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Leadership Experiences of Secondary School Principals in Trinidad and Tobago

Asha Ramraj-Sookdeo
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Asha Ramraj-Sookdeo

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Leadership Experiences of Secondary School Principals in Trinidad and Tobago

by

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MEd, University of the West Indies, 2007

BA, University of the West Indies, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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Abstract

Meeting the leadership needs of principals poses a challenge globally. This problem is exaggerated in Trinidad and Tobago, as certification in leadership is not a requirement to become a principal. Additionally, the lack of empirical data about principal leadership in this country poses a major challenge in developing principals. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was to explore principal leadership in secondary schools in this context. The conceptual lens incorporated Neumerski's angle on instructional leadership theory developed from Hallinger's model and Theoharis's social justice leadership theory. The research questions addressed the nature of the principals' leadership experiences in Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on how principals experience leadership to achieve their strategic goals and how they perceive their leadership development. Data collection involved Seidman's 3-phase phenomenological interviews and the think aloud strategy from 10 secondary school principals selected from a stratified purposeful sample. Data analysis involved computer assisted qualitative data analysis software and manual phenomenological reduction techniques. Findings generated themes, leadership philosophies, context, diversity, marginalization, and social justice issues, along with power dynamics, principals' dispositions, and evolution as leaders. The findings also revealed an achievement gap resulting from socioeconomic issues and a gap in principals' understanding of social justice leadership theory. Implications for positive social change include developing principal leadership that can trigger strategic upgrades in schools' leadership and governance structures that can promote quality and equity in the schools, the workplace, and this society.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sookdaye Seecharan, who passed away during the final stages of this dissertation process. My mother was a beacon of light, love, encouragement, and inspiration in my life. She was a humble yet strong woman with sound ethical values and principles. While she was unable to attend school, she placed tremendous emphasis on education. She provided immeasurable support and motivation in all my educational pursuits. I believe she synchronized my accomplishments as her successes. Her aspiration to educate and create a better life for her children, not only moved me but inculcated an intrinsic passion and will-persistence to strive continuously to improve the quality of education and life for all children.

My mother was not only a pillar of strength and support for me; her strength, love integrity, honesty, and kindness were extended and felt by all that had the opportunity to know her. Our home provided a sanctuary for many of our friends, relatives, and neighbors in their time of need. I benefited tremendously from this beautiful human being and all that she has nurtured in me. Hence, I dedicate this work to her life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The changing dynamics of schools over the past few decades have placed increased global emphasis on enhancing principals' leadership skills (Fullan, 2014; Griffin & Green, 2012; Murakami & Kearney, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Tomàs-Folch & Ion, 2015). This focus on principals is due to their role in leading schools to success, improving pedagogical practices and school culture (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Hutton, 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Miller, 2016). However, there has been a lack of congruence between efforts to develop these school leaders and the increasing needs and challenges with which they are confronted (Arlestig, 2016; Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Heystek, 2016; Lee, Walker, & Hallinger, 2016; Miller, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Wagner et al., 2006).

Many developed countries such as Sweden, the United States, and the United Kingdom, as well as developing nations such as Jamaica, have recognized the need for improved leadership skills (Arlestig, 2016; Bush & Glover, 2014; Hutton, 2013; Murakami & Kearney, 2016). However, specialized training, certification, or development in principal leadership are not recruitment requirements for secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2016), which is not an uncommon occurrence (Bush, 2016). Many principals' careers may have originated from their positions as teachers, but teaching qualifications are not sufficient to prepare individuals to cope with their new roles and responsibilities (Bush, 2016; Slater & Nelson, 2013). There are also no mandatory developmental opportunities for principals in Trinidad and Tobago. Nevertheless, one of the primary benchmarks for measuring

successful and effective school leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is meeting accountability standards at various levels (De Lisle, 2012a, 2012b). Secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago are compared and ranked globally by their participation in international standardized assessments such as Programme for International Student Assessment and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (De Lisle, 2012b; De Lisle, Secharan, & Ayodike, 2009). Hence, the demands placed on these principals to improve academic achievement are no less than their international counterparts.

The context of Trinidad and Tobago reveals the need for an educational leader with a multicultural perspective (Brown & Conrad, 2007). Sensitizing principals about these issues can aid in meeting the social and economic demands of a pluralistic society (Brown & Conrad, 2007). A nation's economic progress can be significantly impacted if issues arising from this multicultural society are not addressed (Deosaran, 2016).

Further, given the mounting evidence linking leadership and learning outcomes, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive development program for principals. Thus, it was important in this study to explore the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. This study includes perceptions of how principals develop themselves to enhance school improvement and student performance. Further, the research was intended to provide evidence that would create tangible and credible suggestions for improving principals' leadership capacity and capability.

This chapter creates a context for the study. It commences with the background that presents a summary of the literature demonstrating the global and local framework of principals' leadership experiences. This summary leads to a statement of the problem, the

research questions, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. Also included in this chapter are definitions of key concepts and constructs, critical assumptions, the scope, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study.

Background

The development of principals' capacity and capability to lead learning in schools is a challenge for many countries (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). Though some researchers have suggested that principals possess a common skillset to perform their duties (Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Miller, 2016; Miller & Hutton, 2014; Noman, Hashim, & Abdullah, 2016; Slater & Nelson, 2013), the success and effectiveness of schools are also dependent on the principals' capacity and capability to contextualize their skills to meet schools' unique demands (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Lee et al., 2016; Miller, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Slater & Nelson, 2013). For instance, there is a need to explore principal leadership in greater detail in the local context of Trinidad and Tobago (Bristol, Esnard, & Brown, 2014; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Hutton, 2016; Miller, 2016). There is a lack of literature on principal leadership preparation, principal evaluation processes and outcomes, principal perceptions of successful leadership, and the historical interrogation of the leadership role of primary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago (Bristol et al., 2014), but extended studies on principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago can facilitate its diverse post-colonial context (Brown & Conrad, 2007).

The diverse colonial past has shaped the current climate of school leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, resulting in a society with a variety of cultural influences such as

Spanish, French, and English (Brown & Conrad, 2007; De Lisle, 2012b). This twin-island nation has a population of about 1.3 million people who are derived primarily from African descendants of slavery and East Indian descents of indentureship, who were both exploited for labor on the sugar cane plantations. The descendants of East Indians and Africans represent approximately the same percentage of the population, 35% and 34% respectively, and 22.8% represent mixed races (Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). Smaller groups include descendants of Chinese, Syrians, Lebanese, and Caucasians, which totaled 1.4% (Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). The social, economic, and political influence of these smaller groups are significant, and sections represent the elite in society; hence, it would be misleading to ignore these smaller groups (Meighoo, 2008).

Even more diverse and dynamic is the religious composition of Trinidad and Tobago's population. The Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, (2012) reported three major religious groups that include 21% Roman Catholic, 18% Hindu, and 12% Pentecostal. The other smaller groups are denominations such as Baptist, Islam, Seventh Day Adventist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodists. Although Trinidad and Tobago has such a diverse ethnic and religious population, there remains a strong British influence, as it was a British Crown colony from 1802 until independence from British rule in 1968. The effects of colonialism are still present in the strong British system of governance, politics, education, and law (De Lisle, 2012b). In addition, Westernized, Anglo-American perspectives have been infused

in schools in Caribbean nations (Brown & Conrad, 2007) without much consideration for the local culture. There have also been minimal opportunities for concepts that emerged from the lesser developed countries to become legitimized (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Lee et al., 2016).

In addition to this diversity in culture and religion, Trinidad has a unique educational structure. Trinidad and Tobago's education system has a hierarchical structure with one central authority, the MOE. Schools follow this hierarchical structure with the principal at the top. However, in 2003 attempts were made to decentralize the principal as the authority by officially appointing middle managers such as heads of departments and deans in every public secondary school. Additionally, the MOE incorporated an integrated approach to leadership by including school boards in the public government secondary schools. The denominational or assisted schools are also public schools; however, the governance structures of these schools are somewhat more decentralized as they have boards of management, which are specific to the religious denomination of the school.

The recruitment of principals and teachers in public secondary schools is governed by a centralized body called the Teaching Service Commission. The Teaching Service Commission is comprised of a five-member team established under the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. All educators employed by the Teaching Service Commission are considered public officers with laws and regulations to guide the performance of their duties. It is essential for principals who are the prime leaders in schools to be fully aware of this regulatory framework. This governing body is

the authority charged with the full executive responsibility to appoint, promote, transfer, discipline, and terminate the employment of officers. The Teaching Service Commission possesses the overall responsibility to enforce rules, regulations, and policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the school.

The cultural, political, and social constituents of Trinidad and Tobago create a unique dimension for principal leadership. Inequity issues emerge in several ways in Trinidad and Tobago's society. For example, in a study on two dominant groups, 61% of students of East Indian descent attended a university within 3 years of leaving secondary schools as opposed to 34% of students of African descent (Deosaran, 2016).

Additionally, female students of East Indian descent have dominated the university attendance, most coming from the denominational secondary schools. Further, data collected from the nation's youth prison in 2013 revealed that 80% of the accused were young males of African descent, of which 90% claimed that they were secondary school dropouts (Deosaran, 2016). This data underscores the ethnic disparity in students emerging successfully from the secondary school system. The placement exam for the secondary schools, Secondary Entrance Assessment, further exacerbates the inequities in the system (De Lisle, 2012a). Academic outcomes of students result from the placement in a stratified system of schools that favor the elite in society (Deosaran, 2016). Amid this dilemma in secondary schools, principals are expected to lead their schools successfully.

To address the challenges with principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, this study extends the understandings of lived experiences of principals in their schools. Education is a vital resource for the advancement of post-colonial societies (Deosaran,

2016). Targeting the key educational leaders, the principals, as the participants for this research may affect the inner circle, the school, and society. Acquiring developmental insights from principals' experiences provided epistemological, ontological, and axiological understandings about this phenomenon of principal leadership. This knowledge can further enhance principals' ability to cope with the systemic inequities and social injustices encountered in a pluralistic society. Governmental authorities have acknowledged the need for democracy and social justice to uphold national ideals; however, a significant hindrance to student success and upward social mobility is social injustice (Deosaran, 2016; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016).

Problem Statement

Effective principal leadership is an essential element in shaping the achievement, success, and effectiveness of schools (Day et al., 2016; Hutton, 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Miller, 2016). However, principals are inadequately prepared to handle increasing demands (Arlestig, 2016; Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Heystek, 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Miller, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Wagner et al., 2006). This problem is evident in Trinidad and Tobago, as academic learning about leadership through formal preparation and training programs are not a prerequisite requirement to be recruited as principals in secondary schools (MOE, 2016). It is also not understood how principals experience leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, as there is a lack of evidence-based research in this area (Bristol et al., 2014; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Miller, 2016). But leadership training for secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago would be more effective with empirical research about these educational leaders. There is a need

for formal leadership training of principals in the Caribbean so they can demonstrate successful leadership (Hutton, 2016; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2012).

Researchers have highlighted multiple ways to address the need for principal training. School principals in the Caribbean region derive their leadership skills primarily from experiential learning about leadership (Miller, 2016). Thus, supporting principals' hands-on-learning experiences with theoretical knowledge of leadership may enhance the quality of their leadership and improve their schools' performance (Miller, 2016).

Further, the mechanism of educating leaders usually involves the acquisition of someone else's knowledge from a third-person perspective, which is superficial and ineffective, and leaders need to acquire in-depth knowledge directly from those in the field (Souba, 2014). This type of research could help close the gap between the tacit knowledge acquired from practical learning experiences and the explicit knowledge or academic learning about leadership (Miller, 2016). Additionally, for principals to become effective leaders, they must acquire epistemological insights of their school context, considering the strategic alignment of these four positions: "people, place, self, and system" (Clarke & Wildy, 2016, p. 45). The principals' experiences in the schools in Trinidad and Tobago acquired from this study can provide support for the leadership development of principals in secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the leadership experiences of principals in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. There is a lack of epistemological understanding in leadership from academia (Miller, 2016), which

requires research to address this experiential phenomenon (Block, 2014). Thus, this study was intended to help understand the lived experiences of principals and emphasized the structures of principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, not on the attributes of a leader. The research drew on principals' perceptions to develop essences of the experiences based on their intentionality or consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). This research provides awareness about these secondary school principals concerning the quality standards they adopted, their challenges, and their projections for self-development. This study offers authentic, detailed insights about how principals have experienced leadership. The findings from this research may support the development of principals in the field of leadership.

Research Questions

I designed this research using a phenomenological qualitative approach to generate insights regarding principals' perceptions of their leadership experiences in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The research questions related to insights about the structure and complexities of their leadership experience in leading and learning to lead their schools. Integral to this approach is the principals' intersubjective relationships in their social world and their values, feelings, and judgments as they experienced their reality. Thus, I chose to approach leadership from a philosophical stance. For this study, there is one overarching research question and two subquestions:

1. What is the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago?

- a. How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives?
- b. How do principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools?

Conceptual Framework

Instructional leadership theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Neumerski, 2013; Tian & Huber, 2019) and social justice leadership theory (Berkovich, 2014; Miller & Martin, 2015; Moral, Higuera-Rodriguez, Martin-Romera, Matinez-Valdivia, & Morales-Ocaña, 2020; Theoharis, 2007) formed the conceptual lens to explore the leadership experiences of secondary school principals. These leadership theories provided an avenue to develop a deeper understanding of principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Instructional leadership theory suggests that the leader's growth and development are focused on improving learning and instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). However, this research adopted Neumerski's (2013) expanded version of the traditional instructional leadership to include improvement of instruction considering the context, collaboration, and culture. This theory involves a strategic and systematic alignment of the operating systems and social systems in the school to achieve the ultimate objective of enhanced student learning outcomes (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Schlechty, 2009).

Social justice leadership theory is built on a philosophy of leadership that promotes advocacy to eliminate inequity issues in schools. It eradicates marginalization and promotes democracy, justice, care, and respect (Gewirtz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg,

2002; Miller & Martin, 2015; Moral et al., 2020; Theoharis, 2007). Central to the vision, practice, and leadership of social justice is the advocacy for equality and equity in the treatment of issues arising from underprivileged, marginalized, and minority groups (Theoharis, 2007).

This integrated framework emerged from the concepts of quality and equity that are characteristics of successful and effective schools (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). Quality is ensuring that the students get the best results, based on the defined standards of excellence in a specific society by ensuring equity, fairness, and objectivity (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). Therefore, integration of instructional leadership facilitated the alignment with the concept of quality, and social justice was aligned with the concept of equity. School principals must recognize and develop sensitivities about the inequities and injustices in the system and provide support for all students to gain equitable learning opportunities (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016).

I connected the context of Trinidad and Tobago with the conceptual framework using previous researchers' works to support the theories. De Lisle's (2012a, 2012b) research indicated that Trinidad and Tobago's society has always emphasized academic achievement at the secondary level and thrives on an elitist colonial principle that structured the education system favoring the privileged. Thus, emphasis on the high stakes secondary school placement examination, the Secondary Entrance Assessment, continues to support the stratified structuring of the schools. Further, Deosaran (2016) illustrated the inequity issues emerging in this society, explaining that the education system in Trinidad and Tobago is characterized by issues arising from privileges,

mismanagement, socioeconomic class, religion, and corruption. For instance, there appears to be an achievement gap between the two major ethnic groups in the country. Using this prior research, I connected and aligned the conceptual theories with the background, the research problem, the purpose, and the research questions, and the context.

The conceptual lens provided a network of support for the understanding of all aspects of the research linking and interlinking the various elements. This integrated framework also helped in revealing how principals understood, analyzed, and synthesized the fundamental structure of their essences, creating a unified structural synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Further, the transcendental nature of the study facilitated the emergence of new insights. These understandings can also be included under instructional theory as an overarching theory because the central feature of all academic institutions and school leadership theories is pivoted on improving learning.

Nature of the Study

I designed this study using a phenomenological, qualitative paradigm to explore and generate understandings about leadership experiences of secondary school principals in their natural environment in Trinidad and Tobago. The research problem guided the search to make the tacit learning experiences explicit. For data to emerge free from my bias or prejudices, I approached the study of principal leadership with an open mindset. Hence, I adopted Husserl's (2002) transcendental phenomenological principles and practices to plan the design for this research.

Recent studies in principal leadership have accentuated the need for a more detailed understanding of principals' lived experiences (Hallinger, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). The development of the contextual emphasis on leadership in schools is important due to society's dynamic nature as well as its demographic and cultural uniqueness (Hallinger, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). This focus on the emic or insider perspective has created a shift from using the quantitative paradigm to study leadership to using the qualitative approach. The increased focus on conducting qualitative leadership research can narrow the gap between the researcher and the phenomenon of leadership. This emphasis can also lead to future studies to be conducted using the qualitative paradigm.

Researchers have emphasized the need to study leadership using the philosophical approach of phenomenology (Block, 2014; Erhard, Jensen, & Granger, 2012; Souba, 2014). Phenomenology can be used to develop leadership, as this research design entails a direct approach with the leaders to reveal the context of leaders' experiences, such as their thinking and ways of being that have helped them lead (Souba, 2014). Exploring Husserl's concepts of the "lived world" can help understand its essence or structure and relationships that characterize a phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Further, intentionality is the awareness of consciousness, which connects the subject and the phenomena experienced (Vagle, 2014). Therefore, to decipher the essences of principal leadership, it was necessary to determine the essential structures of the phenomenon of principal leadership that makes it what it is.

The phenomenological nature of the research provided a means to unfold principals' tacit learning about leadership. Tacit experiences are those that people unconsciously know (Polanyi, 1966). These tacit experiences are referred to as tacit learning or implicit learning. Tacit learning takes place unintentionally through an unconscious process by observing, imitating, and repeating interactions (Chuang, Jackson, & Jiang, 2013). Tacit learning leads to the acquisition of tacit knowledge that is used intuitively to draw conclusions and respond to innovative situations as they arise. In many countries, principals' leadership development is not a priority, so principals, such as those in Trinidad and Tobago, would be acquiring knowledge through tacit means (Bush, 2016). To acquire an understanding of the principals' tacit learning or the unconscious experiences, it was necessary to direct attention or awareness on these unconscious experiences so that the essences would unfold intuitively. Unearthing the essences or the meanings of leadership includes the involvement of both the leaders and followers' cognitive and affective structures interacting and influencing each other in their context (Block, 2014). This process includes leaders' interaction with the self, the people, and the context to acquire the essences of the experience. Hence, I developed this phenomenological research design to study leadership in this context.

The transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach for the study was developed primarily on concepts from the works of Husserl (2002), Kuhn (1970), Tiryakian (1965), Moustakas (1994), and Vagle (2014). Kuhn built on a foundation that provided legitimacy to empirical data being obtained from socially constructed knowledge, which can be done with the researcher's preferred methodology. Tiryakian

claimed that it is a matter of conceptualization of the social phenomena that would determine its appropriateness and accessibility to a particular domain or tradition.

Tiryakian's exploration of the social phenomenon requires cognizance of the relationship of both the objective and subjective realities or the concept of intersubjectivity. However, the Husserlian philosophy of intersubjectivity transcended this research. Intersubjectivity is an inseparable distance between the subjective and objective world, which connects the inner or subject consciousness with the objective or outer world (Husserl, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). This intersubjective world is not a personal construction, but a reality also constructed by others (Husserl, 2002; Moustakas, 1994).

For this methodological design, I proposed eight to 12 secondary school principals as the participants, using a stratified purposeful sampling strategy. I selected an initial sample of eight principals; two were from each of the four groups of secondary schools stratified based on their schools' performance. However, I purposefully added two participants whose demographic information was not represented in the initial eight participants, thereby producing a total of 10 participants. This strategy was intended to obtain the best sample, ensuring the representativeness of the population, adding trustworthiness to the study while ensuring data saturation.

Data were collected primarily using Seidman's (2019) three interview series for conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews from each participant. This approach enabled the participants to move from providing descriptions of their context into the description of the experiences and further the reflective, analytic domains of their consciousness. However, I engaged the principals using the think aloud strategy where

possible, which enabled participants to reflect authentically. It also encouraged verbalization of the practical and metacognitive processes that occurred as participants made decisions and rationalized what they did in specific situations (Hannu & Pallab, 2002).

I also utilized observation techniques and used a research journal to increase the depth and clarity of responses through reflective thinking and testing of the initial reactions. These additional techniques facilitated triangulation of the data and enhanced my intuitive decision-making skills as I developed greater awareness through the process. To acquire the essence of leadership in its purest form, it was necessary to remove of presumptions so that the knowledge acquired would be as authentic as possible; therefore, I bracketed or consciously removed preconceived notions, experiences, biases, or prejudices to facilitate trustworthiness in the data collected from the participants. However, even though bracketing of the researcher's experience is important (Husserl, 2002), the role of the researcher is also important in data collection and analysis. My intuition as the researcher was necessary to preserve the transcendental nature or pureness of the data collected. These data were analyzed using phenomenological reduction and analytic techniques using both hand-coding and Computer-Aided Qualitative Design Software tool, NVivo, to aid in the management of the data and the analysis. I employed the technique of imaginative variation to acquire an understanding of the fundamental structure of the essences, to create a unified structural synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Operational Definitions

This section provides concise definitions of key concepts and constructs that need clarification for this study.

Achievement gap: “Achievement gaps occur when one group of students (such as students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in the average scores for the groups is statistically significant” (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2011). This term usually refers to a persistent gap or inconsistency in academic performance among minority groups or minority student and their white counterparts.

Acknowledgment gap: “The acknowledgment gap is a disparity between some educational leaders and the communities they serve in understanding and valuing the roles of historical context and cultural, social, and economic capital in facilitating or hindering students’ academic success” (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016, p. 229). Tollefson and Magdaleno (2016) contend that it is necessary to reduce the acknowledgment gap as a prerequisite for narrowing the achievement gap.

Context: Context refers to all forces, circumstances, or systemic trends, be it political, economic, institutional, social, cultural, in the international, national, and local school arena that influences the role, responsibilities, and actions of the principal as the school leader (Hallinger & Truong, 2014).

Contextual intelligence: Contextual intelligence is the “ability to recognize and diagnose the contextual factors inherent in an event or circumstance and exerting influence in that context accordingly” (Clarke, 2016, p. 354).

Equality: Equality means that all students are educated regardless of their background or orientation, and there are equal opportunities for success (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016).

Equity: Resources provided in such a way to ensure all students have what they need to achieve their full potential (Deosaran, 2016).

Explicit knowledge: Explicit knowledge is easily articulated, recorded, and codified. It can be formulated and expressed through sentences and symbolic forms. It lies on the opposite side of the tacit knowledge continuum (Chuang et al., 2013).

Inequality: Students are privileged or denied equal access to opportunities based on their background or circumstances (Deosaran, 2016).

Instructional quality: Instructional quality is defined as the resources, activities, pedagogical practices, and processes, as well as the relationships related to instructional inputs and student outcomes (Brown & Kurzweil, 2017).

Quality: “The definition of quality is that the school has good results, or the best possible results, for students at a minimally acceptable level; the educational system decides what results are important (academic, citizenship, affective, or a combination of these, etc.) and the minimally acceptable level that these are considered good enough in a particular country/society” (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016, p. 8).

Assumptions

For this research, intentionality was assumed to have certain “structures and qualities” (Vagle, 2014, p. 29). Therefore, a primary assumption for this research was that the principals selected as participants were experienced, contextually intelligent, and

aware of their roles and responsibilities as principals. I also assumed that the principals selected described their strategic experiences authentically based on their intentional relationships or interconnectedness with persons, the context, and the system. Also assumed was that principals acquired tacit learning experiences to achieve their strategic targets in various areas, developing a better conception of their role as a leader who is responsible for shaping the school, its context, and its culture. Further, it was assumed that these school leaders identified and described the potential obstacles they experienced at various levels of the system based on their experiences in principal leadership and their focus on the phenomena for this study. Thus, the principals offered unique, authentic, and introspective responses about their experiences as they led schools to achieve their strategic goals.

It is the nature of qualitative research that respondents differ in their capacities, abilities to grasp their situations, and in their willingness to share those aspects that they believe themselves to be most deficient. However, their honesty and authenticity were tested by triangulating the data from various sources, and I was able to intuitively grasp their situation. Operating as a vice principal and principal in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, my intuition helped authenticate the responses of the participants.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was established through its purpose, and it was further defined and delimited by the research questions. This study was focused on exploring the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. The principals' ability to handle quality and equity issues found in this educational context

further defined the outcomes. The contextual emphasis and the nature of the inquiry necessitated in-depth knowledge about the experiences and perceptions of principal leadership in the secondary schools. Hence, the participants were selected through a purposeful sampling strategy and delimited to a range of eight to 12 principals in Trinidad and Tobago until data saturation was reached. The emphasis on secondary school leadership limits the transferability of the findings to other populations and excluded principal leadership in the primary and tertiary institutions. This in-depth contextual approach also hinders the potential transferability of the research to other territories or regions around the globe.

