical symptoms that required medical treatment. These findings align with current studies on the increasing complexity of the principalship. The pressure of higher academic standards and increased accountability for student learning was noted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2000).

DuFour (1999) described the massive change in expectations for educational leaders that has taken place over the past two decades. He explains the principals are now expected to be collaborative change agents, a daunting task. Research indicates that a typical principal works ten hours a day with eight additional hours per week devoted to extracurricular school-related activities. One in ten has been named in a civil lawsuit (National Association of Elementary
There is an unprecedented need for quality school leaders at a time when those positions are less attractive.

The principals who participated in this study doubled their responsibilities when they accepted the assignment to open the new school. They continued to lead an existing school from November through June while working to lead the opening of new schools in August. The challenge of opening the new school with limited opportunities for input on staffing, technology, and facilities added to the stress.

Implications

The implications of the research on elementary principals who opened new elementary schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year include suggestions for further research. Additionally, implications for K-12 school systems will be discussed.

Implications for Further Research

This study was limited to six elementary school principals who worked in the same school system. The findings of the study were not normative or necessarily generalizable to all principals who open new schools. The study did, however, give rise to the following ideas for future research projects:

1. A study of assistant administrators who assisted in the opening of new schools would lend an interesting perspective.

2. A case study of system level personnel who are responsible for leading specific aspects of new school openings would provide insight.

3. A longitudinal study of principals who have opened new schools could chronicle changes in principals’ perceptions and attitudes over time.

4. A case study of principals who have opened new schools at the middle and high
school levels could serve as a tool to analyze differences in leadership challenges at varying school levels.

*Implications for K-12 Systems*

Rapid growth in student enrollment projections will continue to result in significant new school construction and renovation in the United States. School systems spend more than 20 billion dollars a year on new school construction. In light of that significant investment, the results of this study suggest several implications for K-12 school systems.

Professional development for principals and aspiring principals should include training on the new ILLC standards for school leaders due to the increasing complexity of the job of principal. Specific training on the process of leading a learning community through the development of shared values and vision; supportive physical, temporal, and social conditions; and a shared personal practice would assist principals in existing schools in addition to principals who are leading the opening of new schools.

Consideration should be given to providing release time for principals who are leading the opening of new schools. The duties and responsibilities outlined in the Review of the Literature, when combined with the personal accounts of principals who have opened new schools, point to the high levels of stress caused by trying to lead two schools at the same time.

Monthly meetings with system level leaders from different divisions of the school system could address some of the challenges faced by principals during the process of opening new schools. McGhee (2000) found these meetings to be helpful in leading the opening of a new middle school.

Principals who participated in the study had virtually no input into the facility design. Teachers and community members had a corresponding lack of involvement. The National Design Principles are based on research and have been endorsed by the American Institute of
Architects, The American Association of School Administrators, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, and The Construction Managers Association of America. It is recommended that school systems review the National Design Principles prior to drafting plans for new schools. Particular attention to Design Principle three, involving all stakeholders in the design process could enhance the vision of the school as an inclusive learning community.

Principals who participated in the study repeatedly mentioned the need for additional student restrooms and a desire for more storage space. Design Principle five addresses the need for the infrastructure of the school and school system to support the latest educational technology. Getting the technology up and running in the new schools was one of the greatest challenges reported by principals.

The opportunity to open a new school is viewed by many educators as the chance of a lifetime. School systems should review staffing policies in an attempt to make the process of staffing new schools as open to all teachers as possible. Limitations on recruiting excellent teachers from outside the school district should be as flexible as possible.

Final Commentary

In summary, the implication of this research is that support from K-12 school systems has the potential to enhance the process of opening a new school. Professional development activities for all school leaders will enhance their capacity to lead communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Mentoring meetings with system level personnel hold the potential to address problems in a timely manner. Adherence to National Design Principals will create the involvement of more stakeholders in the process of designing the new school. Open staffing policies will improve the quality of faculties at all schools as principals and teachers seek the best match for each school’s collective philosophy. Adopting the policy that a principal’s job at a new school begins upon appointment will allow the principal to focus energy on building an
outstanding learning environment for students. Leading the opening of a new elementary school is a challenging opportunity to bring people, ideas, and resources together to establish a new learning community.
REFERENCES


Gewertz, C. (2000). Reader’s Digest grants will focus on school leadership. Education Week, 19(44), 1-3.


APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Karen C. Bryant

May 15, 2003

(principal address)

I, ______________, agree to participate in the research titled “The Principal’s Role in Opening a New School: A Comparative Case Study”, which is being conducted by Karen Caldwell Bryant, Program of Educational Leadership, University of Georgia (770-963-7174), under direction of Dr. C. Kenneth Tanner, University of Georgia (706-542-4067). I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary, I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive description of the leadership experience of six elementary school principals who will open new schools in a large, metropolitan school district in the state of Georgia during the 2003-2004 school year. The work of principals during the construction process and the first six months of occupancy will be examined. The researcher seeks to gain knowledge about leadership characteristics that contribute to the successful opening of a new school.

I understand that the only benefit to me will be an opportunity to read the research findings, reflect critically upon my own leadership, and build a relationship with a colleague. Hopefully, this study and the dissertation to follow will help local school, system and state leaders develop a deeper understanding of the process of opening a new school that will influence informed decision making in the future. I understand that I have been offered no specific incentive or compensation other than the fact that I will be allowed to read the results of the research when completed.

I have been told that this will be an interview study of six veteran elementary school principals who have applied for and been assigned the task of opening a new elementary school for the 2003-2004 school year and who are capable of reflecting on their leadership roles and responsibilities during the process. I will be interviewed by the researcher three times between May, 2003 and January, 2004. Interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes each will be audio taped and transcribed. I will have the opportunity to review transcripts of my interview for clarification.
The researcher will collect artifacts from each school site and field notes will be collected at school system meetings. I have been informed that there are no foreseeable risks involved in participation in this study. I have also been told there is no deception involved in this study. I have further been told that the results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will not discuss my participation in this study with anyone else. She will not attach my name or the name of my school to any of the materials such as notes, audiotapes, or any of the archival materials previously listed. I am aware that the audiotapes will be labeled to protect confidentiality and will be kept by the researcher for a period of six months, then erased. Transcripts will be kept for a period of one year after defense of dissertation, then shredded.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 770-963-7174 (work) or at 770-982-8523 (home).

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the researcher.

Signature of Researcher       Date

Signature of Participant       Date

Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Julia D. Alexander, M.A., Institutional Review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research, University of Georgia, 606A Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview 1

1. Please outline your background, education and training, and professional experiences to date.

2. What were your thoughts about applying for the principalship of one of the seven new schools?

3. Did you apply for a specific school?

4. Were you able to have a voice in the design of the school facility? If yes, what was your contribution?

5. Did you receive any assistance, guidance, or support in your preparation for the initial operation of the school?

6. How did you go about staff selection?

Interview 2

1. How were learning and work spaces assigned for the new building?

2. How did you engage stakeholders in developing the school’s identity?

3. How do communication patterns develop while opening a new school?

4. What job-related stress did you encounter as you worked to open the new school?

Interview 3

1. What were three key or critical steps/events/actions/incidents that made a difference in the success you had in beginning the school year in the new building?
2. What have been the most rewarding aspects of being in the position to open a new school?

3. What would you do differently if you opened another school?

4. What advice would you give to a person opening a new school?

5. Now that you have lived in the building for a while, what recommendations would you make to improve the design of the facility?

6. What suggestions do you have for K-12 school systems as they open new schools?
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