The conceptual framework of instructional leadership and social justice leadership also defined the parameters for this research on the principal leadership phenomenon in this context. These two theories were aligned with the concepts of quality and equity, respectively, and targeted a gap in the local literature. Although elements of other types of leadership, such as transformational leadership, strategic leadership, or servant leadership, were detected in the study, they were not the central focus. Instead, instructional leadership and social justice educational leadership provided a basis that instructional leadership principles and practices to improve learning and instruction are the main purpose of school leadership (Clarke & Wildy, 2016; Dempster, 2012). For this study, instructional leadership was perceived as the umbrella for social justice educational leadership, where principals are not only aware but advocate for creating a culture that promotes fairness, equity, and justice as a prerequisite for learning. Other leadership styles could also be perceived under instructional leadership, so the research

was open to discussion of these theories or concepts that emerged in the findings of this phenomenological study. But instructional leadership and social justice leadership dimension were selected based on the perceived relevance to the context of this study in Trinidad and Tobago, where the focus on academic achievement and inequities were underscored.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the study was the potential bias that could arise from using any type of qualitative interviewing strategy such as the tendency of a principal to attempt to create a positive image of his or her school. This desire to present their best self could result in principals overemphasizing the positive experiences of their schools. However, my intuitive experience working as an educational leader in this context, as well as triangulation of data, assisted in validating the data and helped in presenting a balanced perspective. Wherever I detected instances that there might be a controversial issue, member checking, bracketing, and other strategies were used to ensure trustworthiness. This study was limited by my knowledge, abilities, and skills as the researcher.

Other potential issues encountered are limitations in the timing and scheduling of the data collection events. Additionally, I used a stratified purposeful sampling strategy to select the best candidate by increasing the representativeness of the sample; however, this sample was limited to the individuals found in the various categories. Apart from the potential limitation to generalizability that is normally found in qualitative research, the

uniqueness of the sample and the focus on a specified context further reduced the generalizability of this study.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Theory

This study contributes to research in the field. It may provide significant understandings of the degree to which principals may need to develop social justice leadership and instructional leadership that can be used as a foundation for future research on principal leadership. I linked social justice leadership and instructional leadership, indicating how the development and improvement of social justice leadership skills can lead to improving learning and instruction. This connection was developed by Tollefson and Magdaleno's (2016) concept of bridging the acknowledgment gap as a prerequisite to narrow the achievement gap. Enhancing principals' social justice leadership may reduce the acknowledgment gap where issues of social justice and inequity arise, enabling principals to focus on instructional leadership with an emphasis on improving the quality of performance of all students.

I also advocated for the concept of instructional leadership as an overarching leadership theory for social justice leadership. This rationale aligns with Hallinger and Murphy's (2013) model of instructional leadership that assumes a central position rather than a peripheral spot. Hence, this research may provide the support for other researchers to explore other leadership theories with instructional leadership as the central focus to improve pedagogical skills; thus, creating connections with instructional leadership as a major overarching leadership theory or an umbrella theory. This study can also promote

some unique connections and interconnections that can be used to map school leadership and provide explanations for other types of experiences.

Significance to Practice

Conducting this research using social justice leadership with instructional leadership provided evidence that can enhance the efforts to develop principals, thereby synchronizing the needs, challenges, and demands in their schools and developing the capacity and capability of principals. Consequently, the findings can be used to inform, plan, and design principal preparation, training, or development programs, to improve the professional practice of principals and the quality of leadership in the secondary schools. This research may enhance successful outcomes in school that could lead to the development of a more equitable and better-performing education system.

Significance for Social Change

Enhancing the instructional leadership of principals creates an opportunity to enhance teacher performance and student performance to better close the achievement gap—the persistent difference in academic performance between students because of ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic conditions. Practically, this approach can improve graduation rates, reducing secondary school dropouts. Enhancing principals' social justice leadership skills can also narrow the acknowledgment gap and engender a positive school climate leading to an increase in collaboration, harmony, democracy, and equity.

From a strategic perspective, this research on principal leadership has the potential to align positive social changes in the schools with the community and the country (Berkovich, 2014; Mafora, 2013; Norberg, Arlestig, & Angelle, 2014). The

improvement in the academic performance coupled with a positive school climate is likely to produce a ripple effect directly driving learners' success (Norberg et al., 2014). This type of development can lead to an improved work environment, job satisfaction, and productivity that may promote economic growth and social mobility for individuals. Most importantly, this development of social justice leadership awareness and skills in principals may lead to a reduction in issues of race, ethnicity, and trust and encourage the development of democratic and socially just communities and societies (Berkovich, 2014; Mafora, 2013; Norberg et al., 2014; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Slater, Potter, Torres, & Briceno, 2014).

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the research problem of how principals are inadequately prepared to face the challenges they encounter. This issue led to the purpose of the study: to explore and understand the nature lived experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. The desire to bridge the gap between the needs and challenges necessitated more in-depth insight into principal leadership. The need for heightened philosophical and contextual awareness fit the phenomenological qualitative paradigm.

A significant aspect of this research is its development in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. The literature claimed that this nation thrives on a colonial elitist system of education, which features issues of inequity and social justice while placing primary emphasis on academia. Thus, I connected the two concepts of quality and equity with instructional leadership theory and social justice leadership theory, respectively. This

connection provided an avenue for me to conceptualize this study and narrow the gap in the literature. I collected interpretative insights and meanings from the experiences of the secondary school principals, which made tacit experiences explicit. As a result, the findings of this study might bring about improvement in principal development programs, pedagogy, school culture, and by extension, creating positive societal changes.

In the next chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature on principal leadership to support and develop the background for a robust study. I explore, expand, assess, and research the list of potential key terms within the international, regional, and local spheres. Then, I connect the conceptual theories of instructional leadership and social justice leadership to the phenomenon of principals' experiences in the secondary school system. I approach schools as learning organizations and principals in the paradoxical role as the learning leader and the leader of learning. The epistemological understandings emerging from this study may enhance the process of improving social justice leadership. This knowledge may improve instructional leadership, which in turn could increase the possibilities for added success and effectiveness for students, teachers, schools, and society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The changing dynamics in society have inevitably led to changes in the school context (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016; Wagner, 2014), and principals are influenced by varying local, national, and international forces (Hallinger, 2016). This fluidity and complexity in the school environment and the pivotal role of the principal in improving students' success have increased the attention on principal leadership in schools (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012). However, there has been a mismatch between the efforts to prepare these school leaders to deal with the continually changing demands and challenges in their environment (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016).

In addition to the dilemma that principals encounter in leading successful and effective schools, a global achievement gap exists in the performance of diverse groups of students (Wagner, 2014). Schools are also not equipping students with the appropriate skills to enable them to lead successful lives in the future. School leaders need to resolve the "acknowledgment gap" as a prerequisite for attempting to close or narrow the achievement gap (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). This acknowledgment gap arises from educational leaders not acknowledging and acting on the changing demographics concerning racial, ethnic, class, and cultural forces that affect student learning, which impacts the education system. This dilemma heightens the growing concern that principals are inadequately equipped with the leadership capacity and capability necessary to cope with the increasing challenges of schools (Arlestig, 2016; Augustine-

Shaw, 2015; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Heystek, 2016; Lee, 2016; Lovett, Dempster, & Flückiger, 2015; Miller, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Wagner et al., 2006).

Hence, school leaders must understand the cultural, political, and social dimensions of their schools and equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet the current and future challenges successfully (Hallinger, 2016; Schlechty, 2009).

Central to this research is secondary school leaders in Trinidad and Tobago in assuming the role of principals without mandatory preparation and training for the position (MOE, 2016). The basis for their leadership is dependent on less formal intrinsic experiences and support structures within the education system. But principals have a critical role in leading learning in strategically sustainable and socially just learning institutions (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Lovett et al., 2015; Miller, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that principals possess an in-depth understanding of the various aspects of the context to create synergy and strategic alignment in schools (Hallinger, 2016; Hutton, 2016; Miller, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). Principals must possess the foresight and ability to lead the learning environment in a manner that targets the current and future needs of their students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. Because principals are reflective practitioners (Clarke, 2016), studying principals' experiences became vital in supporting the development of quality leaders, enabling them to promote excellence in education.

The literature review in this chapter includes both empirical and theoretical articles concerning the experiences of secondary school principals. I examine principal

leadership among three main disciplines: education, psychology, and management. Following the literature search strategy is the conceptual framework along with four other major sections. The conceptual lens included perspectives of instructional leadership theories and social justice educational leadership theory emerging from the unique context of this study. As such, for this research, it is necessary to review principals' development of their notion, understanding, and application of these theories. I then introduce the key concepts related to the literature review, focusing on the nature and importance of principal leadership and emphasizing the connection between leadership and learning, which provides a different dynamic of learning from both the leadership for self-improvement and for improving student learning. Subsequently, I present a salient discussion to develop an understanding of tacit learning theories, knowledge management theories, along with implicit and explicit theories. The next section highlights the contextual impact on principal leadership, followed by a section on the strategies' principals adopt in developing principal leadership capacity and capability to become potentially better principals. I conclude the literature review with the phenomenology of leadership and a summary of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

To ensure a comprehensive representation of the relevant literature, I compiled references from multiple sources, both digital and printed, drawing primarily from the last 5 years. I utilized a structured approach to retrieve the materials primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles that were obtained from online databases. I also obtained printed materials mainly from the library at Walden University as well as from two

libraries locally: the MOE's library located at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre and the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. In cases where resources could not be easily accessed, the authors were contacted directly. The limited local materials included books and other articles related to education and principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, alerts on Google Scholar were created in these specific areas of principal leadership to ensure that current literature is represented and incorporated.

I commenced the online search using Google and Google Scholar as an introductory analysis tool to establish pertinent variations of the key concepts and how these search terms may appear in the articles. Synonyms and related ideas were also derived from brainstorming key concepts. Alternative to the key terms such as principal leadership were search terms such as *educational leadership, school leadership practices, school leadership and management, effective principal leadership, coaching or mentoring principals, leadership and learning, leading learning, and principal training and development*. Likewise, search terms were derived from the conceptual framework of instructional leadership and social justice leadership. Related searches were completed, such as *contextual and principal leadership, knowledge management theory, and tacit learning theory*. This list of keywords were expanded for searches in databases using Walden University's library from EBSCO database as the primary gateway. This search yielded results in various databases such as Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Education Source, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, ProQuest Central, ERIC, SAGE Premier, SocINDEX, as well as Taylor and Francis Online. Other online sources

used were UNESCO Documents Database and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development Library of international research in this field.

To find research at the level of schools, the Boolean operators such as *AND secondary schools, NOT preschools, NOT primary schools, and NOT higher education* were also used. The two main limiters were peer-reviewed journals and published within 5 years. I also used geographical locations to limit searches to obtain eccentricities about the region, country, or locale to justify the need for research in the unique context. These searches were also conducted using subject-specific disciplines and on databases related to the study in the areas of education, business, and management, psychology as well as policy and administration.

Articles were generated from many journals emerging from the field of education, psychology, management, business, politics, and economics. Articles emerged from journals such as *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, Journal of Educational Administration, School Effectiveness & Improvement, Leadership and Policy in Schools, Education Administration Quarterly, Education Research for Policy and Practice, Journal for School Leadership, International Journal for Educational Management, and Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.*

Finally, based on a gap in the literature in secondary school principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, the articles were sorted based on major themes and subthemes to provide justification and a base for the study. Hence, this literature emphasized four main themes after the literature search strategy and the conceptual framework. The pertinent concepts in principal leadership that were developed and analyzed included principal

leadership experiences and theories, the conception, importance, and evolution of principal leadership, leadership and learning, and the influence of context on principal leadership. Also, included are tacit knowledge theory, knowledge management theory, and finally, the development of principal leadership capacity and capability.

Conceptual Framework

An integrated conceptual lens comprising of instructional leadership theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 2013; Neumerski, 2013; Tian & Huber, 2019; Weber, 1996) and social justice leadership theory (Moral et al., 2020; Theoharis, 2007) shaped this inquiry. In this study, I explored and illuminated principal leadership in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Neumerski (2013) expanded Weber's model as well as Hallinger and Murphy's model of instructional leadership based on the premise that principals' primary focus is on improving learning and instruction. Neumerski advocated for expansion and integration of instructional leadership to include context, collaboration, and culture for student academic improvement. On the other hand, for this study, the conceptualization of social justice leadership theory in education was focused on the leadership of schools possessing, demonstrating, and advocating for the eradication of inequities and injustices in both traditional and contemporary marginalized educational settings. This understanding was informed by Theoharis (2007), whose definition of social justice leadership evolved from Gewirtz (1998), Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), and Bogotch (2002).

A robust conceptual framework should integrate different perspectives and disciplines to develop a brief view on the issue being studied (Maxwell, 2013). Thus,

central to the development of this conceptual lens of instructional leadership and social justice educational leadership was the need to narrow the focus of the research that was situated amidst disciplines such as education, psychology, management, organizational learning, and economics. The integration of the theories was also spurred by the nature of the local context, Trinidad and Tobago, and Tollefson and Magdaleno's (2016) proposition that principals must develop sensitivities to social injustices and social inequities in schools as a requirement for effective learning and teaching. Hence, leaders need to develop an awareness of social justice leadership skills for effective pedagogical practices.

Additionally, researchers such as De Lisle (2012a) and Deosaran (2016) provided evidence that links these conceptual leadership theories to the local context. De Lisle reiterated that Trinidad and Tobago's society places a high priority on academic achievement, and Deosaran uncovered inequities in the system. Hence, the integration of the instructional leadership theory and social justice leadership theory was the most beneficial conceptual thread for the study. This integrated lens creates a connection with the gap in the research where empirical discussions are lacking in social justice leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. This improvement, it is essential to focus on this educational context.

Instructional Leadership Theory

The prime responsibility of schooling is teaching and learning (Naicker, Chikoko, & Mthiyane, 2013). The emphasis on improving learning and instruction is the essence of instructional leadership in schools (Naicker et al., 2013; Neumerski, 2013), which is the

type of leadership for learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Although all teachers are instructional leaders, the school principal is the “leader of leaders” and should be the pivotal instructional leader (Backor & Gordon, 2015, p. 123). Thus, effective schools require principals utilizing instructional leadership (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Naicker et al., 2013; Terosky, 2016).

The emphasis on instructional leadership has become even more fundamental with the increasing focus on improving quality and accountability in schools (Gurley, Anast-May, O’Neal, Lee, & Shores, 2015; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). The emphasis on learning and instruction has become a priority (Noman et al., 2016). Therefore, principal instructional leadership theory includes teacher quality and leadership capacity, which have been attributed to success in education (Ng, Nguyen, Wong, & Choy, 2015; Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Teaching and learning are a core function of instructional leadership (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Naicker et al., 2013; Noman et al., 2016; Terosky, 2016).

Researchers have pointed out the need for the continuing expansion of instructional leadership theory to improve pedagogy and academic performance of schools (Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Naicker et al., 2013; Neumerski, 2013). For example, Backor and Gordon (2015) revealed that principals are often ill-equipped to be instructional leaders and require proper pedagogical support in nontraditional instructional areas such as cultural diversity, special education, instructional technology, and communication skills. This fluidity and dynamism with the principles and practices of instructional leadership theory have left researchers searching

for innovative ways of thinking about its reconceptualization and emergence in the future (Naicker et al., 2013; Smith & Addison, 2013). However, this does not diminish the level of the importance attributed to instructional leadership (Naicker et al., 2013).

Although several models were derived from the literature, Naicker et al. (2013) highlighted Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership that was extended from Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model as the most featured in the literature. Both models were characterized by aspects of the schools' strategic direction, curriculum implementation, as well as the development of a positive learning context. However, Hallinger and Murphy's archetype included observation and improvement of instruction and assessment. Thus, these models were used as part of the lens of instructional leadership theory applied to the study.

Social Justice Educational Leadership

Central to social justice educational leadership is the vision, practice, and advocacy to eliminate issues of marginalization and to increase equity, respect, care, and empathy to ensure all students learn and achieve success (Theoharis, 2007). Learners may be marginalized in various ways, such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, racially, ethnically challenged, lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified, and language deficient groups. This leadership paradigm suggests that social justice practices are aligned inherently with education (Bogotch, 2002). Therefore, to create a climate conducive for all students to learn, principals must develop their social justice sensitivities as well as their capacities and capabilities to lead. This understanding of social justice leadership can be incorporated into the core principles of instructional leadership as leading to

enhance learning. Consequently, developing instructional strategies to improve equitable learning opportunities to increase students' success could provide the link between social justice educational leadership and principal instructional leadership theory. As such, principals would lead their schools utilizing sensitivities and understandings of social justice to create equitable opportunities for all students to learn and achieve success. However, some leaders who are social justice advocates are distinct from dynamic instructional leaders (Theoharis, 2007). For instance, academic achievement is one of the primary goals of social justice leaders (Theoharis, 2007), and the improvement of learning and instruction are an outcome of social justice leadership (Miller & Martin, 2015; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016).

Socially just schools. Mafora's (2013) conception of socially just schools requires school leaders to expand their leadership to include family and communities. Mafora claimed that in communities where inequalities and injustices are prevalent, students are more resistant and undisciplined and display behaviors related to self-esteem issues. But the promotion of inclusiveness, social justice, and equity in schools enhances the development of relationships with the community that reciprocates these values (Mafora, 2013). They also experience an improvement in learning and instruction as well as the culture of the school and community. Therefore, the improvement of social justice leadership would require leaders to strengthen their communication and relationship skills to expand their leadership to the community to lead learning successfully. Mafora claimed that this approach might adopt an activist slant as it includes extending out of the confines of the school to the family and the community. This scholar contended that

strategic leadership is necessary to develop schools into socially just entities where there is a need to sync this vision of fostering equality, democracy, and social justice at all levels of the schools and into the community.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In the subsequent sections, the key variables related to the nature of the principal leadership phenomenon are explored from psychological, educational, and management perspectives. Firstly, I explore principals as leaders in learning organizations. With learning being at the core of leadership for this study, I searched the literature to clarify and elucidate the concepts of leadership and learning. Thus, learning is explored from the perspective of leading learning to improve pedagogy. These themes were relevant to the principals' roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders and social justice leaders.

Subsequently, issues of principal leadership, such as leading and managing, as well as the changing nature of school leadership, are explored. Then, I examine studies that demonstrated the relevance of the context to principal leadership from various perspectives to demonstrate the international, national, and local influences. Finally, in the last two sections, I examine principals' development of epistemological understanding from tacit-explicit exchanges as well as the development of principals' capacity and capability to lead schools more effectively. This standpoint enabled me to connect the self-learning of leadership by exploring tacit learning theory and the development and dissemination of knowledge. Finally, I connect the research design and research questions with the phenomenology with leadership.

Principals as Leaders of Learning Organizations

Schools as learning organizations. According to Iversen, Pedersen, Krogh, and Jensen (2015), equipping students with skills to cope with challenges for “an unknown future” is a fundamental goal of education (p. 1). These authors claimed that students would encounter unfamiliar situations and emergent challenges in their journey of life. Issues such as globalization, technological and communication advancements as well as environmental changes have triggered significant shifts in the work environment (Iversen et al., 2015; Senge, 2010). These changes have given rise to issues such as global economics, increasing pressures in cost, performance and accountability, a decrease in reflective thinking, an increase in the material standards of living, and challenges evolving from social and environmental instability (Senge, 2010).

To confront, adapt, and overcome emerging issues in the future, researchers claimed that individuals and organizations need to adopt a learning mindset (Clarke, 2016; Gmelch & Buller, 2015; Senge, 2010; Stosich, Bocala, & Forman, 2017). Iversen et al., (2015) suggested emotional and professional preparation for learners to cope with the inevitable shifts. Therefore, learners need to acquire knowledge, competencies, and attitudes in the various domains to lead successful lives. Yet, educators persist in their preferential development of the cognitive domain as opposed to the behavioral and emotional domains. Engaging in holistic growth would facilitate the development of independent, critical, and reflective thinkers (Iversen et al., 2015).

Stosich et al. (2017) highlighted the increasing awareness by researchers to align leadership practices with organizational processes to enhance learning and instruction.

Several scholars endorsed and promoted the notion of the development of schools as learning organizations (Gmelch & Buller, 2015; Kareem, 2016; Stosich et al., 2017) as these institutions demonstrate better performance (Schechter & Qadach, 2016). A learning organization is one where “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 2010, “Give me a lever,” para. 2). Therefore, these schools require learning-centered leaders who could use a holistic approach to ongoing teaching and learning that would require developing learning processes, strategies, systems, and structures (Schechter & Qadach, 2016). Senge (2010) explained that this concept germinated in the management field because of the demand for organizations to adapt to the changing realities, to nurture a learning mindset, and learn new ways of thinking and operating. He recognized and highlighted a lack of alignment between management systems and education systems as the curriculum of schools was not aligned with the changing demands of the workplace. Senge contended that strategic and sustainable changes could only occur in management systems if their needs are aligned with education. Hence, the concept of the learning organization was adopted and adapted from organizational behavior to characterized schools in education.

Learning organizations are characterized by Senge’s (2010) five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, and team learning. Systems thinking is a concept which seeks to integrate and to create that interconnectedness with the parts and the entire system providing a holistic view.

Personal mastery is an iterative process of continuous improvement through self-reflection, clarification, and refinement of personal vision, energy, patience, and perception of objective reality. Mental models are comprised of images or stories of individuals' subjective realities based on their deeply ingrained assumptions. Building shared visions are an extension of the personal conceptions of individuals to acquire commitment towards common aims. Team learning is the ability of individuals to use effective strategies such as discourse and debate to rationalize and synchronize objectives to attain goals.

Leadership and learning. Leadership and learning are core concepts evolving in the literature on principal leadership (Botha, 2013; Clarke, 2016; Dempster et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2011; Mitchell & Sackney, 2016). Coles and Southworth (2005, p. 5) argued that “authentic educational leaders are passionately and persistently focused on enhancing student learning.” Hallinger (2016) maintained that the foremost responsibility of any principal is leading learning. Therefore, it is necessary for principals to acquire a profound understanding of the learning process to promote sound pedagogical practices to lead their schools into becoming successful and productive learning organizations. Hence, reliance on traditional ways of leading schools is no longer a feasible option (Botha, 2013; Clarke, 2016). However, Clarke claimed that there is a need for greater emphasis to be placed on more flexible approaches and reduced dependence on codified knowledge. Effective leaders are continuously expanding their self-learning capacities and capabilities as proactive and reflective learners (Clarke, 2016).

Learning. Scholars expressed varying perspectives about learning. From examining the elusive nature of learning through the perspective of the school, MacBeath and Dempster (2008) proposed that learning is an inherent impulse with which we are born and continues despite schooling. “Learning is a persisting change in human performance or performance potential that results from experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 1). Learning is often perceived as the way we influence the development of individuals, communities, and societies (Arlestig, 2016). According to Senge, “real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. We become able to recreate ourselves. This philosophy applies to both individuals and organizations. Thus, for a learning organization, it is not enough to survive, but to enhance the capacity to create.” (Senge, 2010, “Give me a lever,” para. 45).

Leadership. There are varying conceptions of leadership (Northouse, 2013) that may differ conceptually, sociologically, relationally, territorially, and even in structure (Mitchell & Sackney, 2016). However, common to the majority of classifications is that leadership is a process of influence with the intent to achieve a common goal. The potential to influence is acquired based on power. School principals usually possess power based on their position. Nevertheless, many of these leaders also possess personal power due to their level of personal expertise.

MacBeath and Dempster (2008) analyzed leadership and pointed out that similar to how human beings possess natural abilities to learn, they also possess innate leadership instincts. In both instances, the natural processes of leading and learning are impeded by social and institutional norms and values. These authors indicated that the desire for

power and influence is inherent in all human beings, as can be demonstrated by the various social relationships and groups to which they belong. However, the institutionalization of leadership is prone to the development hierarchies which remove the natural “fluidity and interchangeability that occurs outside their rigid constitution” (MacBeath & Dempster, 2008, p. 2).

Formalization of leadership hierarchies created the inclination to individualize leadership, inhibiting its potential for shared or collaborative leadership (MacBeath & Dempster, 2008). However, the literature regarding principal leadership increasingly suggested an emerging natural progression towards sharing and collaboration (Dempster et al., 2017; Starr, 2014). Urick and Bowers (2014) contended that even the traditional top-down model of instructional leadership is mutating to an increasingly collaborative or shared instructional practice. While the principal is still primarily responsible for curriculum delivery, in many schools, the responsibility for pedagogy is shared among the middle managers in the school.

One of the characteristics connecting leaders includes the ethics of good leadership, which is ideally pursued in an educational setting (MacBeath & Dempster, 2008). Serving others, respecting others, and community building with values of honesty and justice are concerns of an ethical leader (Northouse, 2013). The Delors report explained that the most critical and enduring moral purpose of schooling is, “learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be” (MacBeath & Dempster, 2008, p. 2).

Examining learning as it relates to the discipline of leadership in education, presents a unique situation where it commences with learning, and the desired outcome is learning. Therefore, learning involves a process where the leader improves his or her knowledge and understanding of leadership, with the intent to enhance student learning through building leadership capacity in the school. MacBeath and Dempster (2008) articulated “learning enhances leadership and leadership so infected cannot help but make learning its central preoccupying focus” (p. 2)

Principal leadership. According to Botha (2013), principals are central figures in the leadership and governance of their schools. They are faced with the challenge of finding creative and innovative strategies and approaches for leading their schools. Based on the personality traits of school leaders (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016) and epistemological assumptions and beliefs about the nature of the human species and how they learn (Botha, 2013), varying leadership practices would be employed. These scholars identified principals’ conception of leadership to be an integration of the varying styles, modes, and approaches.

Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015) explained that principals’ leadership skills might not directly influence students’ outcomes. However, these school leaders are possibly the most potent force in the school who influence essential factors that can directly impact on student learning outcomes. Allen et al. (2015) explained that apart from principals’ ability to influence pedagogy through their instructional leadership capacity; they also control and influence organizational structures and school culture directly hinged on the advancement of students’ growth and development.

The quality of a school's performance is a direct reflection of the quality of school leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014; Naicker et al., 2013). Miller (2016) claimed that his investigation of the literature did not yield any studies where researchers were able to demonstrate improvement in student academic performance without effective principal leadership. Coles and Southworth (2005) stated that dimensions of principal leadership are not static and predetermined, but quite fluid and dynamic as the journey progresses. These scholars claim that it is filled with complex and perplexing issues that require leaders to integrate learning on school leadership using a comprehensive approach as opposed to reductionist thinking.

The empirical evidence demonstrated a relationship between principal leadership and improved school performance (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Finnigan (2010) reinforced this perspective and added that principals are key players in driving their schools' performance in both a direct and indirect way. They impact directly on teacher performance and shape the functioning of the internal processes and systems such as school culture and resources. While the principals' role regarding student achievement is vital, their impact on students is more indirect.

The research supported a positive relationship between principal leadership, teacher motivation, and teacher expectancy, regardless of the schools' status (Finnigan, 2010) and commitment (Marshall, 2015). Principals were also required to provide increased instructional support in high needs schools as opposed to other leadership styles. Teacher motivation was enhanced with this instructional support and transformational initiatives. Finnigan revealed that good principal leadership was

necessary to improve teacher expectancy, which was higher in groups of teachers that were new, qualified, as well as African American background. Finnigan concluded that there was a positive relationship between teacher expectancy, student performance, and school performance.

Marshall (2015) claimed that the effect of principal leadership on teacher productivity had been a contentious issue in Barbados by educational bodies and authorities. Stemming from this issue, Marshall sought to investigate the influences of principal leadership styles on the levels of teacher commitment. He examined the relationship between 11 secondary school principals and their cohort of 90 teachers. Marshall's findings confirmed that there is a positive relationship between principal leadership styles and teacher commitment. To measure this relationship, Marshall explained that he used the sub-variables such as "planning, decision making, communicating, organizing, and coordinating, delegating, evaluating, and social and professional support" (p. 44). Marshall's research demonstrated that principal leadership is not the only factor to influence teacher behaviors. Additionally, Marshall's historical analysis conducted by Supersad, Simmonds, James, and Henriques in Caribbean countries such as Trinidad, Jamaica, and St. Vincent during the 1990s, highlighted a positive relationship with principal leadership and teacher commitment, teacher performance, job satisfaction, teacher attrition and staff turnover.

Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown (2014) conducted a study to determine whether principals' leadership styles had any effect on student performance. Shatzer et al. compared instructional leadership styles with transformational leadership styles using a

sample of 590 teachers in 37 elementary schools to rate their principals. They used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to measure transformational leadership, while the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale was used to measure instructional leadership. Using regression analysis, the researchers deduced that instructional leadership provided a more significant explanation for variance in student achievement than transformational leadership. Additionally, Shatzer et al. concluded that principal leadership styles were more inclined to influence student learning and achievement than school context and principals' demographics.

The literature suggested that there is a symbiotic relationship between principals' leadership styles and their schools' performance. However, the context of the school is a primary factor in determining the leadership style displayed by principals. Kareem's (2016) research on the influence of leadership in building learning organizations reflected that all types of leadership styles are essential for building learning organizations. Kareem stated that in developing schools to become learning organizations, a transactional and transformational style of leadership is essential. Based on Senge's (2010) concept of the learning organization, the leader would need to demonstrate both strategic leadership and sustainability leadership to align and sustain various aspects of the system. Also, academic leadership is perceived to be socially constructed (Martin, 2017; Southworth, 2002). Therefore, the increase in diversity may demand a different kind of communication and leadership style (Arlestig, 2016). Researchers such as Theoharis (2007), advocated for improving social justice leadership in schools with a heterogeneous population. Various researchers have either explicitly or implicitly pointed

to the enhancement of student learning as one of the fundamental goals of various educational leadership theories. This inclination towards improved academic performance embraces instructional leadership as an overarching leadership style.

Leading and managing. Principals' roles and responsibilities are increasing in complexity (Ng & Szeto, 2016) and are not only linked to leadership but also management (Tomàs-Folch & Ion, 2015). Northouse (2013) explained that both concepts, leadership, and management, similarly involves varying levels of influences regarding outcomes related to people and accomplishing goals. The outcomes of the two processes vary in that leadership is dynamic and requires greater fluidity, while management's primary is order and stability. Northouse continued to explain that management is more bureaucratic with emphasis on completion of tasks and refinement of routines, whereas leading is the act of influencing people through paradigm shifts. Therefore, management requires a more unidirectional approach, as opposed to leadership, which utilizes a collaborative approach in the process of achieving goals (Northouse, 2013).

The changing nature of school leadership. Researchers highlighted the dramatic changes and expectations in the roles and responsibilities of principals emerging from globalization, technological advancements, and economic changes (Botha, 2013; Ng & Szeto, 2016). Botha's (2013) findings confirmed that society's shift from being more industrial to becoming more knowledge-oriented necessitates a cognition shift; thereby transitioning fundamental epistemological assumptions, beliefs, and insights about leadership.

In attempting to improve the quality of leadership in schools, Dempster et al. (2017) identified three major shifts emerging in the literature on school leadership. These shifts include the changing focus on leadership as a position to leadership being perceived as an activity. Secondly, there is a shift from individualized leadership to increasing collaboration or shared leadership (Starr, 2014). Further, the literature on leadership reflects a movement away from the generic model of leadership to more context-specific models (Hallinger, 2016). Dempster et al. (2017) claimed that this understanding is essential for policymakers and practitioners in education, to enable them to empower leaders through professional development and training and bridge the gap between policy and practice. Dempster et al. reiterated that student learning should be the focal point or the essence of principal leadership regardless of sociocultural and economic issues.

Dempster et al. (2017) revealed that leadership for learning has several core dimensions. Central to this leadership framework is the strategic alignment of various forces and factors with a moral commitment to the improvement of student learning. Therefore, the professional development and growth of school leaders are hinged on the evidenced-based research and innovative approaches for improvement. In creating a unified vision and developing shared ideologies to improve student learning structures and systems, it is essential to develop and promote the concept of shared leadership. This collective thinking emerged into epistemological insights manifested into well-planned curriculum guides and well-coordinated learning activities within a supportive learning environment. In the final analysis, Dempster et al. extend the learning process by

developing connections external to the school. In this way, stakeholders of these schools could contribute to the natural process of learning.

Relevance to this study. An understanding of the dimensions of principal leadership and the nature of the eclectic system in which these leaders operate is essential. Vital to this study is the epistemological understanding of key aspects of leadership and learning and its synchronism with instructional leadership, which forms the basis of this research. Integral to the development of schools as learning organizations is the dynamic role of the principal as the leader of learning. These school leaders foster learning that is relevant and needs to be strategically and systemically aligned. Imperative to the study is the changing dimensions of the schools and the need to improve student performance, in an atmosphere of respect and equity where social justice concerns are addressed. Hence, it is necessary to demonstrate how the principal's roles, responsibilities, and leadership styles may be influenced by demographic, technological, global, and environmental factors. Consequently, these vital insights could be used to inform policies and practices geared towards the improvement of development and training programs for principals.

Contextual Influences on Principal Leadership

Traditionally, contextual influences were not a prominent feature in the literature on principal leadership (Hallinger, 2016). If highlighted, this was usually done from a localized or nationalist perspective (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). International, regional, and cross-cultural exchanges caused by globalization and economic integration created an expanded awareness of this connection of context and leadership in the educational arena

(Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). My examination of the literature revealed that principals need to have a comprehensive understanding of their context to be successful. Contemporary studies avidly advocate for the refinement and exploration of approaches and strategies to increase appreciation of the context within the parameters of education leadership theory (Akkary, 2014; Clarke & Wildy, 2016; Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Lee & Hallinger, 2012; Noman et al., 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016).

Hallinger (2016) identified deficiencies in modal research methods that neglected contextual considerations in the study of principal leadership. He supported the need to explore innovative means of studying leadership in various settings to increase contextual understanding and to improve as well as refine educational leadership practices.

Pashiardis and Johansson (2016) reiterated the need for contextual studies to provide greater depth, detail, and relevance to research principal leadership. These researchers claimed that contextual emphasis narrows the leadership gap by improving the quality of leadership in the specified context. This focus has become extremely important, considering the dynamic developments globally due to the complexity of the cultural, political, social, and economic shifts. Hence, it is necessary to increase the depth, creditability, and trustworthiness in research on principal leadership. The literature reinforced the need for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in education take a pragmatic look at their educational environment and heighten their emphasis on contextual considerations in school leadership at all levels of the system (Akkary, 2014;

Brown & Conrad, 2007; Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Noman et al., 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016).

On the contrary, researchers such as Gurr (2014) and Miller (2016) questioned the level of influence attributed to this variable of context. Both researchers acknowledged that contextual sensitivity is an essential element in leading educational success. However, they claimed that the influence of context on principal leadership was being overemphasized. They stated that contextual considerations were embedded and formed an intrinsic part of the practice of principal leadership. They contended that regardless of the situation, principals must be cognizant of their context to which they should be flexible, adaptable, and able to influence favorably (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Gurr, 2014). Paletta, Alivernini, and Manganelli's (2017) research affirmed that principals, irrespective of the context, demonstrated a positive relationship with variables related to pedagogy and educational climate while maintaining their focus on academic success. However, these studies highlighted that high-quality principal leadership involves the principals' inherent ability to understand, consider, and respond appropriately to emerging challenges in various contexts. Nevertheless, paramount to leading schools to success is the principals' capacity and capability to adapt and cope with contextual issues.

International contextual influences on principal leadership. The international context influences both national and school policies and practices in various parts of the world (Clarke & Wildy, 2016; Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012). Shaping both the macro and micro contexts in education are global education policies that can be imposed by agreements with international bodies. These institutions include financial

organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other financial aid agencies in countries agreeing to achieve common objectives such as the Education for All policies (Dale, 1999; Verger et al., 2012). Verger et al. (2012) and Dale (1999) contended that other influential factors are derived from the mutual agreements by a group of countries and persuasive arguments influenced by best practices or evidence-based research. In addition, they claimed that international standardized tests such as the Programme of International Student Assessment could contribute to the standardization of curricular content at the global level.

My analysis of the literature demonstrated a disconnect in the alignment of these policies from the international to the local levels (Mukhopadhyay & Sriprakash, 2011; Verger et al., 2012). For principals to understand and acquire the necessary insights about the global effects of their leadership practices, they need to develop a multilevel perspective of the system to establish strategic and sustainable goals (Clarke & Wildy, 2016). This outlook would enable them to prioritize their interests, better rationalize their decision-making, and empower them to provide greater depth and clarity to justify changes such as curriculum and other school policies (Clarke & Wildy, 2016; Lovett et al., 2015).

Several researchers highlighted that principals utilized generic leadership practices in varying contexts (Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Miller, 2016; Noman et al., 2016). However, researchers raised concerns about the importation or superimposing of these models in the local or national landscape and principals' ability to apply these practices appropriately (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Lee & Hallinger, 2012;

Miller, 2016). Principals were expected to use their innate ability to tailor their leadership practices to suit local and national norms and to bridge cultural, social, economic, and political divides (Gurr, 2014; Miller, 2016). However, contrary to the view that principals possess an inherent ability to bridge the cultural gaps (Gurr, 2014; Miller, 2016; Paletta et al., 2017), several studies identified incongruence with these general practices and the local and national landscape (Akkary, 2014; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Hallinger, 2016; Lee & Hallinger, 2012).

Furthermore, Akkary (2014), as well as Brown and Conrad (2007), demonstrated scenarios where westernized Anglo-American policies and practices, the acclaimed ideologies, or standards, were expected to be adopted. In Lebanon, Akkary (2014) reinforced this situation and, based on his investigation, claimed that these ideologies were considered “universal truths.” As such, the limitations regarding its unique cultural orientations were not considered. Akkary’s results revealed that there are many role similarities with their Lebanese principals and those of their western counterparts. However, differences were detected through the reduction of attention on areas such as instructional leadership and reduced responsibilities as a school improvement leader. Additionally, principals perceived their role as a “highly idiosyncratic craft” (Akkary, 2014, p. 718). Hence, they adopted greater autocracy in the leadership of their schools.

On the other hand, Brown and Conrad (2007) claimed that there is a tendency to consider the dominant Anglo-American perspective as the global position. However, these western perceptions related to leadership policy in schools may not be appropriate or relevant to the situation. Noman et al. (2016) supported the need for increased

emphasis on contextual considerations to increase opportunities for school success. They also cautioned policymakers and practitioners in education against the overreliance on “borrowed models” and the need for practitioners to demonstrate contextual sensitivity in their decision-making process (Noman et al., 2016, p. 1).

The demands of the different cultural contexts are grounded on the research done by Hofstede (2011), where he classified the various countries in the world based on their distinct dimensions of culture. Hallinger (2016), as well as Lee and Hallinger (2012), demonstrated how the principals’ role and behavior are shaped by their institutional context in the international arena. They explained that the institutional contextual alignment refers to the systemic alignment of the education system at the local, state, and regional levels. It is based on relationships, practices, and structures that appear to influence the time allocation of principals in the areas of instructional leadership, management, and community collaboration.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) contended that there were differences in time spent on the different leadership approaches and strategies based on the type of structure in the education system. The more structured the system, the higher the power-distance, increased autocracy, decreased collaboration, and reduced time spent on instructional leadership. Lee and Hallinger explained that centralized systems usually are more structured and are defined by less time allocation for principals in the outlined areas in countries such as Kuwait, Thailand, and Vietnam as opposed to the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. They demonstrated statistically significant differences

in the time principals spent on the job in Kuwait as opposed to Canada. Also, the principals' practice may vary based on existing policies and norms.

Principals in decentralized systems demonstrated greater autonomy over the recruitment process of their teachers as opposed to the more structured centralized the central body, such as the MOE, conducts the recruitment. Additionally, changes in the policy context impact the axiological assumptions that created a shift in the institutional context or culture. The emphasis on educational value was particularly noticeable from the 21st century with the shifting educational quality and accountability systems in the United States (Hallinger, 2016).

National and local contextual influences on principal leadership. The increasing shift towards systems thinking and contextual sensitivity triggered an upsurge in research in the national context as it poses tremendous implications for principal leadership (Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). In attempting to study this impact, several researchers dissected the national influences in various forms. These macro context indicators include social and cultural dimensions (Akkary, 2014; Gurr, 2014; Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Ylimaki, Bennett, Fan, & Villasenor, 2012), the political context (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016;), and the economic factors as well as cultural and institutional structures (Levin & Lockheed, 2012; Riley at al., 2013; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). However, the robust interconnected nature of the system creates difficulty in attempting to disengage the elements of the context.

Hallinger (2016) emphasized that it is essential for principals to be contextually sensitive to be successful school leaders. He highlighted strategies, methods, and approaches that principals use to adapt and adjust their context. He examined principal leadership using contextual dimensions such as institutional, community, sociocultural, political, economic, and school improvement context. This increasing interaction and rising sensitivity to the national cultures and variation in the norms of nations led to the accentuation of the value-laden nature of educational leadership. Recognition and appreciation of the sociocultural context could provide vital evidence of the value system of the country.

Political context. Research has demonstrated that the political context of a society shaped the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of school leaders (Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Zembylas and Iasonos (2016) claimed that the political instability in Cyprus influences immigration, economic, and ethnic strives that filter into the school system. Due to the upsurge in the population of Cyprus within two years due to immigration crises and economic crises in a politically sensitive context, principals attempted to juggle their leadership style to meet the needs of their schools. Hence, many principals adopted a social justice leadership style to meet the needs of marginalized students.

Hallinger and Truong (2014) identified explicit ways in which the political climate affected the normative practices of school leaders. According to Hallinger (2016), the political authorities frequently decide the national policies and prioritize the educational outcomes. For example, in Thailand, the leadership of the schools defined

and prioritized the national goals of education. Hence knowledge application capabilities, as well as student ethics and happiness, take precedence in educational development. Knowledge dissemination is also high on the agenda in the social and political integration in education in Malaysia. However, in Vietnam, obedience to the sole Communist rule is the primary goal of education and takes priority over cultural transmission, knowledge dissemination, and skill development.

Additionally, Hallinger and Truong (2014) claimed that the roles and responsibilities of principals are dependent on their policy context and the level of structure of the system. Walker and Ko (2011) stated that the change in the policy context to include increasing educational quality and accountability has consequently impacted the roles and responsibilities of principals. Hallinger and Truong explained that principals in decentralized systems such as in the US, Canada, and Britain are an integral part of the recruitment process for principals and teachers. Whereas, in many of the centralized systems such as Vietnam, Thailand, Turkey, and Greece, they are not involved in the recruitment process.

Furthermore, Bhengu and Myende (2016) explained how the changing of national policies in South Africa brought on by an increase in democracy affected the level of school governance. These researchers stated that the principals were cognizant of the fact that it was necessary to synchronize the essential nature of these policies with the local and community culture. They stated that successful principals acknowledged that policy is used to guide leadership. However, in evaluating policies against the best possible solutions in the specified context, principals were faced with a situation where policies

were not congruent with the community values. Nevertheless, the leadership was expected to go above and beyond compliance to find a workable, lawful solution for that specific context. In Asian countries, successful principals did not distinguish differences between their political and educative context and so opted to integrate their work into the system as opposed to challenging it (Lee et al., 2016).

Economic context. Levin and Lockheed (2012) explained that the nature of the principals' work would be affected by the economic viability of a nation. The philosophy of nations and their governments affect their economic policies and their allocation to its education system. For example, the distribution of funding may influence the quality of teachers attracted to the organization, the resources allocated, and the infrastructure such as labs, libraries, and technological access. Therefore, principals in deprived environments would encounter different challenges because their fiscal policies would differ (Hallinger, 2016), and they would be required to demonstrate different leadership, approaches, and behaviors.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) suggested that the economic context of a country can impact how principals perceive and structure their roles, responsibilities, and other work-related functions. Several principals considered the effects of their economic situation before making decisions in their schools to prioritize work-related activities (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Lee & Hallinger, 2012). Bhengu and Myende (2016) supported this perspective. They suggested that successful school leaders in deprived contexts were dynamic, adaptable, flexible, and consistently evaluating their decisions to ensure the best possible outcomes. These leaders asserted that leading schools in a deprived context is

about meeting the needs of each student and not about compliance or one-size-fits-all policies. Bhengu and Myende explained for these leaders to be successful principals in deprived contexts; they needed to adapt and frame their leadership based on their evaluation and conceptualization of the best possible results.

On the other hand, the economic context of a nation determines the type of policies implemented in education and its implications for the leadership of schools. For example, the United States' decision to spend billions of dollars to close the achievement gap created a situation where there was an increase in accountability systems (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). School leaders would have encountered a shift in the conception of educational value. Therefore, the political decisions would have implications for social change in education and the axiological assumptions of the low performing students. Social justice issues, as well as issues of equity and equality, would become more relevant to the leadership of the schools.

Organizational and cultural context. Lee and Hallinger (2012) demonstrated how organizational and cultural context shapes principals' leadership practices. They highlighted that principals' time on tasks was reduced with an increase in the formalization and structure of the organizational context. They asserted that an increase in structure and formalization would reduce ambiguities and hence reduce the time allocated to solving administrative issues.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) used a two-level hierarchical model to study how attributes of the macro-level contexts influenced principals' behavior. These researchers utilized data from the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study assessment

to analyze 5,927 principals from 34 nations. They examined varying national contexts to determine the variation between time usage and resource allocation. In addition, they studied the dimensions such as economic development, societal culture, and educational systems in a variety of contexts to decipher how principals utilized their time to perform instructional leadership functions, administrative tasks, and deal with relationship issues related to parents and the community. The findings revealed that there are variations in time use and allocation in various countries. Nevertheless, economic, sociocultural, and institutional structures may affect the trends.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) claimed that principals in societies with higher gross domestic product tend to spend more time on the job. Lee and Hallinger speculated about the rationale for these outcomes. They suggested that it may be possible that principals from the lesser developed countries may need to source more than one means of income. Hence, they had less time to spend on the job. Additionally, Lee and Hallinger suggested that there is the possibility that principals' roles and responsibilities in more economically developed societies are more defined professionally in their management roles as principals.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) pointed out that principals from less hierarchically organized societies spend more time on instructional leadership than societies with higher power-distance index. These scholars explained that societies with lower power-distance index had more collegial relationships and found it easier to adopt instructional leadership roles, while those societies with a high power-distance index may view the instructional leadership as interfering with the teachers' pedagogy. In addition, Lee and

Hallinger claimed that less hierarchically structured societies developed closer relationships with their school communities, as opposed to the higher power-distance index societies. These authors deduced that the school is a microcosm of society and reflects the ethics and principles valued by society.

Social context. Principals' leadership practices are influenced by the social context in which they operate. For example, the community contexts vary widely based on the needs, opportunities, resources, and constraints they present to school leaders. Success in seizing opportunities, working and expanding available resources, as well as managing constraints impact on the ability of leaders to meet the requirements prioritized by a community. Hallinger (2016) claimed that community context has the potential to affect the level of principals' leadership interaction in areas of "goal setting, instructional supervision, and parental involvement" based on the "needs, constraints, resources, and opportunities" in the social environment of the school (p. 5). Hallinger demonstrated variations in instructional leadership practices in the classroom based on the differing socio-economic status of the learners. These differences are exemplified in the leadership styles that principals demonstrate in urban and rural communities (Hallinger & Lui, 2016; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, & Angelidou, 2011; Zhang & Pang, 2016). Hallinger also claimed that principals adopted a task orientation versus a relationship orientation with staff. This researcher explained that schools' socio-economic composition affected principals' ability to act as a liaison between the school and the community.

The failure of educational leadership to consider the context in leading schools to success can potentially generate a ripple effect at the various levels of society (Hallinger,

2016; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). Tollefson and Magdaleno (2016) claimed that understanding contextual considerations are primary in leading learning in schools. They asserted that an “acknowledgment gap” exists where policymakers in education fail to recognize the importance and relevance of the implications of context in leading schools to success. From their analysis of the decades of efforts that were made to close the achievement gap, these researchers discerned that the policymakers neglected the social, cultural, and economic considerations of the context that was crucial in attempting to ensure all students succeed. Hence, many students were still left struggling, especially those from culturally and ethnically diverse, as well as poverty-stricken backgrounds. These students felt hopeless, alienated, and disenfranchised. Tollefson and Magdaleno (2016) identified this key ingredient needed for students’ success as the acknowledgment gap.

Hughes, Newkirk, and Stenhjem (2010) alleged that “it is also common for these deprived students from low socio-economic backgrounds to feel doubtful about their chances of success in a society in which they believe the system is stacked against them and in which they will feel little control over their limited opportunities” (p. 22-23). Tollefson and Magdaleno claimed that schools’ function as “instruments of social reproduction” (2016, p. 229). Therefore, educational leaders must acknowledge the various aspects of context so that the goal of equal opportunities for each student can be realized.

Bhengu and Myende (2016) studied how principals were successful in schools in deprived contexts. The findings from the ethnographic study conducted by Bhengu and

Myende (2016) revealed that principals could lead schools successfully because of their ability to be flexible and adaptable based on the contextual challenges faced in their schools' settings. These leaders' philosophical principles compounded with their strategic thinking facilitated their analysis and development of plans that were unique to their specific context. These principals demonstrated a dynamic ability to be able to bridge the gap between the national policies and local needs of the schools and communities. Their belief in adjusting their leadership tactics based on contextual needs and the embracing of community values nurtured a positive school culture leading to school success. Bhengu and Myende (2016) reinforced the concept of leadership being influenced by context. They concluded that principals' leadership practices were not static but dynamic and evolving within a given context.

Initial studies of school leadership utilized predominantly quantitative designs using various instruments that facilitated a comprehensive global perspective (Hallinger, 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016). The findings revealed generic practices and principles of school leadership that was not sufficiently customized and detailed enough to generate the type of data to meet the specific needs of the schools. At present, there is a demand for research methods to be refined and tailored to include the element of context to create a better understanding of how principals achieve success in varying contexts.

Relevance to the study. Emerging from the literature on principal leadership and context is the need for principals to develop an awareness of their environment and develop skills to handle challenges that arise. Transferring policies, principles, and practices without considerations of the feasibility of the context in which it would be

applied could have dire implications for the principals and their schools. Issues such as the “acknowledgment gap” have now become a significant prerequisite that needs to be satisfied before contemplation or consideration of bridging the achievement gap. This focus has become extremely important, especially considering the dynamic developments in various geographical locations in the world today and the complex diversity and cultural, political, social, and economic traditions. Therefore, understanding the essence of context supports the significance of this research in the multicultural context and polarized political climate of Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, in a society with these strong cultural values and ideologies, it was necessary to study the dynamics, create awareness of the situation, and develop these sensitivities in principals.

Tacit Knowledge

According to Crane and Bontis (2014), De Toni, Fornasier, and Nonino (2017), as well as Edge (2013), explained that tacit knowledge or implicit knowledge is acquired through experiential learning that is linked to explicit knowledge through knowledge management theory. It is an organizational development concept that is significant in developing and sustaining competitive advantage, increasing profitability, success, innovation, and enhancing decision making. Wipawayangkool and Teng (2016) stated that tacit learning facilitated the identification of areas that need support and provided the ability to reinforce these with appropriate management practices. Employing the tacit-explicit exchange increases the knowledge base for principals (Miller, 2016). This process is critical to understand how principals and administrators create and apply their knowledge in leading schools successfully and effectively.

A significant concern with school leadership is the quality and relevance of explicit knowledge disseminated through adequate training, preparation, and development for school leaders (Gmelch & Buller, 2015; Mestry, 2017). Gmelch and Buller (2015) pointed out that “academic leadership is one of the few professions one can enter today with absolutely no training in, credentials for, or knowledge of the central duties of the position” (p. 2). Hence, personal agency is vital to the leadership development process as academic leaders need to take responsibility for their learning, especially as they are responsible for the learning of others (Clarke & Wildy, 2016).

Clarke and Wildy (2016) illustrated the role of the principals as being central to learning in schools. These scholars claimed that this sense of personal agency promotes responsibility for self-learning or tacit learning, which is a natural process based on leaders’ experiences. It empowers school leaders to act, influence, and motivate themselves and others, as well as assume responsibility and control for one’s circumstances. It builds on their capacities to handle a wide range of tasks and situations with confidence and resilience. Hence, effective school leadership necessitates “personal formation and growth to the extent that taking responsibility for nurturing the growth and development of others becomes natural” (Clarke & Wildy, 2016, p. 49). The process of leadership development and knowledge creation is enhanced when leaders take responsibility for their learning and employ the conscious process of cognition and metacognition as they engage in their experiences of leading and learning (Clarke & Wildy, 2016; McCall, 2010; Robertson, 2011).

Knowledge creation as a result of an implicit-explicit debate has presented varying controversial perspectives. St. Germain and Quinn (2005) demonstrated the lack of learning knowledge by new administrators in the decision-making process resulting in premature closure in problem-solving situations. In St. Germain and Quinn's study of principals, both novice and expert principals, contextual intelligence was higher with the experts as they were able to draw upon their prior experiences in dealing with situations (2005). These scholars stated it is possible as experts can generate solutions for impending challenges on the spot through dialogic inquiry.

Tacit knowledge is developed through experiential learning as individuals acquire knowledge over time based on their professions, duties, or tasks which they perform (Grandinetti, 2014; Polanyi, 1966; St. Germain & Quinn, 2005). Grandinetti (2014) argued that Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge was based on an individual gaining knowledge through an unconscious process. However, Grandinetti claimed that individuals could acquire implicit knowledge or tacit knowledge consciously. Similarly, from an educational perspective, St. Germain and Quinn explained that tacit knowledge is not only acquired unconsciously as an outcome of spontaneous action, but it can also be acquired by consciously and actively shaping experiences in pursuit of knowledge. Also, basing their concepts on Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge, St. Germain and Quinn claimed that practice yields understanding. They explained that an authentic appreciation of reality could not be acquired solely by knowledge of the structural components, but it involves an application of the structure to experiential circumstances. St. Germain and Quinn highlighted the need to explore natural avenues to tacit knowledge that is not a

feature of the traditional leadership programs. However, a significant drawback in the articulation of tacit knowledge is the lack of organized and systematic strategies for storing the knowledge of lessons learned in schools. Therefore, it is a difficult process to convert tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge in the educational arena.

Explicit knowledge is located at the opposite end of the tacit spectrum as it engages experiences in a more formal, tangible format that makes it easier to disseminate among individuals in the organization. Grandinetti (2014) claimed that explicit knowledge would have emerged initially from tacit learning experiences and be further developed through a conscious learning process. The ability to share tacit knowledge or learning experiences depends on “the extent to which people internalize knowledge and the degree of fit among certain tasks, technology, and individual factors” (Wipawayangkool & Teng, 2016, p. 2). Wipawayangkool and Teng stated that knowledge occurs when an individual learns to transfer the implicit or tacit knowledge to procedural knowledge.

For the literature review, it was essential to develop an understanding of how principals create knowledge based on their experiences. My awareness augmented the understanding of the research that draws upon the lived experiences of principals as they perform their duties. It lends itself to the phenomenological design as Crane and Bontis explained that principals’ tacit knowing or the way they “make sense of their world” (2014, p. 1136) would be revealed through actively discussing their lived experiences and their interpretation of the world.

Developing Capacity and Capability of Principals

Employing a sustainability mindset, Gmelch and Buller (2015) rationalized and distinguished the need for developing principals as opposed to training them. Gmelch and Buller (2015) contended that the inadequate preparation and development for academic leaders is not because of a lack of expertise. They claimed that one of the primary reasons that educational leadership fails is because attempts are made to train leaders using a one-time approach and short-term task-oriented strategies as opposed to adopting a process of continuous development of leaders. Hence, a distinction must be made between leadership training and leadership development. Gmelch and Buller explained that in higher education, the training of academic leaders tends to be a short-term process using a standardized approach that is focused on strategies, techniques, and tactics. It is based on the assumption that to become the best leaders, administrators need to be taught the best methods and approaches. However, Gmelch and Buller acknowledged the importance of these processes for leaders such as strategic planning, program review, budget management, and outcomes assessment. They claimed that these methods are only tools for leadership but not the key to leadership itself.

Consequently, Gmelch and Buller (2015) highlighted the need for a more comprehensive view that emphasizes “the development of genuine academic leadership” (p. 7). This perspective entails the adoption of an approach that combines task orientation with people-orientation and must be built on administrators’ current needs and understandings rather than standardized methods and beliefs of what is deemed successful. Therefore, this approach promotes a shift in the mindset from leadership

being based on set models such as the Myers-Briggs profile. Hence, they advocated for the development of leaders as opposed to training them, thus promoting a growth mindset as opposed to mastering techniques. Further, Gmelch and Buller (2015) explained that sustained or ongoing leadership development programs provide consistent iterative support that administrators need to bridge the gap between policy and practice. These continuing professional development programs are designed to meet leaders at their levels and scaffold their learning and understanding to meet their specific needs.

Principal professional development. One of the critical factors encountered in the literature in the quest to lead successful schools was the ability to develop leadership capacity and capability (Lee et al., 2016; Retna, 2015; Stosich et al., 2017). Wright and da Costa (2016) stated that professional development programs are met with uncertainty surrounding approaches to meet the needs and preferences of school principals. However, from their research, these scholars established that it is “a right and a responsibility” for school leaders to engage in continuous professional development (p. 40). Lingam (2012) supported the need to have ongoing leadership development for principals. This consideration is necessary to ensure future success from the perspectives of sustainability and systemic, strategic alignment.

In attempting to improve professional development, Wright and da Costa (2016) conducted a study using a model called principal reflection of best practice, which highlighted experience or experiential learning as a critical factor in influencing designs of professional development for principals. Hence, they underpinned their research by adapting Dewey’s theory related to the nature of human experience and experiential

learning as articulated by Lewin's model as well as Knowles' contributions that were focused on "andragogy" (Wright & da Costa, 2016, p. 32). Wright and da Costa used the principles of continuity and interaction derived from Dewey's ontological insights about the experience to influence the design of the professional development program for leaders. The concept of continuity incorporated the individuals' ability to influence future behavior and interaction, taking into consideration the situational influence of the experience.

Highlighting insights from the two classic authors Lewin as well as Knowles; Wright and da Costa (2016) explained how experiential learning contributed to the changing conceptualization of professional development. These scholars promoted Lewin's model that demonstrated the need to create a learning environment where participants feel safe, secure, and free to make decisions and choices. On the other hand, the incorporation of Knowles' model emphasized elements that would facilitate and motivate adult learners to make sense of their experiences. Hence, based on the concepts of adult learning theory, professional development should be conducted in an environment conducive to adult learners. Also, the professional development program should be able to facilitate and include adult learners' input into the planning, design, and evaluation associated with the program to meet these leaders' individual needs better.

Reflective practice was another significant aspect of the research conducted by Wright and da Costa (2016) on developing quality leadership programs. Other researchers also endorsed and advocated for the use of this strategy to improve learning in leadership (Clarke, 2016; Dewey, 1939; Schon, 1983). According to Wright and da

Costa, reflective practice is an approach that considers analytic or reflective thinking on the application of theory to problematic situations with the intent of improving or becoming more skillful. Likewise, expert practitioners can tap into their tacit pool of knowledge to uncover, refine, and address issues related to both theory and its practical applications.

While reflective practice is not prevalent in organizational learning theories, it is used as a viable tool in attempting to improve educational leadership. Honig and Rainey (2014) suggested that research on reflective practice can serve to test assumptions on implicit and explicit knowledge, enabling the building of feedback loops to capitalize on individual and organizational learning. It also has the potential to support principals' professional needs and facilitate the process of sustaining meaningful change. Emerging from the research on rethinking professional development and the success of principals' reflection of practice was the recognition of the differential needs of each school leader (Wright & da Costa, 2016). Wright and da Costa claimed that the new principals and potential principals acquired an epistemological understanding of principal leadership based on learning opportunities arising from both structured and unstructured situations, as well as from mentoring prospects within authentic settings. Further, communities of practice became a more revered opportunity to learn and acquire understandings of technical and managerial skills in principal leadership as new leaders found their niche and became socialized in this new community of professionals (Wright & da Costa, 2016).

Networking is another viable option used to develop principal leadership capacities and capabilities. This strategy is regarded as a central forum for principals to engage in high-quality dialogic discussions with their peers regarding pertinent school issues. This environment created an opportunity for sharing and collaborating on ideas, principles, and practices. This approach encourages school principals to reiterate and endorse existing principles and practices. It facilitates the exploration of new ideas and understandings, especially regarding issues encountered, or those concerns that may be more relevant to new principals (Kiggunda & Moorosi, 2012; Wright & da Costa, 2016).

Heystek (2016) claimed that peer support, collaboration, and constructivist learning are vital elements utilized in the process of networking. Kiggunda and Moorosi (2012) stated that networking provided a unique mechanism for learning as principals engage in their school improvement efforts. These researchers found that this strategy can provide a potent resource for principals in schools with similar contextual climates as they may encounter similar issues. Wright and da Costa identified conditions such as time, space, facilities, design involvement, open communication, accessibility, motivation, readiness to learn, strategic alignment, ethics, organizational support, authenticity, goal setting, and expectations as conditions for supporting the developing of the principals engaging in growth and development through networking arrangements. Wright and da Costa (2016) illustrated the need to invest and acquire ample support and resources to provide sustained professional development of leadership capacities and capabilities of principals.

In this section, I explored strategies for developing the leadership capacity and capability of principals. The literature distinguished between the concepts of developing leaders as opposed to training them. Researchers suggested that for leadership learning to be successful, a growth mindset must be adopted, and learning must be a continuous process as opposed to a one-shot exercise. This understanding is critical for the future development of principal leadership. More importantly, this knowledge is necessary to bridge the gap in research on school leadership development and prepare school leaders to face future challenges they may encounter.

Phenomenology of Leadership

Leadership is a complex, dynamic, and perpetually evolving phenomenon and attempts to capture its multidimensional nature appears to be elusive (Block, 2014; Souba, 2014; Sutherland & Cameron, 2015)). Sutherland and Cameron (2015) stated that trends in leadership research reveal two significant shifts in leadership research. Firstly, the research is pointing to a shift from quantitative dominated methodological tools used in the study of leadership towards a mix-method and more qualitative research paradigm claim that statistical tools and analysis are unable to capture its subtle nature appropriately. However, contemporary researchers have been advocating to increase the depth in leadership research (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016).

Secondly, social changes have been influencing the nature of the leadership experience (Sutherland & Cameron, 2015), as exemplified in the primary research question. Historically, leadership research has focused on the hierarchical nature of the relationship, with the leader being perceived as the hero. However, this relationship has

altered dramatically to one where the phenomena of leadership are studied with a primary emphasis on the relationship between the leader and the follower (Block, 2014). This change has narrowed the power relationship between the leader and the follower from top-down to a more horizontal matrix (Sutherland & Cameron, 2015).

While Souba (2014) acknowledged leadership to be a widely studied phenomenon, capturing its multifaceted and intricate nature proved to be a challenge. Block (2014) recommended the philosophical approach of phenomenology for researching this phenomenon, as it facilitates the intersubjective relationship between the leaders, followers, and the context. Therefore, this approach provided support for understanding the actions of leaders as an outcome of their engagement in the process of introspection, self-reflection, and self-awareness that engages philosophical cognitions related to ontology, epistemology, axiology, aesthetics, and even politics.

This approach was supported by Souba (2014), who stated that studying leadership through firsthand live experiences from a phenomenological perspective provided “the fundamental structures of human ‘being’ that makes it possible to be the leader in the first place” (p.78). Souba claimed that this type of inquiry facilitated the use of dialogic relations to deliberate and think reflectively to explore how individuals experience the phenomena. Phenomenology adds new voices and perspectives to the discipline, and so augmenting new data, thereby presenting a much richer picture of leadership. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) added that an essential philosophical assumption in conducting research related to this approach is that human beings share commonality from their experiences with a phenomenon. Patton (2015) explained that the

phenomenological study would provide the avenue for leaders to develop an awareness of their experiences is by developing a conscious awareness of the experience by placing attention on their perceptions.

Summary and Conclusions

This review demonstrated an abundance of literature internationally on principal leadership. However, the research highlighted the disparity between the efforts to prepare principals and the unique challenges they encounter due to their unique context. While Hallinger (2016) and other researchers pointed to several similarities related to principal leadership attributes and challenges, they also highlighted the need for principals to acquire contextual intelligence. Westernized models imposed in different societies highlighted cultural, social, and political inconsistencies with these models. Thus, the literature supports the establishment of the research gap and the need for this phenomenological study to be conducted on the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago.

Further analysis of the literature in the social context established its relevance. It promoted the development and integration of the conceptual theories of instructional leadership theory and social justice leadership theory. Both theories, being culturally situated and pertinent to the context of Trinidad and Tobago. Then, I elaborated on critical concepts such as the conceptual nature, and the paradoxical dimension of the principal leadership. The latter concept emphasized principals as leaders of learning in their schools, as well as principals learning and developing the art of leadership. Therefore, the need to build capacity and capability to lead could be acquired through the

process of self-learning by tacit means or explicit learning with the assistance of others. Creating tacit knowledge places learning organizations in an advantageous position. Also, principals in various countries are acquiring explicit knowledge of principal leadership, which could be developed through various formal and informal programs.

Most importantly, these insights elaborated the call for detailed, in-depth, and authentic insights into the leadership experiences of the principals propagating the development of the phenomenological qualitative mode of inquiry. The focus of the research is to acquire, understand, and explore the essence of leadership experiences through interviews by obtaining rich, thick text. As such, in the next chapter, I articulate the purpose of the research, research questions, appropriateness of the research design, and the role of the researcher. Further, I explain the methodological details that include the participant logic selection, sampling strategy along with the justifications, procedures for participant recruitment, data collection, instrumentation, and the data analysis plan. I then elaborate on the issues of trustworthiness and specific ethical considerations in compliance with local and international research bodies.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

There is a need for a more in-depth understanding of principal leadership to improve both school performance and student achievement and for creating positive social change. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the essence of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. This chapter provides details of the research design and its rationale, the researcher's role, and the methodological strategies and tools for obtaining relevant and reliable data. The participant selection logic, the interview procedures and protocol, the data analysis plan, and ethical procedures are also outlined in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

I selected a phenomenological qualitative research design for the study to generate insights regarding principals' perceptions of their leadership experiences in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The research questions were intended to unfold detailed insights about the structure and complexities of their leadership experience in leading and learning to lead their schools. Integral to this approach was the principal intersubjective relationships in their social world and the value, feelings, and judgments of the principals as they experience their reality. Thus, I chose to approach leadership from a philosophical stance. For this study, there was one overarching research question and two subquestions:

1. What is the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago?
 - a. How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives?
 - b. How do principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools?

Rationale for Research Design

To obtain and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of principal leadership in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, I designed this research using a phenomenological orientation to the qualitative tradition of inquiry. Principal leadership has been dominated by quantitative methodology with more objective approaches and tools that provide a broader overview or etic perspective (Sutherland & Cameron, 2015). But recent research has highlighted the need to dive deeper into the phenomenon of principal leadership to incorporate and engender the subtler insights and embedded issues such as cultural and contextual influences (Block, 2014; Souba, 2014; Sutherland & Cameron, 2015).

Phenomenological studies are best suited for the complex, multidimensional, and perpetually evolving nature of leadership (Block, 2014; Souba, 2014). Meaning attribution is one of the most distinctive features of phenomenological studies as the individual units of data emerges and a subsequent study of the whole phenomenon ensues (Paley, 2017). This phenomenological perspective helped the participants to reflect on their lived experiences through the interviewing process, where the essence or meanings

of their experiences could emerge. This type of discourse reduced the power relationships between the researcher and the participant (Seidman, 2019), which empowered principals to share their experiences more intimately so that their voices were heard. Therefore, their visibility in the world of educational leadership was enhanced, especially in Trinidad and Tobago.

Further, I adopted a transcendental phenomenological perspective as derived by Husserl to approach the research. Phenomenological approaches are focused on the exploration of the ways people make sense of their experiences and transform those experiences into their consciousness, in acquiring both individual and shared meanings (Patton, 2015). Thus, phenomenology deals with people's conscious experience of the world in their daily lives, facilitating the capture of tacit experiences in a conscious, reflective manner (Husserl, 2002). This phenomenological exploration of principal leadership experiences emphasized understandings from the perspectives of participants' reflections of their lived experiences. The primary strategy for data collection was a phenomenological approach to interviewing (Seidman, 2019), which facilitated the answering of the research questions.

Phenomenology has similarities with other qualitative approaches, as it indicates the inadequacy of quantification, generalization, causality, and participants' subject realities (Paley, 2017). Phenomenology also involves similar methodological devices such as purposive sampling techniques, small sample sizes, and interviews (Paley, 2017). However, phenomenology has the unique attribute of gleaning meanings from an emic or insider perspective or unique voices about a phenomenon that makes this approach

particularly suitable to acquire the essences of the principals' practices. Direct experiences, awareness, and interactions heighten participants' appreciation of their reality (O'Leary, 2007).

Other qualitative traditions, such as case study and basic qualitative traditions, were potential options for this study but were not chosen. For example, case studies involve a bounded sample based on context, time, or place (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015). However, in this study, the sample could not be bound based on an individual case or multiple cases. The sample size was determined based on the anticipated saturation point required to study the experiences of principal leadership to obtain the essence of this phenomenon. Further, although the basic qualitative approach also has similarities to the approach chosen for the study, the basic qualitative approach is not connected to any of the theoretical, philosophical, epistemological, or ontological traditions that relate to the phenomenon in phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Percy et al., 2015).

Grounded theory, ethnography, and narratives were also not selected, as the philosophical underpinnings of these orientations were not aligned with the purpose, the problem, or the research questions of this study. Gleaning the meanings of the experiences and understanding the essence of lived experiences from the participants' perspectives did not necessitate theory generation, which is characteristic of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). Ethnography was also not appropriate for this research, as it has a central focus on culture and ethnicities, and diversity issues were only part of understanding the

phenomenon in this study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). Finally, the narrative approach was inappropriate because it is focused on research featuring unique stories experienced by individuals and not on assimilating common meanings about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015).

The Role of the Researcher

One of the most sensitive areas in developing a robust qualitative study is the integral role of the researcher, which lends itself to establishing rigor and trustworthiness in the research. Researchers are instruments of inquiry in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) with their primary role being determined, acquired, and ascribed through their intimate relationship and interaction with the data collection. For this phenomenological study, my fundamental role was an interviewer where I was required to conduct interviews, audio-record, transcribe, code, analyze, verify the data, and draw conclusions.

As the researcher, I operated with the underlying assumption that individual practical experiences are influenced by their cognition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019). Therefore, my focus was on authentic meanings of the participants' experiences and the meanings the participants derived from these experiences. The emphasis on lived experiences in this phenomenological approach was obtained through an active reflection of the experience and expressing it through the interviewee's verbal responses to questions. Finally, I needed to interpret the data to establish an enhanced and significantly meaningful understandings of the phenomenon.

Researchers' backgrounds and experience as well as ability for cross-cultural sensitivity and personal operational philosophy are critical in establishing quality, trustworthiness, and credible research (Patton, 2015). Bracketing or suspension of the researcher's objective reality about the phenomenon is also important to addressing confirmability issues. Another strategy that improves the credibility of the research is the researcher stating their experiences so that the audience could discern the researcher's perspective and potential biases (Maxwell, 2013). As such, the knowledge of my background is essential to the development of a quality study. At the time of conducting the interviews for this study, I was a vice principal employed by the MOE at a secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago, and during the final stages of the analysis I accepted the duties and responsibilities as a principal. Operating as an educational leader in Trinidad and Tobago enhanced my ability to understand the experiences of principals in this environment. To ensure that I represented the experiences of the participants authentically, I bracketed any gender bias as well as social and cultural experiences as a female of East Indian ethnic origin and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

As an assistant principal, I am considered a member of the group of principals and attend principals' meetings and conferences. However, operating in a subordinate role to the participants who were appointed principals, I was not able to assert any power or influence over these individuals due to positional authority. I also did not interview my principal. However, I still ensured that I did not assert personal power or superiority over the participants as a doctoral student. Hence, for the data collection process, my role was

to develop and maintain a working research partnership (see Maxwell, 2013) with the principals to ensure the production of useful and valuable data.

I was also mandated to maintain the highest level of professionalism and integrity to ensure the protection of the participants by abiding by all regulations and ethical principles outlined by the MOE in Trinidad and Tobago and Walden's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). These ethical issues included formal authorization from the MOE to conduct this research in the public schools in Trinidad and Tobago. I informed the district offices of the MOE and adhered to all the policies and procedures as outlined by the MOE. Likewise, I ensured compliance with all policies and procedures of the approved application number 03-26-18-0320347 that was submitted to the Walden University's IRB. I also successfully completed the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research training on Protecting Human Research Participants. I fully disclosed to the participants the purpose of the research, confidentiality issues, safety, and security risks, as well as their willingness to participate voluntarily. As the researcher, it was necessary to make sure all steps were taken to guarantee the data were collected and managed ethically to ensure participant protection, confidentiality, and data saturation.

Methodology

In this section, I elaborate on the details of the data collection process, the logic for participant selection, and instrumentation procedures. Also included are procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Finally, a data analysis plan, the issues of trustworthiness such as credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity),

dependability (reliability), confirmability (objectivity), as well as the ethical procedures are considered for this study.

Participant Selection Logic

Population. The population consisted of 137 principals from public secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, 129 from Trinidad, and eight from Tobago. These public secondary schools comprised of both government and denominational schools. The government schools are public schools that are owned solely by the government. The denominational schools are also public schools where their respective Boards of Management receive public funding from the government. Approximately 81,185 students attend these public secondary schools between the ages of 11 to 19. There were 76,875 of these students attending the public secondary schools in Trinidad and 4,310 from Tobago. The 129 schools in Trinidad are representative of the population in Tobago. Therefore, the sample interviewed for the study was selected from the secondary schools in Trinidad.

Sample size and strategy. For this qualitative phenomenological study, I used an emergent sample of eight to 12 participants, intending to arrive at data saturation. Data saturation is reached when fresh, innovative, or pertinent evidence ceases to emerge from the data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure the collection of rich and thick data, I obtained the sample through a process of stratified, purposeful sampling to enhance the representativeness of diverse aspects of the population. In addition to using this approach, I conducted two to three interviews with each participant, and I used open-ended questions and probes to catalyze the process of data saturation. I used probes to

prompt the participants to continue detailed, thick descriptions while bracketing my thoughts, judgments, and beliefs. The interviews were structured to ensure that all the participants were asked the same questions and saturation would be reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The first two interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, the third interviews included the option of face-to-face, Skype, or the telephone based on access depending on the participants' preferences. Both the second and third interviews were conducted to acquire greater depth, clarification of issues, and data saturation. On average, interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes.

Sampling Strategy

Step 1: Permissions. The first step involved acquiring a letter of cooperation from the MOE granting permission to conduct the study in all secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. All 128 principals in public secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago were selected from MOE's district databases. These names were acquired solely for sampling. After selecting the sample, the participants' identities remained confidential in all written work. Pseudonyms were used to replace the names of the participants, and a confidential audit trail was created for the management of the data to prevent unwarranted safety and security risks. These principals were able to provide rich, thick data required to answer the research questions based on their leadership experiences. They were assistant principals or acting principals for at least 2 years before they were appointed principals.

Step 2: Stratification. These 128 principals were placed into four categories based on the ranking of their schools' academic performance in the Caribbean Secondary

Examination Certificate. National school performance data were obtained from the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation at the MOE related to the percentage of students attaining passes in at least five subjects at Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate level for at least 3 years, 2015 to 2017. The mean for the 3 years was calculated, and the schools were stratified into categories. Schools obtaining a mean of 75% and above for the 3 years were labeled high performing. Schools with averages between 50% to 74% were classified as upper-middle performing schools. The lower-middle performing schools were ranked from 25% to 50%. All schools with means less than 25% were labeled low-performing schools.

Step 3: Selection. This step was intended to select the most appropriate participants to provide suitable data on instructional and social justice issues taking into consideration the diversity issues. Hence, from the district office, I acquired the demographics of the schools' population based on gender, cultural, and racial dynamics from the schools' statistical returns and prioritized the schools based on their diversity. Then I also acquired public information from the district offices based on the names, the gender, ethnic background, and experience of the principals for each of the four categories of schools. From the list, I then purposefully selected one male principal and one female principal with the most experience from each category, preferably of different races. Letters of invitations and consent forms were e-mailed to the principals who were selected to participate in the study. If participants did not respond with a week, a reminder invitation was sent so that they could state their willingness to participate in the

study. The next suitable person was purposefully selected if someone either did not respond or did not wish to participate in the study.

Step 4: Data saturation. If saturation levels were not arrived at with the selection of the eight participants, I proposed another round to select four more participants was necessary. This final round of selection would include two male participants and two female participants from the four categories, based on their experience and ethnicity.

Justification for Sample Size and Sampling Strategy

Sample size. Patton (2015) explained that there are no specific rules to dictate the sample size in qualitative research. However, justifying the appropriateness of the sample size depends on the purpose of the inquiry, available resources to conduct the investigation, (Patton, 2015) the conceptual framework, and the research questions (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014;). Maxwell (2013) contended that qualitative inquiry is usually concerned with adequately describing, interpreting, understanding, and explaining the phenomenon of interest. Patton explained that the contention regarding sample size selection lies within the tradeoff between breadth and depth. Hence, using the same resources within the specified period facilitated more generalized perspectives from a larger sample as opposed to a researcher who is seeking more depth from a smaller sample. Maxwell (2013) explained that using excessively large samples with similar resources for conducting interviews would generate shallow responses that would not appropriately answer the research questions.

Patton (2015) also advised that for phenomenological studies, data saturation can be achieved with a small sample of six participants. Qualitative research primarily

engages small sample sizes to focus on specific settings and participants. It allowed the researcher to select strategically, participants that provided the richest data about the phenomenon of interest rather than creating abstract indicators (Maxwell, 2013).

Therefore, the one to two-month period allocated to collect data would be appropriate for the sample of eight to 12 principals participating in this study.

Qualitative research is not usually concerned with establishing causality (Maxwell, 2013). Hence, it is not necessary to use a larger sample to ensure representativeness, as generalization is not usually the primary goal. Maxwell (2013) explained that the research questions indicate the level of depth required for the study. Hence, analysis and emphasis on answering the research questions would prevent inappropriate generalizations and assumptions relevant to other types of studies.

Justification for sampling strategy. It is necessary to use a purposeful sampling strategy for this phenomenological study to be able to acquire that appropriate depth of understanding meanings of principals' experiences. This sampling strategy facilitated the purposeful selection of information-rich cases such as the best site selection, as well as a prime selection of the principal participants. I used the conceptual framework of instructional leadership theory and social leadership theory as a basis for the design of this stratified purposive sampling strategy. From the instructional leadership perspective, the schools were ranked into four categories based on academic performance from high to low performing schools.

Since social justice leadership theory was one of the theories in my conceptual framework, I used the stratified purposeful sampling to obtain representativeness of

sample demographics based on gender, and race after stratifying the schools into four categories based on their academic performance. In this way, theoretical orientations and perspectives were connected to provide an overall orienting lens that could raise questions related to diversity. This type of sampling strategy facilitated the representation of the schools in different categories. It improved the credibility or internal validity and trustworthiness of the research creating more rigor and a robust research design.

Maxwell (2013) stated that this strategy expands the diversity of the sample, increasing the credibility, internal validity, or internal generalizability of the study. Maxwell explained that while qualitative researchers are hesitant to make claims about generalizability, it should be an issue that must be carefully considered in planning the research design. Considerations of representativeness or diversity in the population increased the ability to generalize within the population as it was impossible to study the entire population (Maxwell, 2013). As such, the stratified, purposeful sampling strategy enhanced the representativeness of diverse aspects of the population and was therefore appropriate for this study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After performing the necessary steps to select the sample of eight to 12 principals for this study, I informed their respective district supervisors of the research and about the need to recruit these participants. I contacted the district supervisor, presenting them with the approval for the research to be conducted in schools in Trinidad and Tobago, and the names of the potential participants. I contacted the participants through email to seek their willingness to participate in the study. In this email, I described the research project,

its importance to the research, and its potential value to educational and social change. I also provided the MOE approval for the research that granted permission for their voluntary participation. I indicated to the potential participants that their names were located on the MOE database. Then, based on the selection criteria, the best candidate was chosen for the interview based on their willingness.

Consequently, participants were informed that their involvement in the research entailed participation in one face-to-face interview about 60 to 90 minutes and two follow-up interviews for 60 to 90 minutes each, either face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interview based on Seidman's (2019) three phases of phenomenological interviewing. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and kept secure in a personal file labeled under confidential naming conventions and used for the sole purpose of this research. Paper transcripts were locked in a personal filing cabinet, while passwords were used to secure the documents on my computer. I presented participants with written transcripts of their interviews to clarify and confirm the authenticity, accuracy, and integrity of the data. As mentioned, one follow-up interview per participant was required to generate more detailed information and to verify and clarify issues. The participants also received the reassurance that all ethical and confidential issues would always be maintained. Therefore, pseudonyms were used to replace their names and the identity of their schools. Also, no identifiers of individuals or schools were kept in the research records or presented to any audience or parties.

Finally, for principals who agreed to participate in the study, I presented them the written consent with all these conditions such as name, a background of the study,

procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks, and benefits. Then I made the necessary arrangements with the principal for a suitable time and venue to conduct the interviews within one month. I also exchanged phone numbers so that final confirmation could be made in the event of an emergency. Where initially, principals choose not to participate, then the next best possible candidate was approached using the same procedure. When the interviews were completed, I gave thank you cards to all participants to express my appreciation.

Interviewing. According to Janesick, interviewing is the “heart and soul” of qualitative work (2016, p. 99). Seidman (2019) highlighted interviews as the primary source of data for phenomenological inquiry. He claimed that interviewing provides the avenue for individuals to generate insider views and insights from within themselves, highlighting the subjective interpretation of their human condition. Maxwell (2013) emphasized that the intensity of the interview provides the opportunity to collect detailed descriptions of the phenomenon as the participant experienced it. Interviewing provides an opportunity for the participants’ responses to override the subjectivity or personal biases of the researcher, and therefore increasing the trustworthiness of the data. Thus, the interviews produced high-quality data from an emic perspective, as participants related their experiences about the phenomenon of principal leadership. The interview process, schedule, and techniques employed by the researcher became increasingly vital tools for channeling this dialogic inquiry.

Instrumentation

Interviews. To encourage principals to participate in the study and to reduce their time commitment that would be required from the study, I adopted the Seidman's (2019) three-interview approach designed to conduct at least one face-to-face interviews, followed by a telephone, or skype with each participant of the eight to 12 participants in the sample. I designed interview protocols or guides comprised of open-ended questions to explore this study phenomenon of principal leadership experiences. Each interview protocol comprising of open-ended questions was developed using the conceptual framework, the literature review, and exemplars of interview questions from the empirical literature that I reviewed (see Appendix A). This instrument was used to guide the interview with probes and prompts intended to produce an abundant flow of data to answer the research questions. I asked follow-up questions related to each participant's answers to maintain the flow of the session and for the ease and comfort of the participants. I concluded the interviews by debriefing the participants to ensure that participants were fully informed and felt both physically and psychologically comfortable that all ethical concerns would have been met. Thus, I refocused them on the purpose of the study, explained and made arranged follow-up interviews to their convenience, and thanked them.

Development of the instrument. To develop the interview guides for this study, I adopted Seidman's (2019) three-phase interview approach and developed interview guides for each of the three phases. Seidman claimed that the three-phase interviewing process emphasized the phenomenological theory. For the first phase or the first

interview of the interviewing process, I explored the principals' leadership experiences in their educational context. Consequently, for the second phase of this interview, I adapted Seidman's suggestions and facilitated participants in reconstructing their experiences with greater emphasis on their context. As such, I encouraged the principals to reconstruct their experiences providing greater detail and clarity as experienced in their educational context.

In the third phase or third interview, participants were encouraged to provide reflections on how these experiences were meaningful to them (Seidman, 2019). Similarly, principals reflected on their lived experiences and made meaningful deductions about what they learned from these experiences. Seidman claimed that "the meanings people make of their experiences affect the ways they carry out the experience" (2019, p. 18). During this final interview, the development of other more refined instruments based on the data collected from round one of the interviews provided further clarification and verification. These three interviews were conducted with each participant.

Sufficiency of the instrument. To establish the validity of the instrument or the interview protocols, I discussed its development with experts in the field, such as school supervisors, retired principals, faculty from my dissertation committee, being careful to exclude the individuals that belong to the population of secondary school principals. This exercise aided in restructuring the interview questions to refine the research questions and better align them with the purpose of the research and the conceptual framework. These discussions highlighted the need for increased clarity and emphasis to be placed on the social justice concerns and inequity issues embedded in the school system. Based on this

process and feedback, the questions on the interview protocol were rephrased and realigned with the research questions to increase credibility. Discussion of the questions on the protocol also pointed to the reliance on my ability as the researcher to ask the right questions, create the appropriate tone for the interview, and establish the proper context to collect high-quality data. The importance of silence and the use of probes were highlighted as techniques that could be effectively used to gain deeper insights from the participants.

Field journal. The field journal was another important instrument that I used to collect, analyze, triangulate data. This instrument was created and organized using the four categories-based Bailey's (1996) model for the analysis of field notes. The categories included notes from observation, theory, methodology, and analytic memos. The primary purpose of these notes was to record salient responses from the participants that could be vital in the data analysis process. The recording of personal observations and details of the interviews in the prescribed forms aided me in the organization of the management of the data. This journal was also a means of recoding intuitive flashes that helped in preserving the authenticity of the data. This journal also provided self-reflection concerning the interaction with the principals.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for this phenomenological study to explore the leadership experiences of the principals' in Trinidad and Tobago would commence using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo. CAQDAS would aid in the organization, management, of the data analysis. Also, NVivo would

provide one central, convenient location to store, code, review, and audit the findings that are critical in establishing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and the trustworthiness of the data. The data analysis process would commence with importing the audio recorded files of each participant in NVivo, naming with the attached pseudonym, and developed confidential audit trails to ensure authenticity and integrity with the data collection and analysis process. NVivo would facilitate the transcription of audio files to text files that would be used to easily facilitate the data reduction process and the generation and development of new codes.

For this study, I adapted a version of Boyatzis' (1998) approach to thematic analysis. Boyatzis recommended a three-coding approach to data analysis and the process of data reduction that includes a priori coding, data-driven coding, and hybrid coding. However, for this study, in place of the a priori codes at the first stage of the analysis, I proposed to use *in vivo codes* derived from the participants' transcriptions. *In vivo codes*, according to Creswell (2013) provide exact words used by the participants as code labels and would be more aligned to phenomenological reductions. Hence, I would begin the process of data analysis with the development of *in vivo codes* using the CAQDAS to assist in the generation of a word frequency search from the data. Then, I proposed to continue the coding process using data-driven or emergent coding and the hybrid approach to coding.

While the use of a priori or preexisting codes could serve as a guide to the coding process, Creswell (2013) suggested that it might also serve "to limit the analysis to the 'prefigured' codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the views of the participants

in a traditional qualitative way” (p. 185). A phenomenological inquiry is primarily focused on the freshness of the participants’ experiences and the meanings they make of their experiences (Seidman, 2019). To increase the credibility of the study, I would use epoché or bracketing of my preexisting notions about categories or codes that I might subconsciously developed from the research questions, the conceptual theories, and the literature to facilitate the emergence of participant’s experience through its transcendental existence.

Secondly, data-driven coding is a process where codes emerge from the analysis of the data or the interviews. Finally, a hybrid-driven approach where codes emerged from the critical thinking and analysis of the research based on an assimilation of ideas as well as what the researcher believed the data suggested. Analysis to identify themes and determine explanations to the research questions increased the validity through the triangulation of data analysis from the varied sources.

In NVivo software, the codes are called nodes, and the selected text associated with each code is located in the node. This process created easy access for review. The initial *in vivo* codes generated was as the first preliminary codes. However, as Creswell (2013) suggested, I ensured that new codes or nodes are created as necessary as they emerge from the interviews. Hybrid-driven codes would also be considered during the process of coding. The coding structure would be developed as the new nodes are linked to other nodes while reading the text. The codes could be further reduced to themes and subthemes and aligned with the research questions. The thematic analysis involved the competency of pattern recognition (Patton, 2015). Quality checks would be performed by

corroborating themes, and codes, utilizing the process of analytical triangulation. Also, NVivo software facilitates the easy review of codes and text to verify that appropriate meanings are generated. It would be necessary to conduct member checks at this stage to ensure that analytic categories, perceptions, and conclusions are synchronized with the participants' perspectives. NVivo software facilitated the iterative process in qualitative data analysis, which demands that I examine the multiple sources of information repeatedly and reflect on the feasibility of the various suggestions, recommendations, and options available. NVivo allows hierarchical coding, which facilitates the creation of several categories of coding. As the researcher, I would use my analytical skills and abilities to create the codes, and I would use the software tools to support the process.

NVivo software also facilitates the data analysis process by possessing features that facilitate the examination of different sources of data in a reasonable timeframe. It may reveal connections that would not be identified through my coding and analysis. Specifically, NVivo would aid in queries through the application of features such as text searching and coding comparison capabilities. These approaches would identify emerging themes within the data to complement the *in vivo* codes.

Once the coding process is complete, and the data would be organized in a hierarchical structure with the codes, themes, and sub-themes. From NVivo, it should be easy to see the number of segments coded to the specific text. Then I would run a matrix query to search for co-occurrences, where more than one category has been used to code a segment of the data. It would be necessary to validate the co-occurrences as NVivo facilitates easy checks with the codes and the text. It is then required to build

relationships between the categories where the co-occurrences occurred through the relationship nodes. Finally, I would group categories based on the relationships and provide both visual and text-based information to synthesize the data and draw conclusions to create a better understanding of the leadership phenomenon.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Maxwell (2013) explained that trustworthiness in qualitative research is not a result of indifference but integrity. Patton (2015) highlighted that the different orientations in qualitative research lend itself to different criteria for evaluating quality and trustworthiness. Creswell (2013) explained that trustworthiness in qualitative research lies in the researcher's ability to articulate an understanding of the philosophical orientation that the researcher wishes to explore. Hence, for this study, I explored in a very authentic way the nature of the leadership phenomenon of the principals in their specific context. I also acknowledged the reflexivity of the researcher throughout the research. I consciously applied plausible tactics such as, reflective thinking, journaling, bracketing, and member checking, to carefully reduce and eliminate these potential threats that may have affected the trustworthiness of this study.

To strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the study and to ensure the true reality of the phenomenon, "principal leadership" was captured, I collected high-quality data by observing a systematic, rigorous process of in-depth fieldwork. It is critical to appreciate the significant role that a qualitative researcher plays at every stage of the research process and his or her influences on the trustworthiness of the study. I approached this research process with a "reflexive consciousness" so that one could

understand how the effect of one's personal experience and context, impacted the research (Patton, 2015). Towards this end, I declared my background information and personal bias so that readers could evaluate my influence on the research.

I continued to employ varying techniques strategically throughout the study to increase credibility. I used strategies such as probes and silence where necessary in the interviewing process to produce rich, thick data until saturation is reached. Also, audiotaping, verbatim transcriptions and member checking of interviews are a means of ensuring that authentic meanings are generated from the principals' lived experiences that addressed credibility issues. Maxwell (2013) claimed that member checks or respondent validation are one of the most critical strategies for aligning the researchers' interpretations with the participants' experiences. Member checks were also used as a means of discerning any prior unobserved personal biases about the phenomenon. Also, triangulation of the data from the three interviews and the perspectives of the different participants was used as a means of validation of the participants' responses. However, according to Maxwell (2013), I was conscious of triangulating data with the same potential biases, which may be evident in the interviews.

Both credibility and transferability issues are improved by using a robust sampling strategy. I utilized a stratified purposive sampling strategy to ensure maximum representativeness of the sample while still attempting to obtain the rich responses with the three 60 to 90-minute interviews. Both supporting and discrepant data were rigorously examined to determine its legitimacy in influencing the findings, bearing in mind the pressure to disregard findings to conform to the recommendations. This process

enhanced the transferability of the data. Peer and committee feedback and authentic reporting of discrepant evidence added credibility to the research.

To enhance the dependability or reliability of the research, proper procedures and processes were used to track the various stages of the study. This exercise was conducted using the NVivo 12 software to support the development of both an audit trail and an inquiry audit. NVivo 12 provided the tools to support the development of the audit trail to provide a more detailed description of each step of the research from its commencement to the reporting of the findings. Also, the software tools enabled the inquiry audit to enhance accuracy and evaluation by using the data to support the findings, interpretations, and conclusions. In this way, the risk of chance associations and systematic biases was reduced, thus allowing an improvement in evidence-based reporting as opposed to generalized explanations (Maxwell, 2013).

Additionally, confirmability or objectivity issues were reduced by reviewing the interview questions with a few experts in the field and adjustments made to the instrument to better target the research questions. Additionally, strategies such as journaling were used as it was easier to identify biases through the practice of introspection and metacognition. The bracketing of personal biases as they occurred and member checking the contents of the data at various stages was critical in establishing confirmability in the research and integrity of the researcher. It was important to remain completely open-minded, flexible, and continuously reflecting on the phenomenon of interest to ensure fidelity to the data as produced by the participants. This evidence from

the field data and additional support from the literature to ground the findings strengthened the quality of the study.

Ethical Procedures

At every stage of the research process, attempts were made to adhere to the underlying and ethical principles with the highest level of integrity, authenticity, and responsibility as outlined in the guidelines of professional research standards of the Institutional Review Board at Walden University and the MOE in Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, I observed the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect as outlined in professional and international ethical standards, especially during the data collection and analysis stage of the research.

I acquired access to the population of principals at the public secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago by following the process as outlined by the MOE. Hence, I received relevant approvals from the MOE in Trinidad and Tobago. Initially, I applied for permission to access the population by providing several documents. These documents included an approved prospectus, a sample of my instrument, the interview protocol, as well as a letter from the Chair of my dissertation committee validating the purpose of the research from an authorized, accredited university. Only when I received the signed approval from the Educational Planning Division of the MOE in Trinidad and Tobago to conduct this research on principals in the public secondary schools, then I began developing the proposal.

Next, I ensured that all ethical standards concerning human subjects were observed. Consequently, I obtained the Institutional Review Board approval number 03-

26-18-0320347 at Walden University before proceeding to select the sample. Then, I informed the District Supervisors by presenting them with the official permission from the MOE to facilitate the data collection process. The population data were collected from the MOE's database to begin the sampling process. This information about principals in public secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago was acquired from the district's database of the MOE. Their names were used for sampling only and remained confidential. I replaced the participants' names after the interviewing process with pseudonyms and the interviews with a prescribed naming convention to protect their identity.

For participant recruitment, I ensured that all privacy and safety concerns were disclosed. These issues included privacy in making initial contact with the participants, their personal contact information, informed consent procedure, data collection strategies, and follow-up meetings with participants to review their transcripts and perform member checks to confirm the validity of the researchers' interpretations. The management of data has serious ethical implications, so precautions were taken to ensure only personal access. I secured hard copies of data in locked filing cabinets at my home and backed up electronic files that I used for the data analysis within the NVivo software. The data were secured and managed before the field study, for the duration of the study, and would be secured for five years after the study. An audit trail was created to aid in the management of the data to prevent unwarranted safety and security risks. I organized and manage the data using an appropriate proper naming system, a proper data tracking system,

transcription procedures, and quality control procedures to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and the data.

Summary

In this chapter, I aligned the relevant concepts from the literature with the conceptual frameworks, the research problem, the purpose, and the research questions to develop the research design. Thus, I demonstrated how the phenomenological lens of qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate to facilitate the depth required to answer research questions on the secondary school principal leadership experiences. I provided a detailed outline of the methodological approaches for the participant selection logic, sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis. I provided insights on NVivo software for the data analysis to add efficiency and credibility to the findings of this research. Ensuring trustworthiness in the development of a qualitative research design is extremely critical in developing a robust study. Hence, as the researcher, it was imperative to demonstrate competence at all stages of the research. The researcher's competence could reduce bias and enhance credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Finally, I ended the chapter with a discussion on adherence to the ethical principles regarding human subjects. These guiding principles enabled me to plan the study to ensure the benefits of conducting the research outweigh any potential risks or harms that participants must endure.

In Chapter 4, I present the details of the findings from this research. Here, consideration is given to the fieldwork setting, the participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. I put forward the emergent

themes and align them with the research questions and subquestions and discuss them, respectively. I elucidate the findings with verbatim from the interview transcripts to substantiate and provide evidence to support the reflections of the principals' experiences in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore, understand, and develop in-depth insights about the leadership experiences of the secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. The leadership experiences were approached from a philosophical stance to unfold the structures and complexities of leadership. This approach placed epistemological, axiological, and ontological emphasis on principals' intersubjective relationship in their social world and the value, feelings, and judgements of the principals as they experienced their reality. For this study, there is one overarching research question and two subquestions:

1. What is the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago?
 - a. How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives?
 - b. How do principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools?

Using the research questions, I developed semistructured interview schedules informed by Seidman's 3-phase, in-depth phenomenological interview series. Participants reflected and shared the details of their experiences through an iterative emergent process. I also used the think aloud strategy in the data collection process, probing participants as they related experiences based on their structures, intricacies, and perceptions of leadership.

The data were analyzed using phenomenological reduction and analytic techniques by employing the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994) to establish the themes. Findings generated six predominant themes that informed the nature of principals' leadership experiences:

1. Leadership philosophies.
2. Strategies and contexts.
3. Diversity, marginalization, and social justice issues.
4. Power dynamics.
5. Principals' dispositions.
6. Evolution as leaders.

The results of this study illuminated areas of the cognitive and analytical processes the principals experienced as they handled leadership issues in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Principals' strategic experiences were based on their intentional relationships or interconnectedness with the self, the context, and the system. The first subquestion was aligned with the first five themes. The first and fifth theme, leadership philosophies and principals' dispositions, required principals' introspection and reflection on themselves, whereas the second, third, and fourth themes strategies and context, diversity, marginalization and social justice, power dynamics, required their intentional relationships or interconnectedness with the self, the context, and the system. The final or sixth theme, evolution as leaders, informed the response to the second subquestion and related to principals' learning to lead or development as leaders. Using the think aloud strategy, the participants relived challenging experiences, reflected on the process, and

then analyzed their reflections. The intentional relations were the interconnectedness with the challenges and self-analysis about how they develop these leadership skills, knowledge, and understandings. The principals realized that they evolved as leaders through learning from their tacit experiences, observations, and critical reflections. A couple of principals stated that they had pursued studies in leadership as a matter of personal agency to develop themselves. This knowledge they found to also aid in overcoming leadership challenges.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the fieldwork setting, followed by insights about the methodology, which include demographics of the study entailing the stratification of the schools and the participants' demographics. Then, I discuss the data collection and analysis process and the evidence of trustworthiness. Afterward, I present the findings and provide the emergent themes and align these themes with the relevant research subquestions. A summary consolidating these insights is also included in the chapter.

Setting

The fieldwork was conducted during a 6-week period in a relaxed, comfortable environment. It commenced during the Easter break, where both students and teachers were on vacation and continued into the final term of the school year. The interviews were scheduled at various times of the day based on the availability of the principals. Nine of the participants preferred to be interviewed in their offices behind closed doors, and the final participant was on vacation leave, so he preferred to be interviewed in a quiet, comfortable, confidential space on the verandah at his home.

All participants appeared to be at ease in their spaces, as I facilitated their time and accommodation requests as best as possible. The participants did not indicate any level of discomfort, and I did not detect any noticeable levels of stress, instability, or trauma internal or external to their schools. This atmosphere was conducive to discuss the background of the study, its purpose, the participants' rights, and confidentiality issues. These factors enabled me to conduct the interviews as well as the member checks with ease. Though there were a few interruptions during the interviews, they were minimal and did not cause any visible signs of distress or trauma. Additionally, none of the participants indicated that they were unwilling to participate or continue any of the three interviews.

Demographics

The Stratification of Secondary Schools

To capture major variations in the sample, I stratified all the public secondary schools into performance categories based on their mean academic performance at the Caribbean Certificate of Secondary Education for 3 years. This classification demonstrates that 70% of the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago fall in the two-extreme limit in terms of their academic performance of schools. Forty-four percent of the secondary schools fell in the low performing category, and 26% of the secondary schools appeared in the high performing category, between 75% to 100% (see Figure 1). Figure 1 shows the percentage of schools that fall into each of the academic categories.

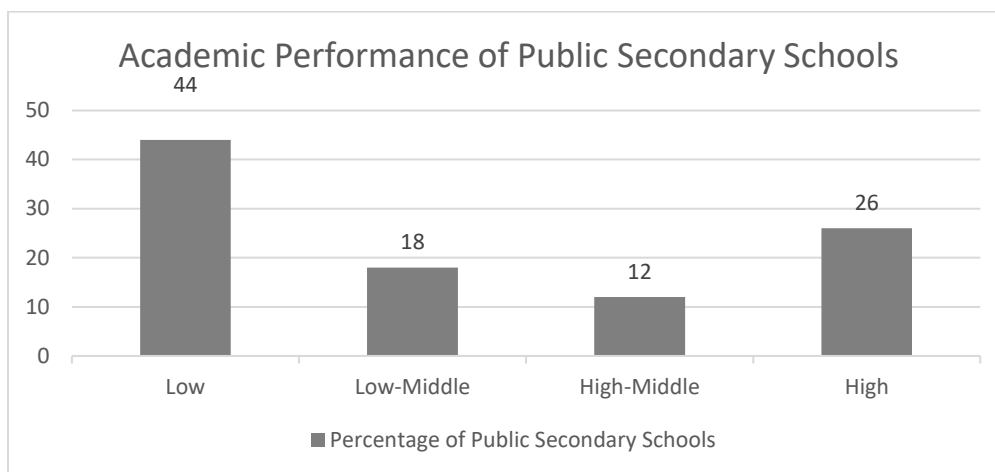


Figure 1. Stratification of schools based on academic performance.

As I further examined the categories of schools to obtain the maximum variation, I found that as the positive gradient with denominational schools and the academic performance strata. Hence, as the performance categories increase, so did the number of denominational schools (see Figure 2). On the contrary, as the academic performance increased, the number of government schools in the different categories decreased (see Figure 2). There were only three denominational in the low-middle performing schools out of the 24 schools that were found, and these three were single-sex denominational schools. In the high-middle group, the number of denominational schools doubled to six, and the number of government schools was 10, being reducing to almost half of the number in the low-middle strata of schools.

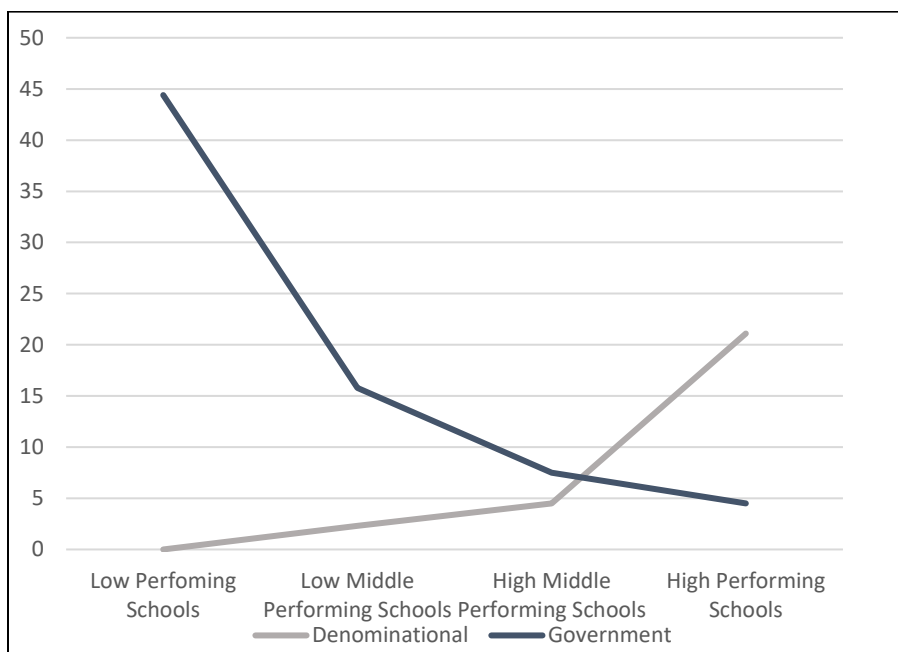


Figure 2. A comparison of the academic stratification of the denomination and government schools.

Three participants were selected from schools in low performing category. Two participants each were selected from schools in the low-middle performing strata and two from the high-middle performing strata. Finally, I selected three participants from the schools from within the high-performance range. It must also be highlighted that seven of the total 10 participants from the sample were principals in public government secondary schools, and three of the participants were principals from public denominational secondary schools belonging to the Muslim, Hindu, and Catholic faith.

Participant Demographics

To obtain a diverse range of participants in each of the four categories, it was essential to select the best participants based on their gender, religion, ethnicity,

experience, and willingness to participate in the study. Table 1 demonstrates the diversity in the demographic of the sample that was selected.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participant Principals

Participants' Name	Gender	Religious Background	Ethnic Background
Anisa	Female	Muslim	East Indian
Brad	Male	Muslim	East Indian
Charlie	Male	Roman Catholic	East Indian
Dan	Male	Pentecostal	East Indian
Ema	Female	Hindu	East Indian
Fran	Female	Hindu	East Indian
Glenda	Female	Roman Catholic	African
Hugh	Male	Roman Catholic	Mixed
Ian	Male	Presbyterian	Does not identify with any ethnicity
Jabari	Male	Roman Catholic	African

The sample consisted of six male and four female participants. Six participants were of East Indian backgrounds, two of the participants were of African ethnicity, and one of mixed identity. While one participant claimed that he does not identify with any ethnicity, he stated that his religious background is Presbyterian. The religious background of the other participants reflected a variety of religious persuasions: two Muslims, two Hindus, four Roman Catholics, one Presbyterian, and one Pentecostal. The experiences of the participants varied between 1 year to 13 years, four of whom had between 11 to 13 years' experience, four principals with 6 to 8 years' experience, and two of the participants had between 1 to 2 years' experience. It is also important to note that the participants emerged from schools in seven out of the eight educational districts in Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, the sample emerged from varying geographical

locations. This type of variation was necessary to ensure that data were not captured from a homogenous group in society so that varying perspectives of principals' lived experiences were represented in the data.

Data Collection

Data for this research were collected from 10 participants through three interviews. The interviews were organized to fit participants' schedules and needs. The interviewing process commenced at the beginning of April as students went on vacation during a 2-week Easter break, and the process was completed over 6 weeks. Some of the principals preferred to complete the three interviews within the Easter break, and others continued into the new school term after school hours. This preference resulted in interviews of many of the participants being scheduled consecutively, as opposed to completing the first round of interviews for all participants before starting the next. This type of arrangement facilitated the interviewing process as school was not in progress, so the demands on the principals' schedules were reduced. I conducted the final interviews for two participants and member checking over the phone to facilitate the participants' schedules. I used verbal reminders to facilitate and secure participation in the interviews.

The first two interviews for each participant lasted from 48 minutes to 120 minutes. A few of the participants were eager to share their experiences and willingly went beyond the allotted time of 90 minutes. The third or final interview was the shortest and ranged from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. Before I commenced the rigor of each interview, I adopted a "phenomenological attitude" as I engaged in the process of *epoché* where I became aware or conscious of my thoughts and wrote memos based on any

personal bias, prejudices, or assumptions that I might possess. This process gave me clarity and facilitated a more open, objective approach to studying the leadership phenomenon. I also observed the participants during the interviewing process and took notes about their facial responses, gestures, and mannerisms.

I felt data saturation had been achieved by the time I had completed the 24 interviews for the eight participants. However, to add credibility and to ensure that data saturation was indeed achieved fully, I purposefully selected two additional participants whose diversity was not represented in the sample thus far. The ninth participant was an Afro-Trinidadian male principal from a low performing school. Because most schools in the high performing category were single-sex denominational schools, the 10th and final participant was a principal from a high performing coeducational government secondary school.

This type of stratification of the categories enabled me to make a better sense of how intentional relationships were experienced. These categories made it easier to discern the similarities and distinctions both within and across the different strata. Thus, I was able to develop the noema-noesis relationship, the textural and structural dimensions of leadership through the process of sharing, reflecting, perceiving, judging, and valuing of principals' lived experiences. Strong overlapping expressions provided understandings that clarified the leadership processes and provided support for the two research questions. Discrepant data provided evidence that enabled me to develop a better appreciation and understanding of the uniqueness of the participants and the context in which they experienced leadership.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I adapted Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis. However, I further adapted this process with the Van Kaam Method of phenomenological analysis (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) to aid in the process of data reduction and testing. This integrated approach enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings on the structures of leadership.

Though my original analysis plan began with generating potential codes using a word frequency search, the words generated in this way did not accurately represent key findings in the interview data. Increasing familiarity with the data helped me to realize that the most productive mechanism for coding was the manual in vivo coding features and approaches available within the NVivo software. I used this as I read and reread the interview transcripts to manually identify the codes that best captured the key themes and ideas embedded in the interviews. This approach facilitated the emergence of codes directly from the participants' expressions that enabled me to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. As a result, the themes generated were better aligned and synchronized with the transcendental nature of the design. This process was followed by the second stage and third stage, the data-driven, and hybrid coding, which were done both sequentially and simultaneously during this process.

I also hand-coded the data, and I analyzed the three interviews consecutively highlighted in different colors, the various codes, relevant categories, and themes. This process enabled me to generate new understandings, develop coherence, assimilate, and correlate new insights and codes from the interviews. I was also better able to refine the

codes and remove redundant data from the interviews as I coded the interviews. The repeated coding enabled me to align the data better with each participant and the research questions. I was able to decipher and understand intentional relationships. Thus, I was able to capture the structure or essence of the leadership phenomenon of the individual participants with greater clarity and accuracy. I also felt this process aided in personalizing the intentionality of the experiences as I corroborated and consolidated the themes and connected them with the research question and subquestions.

Themes and codes also emerged as I applied this hybrid-driven strategy. Through journaling, critical analysis, and continuous authentic refinement of codes and themes, I ensured greater congruence with the essence of experiences. This process of developing the codes, categories, and themes was noted as they were identified or arose. Further, I interrogated the data through an authentic, iterative, reflective process to identify and refine the codes and themes as well as to enable identification of expressions and statements to ensure authentic alignment with the research questions. I also triangulated the data from the various participants to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. To ensure authenticity and confirmability of the findings, I wrote analytic memos as thoughts and ideas emerged during the process of coding and throughout the data analysis. I also engaged in journaling exercises during the data collection and the data analysis process, which enabled me to clarify my thoughts and ideas. Even though I was mindful of my experiences as an assistant principal in a secondary school, I found that journaling enhanced this metacognitive consciousness and so enhanced clarity of

understanding. This process helped to bracket my experiences so that I could obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' perspective.

I utilized analytic techniques from the Van Kaam Method of phenomenological analysis to aid in data reduction and determine the immanent themes (Moustakas, 1994). This data reduction process, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), enabled me to eliminate redundant information that was tested based on the two questions. Firstly, the transcendental process involved an interrogation of the data to find out if it captured the essence of the experience adequately. Secondly, whether it was possible to abstract, and place labels on the abstracted themes. Moustakas claimed that if it met those requirements, "it is a horizon of experience" (1994, p. 120). Statements, assertions, and expressions that did not meet these conditions were not coded. I eliminated the repetitive, overlapping, regurgitated, redundant, and vague expressions. The structures that remained were "the invariant constituents" or the essence of the principals' leadership experiences.

I related significant statements that were relevant to each of the two subquestions for each participant and stated the meanings of the significant statements. The meanings for each subquestion were further analyzed, and the aggregate was organized into clusters that were common to all participants. A central theme for the cluster was formulated. I designed a table to enable easy analysis, correlation, and corroboration of the clusters of the 10 participants for each of the subquestions. Thus, I compared the data from the 10 participants for similarities and differences among them. This exploration was done for each of the themes and categories related to the research question. The clusters were

referred to the original transcript to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data. From the analysis, I presented rich descriptions or vignettes based on the findings. For the final validation of the vignettes, I conducted member checks, where the participants verified that my understanding of the phenomenon was synchronous with their views.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I engaged in a rigorous process of data reduction to ensure congruence and alignment with the findings. So, I adapted Boyatzis' (1998) three-pronged strategy for coding, which was conducted concurrently during the data analysis process. To ensure authenticity and credibility, I engaged several processes to ensure the true meanings were derived. The use of the Van Kaam strategy to test the data based on the two research subquestions eliminated repetitive and redundant statements. I used both NVivo 12 software tools and manual processes to code the data. I found that hand-coding the data outside of NVivo enabled me to acquire a better understanding of the intentional relations and develop the structures of the leadership experiences of each participant. The repetition of this analytic process manually enabled me to better compare and corroborate the themes within and across the interviews with greater efficiency and accuracy. Also, during the analytic process, I reflected continuously and used my intuition to aid in understanding and acquiring meanings of the vignettes. Hence, memoing and journaling became a part of my routine that enabled me to achieve increased authenticity and confirmability as I synchronized the data with all the participants.

I engaged in a rigorous and systematic audit trail and ensured that the research was in alignment with all the MOE and IRB policies and guidelines. The rigor of the data

analysis process, which is reflected in the various strategies used in the analytic process, would have increased the dependability of the research. One such process is the constant comparison both within and among participant responses. Being mindful and the bracketing of experiences also ensured the participants' voices were not distorted.

Even though I felt data saturation was achieved with the initial eight participants; I strengthened the transferability of the study by adding two participants that were not represented in the sample thus far. Hence, I purposefully selected an Afro-Trinidadian male principal and a principal of a high performing government secondary school as these two categories were not represented in the sample. Widening the sample variation improved the noematic core or the structures that emerged, and so would increase the credibility and transferability of the findings.

Also, adding to the transferability of the study was the intensity, willingness, and engagement of the participants that enabled me to collect deep, thick, and rich responses of the participants. All participants were eager and excited to share their experiences and were enthusiastic about the outcomes of the study. One participant said that she wanted to share her efforts as people were of the view that she was not a hard worker since she was leading a low performing school. So, even though I reminded them that the time for the interview had ended, most were willing to continue sharing their experiences.

By adopting a reflexive consciousness, I was able to observe and better understand the participants' perspectives. My knowledge and experience as an assistant principal enabled me to identify with the participants. However, during the period data analysis of the data, I had the opportunity to perform the duties of the principal in two

public schools. This experience as an acting principal enriched my understanding of the systems, policies, procedures, and practices that were perceived, interpreted and valued by the participants. Also, I was able to explore strategies that were used by the various principals in their schools. For example, by being able to attend the principals' fraternity meetings, I developed a greater awareness of the school development planning process and issues principals encountered. Also, I was better able to understand diversity issues. Consequently, I became more mindful of my interactions and understandings of principals' circumstances and the approaches for handling their challenges. Further, observing, engaging in critical reflection, employing metacognitive thought processes, and journaling enhanced my knowledge of the research tradition.

Findings

In this section, I present the emergent themes where firstly, I aligned these themes with the primary research question and the two subquestions. The main research question is: What is the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago? Figure 3 provides a graphic alignment of this primary research question. Subsequently, I constructed two tables, Table 2, which presents a summary of the alignment of the emergent themes with the first research subquestion: How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives? Then, I constructed Table 3, where I present a summary of the alignment of the emergent themes to the second research question: How do principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges

encountered in secondary schools? Finally, I connect the themes with each research subquestion to provide a unified structural synthesis.

Emergent Themes

After horizontalization of the data and critical iterative deliberation, the significant themes that emerged from the data were leadership philosophies, school contexts and strategies, diversity and marginalization, power dynamics, principals' disposition, and evolution as leaders. The themes that emerged were aligned with the primary research question and were central to understanding and exploring the nature of the leadership experiences of the principals in Trinidad and Tobago (see Figure 3).

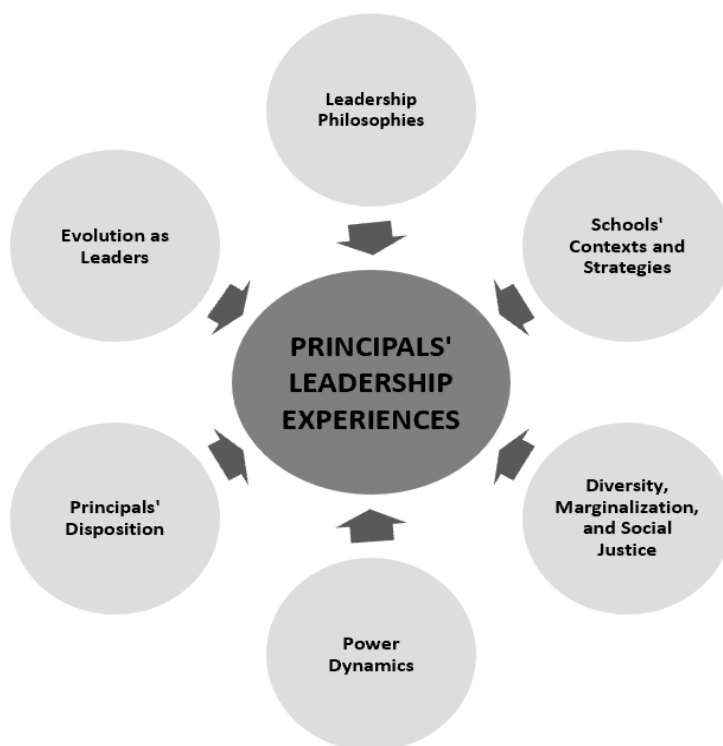


Figure 3. Major themes derived from the study on leadership experiences of principals in Trinidad and Tobago.

Alignment of Themes with Research Subquestions

Table 2 and Table 3 demonstrate how I further developed and aligned the themes to respond to each of the subquestions, respectively. The first subquestion that relates to principals' experiences leadership to achieve their strategic goals and objectives was aligned with the first five themes: leadership philosophies, school contexts and strategies, diversity and marginalization, power dynamics, and principals' disposition. The second research subquestion related to principals' developmental capacity and capability in coping with leadership challenges was aligned with the theme evolution as leaders.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes for Research Subquestion 1

Themes				
Leadership Philosophies	Contexts and Strategies	Diversity, Marginalization and Social Justice	Power Dynamics in Schools	Principals' Disposition
Subthemes				
Human approach to leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading from the heart • Relationship building Leading by example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differing leadership cognitions • Who will follow me? • Hiding your panic from others. • Taking management further and further 	Historical context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum change • MOE's policies and practices • Defying the status quo • Climate of violence Social settings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder involvement • Parental support Academic context and school ethos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing accountability • Collaboration Bureaucracy	Diversity and marginalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalization based on academic stratification • Conception of student success. Socioeconomic challenges. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low parental interest. • Student attendance. • Disinterested teachers. • Stigmas attached to the low SES students. Marginalized principals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race, ethnic, and religious diversity • Race used as a detractor • Level of disgust. • Racial and ethnic issues Marginalization in denominational schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender issues. Principals' insights on social justice leadership.	Power issues with middle managers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power issues with staff • Power issues with cliques • Power sharing • Coercive power • Coercion versus collaboration • Changing strategy 	Euphoria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is exciting • Solution oriented attitude • Being sociable • Frustration • Teachers' apathy towards students • Unfair advantage • Emotional attachment • Isolation and loneliness • Coping strategies

Note. Research subquestion 1 was "How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives?"

Table 3

Summary of Themes and Subthemes for Research Subquestion 2

Theme
Evolution as Leaders
Subthemes
Influencers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Mentors • Peers and district supervisors • Religious organizations • Schools • Administrative experiences
Critical reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think Aloud Strategy
Observations
Gaps in principal leadership development in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession planning • Developing relationships • Community building • Formal training and development • Control and autonomy • Increasing accountability

Note. Research subquestion 2 was “How do principals perceive the development of their leadership capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in the secondary schools?”

Findings for Research Subquestion 1: Leadership Experiences

In attempting to develop an understanding of the leadership phenomenon of the secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago, it was necessary to discern their philosophy of leadership. These beliefs about leading from the heart, leading by example, or taking a humanitarian approach to leadership appeared to permeate inherently through the actions and decision making as principals verbalized their experiences. Although participants’ leadership philosophies differed, these notions would have informed their understandings and influenced how they experienced leadership in their schools.

A strong element emerging from all interviews was that the leadership strategies that principals employed were closely aligned and influenced by their context in their specific schools. Similarities and differences were detected with principals' approaches to leadership within and across the academic stratification of the schools; low performing, low-middle performing, high-middle performing, and high performing.

Marginalization and social justice concerns stemmed from the diversity in the school environment, mainly related to socio-economic status, race, religion, and gender. These matters resulted in situations that occurred where principals had to respond. However, the diversity and marginalization that were highlighted in the different schools had some similarities and some differences. For example, in the lower performing schools, the diversity challenge that seemed to be most prevalent was socio-economic. While, in the higher-performing schools, diversity issues such as gender, ethnicity, and race were identified as being more subtle.

Principals' portrayal of their experiences leading their staff were delineated by power issues, especially in the instances where the principals were newly appointed. Some principals experienced profuse confrontation as they interacted with their staff. These leaders defined power issues as being potentially the most significant challenge they may have encountered as leaders. In some instances, principals identified power issues internal to the school, such as the individual and group dynamics of the staff that did not foster and propagate good work habits. Principals recognized the school environment to be one of 'no consequence' because the Teaching Service Commission

took too long to institute disciplinary action. Also, they claimed that teachers acquired strong support from their union, Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association.

In other instances, principals highlighted issues with bodies external to the school, such as with the MOE, the parents, and the community that was not promoting the best interests of the school. Hence, the theme power dynamics highlight as a critical theme needed to display the power relationships principals encounter as they aspire for success.

Leadership Philosophies

All principals recognized, acknowledged, and were mindful that they were leading by consciously looking for tangible changes, outcomes, or strategic goals. The findings revealed that the desired goals that all participants aspired to achieve were pegged to their beliefs, notions, ideologies, and philosophical assumptions about leadership. These insights influenced the planning process, decision-making, and actions of principals and, by extension, the experiences principals derived. Principals' conceptions of the leadership phenomenon offered a philosophical appreciation and were integral to how they defined themselves as leaders. Their beliefs would have informed the noesis by their perceiving, valuing, and judging lens in each situation as they relived and transcended the phenomenon to bring about tangible results. Thus, the vignettes provided excerpts or textural frames of reference that emerged from the data about how the principals' experiences become rooted in their consciousness and the meanings they generated from experience.

Even though the ideologies of the participants may have differed significantly, the overall theme, philosophies of leadership strategically informed principals' actions and

were aligned to their leadership approaches. This consistent theme, leadership philosophies, was fundamental to explore the response to the first subquestion and provided a critical lever to understand and clarify the in-depth thoughts and meanings. It also provided a rationale for the basis of the actions and experiences of principals. Also, statements included in this theme presented a mechanism to steer the development of a structural framework and textural portrayal of principal leadership in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

In attempting to understand principals' conception of leadership, I noted two most coherent concepts that captured the essence of how principals led to achieving their strategic goals and objectives. Firstly, all principals claimed that a humanistic approach is vital to their leadership. Secondly, leading by example or being an exemplar was also a fundamental aspect of their leadership and integral to the achievement of strategic goals and objectives. However, there was noticeable dissonance in the understanding of the concepts of leading and managing interchangeably. However, all principals agreed that to assess their leadership capacity; there must be tangible changes or outcomes.

A human approach to leadership. Another highly subscribed notion of leadership that was echoed by all principals was the vital need to reach the students at an emotional level as human beings, before they can reach them intellectually. Glenda shared her experience with one of her new teachers:

He is a new teacher...and really wants to do well. But he doesn't understand that most of the time when you're teaching, the children's heads are somewhere else...I showed him...you see that one there [pointing as if to a student] before we

can teach anything, you have to reach them. You cannot teach a subject; you have to teach a child. Therefore, you have to understand what the children are going through. And sometimes you won't teach anything; you just have to sit down and talk with them.

Brad echoed the similar sentiments reflecting that emphasis on meeting the students on an emotional level. He claimed, "you must reach the students as people first." Ian felt that being perceived as a person was of higher value to his leadership than being recognized as a principal. He claimed, "me as a human being than me as a principal is more valuable to my leadership." Charlie elaborated on this human aspect and felt that it is a vital aspect of leadership, and it should be a characteristic of all schools. Charlie further clarified that using this approach to leadership meant that he "appealed to human nature" and "people's emotional intelligence."

I probed Charlie further during the interviewing process and analyzed his reflections and experiences. Charlie appeared to link emotional intelligence with the hope of influencing human actions and relationships based on moral and ethical principles. Charlie shared, "...it's a human approach, and you are trying to appeal to people's emotions, I get passionate about it." Charlie was ardent that this humanistic approach should be a vital aspect of the teacher-recruitment process. He claimed that this understanding of being humanistic aspect is essential as without it, "teaching cannot exist... Independent of that [human aspect] teaching cannot [exists]." Charlie felt so strongly about this approach that he suggested questions to capture the human aspect of a person. Charlie recommended asking teachers simple questions such as how they "would

handle a situation,” or how they perceive a situation and asking about their “value system.”

Leading from the heart. The human aspect of Anita’s conception of leadership was “leading from the heart.” Her leadership practices were characterized by considerations of the children’s perspectives. Anita empathized and treated the children the way she felt she wanted to be treated and propagated this advice to her staff. She expressed:

In a school context...you have to lead from the heart because you know this is about children, and this is about their future. You have to ask yourself by thinking all the time what you do for others is what you would want to have for yourself...Basically, that is my mantra, even in staff meetings.

Dan followed a similar principle where he would try to perceive and relate situations to himself. He described one of his major challenges with a leaking sewer, which would have put his staff and students at risk. He discussed the underlying thinking, which informed his decision making and said:

if something is good for me; it has to be good for the staff. If it has to be good for the staff, it has to be good for me as well. And, certainly, none of us want to put ourselves at risk.

Relationship building. Likewise, Jabari also emphasized the human aspect of leadership and its critical importance. However, he described it as becoming more “relational.” This urgency to become more relational as a leader unfolded throughout the entire interview with Jabari. He felt that he needed to put more effort into developing

better “relational” skills to improve his leadership. Jabari revealed that for him, “Leadership is relationship building so that people understand and see the importance of working together to move the environment.” He explained, “Everything revolves around that relationship that you have with staff and the ability to empathize, the ability to listen and understand how people are thinking with a consideration that there is one vision and one goal to work towards.” He elaborated that in leading, he thinks “the major thing for anybody is people, people....” Upon reflection, he highlighted, “I am always there...Walking, talking, doing...Trying my best to be relational...and I have to say, trying because that is not an easy thing to do.”

On the other hand, Ian conveyed how his relational skills as a leader helped him to achieve his strategic goals and lead his school to success quite effectively. He reflected on how his “relationships became highly personal,” and this enabled him to engage his teachers in discussions leading to outcomes that led to positive changes in the culture and achievement of the school. He said that in dealing with conflicts, “when I’m finished with the issue, I still love you. And, people liked that...”

Leading by example. All principals believed that they were exemplary leaders and shared a variety of experiences where they led by example. Ema shared details of experiences, where to lead effectively. She needs “to lead by doing and demonstrating what should be done.” Ema emphasized:

I think to be an effective leader; you have to walk the talk; you can’t just come and say that you have goals, and I would like to see this and that and sit back. If you don’t go ahead and pull people along, then it really wouldn’t happen, so you

have to be forceful, and you have to find some way to put into action what you want to see.

Emma reiterated, "...if you don't lead by example, and you don't have a passion and drive to do something with the people in your department, then everybody will just do what they want." She gave an example of a gap or an area that needed improvement and shared experiences where her heads of departments did not show initiative in solving a problem until she actively demonstrated what to do.

If I were to say I want to see academic improvement... I'll tell the HODs [heads of departments] to do your thing, and let's see what will happen... It's not going to happen... So, unless you do things like that and go down to that level. Nobody is willing to do anything. So, you really have to take the bull by the horns and get down into the problem.

Charlie chose to lead by example. He expressed, "How I'm made up, I don't ask anybody to do anything that I'm not willing to do myself." He reflected:

When we have a clean-up campaign in school. I will be outside picking up rubbish myself. When we have to move furniture, I will go move the furniture. When we're having searches of the children, spot checks, I am there... I'm not going to ask the deans to break up a fight if I am not willing to go in the middle and hold down the children fighting, I think that carries some weight.

Glenda imparted her ideas about being an exemplary leader:

I really believe the principal should lead by example, so if I want the staff to dress a certain way... You must dress the way we want to be addressed.... So, I want to

come to school on time. I am here early... I want them to do their best. I do much more than I am supposed to do...

Jabari shared that he felt he was a “moral example.” He ensured that his actions were demonstrative of what he was saying, and if not, he revealed that he would take the necessary corrective action.

Ian elaborated on how he felt he lived and emulated the outcomes he wanted. In dealing with religious issues where many of his staff members and students were ethnocentric. He revealed how his ethnorelative mindset was demonstrated by his willingness to participate in religious and cultural activities outside his faith and appreciate the beliefs of others. He shared:

I never mandated, I lived it, I lived it. Everybody knows how strong I am in my faith, yet as I said, I would be there. I am not just supporting them. I am there with the Hindus at the celebration. As a matter of fact, the pundit will light the first deya together with me ... Some of the Christian teachers would ask me ...how you could do that, and I say well I don't understand how I could not do that?...but I think we work hard to let the students know...I am not giving up my belief to try to understand what you are doing. I could gain knowledge and understanding from what you are doing.... That does not mean compromising.

Differing leadership cognitions. Ian perceived, leading as being able to influence people. Ian captured the concept of leadership in a question, “who will follow me?” Ian stated very emphatically, “if you can answer that question, you will know if you can lead or not....” He asserted, “I believe that if I represent the staff, and if the staff believes in

me, and if the staff is willing to follow me, that's my leadership." How Ian experienced, the leadership phenomena would have been influenced by these beliefs. Ian shared several experiences where these tenets of leadership guided him to rationalize, support, listen, share, and convince individuals to build their trust and confidence in him as the leader of the school. He deemed that "people will follow when they think that their vision is part of the institution vision."

Hugh defined leadership using various lenses. His first response when asked what leadership means to him, was to point to a sign on the door and state that he had to refer to this sign "quite a few times since he entered this office", "Leadership is the ability to hide your panic from others." On one occasion where part of the school was demolished by fire, and he said that several members of staff were devastated. Hugh further refined leadership to mean "taking a group of people and moving them to where they would not have gone by themselves...where the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts." Hugh recapped one of his leadership mentors explaining to him that "leading is how you deal with a strand of macaroni, if you push it, it doesn't go anywhere. You have to hold it and pull it to move. So, he was, of course, famous for leading from the front" He further clarified:

knowing where you like to see that institution [your school] ... where it will be, where it should be, and having the vision of what can be done and doing what it takes to motivate all the stakeholders to help you get there....

Hugh's perspective differed as he explained that leadership Hugh clarified that for him, "Management is about pattern maintenance... getting the systems humming along and

then sitting back and saying look how they work.” Hugh added, “leadership is about taking management further and further.”

Brad and Ema’s descriptions of leadership included insights such as “putting systems in place” to increase accountability. Dan iterated that “leadership is managing and serving” and “leading is managing with a team.” Dan and Ema recognized that they were leading according to the beliefs that leadership was based on seeing “structure” or “systems working.” Dan shared, “For example, I am one who believes in structure. ...So, that I will know if leadership is taking place if I see structure in place, if I see systems working if I see we’re getting the outcomes....” Ema felt that by “putting structures in place... the school would run efficiently.... She elaborated, “once structures are put in place, then things would fall in place... “This visible outcome was grounded on both participants’ conceptions, notions, or philosophy of leadership, which is ‘seeing structure’ or other outcomes aligned to this underlying belief. These beliefs would have created the intentional or intersubjective relationship between the participant and the phenomenon of leadership and therefore influencing the participants’ transcendence of the leadership phenomenon.

Glenda believed that “leadership is situational... You deal [with issues] according to the situation...” and this is one of the belief systems that guide her actions and experiences as a leader. Upon reflection, Glenda recalled how she practiced situational leadership.

As the administrator...manager...leader, my actions and decisions are taken to support, encourage and motivate all to operate in the interest of the school... To

get the best out of the staff is to understand their personalities, philosophy of education, their locus of control etc. and I will know which style to use with whom to ensure the best outcome in the interest of students and by extension the school... As a result, based on the situation and the people involved, my style varies from participative to democratic and autocratic to laissez-faire.

Underpinning the actions, experiences, and processes that led to the achievement of strategic goals and objectives were the participants' leadership philosophies or their conceptions, ideologies, and beliefs about leadership. Expressions that emerged from the interviews that provided understandings of their stance about the notions, beliefs and philosophical assumptions about what leadership means to the participants were "who will follow me", "putting systems in place", "leading by example", "the ability to hide your panic from others", "managing and serving", "relationship building", "leading from the heart," "dealing according to the situation", "taking a group of people and moving them where they would not have gone by themselves", "taking management further and further" and "developing a human approach to leading."

Even though the ideologies of the varying participants may have differed, it is vital to identify that overall themes, which is their philosophy of leadership, were strategically informing their actions and were aligned to their leadership. This invariant theme, leadership philosophy, was fundamental in exploring the response to the first subquestions and provided a lever to clarify the in-depth thoughts and meanings and offered a rationale for the actions and experiences of principals. Also, statements included in this theme presented a mechanism to steer the development of the structural

framework and textural portrayal of principal leadership in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Schools' Contexts and Strategies

The findings revealed that the strategies principals used to lead their schools varied based on their schools' contexts, organizational culture, structure, and resources. Hence the theme, schools' contexts and strategies, speaks directly to principals' experiences as they plan to adapt and adopt varying strategies and approaches to achieve their strategic goals and objectives in their unique situation. A strategy is the development plans, policies, and approaches to lead schools to gain a position of advantage by exploring emerging possibilities and overcoming challenges. Thus, to determine and achieve strategic goals, principals assess their schools' environment garnering the relevant knowledge and understanding to develop and implement strategies to enhance their effectiveness as leaders.

Historical context. Evident in the articulation of principals' experiences was the rationale for the emergence of their schools and how context affected the strategy and strategy implementation. For example, Ian's discourse revealed the historical foundations and philosophy behind the construction of the high performing co-educational government schools that he led. He explained that this school was built because of the need for inclusion of the working class and to increase educational opportunities for all citizens. He commented, "the working-class people who made it [to the elite schools] at that time were very fortunate and far between...." Ian shared that secondary schools built around the same time were the top-performing government secondary schools in the

country as they were made of students who did not get a place in the top-performing denominational schools.

Curriculum change. Further, Ian elaborated that apart from the public government schools catering for the needs of the working-class people such as the “craft workers and tradesmen”; These secondary schools were intended to cater for people of professional backgrounds, the education of boys and girls together, as well as for technical educational needs. Hence, the curriculum of these schools was far more diverse and inclusive than the denominational prestige schools’ curriculum. The schools constructed in this era were known as the “premier” government schools, with an expanded curriculum offering technical subjects such as “woodwork, cookery, and typing.” Therefore, the contextual elements played an integral role in the development of the school’s curriculum and culture and influenced Ian’s decision making. These factors corroborated with Ian’s leadership philosophy, impacted strongly on the development of strategy, strategic goals, and strategic planning for success.

Ministry of Education’s policies and practices. The political context of the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago is very top-down, with principals being asked to align their goals and priorities with the policies and guidelines provided by the MOE.

Ian commented:

Before you start thinking about your school, ...all principals first should be familiar with the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education [MOE] because whether we like it or not, whatever we do must support that line. So, I think it is a

safe bet to see what plan is fit for education in Trinidad, and I now carry my school forward but within that line.

Further, Ema explained how she used the MOE policies and guidelines from the school development planning initiative to support, develop, and align her goals and objectives in her school. Aspects of the plan included a school self-assessment. This tool enables the principals to create a snapshot of the current state of the school and areas needed for improvement. She explained that her school's strategic goals emerged through the process of "looking at where we are and where we want to go and setting incremental, achievable targets and getting buy-in." She expressed the goals and objectives of the school were aligned with the aims of MOE, the collective vision of her staff, and her core principles and beliefs.

Defying the status quo. Even though principals may disagree with a policy or practice by the MOE, it is not usual practice for principals to defy the implementation of a MOE's policies. However, a few principals shared situations where they challenged the status quo. Ian defied the MOE's mandate to implement competence-based vocational qualifications (CVQs) because he felt that the MOE's mandate was not in the best interest of his students. He claimed that this policy was not aligned to the quality, nature, and academic capacity and capability of his students. Despite the pressure placed on Ian by the MOE for each child to pursue a CVQ subject, Ian did not conform. He shared insights about how he aligned his objectives with the contextual elements of his school. He shared:

When I was at [X Secondary School], the things I want to look for might be quite different from what I want to look for in [Y Secondary School]. The senior comprehensive schools do CVQs. When they told me that I have to do CVQ at [my current high performing school], I said, ‘al yuh crazy like hell!’. I had worked on a committee that started the CVQ’s. The CVQ had a purpose. It does not meet the needs of [my school], a school where children are doing nine O’ levels subjects [where students excel academically]. Why force them to do CVQ? In the Senior Comprehensive [which is a lower performing] where children who are at a loss and need skills training, let’s do the CVQ there.

He shared that the students at his school are high academic performers and did not need CVQs since they were excelling at the same or similar subjects at a higher level in half the time. Ian explained that CVQs were considered “lower graduation points than the CSEC [Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate] subjects.” Ian stated that he inquired from the MOE, about the potential benefits of this program for his students and he was told that the MOE wanted to ‘use his school to promote CVQ because if this school is doing CVQ, then the senior comps [comprehensive schools] will say well it has value.” Ian claimed that even though he was reprimanded for not following the mandate of the MOE, he did not conform because he did not see how his students would have benefited from it.

Climate of violence. Also, Jabari defied the status quo and the MOE regulations by using physical force to discipline students. Jabari revealed how he attempted to achieve his goal of improving discipline in his school. Upon reflection, he explained that

being a disciplinarian, he took matters in his own hands even if it meant offending the authorities so that he could curb the problems in his school. He shared:

When I came to this school, it was really a climate of violence. The second day there was a chopping on campus. There was a fight outside and papers [news media coverage] being made.... I remember going to graduation or an interfaith ceremony to send...the students away and scratch bombs [fireworks] throwing here and throwing there. I am a very touchy principal. I actually held the students and threw them out of the school. I have done it. I have gotten in trouble with the police and everybody else. I felt, and I still feel it may be wrong. In this environment, it may be really crazy to do that. I do it less because things had changed because when I came here, that is what I did. I held I moved. I pushed out...I send home legally as the case may be to make the school what it supposed to be. It took a long while for us to have an environment, so whenever the SSIIIs [school supervisors in charge of the education district] visit, they would always speak about a school culture that appears to be working. We have a really good outlook of discipline, we don't get fights again, we will get them off and on bullying, but the environment in terms of that kind of toxic, violent environment, not so at all. When I was at my last school, the people always indicated that the school seemed to be as quiet as any denominational school or even more quiet.

Social setting. All principals agreed that sensitivity to their social environment was integral to their functioning as leaders. They described their context and explained how they influenced their decision making and actions. To lead effectively, Charlie

provided a detailed illustration of the need to be aware and sensitive to the social or community context in which one functions. Charlie explained that his school was founded as part of a political initiative of the government, the Secondary Education Modernization Program (SEMP), in the latter half of the decade in 1990. Being a leader in a low performing school, located in a high-risk area, Charlie reiterated the need to understand his community context. He reflected:

I got reports of children that supposed to come to school, and they didn't come ...they're in their uniform, and they're on the junction with fellas [fellows] by a grocery. They're smoking their weed [marijuana] ...I jump in my van, drive up in the middle of all the fellas. 'Morning gentlemen'. Rasta with their weed, chain on their neck. 'Morning gentlemen'. Some might watch me; some might utter morning. Then I ask [speaking to the student] ...why you here? You're supposed to be in school. Then I take them [the students] in the van and then carry them ...until they reach in school.

Charlie received several violent threats. However, he appeared to be impervious in his dealings with the people in his community and the contextual challenges he encountered. Charlie reflected, "One student here threatened me, and that is because he [the student] was high [on drugs]...he [the student] threatened to burn down my house and kill my family." While he indicated he "didn't back down" and "would not normally back down", he still took the necessary precautions and made a police report. Also, he conveyed that he considered shifting his behaviors and actions as a leader because of the crime situation in the context in which he operates. He commented:

These days because of the level of crime and the extent to which people go in terms of violent crime, I have to consider toning down. When I get angry, I get very loud, so I have to tone it down a bit. But there is a point [where] you have to draw the line. And the way the country is going now, with violence and that kind of thing. I'll be a little cautious. But I always tell myself the day I fear to come to work, the day I fear a student, I will send in my resignation. Because if I'm sitting in this chair, I ain't afraid of anybody.

The participants all affirmed that it is necessary to critically assess their social environment and develop an appreciation and awareness of the context in which one functions. They clarified during the member check that the social context of the school encompassed and is reflective of both the community and national climate.

Stakeholder involvement. In the high performing schools, the participants expressed that there are fewer children in the lower economic bracket in their schools. Also, they indicated that parental, community, and support from the alumni is very strong. Principals revealed that the students at the lower end of the academic continuum encountered more socio-economic challenges than those on the other side. Also, these deprived students did not even have the parental support needed.

These students emerged from low poverty-stricken homes with unstable family backgrounds with the dynamic of distance from the schools compounding their challenges. Principals in these schools experienced challenges in dealing with high absenteeism rates and dropout rates of students. Charlie stated that on an "average day,"

the absenteeism rate ranged from 20% to 35%, and the dropout rate was between 10% to 15% when the students reach 14 to 15 years.

Principals felt that socio-economic status had a more significant influence on student behavior and performance than race and ethnicity. Ema claimed that she experienced similar issues emerging from schools with various racial compositions and similar socio-economic status. Ema noted similarities in terms of sexual behavior and family background. She shared:

I was surprised that the culture of the children and the way they behaved in terms of sexuality and sexual misconduct.... So even for a predominantly East Indian..., you would think that the family structure is strong, but it is not.... So, you have children coming from single-parent homes. A lot of the children come from homes with stepfathers, or children are from different fathers in the same house.

Further, Brad and Anita, principals of the low-middle performing schools, reinforced this perception and expressed similar sentiments based on experiences with their students who came from similar socio-economic backgrounds. They agreed with Ema's perspective that "...poverty is a great equalizer..." and socio-economic status had a greater influence on student behavior and performance than race and ethnicity.

Parental support. Based on the reports of principals, there was a sharp contrast in parental support and involvement in the low performing schools as opposed to the high performing schools. Charlie, Anita, Ema, and Brad commented that they experienced a lack of parental support and supervision for students in their schools that all fell at the lower extreme of the academic continuum. Charlie relived experiences where parents

demonstrated very lackadaisical attitudes toward caring and accepting responsibility for their children. He revealed a case where a student had psychological, attitudinal, and socio-economic challenges. He explained that the school provided the support and made the necessary referrals to the student support services, but the parents did not demonstrate the responsibility for their child's health care. Charlie disclosed:

Part of the reason would be [to acquire] the finances to even travel to where they had to go to the Centre to get the medication. They couldn't afford it, so we got the parents involved again. We used the social worker and guidance officer to get the extended family involved...to try to convince the parents that they are the ones who have responsibility for her [the student] to get her to an alternative Centre where she can get the medication that she needs. We got the parents to agree, yet every time we decided to assist and get them to do something, they duck[avoid] us. For instance, we organize the National Centre for Disabled Persons [NCPD], which is one of the centers we identified at the school's cost. We arranged to have a site visit, to carry the parents and let them see it so that they will be comfortable with their child going. One parent didn't make it. We got the other parent and an aunt to go instead. The aunt was all for it. The mother at that time who went said that she was all for it, as well. But since then, a couple of months now, we can't get her to come and sign the relevant documents....

Anita's experiences were one where her parents' behavior did not support the development of a positive culture as they encouraged their children to fight. She shared an issue where two girls fought, and one girl's parent decided to take matters in her own

hands. The 'parent attacked' the other girl outside the school. She said, "the parent came and picked up her child but waited and came back on the compound at dismissal to get at this other child."

In contrast, the principals of the high performing schools indicated that they experienced high parental support and community involvement in their schools. Ian said, "I find that I got tremendous support from the parents. I find that once the parents came to the school, once they adopted the culture of the school, and once they saw what was going on. It was amazing....." Hugh reinforced this positive parental influence and support in the high performing schools. He stated:

We have our [Parent Teacher Association], a very vibrant group of women and men...Parents just want the best for their kids, and they coordinate with the school in a fantastic way to have things done, mostly fundraisers for the state of the plant, and we also have HR [Human Resource] and PR [Public Relations] development. They do things for the staff. They do things for the boys. They coordinate nicely with the alumni.

Hugh shared an incident where, under trying circumstances, he obtained the support of the parents, the community, and the government. He explained that his school was consumed by fire, and teachers, parents, and students were emotionally traumatized. Hugh obtained tremendous support from the parents, community, alumni, and government to rebuild the damaged area. He relived the moment, stating that he felt a sense of euphoria, especially when, within a short space of time, the block in the school was rebuilt even better than before.

While in high-middle performing schools, parental support was not as strong as the high performing schools; it was notably more reliable than in the low-middle performing schools. Both principals from the high-middle performing category, Fran and Dan, experienced a positive collaborative, supportive school culture that attempted to target the needs of their learners. Also, they attempted to compensate for the lack of parental support for the children in their school by making a tremendous effort to provide psychosocial support to ensure that these students could cope with the challenges they face. Dan shared how he encouraged activities and clubs that promoted the development of such as culture in the school. Despite these efforts, both principals still echoed a level of concern about the level of parental involvement and stated that it is a work in progress and needed more parents to become involved.

Academic context and school ethos. Principals' leadership strategies would have varied based on the different aspects of context. The academic context emerging from the stratification of the schools played a critical role in principals' planning and decision making in their schools. From the analysis, it was observed that the schools at the higher end of the academic continuum have a positive school culture. These five principals in the higher-performing schools relived experiences by using affirmative words and phrases to describe metacognitive moments. The content laden words and phrases included: "overwhelmingly positive," "inclusiveness," feelings of "euphoria," "family culture," "strong peer support," "highly motivated staff," "high staff morale," "diversity in discussion," "unity in expression," "parents just want the best for their kids and

coordinate with the school in a most fantastic way,” “respect for every race, creed, and religion,” safety, as well as “equality, enjoyment, modeled on top of that success.”

However, the conversation with the principals of schools at the lower end of the academic performance continuum depicted entirely different scenarios. The culture of the school emanated from varying expressions used by Brad, Anita, Jabari, Ema, and Charlie. Examples of their sentiments were “this place was chaotic”, “students emerged from low socio-economic backgrounds”, “the children we get here...when they come here the behavior is not what you would expect”, “they do not respond to the rules, they have a kind of mentality that is not about learning”, “I want somebody to understand what I am saying because it was really rough,”, “bringing the parents in; that was also a challenge”, “parental involvement low”, “it isn’t a positive climate in terms of everybody working together...You have divisiveness on race, social standing, political affiliations, divisiveness down qualifications and age factor”, as well as principals describing their teachers as “not being motivated enough or passionate enough.”

The principals’ portrayals of their leadership experiences highlighted that principals in the same or similar strata experienced similar culture and climate in their schools. Also, the evidence underscored more commonalities with the low-middle performing schools and the low performing schools concerning culture and context, as opposed to the high-middle performing schools. Similarly, the high-middle performing schools showed a greater inclination towards the high performing schools.

The findings revealed that the leadership styles of principals in the high performing schools were similar regardless of the type of school in the sample: the boys’

denominational school, the girls' denominational school, and the co-educational government school. In the high performing schools, all three principals expressed that their role as an instructional leader was more collaborative and focused on curriculum expansion. They were comfortable with sharing leadership with staff. Even students were empowered as leaders and were instrumental in leading teams and extracurricular projects.

Hugh claimed that his role as an instructional leader did not require him to micromanage learning and instruction as his vice principal was very efficient in this area. Hugh was primarily focused on the expansion of the curriculum to include the teaching of geography and improving the performance in Spanish. His involvement entailed the enhancement of curriculum policy, planning, and implementation. Similarly, Ian's instructional leadership strategy was focused on the expansion of the informal curriculum to enhance extracurricular activities. Fran also expanded the curriculum by providing the infrastructural support for an information technology lab. In the delivery of the formal curriculum, Ian would pass and observe his teachers and commend them on their use of differentiated strategies in learning. Also, he played an integral role in improving teaching by making teachers accountable as he would analyze and discuss them individually with the teachers so that they could identify strategies for improvement.

However, the principals' experiences in the high performing schools differed significantly from principals in the lower performing schools. All principals at the lower end of the academic spectrum placed primary emphasis on improving the discipline of their schools before focusing on instruction. Brad felt that he was unable to focus on

learning and instruction in the way that he should because he was primarily engaged in improving discipline. Anita's strategy, even though she was focused on discipline issues, was to employ instructional strategies to enhance learning. She created a forum in her staff meeting for open discussions to promote the sharing of best pedagogical practices. Also, she increased library usage to encourage students to work independently.

Instructional leadership strategies in the low and low-middle performing schools were primarily focused on student engagement, getting teachers to go to class, and directly influencing the improvement of learning and instruction. Jabari believed that the principals' job as an instructional leader is one where he is supposed to ensure that students are engaged in such a way that they are excited to come to school. He explained:

I believe that we have to teach in a particular way that students want to come to their class...so that when the bell rings [to end the class], they don't want to leave...whenever I do a class check or clinical supervision or speak to the Heads of Department...I think the best way to make any student move forward academically is by engaging teaching...Engaged teaching means that students at all times must be anxious if they don't come to school because they are missing the fun, and they want to come to class and do things. I believe in teaching by doing...It is what principals are supposed to be doing.

Charlie shared that his instructional leadership and decision-making is based on the fundamental principle "what is in the best interest of the child." Charlie reiterated his seriousness towards ensuring student maximizing learning and instruction:

What I say all the time... is that my philosophy, plain and simple, is what I want for my child I must want for other people's children, and I tell my staff that all the time. So, I would want my child to go to school and make sure they have a teacher in class. Therefore, I would ride anybody back inside here if they are breaking class. I want my child when he gets homework that it's corrected on time, and he gets a fair assessment. Anybody just set a paper and give marks I would ride their back for that. I want my child to have a holistic education, to be exposed to sports, to go to a football match to wave a flag....

Jabari felt that teachers were not focusing on improving their instructional strategies to enrich learning and instruction in the classroom. He described how he was instrumental in improving the climate of the school in terms of discipline. When I asked Jabari if the improvement in the discipline and the culture of the school triggered an improvement in academia, he replied, "it is supposed to improve academic performance." However, he claimed, "because of the lack of teacher engagement, performance did not increase significantly." He articulated, "...So the discipline improved, you have a sense of quietude in the school, but...the teaching and the engagement in the class; that [teaching] culture has not changed significantly." Jabari elaborated further, "...the students are fighting less, breaking class, less, doing a lot of stuff less and more sedate, but they aren't passing exams." Jabari explained:

The only thing that could make that happen is increased student engagement in the class. The teaching remains the same. So, what has happened...is maybe the children have changed, or the children are now mindful of an environment that if

they're there, something [learning] will take place. But, that consequence of not passing exams has not stuck in their heads. So, there has not been that shift, and we have been trying...as much as possible to get this shift with students understanding that they are responsible for their studies...teachers are responsible for grades going up....We are struggling to get that movement in that direction.

Jabari remarked, "What I think happened in education in Trinidad and Tobago is that a child comes in, and we don't make a difference...." He elaborated, "Yes, they come in, and if they study... they study, and if they don't want to study, they don't ...and all schools lose value." Jabari qualified his statement to say that "I am speaking generally because I know sometimes there are teachers that make a difference."

Increasing accountability. In several instances, the principals described situations where the respective members of staff were not taking responsibility for their decisions, actions, or performance. These individuals were not being held liable, and there were not any resulting consequences. As instructional leaders, Brad, Ema, Jabari, Anita, Charlie explained, their difficulty in leading students to achieve success is increasing accountability by the respective members of staff. Jabari and Brad explained that his heads of departments are not data-driven and do not align the goals of the school with the School Development Plan. They said that these middle managers are not data-oriented and are not using data to inform their practices. Brad described his disappointment with middle managers' understanding of data importance and ability to collect and share relevant data:

their understanding of their middle management role...to take the time to collect data, and give me empirical data...No, I cannot say they do that at all.... middle management they are prone to giving anecdotal statements here and there and everywhere and so, on the other hand, I am very upset about those kinds of things...

When I asked Ema how she knew that she is leading to achieve her strategic goals and objectives, she explained that by “putting structures in place, so that the school would run efficiently...once structures are put in place, then things will fall in place... to make people more accountable.” She believed that establishing and improving stringent measuring and monitoring systems is a fundamental means of assessing the progress of the school. She commented, “I think they [teaching staff] were doing it before, but like it was an exercise on paper when people use to do schemes of work, but I think looking at your results on an individual basis really helps.” Ema claimed she needed to tighten the structures and systems in the school, both at the departmental level and for the deaneries.

I am tightening up, just tightening up, and letting people know that I am mapping their progress and holding them accountable for their subject area. It has been improving the academics but only two years that I am here...

In this way, both heads of departments and deans and are forced to perform because “new reporting systems are being demanded of them.” Ema emphasized that “data is a wonderful thing,” and data management and data-driven decision making are critical to assess improvement in the academic performance and discipline. At the departmental level, Ema closely monitored the timely submissions data and reports,

teacher and attendance to class, and results from the various types of assessment. Ema used the result from summative evaluation based on standardized exams to analyze and track students' performance. She stated:

So, when you have the data...like every year for CSEC [Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate], I would draw the graphs and for the first staff meeting to show how they[students and teachers] performed; last year's performance, and the last two years performance, and this year's...and see what it looks like...compare the subjects over three years and compare different subjects...so people could see. To me, unless you could see that...You are working in a vacuum.

Ema employed a strategy where she makes the staff aware of their performance both at the individual level and at the departmental level with the hope that they would feel pressured to perform. Her perception is that teachers are concerned about maintaining a positive self-image so that they would have to make a greater effort. She stated:

I have never had a showdown, so it means that they would kind of jeopardize their position in terms of how they look. So, if you are not showing improvement while other departments are on board. You see them improving by leaps and bounds. Then it says something to you. So that is the kind of pressure I put on them.

In the deaneries, she aggressively increased the monitoring practices, strategies, and approaches to dealing with various situations. The deans had to improve their monitoring systems and place emphasis on narrowing the gaps that are identified in the

system based on the data captured in the school self-assessment, such as students' attendance and punctuality as well as uniform breaches. Ema claimed:

You have to be on your children all the time; you have to know your children.

You have to patrol. They have to know that you are dealing with them if they should do something wrong...So they know we are not letting anything pass, and that is how you get the discipline to improve.

Ema stated that when she arrived, the number of students that were suspended went up because she suspected that students were being sent home without appropriately recording and doing the suspension forms legally. She claimed, "I laid down the law for the children, so they know whatever they do, whatever it is, I will take them to task..."

Collaboration. Charlie explained, to obtain trust and buy-in from the staff, it is necessary to collaborate and include them in the decision-making. He expressed:

I stay away from trying to make unilateral decisions. Even if I have a decision, something I'm inclined to do, I call members of staff that I trust to get their feedback, and there are those that I call that I know are just out to be antagonistic to get their opinion as well, so it puts me in a position to make the better decision...because I don't want it to be said that I am biased because I have an affiliation....

Ema may have a personal vision for her school. She said that it could not be perceived or phrased as her goals because they may oppose it, and she would not get buy-in. Ema described how she takes a personal interest in the improvement of the plant, and she is very persistent and hands-on and is willing to go beyond the call of duty to ensure

that the physical facilities and environment are functional, clean, and beautiful. Ema gave the school a facelift because, in her mind, the “environment is supposed to look a certain way, to feel a certain way.” However, she attempts to portray these goals as a collective vision.

... as I say, I don't ever present it as my goals... You will have a vision for your school, but I don't think you ever say this is what I want to see for my school, I word it as collective or our vision for the school....

Bureaucracy. The bureaucratic context, which embraces the alignment of the schools with various aspects of the education system, played an integral role in the strategies employed by principals. All principals expressed their annoyance about the bureaucracy of the MOE and their apparent lack of appreciation and understanding concerning challenges that principals are encountering in their schools. They highlighted various aspects of the financial, disciplinary, data, and information systems where the process is long, drawn-out, and cause a lot of frustration for them. These processes directly hinder principals from achieving their strategic goals. Charlie was most passionate and captured their feelings best as he declared, “This ministry [MOE] makes life a living hell... Too much paperwork, too much triviality, and bureaucratic red tape to get things done.” He felt confused about the priorities of the MOE and complained:

I have literally hours and hours of paperwork to do. That's absolute rubbish. If a water pipe burst now and I have to go and buy a tap, I have to get three quotes to go and buy a tap. So, what? Let the water run out and shut down the school for a day or two days before I get water back. That is madness....

Principals also complained about the bureaucracy related to the disciplinary process with teachers. Principals were usually hesitant to start the process with delinquent teachers as they felt it was a “futile venture.” These leaders indicated that instituting the disciplinary process against teachers was not the preferred approach to disciplining teachers because resolving these issues seems to be challenging and lengthy. Both Jabari and Ian regretted not starting the process at an earlier stage with their teachers and felt that they allowed the situation to have developed too far. They questioned their indecisiveness but also thought that they did not get the support from the MOE as they tried to resolve the issue. Jabari shared:

For me, it’s always more because we live in an environment of no consequence. It takes very long for anything to happen. So, the initial movement is healing and letting people understand that things may not be perfect, but we are here for our students, and we focus on student outcomes. And that, that could last perhaps too long...sometimes it may. I take long before I start the process and I don’t think that; it may be the right thing to do. I’m not quite sure. But that, reaching to that process of counseling and verbal warning and written warning [progressive discipline] takes a good while with me, but it does happen.

Upon reflection, Jabari regretted not starting the disciplinary process with this teacher faster because of the adverse impact that he is having on the school climate. “Well, in retrospect, with this officer, I should have moved sooner. Because I think his presence in the environment is damaging...” Ian shared that he preferred a “softer approach’ but he was forced to use the disciplinary procedure because of the number of

complaints he was getting from parents and students. He shared, "...because it forced me to use the disciplinary procedure which I had not been using. I had been trying to do things in a professional but collegial way, and it did not work."

Diversity, Marginalization, and Social Justice

Emerging from the data on principals' leadership experiences in Trinidad and Tobago is the need to address diversity, marginalization, and social justice issues to achieve strategic goals and objectives. Diversity in these educational institutions exists because of the wide range of beliefs and conceptions emerging from matters related to socioeconomic status, gender, religious, racial, social, and cultural beliefs, as well as academic performance. Marginalization issues were highlighted where principals felt that certain groups of people were deprived and streamlined and were not provided with ample educational opportunities to achieve success. Some principals even shared experiences where they felt marginalized as students, and this heightened their awareness of marginalization issues that students face. Glenda reflected:

I think it's because of my experiences going to school where especially when I was going to [a prestige girls' school] from Junior Sec. [low performing secondary school]. I felt very marginalized at [a prestige girls' school] simply because I was from Laventille. I was poor. You know I didn't have parents who had big names like the other children, most of the children were white, I'm black.... It was clear to me that I was treated unfairly because of my socioeconomic background and my race.

When Hugh was asked how he felt when handling social justice and inequity issues, he shared:

A bit of it, I would admit resonates personally because, as a student, I did not come from a wealthy family, and I came from a part of Trinidad, which was not recognized....I came from the East, and I went to school in Port of Spain, so I was marginalized as a student in a school that was designed to cater to the French Creole elite and that sort of thing. Coming from the East and not off that socioeconomic background, I was made to feel a bit different, so it resonates with me....It makes you want to fix, you identify, and you want to fix and you just gently tell the teacher that this is an education system where not everybody is at the same level...and you have to prove yourself and reach far and wide and come up with different teaching strategies to get everybody to learn.

Diversity and marginalization. The data from the various schools was intended to capture a maximum variation sample so that issues that principals experienced related to diversity would emerge. The sample was composed of a population of principals from various backgrounds, Afro-Trinidad, Indo-Trinidadian, and a principal with a mixed background, with diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage. These principals led schools with very diverse school populations with backgrounds that were very different from their own. Even in the two denominational schools selected, the principals informed me that most of the school population did not belong to the faith of the school. Based on this heterogeneity, how principals led their schools and coped with the issue of diversity

and marginalization was critical to the success of the schools. Ian gave an example of diversity at his school and community:

Diversity is something that I hold as being extremely important, whether it is racial, cultural, religious, and even sexual diversity. I put it on the front burner because [X secondary school] is situated in an area where there are equal parts of Indian and African children. There is a sizeable Muslim population in the school. There are children who speak about being gay or lesbian. When they speak about it and what I try to encourage is I don't have to agree with you, but I will listen to you. You will not be treated differently because I do not agree with you. I am from an older generation, to be honest with you, I cannot support the gay movement, but neither do I discriminate against gay people. So, you can't get me to say I think it's right, but at the same point time, your being gay will not affect you as a human being in my eyes, but I will not agree with it.

Marginalization based on academic stratification of schools. Issues of diversity, marginalization, and social injustices were more prevalent in the schools at the lower end of the academic continuum as opposed to the opposite end. The students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are already disadvantaged because of their low performance and the academic challenges that these students face. The principals complained that the secondary entrance placement system in Trinidad and Tobago is pillared on and promotes marginalization based on academia. This system stratifies the students based on language and logic so that students with better support are more inclined to achieve success. For example, Jabari stated that the children that have greater parental support and financial

resources are more apt to be placed in the higher-performing secondary schools.

According to Charlie, the students in the low performing schools are marginalized because “they are not getting equal opportunities for education like the elite and the rich sections of society, that have increased support.”

Conception of student success. De Lisle (2012a) pointed out that the conception of student success in Trinidad and Tobago’s society is primarily determined by academic achievement. However, the principals in the low performing schools, Ema, Brad, and Jabari endorsed Charlie’s ideal “to produce a well-balanced child who can survive in today’s society....” These principals expanded their conception of success for their students to include attainment in “other ventures” such as arts, sports, and attitudinal and behavioral improvements. Charlie maintained that success for him is determined by “the type of child that leaves the school.”

Charlie enthusiastically conveyed that sports involvement provided opportunities for students to succeed at the school, district, national, regional, as well as the international levels. He highlighted a few students that were involved in sports and were able to transfer their attitude and diligence from their sporting and artistic pursuits into their academic pursuits as well as other areas of their lives.

Three years ago one of our young ladies was able to get a scholarship to a university abroad based on her performance in track, and yes we see not as many as we would like to see, we have seen some improvement in terms of academic, not necessarily performance but diligence in terms of trying harder when it comes to their studies, because they realize when they meet these spotters out there who

come to recruit them at events and so on, and they are told well you still need a subject or two subjects or so. It becomes real for them, and so they have more diligence when it comes to them trying harder and discipline as well. Discipline yes, definitely there is an improvement in discipline... Not to the level we would like, but definitely, there is an improvement.

Ema also highlighted how she recognized her students by placing winners on a wall of fame and having a parade through the streets in her community. She articulated, “See on the wall here, the under 20 school football winners and we had a parade with music and what not through the streets [Laughs].” Likewise, Jabari said:

In terms of other accomplishments, I think I work very closely with people who are champions, so the dance teacher is a champion, so this school became the dance champion school, the volleyball coach... the coach is a champion, so therefore, I can enable people to reach their potential in that sense. I have seen enthusiasm from the students. For example, the art students, they are very happy when they’re doing art...so everybody wants to do art. Everybody wants to join the dance [class]. Everybody wants to learn drama, that kinda stuff, and the teacher helping and supporting is a thing that has improved in relation to those senses [different learning styles].

Charlie further underscored that other benchmarks used to measure his success were the tone of the school, the reduction in violence, the politeness and respectfulness of the students, and the cleanliness of the environment. He explained:

The quality of students that leave here, not academic quality, that's a fact, minor fact. The mere fact that when you walk...[or] a stranger [visits], the students would tell you 'morning Miss' or you could ask one of them where the library is, and they will carry you to the library rather than say walk down there. The fact that when I walk on the compound, there is minimal garbage. Over the years, when I came here, this is not an exaggeration. At least every other day, there was the police, ambulance, and blood on this compound, fights, and gangs, and things. I can't tell you the last time we had a fight.

Charlie measures the progress of the schools based on both quantitative and qualitative standards. He spoke to this issue saying:

We went from a 1% pass rate as the golden standard to last year was 17.8%, so we have increased academically. Sports as well, cricket, football, trophies we have won, we have won at the division level, now we reach the championship level. Again, quantitatively that's a success. Qualitatively the quality of students coming out, to me, that's my greatest success. We have children whom you would have given up on. You can't seem to reach out to them; you know they're going to end up in jail before 16. They come out of here with at least one subject.

Socioeconomic challenges. Assertions from the principals demonstrated higher levels of socioeconomic challenges in schools at the lower end of the performance continuum. Principals related students from low-socio-economic backgrounds or poverty backgrounds to higher levels of indiscipline, demotivated staff and students, low academic achievement, and low parental interest. They faced challenges of creating a

positive school culture that would involve curbing the indiscipline, getting the parents involved, finding strategies to motivate staff and students, improving pedagogical practices, working with decreased government funding, and dealing with social injustices at their schools. Brad cautioned:

We have an underclass, that's why I keep referring to socioeconomic background. Jamaica has it spiraling out of control. We have an underclass, and beyond a critical mass it cannot be controlled, beyond a specific size in all cultures, in all societies, you try to be as best as you can to be egalitarian about life. There is that underclass, people who push the boundaries, people who may not be accepted, those who may be financially despondent, etc. What we see in Trinidad is that underclass spiraling out of control, and it has very little to do with race. We cannot allow a marginalized group to continue like that. It's not healthy for the group, the wider society, because once it gets beyond a certain size, it cannot be managed. In other societies, it's so small that they don't even bother with it. The education system has to address that.

Ema agreed with Brad and commented that from her experience working with students of varying races, ethnicity, and gender, "poverty is a great equalizer." Initially, Ema believed that students of East Indian families had a stronger family structure so that their behavior would have been different, but this was not what she experienced. She encountered these "children coming from the same thing [backgrounds] single-parent homes. Homes where they have stepfather's, or the children are from different fathers in the same house. They are all the same...."

Low parental interest. The five principals from this study representing the lower end of the academic continuum indicated that most students in these schools were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and parental involvement was very low. Jabari declared that “the reason that the students are here in the first place is that their parents didn’t care in the first place.” Jabari expressed concern about a lack of parental support and the type of example that parents were setting. He stated that students, especially those in low-income homes, lacked supervision, and do not get the necessary support in doing homework. His philosophy is that “parents could help, full stop.” He elaborated:

most times, you learn from what your parents do and, and their parents were not involved in education anyhow. So, we have a serious issue where students are not supervised at home. Where the parents do not understand the importance of students doing homework given from the school. So, I think that you know that studies suggest that lower-income students perform lower... I think the school supposed to be that jewel that makes a difference, and it’s happening in various areas in the world... basically, what I’m saying is that I don’t think the parents are very much involved in their students’ success.

Charlie explained that his philosophy entailed providing psychosocial support to meet the needs of the students before academic learning can take place. In attempting to set goals, Charlie pointed out the importance of knowing the dynamics of the students at his school. He commented, “...You have to realize the students you have. Most of our students, 95-97% of our students, are not academically strong.” He reported his school has a population of about 500 students, there was a 10% to 15% dropout rate as the

students entered from three or they approached the age of 14 to 15. The student population reflected a predominance of students of African backgrounds. There were similar percentages of boys and girls. When I asked him what type of needs, he catered for, Charlie replied:

A very high percentage of our student population are from broken homes...very high. I would estimate if you count broken homes as in single families as well, single-parent families, I would say as much as 75% to 80% of our students. So, a lot [of students] are left to their own devices. They don't have mentors, typically father figures. The communities they come from are communities that have challenges in terms of crime, drugs, and things like that all negative aspects. So, it's easy for them to follow the wrong path.

Student attendance. The principals in the low performing school explained that children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds have low attendance at school, and this directly influences their performance. So even when the intervention takes place and support is provided to the child, the home may not be able to continue to provide the kind of psychosocial support necessary to enable the child to succeed. Ema reported that she has not seen where the support from the benevolence directly impacted and improved academic performance. She stated, "A lot of cases that we have here are like that even though we are helping the children, I don't think it makes a difference to their academics."

Disinterested teachers. Charlie perceived that his staff was not interested enough to inquire about the backgrounds of the students in their class. Charlie recounted times

where he felt his teachers were not interested or did not show initiative when it came their students:

Teachers generally can't name ten children in their class. If their class is 25-30 children, they can't name off the top of their head ten children. They can't tell you which child is on welfare in their class...They can't tell you which child in the class is from a single-parent family, only living with a mother or father...You have a child missing for a week...and come back to school as normal, and you didn't ask what happen, didn't ask for a note, or during the week you didn't pick up the phone and call the parent and ask about the child. If you don't have that in you, you cannot convey, let me tell you something, children are the most perceptive creatures on the face of the earth. In the first 30 seconds you walk into a classroom, that child will tell whether you are or against or indifferent to them.

Stigmas attached to low SES students. Ema claimed that the stigmas attached to students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds are compounded by teacher demotivation and that together these posed a major challenge in moving the school forward. Ema stated that teachers commonly refer to the low SES students as the "type of children that they have," and this belief that the students are from deprived backgrounds is used to validate and justify the student's poor performance. Ema believed that the onus is on her to build the children's self-esteem and self-confidence. So, Ema keeps reinforcing that they are "good children." She reiterated that there is a "lack of effort from teachers as they are not motivated or passionate enough about what they're doing." Ema feels this attitude fuels the stigma attached to a socioeconomic status that is

propagated by certain members of the staff. Ema also attempts to create a sense of belonging for the students. She stated:

When I talk to them in the assembly. I refer to them as my children...I said to my staff, these children, you know we talk about 'these children we have' ...you have to let children see that they could experience success so that we can build on that...It will give them confidence, and it will motivate them to do better.

Ema elaborated:

Sometimes you have to appeal to them and have a good relationship with them...so when they feel or when they see you treat them as a person...You have to value each person because you don't know what that person could bring to the whole organization. So even though someone might be eccentric, you will be surprised in a situation how that person will function. So, you really have to treat each person as an individual and try to be as respectful as possible...You have to be dynamic. You have to be a certain way, open-minded....

Marginalized principals. Principals working in schools at the lower extreme of the academic continuum complained that they felt marginalized. Anita complained that only the principals at the top performing schools are "recognized and celebrated." So even though principals like herself and Ema worked very hard, no value was given to the effort or the improvement that they have made to their schools. She commented that they are usually compared to principals in prestigious schools where students are placed based on high academic performance in the Secondary Entrance Assessment. Anita even said she was "glad" that I was interviewing so that someone would listen to her and know the

efforts that she and her colleagues in these types of schools are making. She expressed frustration with the system and said that no matter how much effort she put in, with the caliber of students she receives, her school may never become a top performing school.

Brad affirmed Anita's perspective on the evaluation and assessment of principals and their schools. He commented that although these principals would have shifted the average academic performance of their schools from less than 25% to between 25% to 50%, they are judged based on a comparative performance as opposed to being 'highlighted' based on the growth in performance of the schools. So, even though they were working harder and demonstrated an increase in performance, compared to those principals in the prestigious schools, their efforts were not recognized.

Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. Principals claimed that there are issues of race, ethnicity, and religion hovering in their schools. However, principals' experiences varied based on their specific school context. Also, there seems to be a general avoidance or a downplaying of how principals handle, acknowledge, confront, and deal with racial issues. Ema deemed race issues to be "sensitive" and professed that she was not skilled to address racial issues in a staff meeting. She revealed that she would not shun dealing with any racial or social justice issues that may present itself. Ema stated, "I think [because] diversity is such a part of our culture that it is not really an issue because we are accustomed to dealing with it... You have to be open-minded, and you have to be flexible." However, she disclosed that her science background might not have supported the development of her linguistic ability in articulating sensitive issues such as race. She

feels a person more apt to deal with race and diversity may be better equipped to deal with it in an open staff forum. She shared:

now I am science, so I don't have the gift of saying things nicely [laughs]. I would say it as I see it...I might know the street things and what goes on. I cannot lecture anyone on it. So, I think if you have to talk about topics like that [race] then...someone needs to be trained in my mind to talk about it in a forum like a whole staff.

Ema eventually acknowledged her hesitance to dealing with diversity issues and suggested that more emphasis should be placed on this area not only at the individual level but as a society. She uttered:

...the diversity thing' is an issue that we in Trinidad know exists, but we really do not give it too much thought, but it is an issue...like a lot of Trinidadians, we know it exists, but we really do not like to deal with it head-on...But it is something we have to be sensitive about and aware of... So, I think I can focus a little more on that...it is something that I never gave much thought about. It is something I would have to think about a little bit more even in terms of how people perceive me or look at my actions.

Brad said he was "uncomfortable" to discuss race issues. He shared that there was the stigma of being "racist" attached to you if you spoke about race. Brad shared, "if you speak of racism, then you are racist." Brad explained how difficult it was for him to discuss racial and ethnic issues. He reflected:

When it [racial issues] would have come up, you're wondering what you should say. How should you respond? So, you're uncomfortable because you don't know how to respond, what is the correct response. There is this theory that if you speak of racism, then you are racist. That was where the discomfort came... and the fact that we shouldn't really be discussing this....

When I asked Charlie how he felt handling race issues, he indicated that while he disliked it, he had no difficulty dealing with these types of 'discordant issues. He claimed that he is a very straightforward person and that he is not afraid to confront any situation which presents itself. Charlie also claimed that he has no allegiance to any race or culture that could sway him to behave or show preferential treatment to any group. Charlie stated, "My father...use to tell me there is no pillow so soft as a clear conscience, and now when I go to sleep in the night, I rest my head easy." He explained that while these issues exist, he cannot accuse anyone of being racist or prejudice without evidence.

Without proof I cannot accuse anybody of being racist, I can't accuse anybody of feeling that they're better than anybody else, so everything has to be, I call it a game. You have to play, and you have to read personalities, and you have to work around it and get it done... Constantly you have to be on the ball. I have to be one step ahead of everybody else. You have to play the game.

Jabari was unwilling to recognize, confront, and deal with social justice issues related to race and ethnicity. He reiterated that he recognized immediately that his "consciousness is that it's not ethnic." So, his strategy in dealing with ethnic issues is to "steer" the students, "in a way to recognize what caused Miss or Sir to behave like that

and then they understand it's not ethnic." Jabari expressed, "I don't see ethnicity.... I don't know why...." However, he acknowledged that there were ethnic issues being raised in the staff. He affirmed, "I hear there are ethnic issues in the staffroom... but I have not actually spoken directly about ethnic issues." Jabari commented that there are ethnic and racial issues raised by students and the "children... actually, believe that it's ethnicity, and they can't change their belief. It's difficult for them." Also, Jabari expressed his awareness of ethnic issues in the Trinidad and Tobago context. He commented, "... I think in this environment when I say in Trinidad and Tobago, a lot of people see ethnic issues."

Jabari shared a situation where he was questioned about the criteria selection of members of the middle management team. He was made aware of the composition of the middle management team was skewed in favor of an ethnic group and he did not follow the MOE policies and guidelines for acting appointments. He indicated that he placed individuals to act as Middle Managers based on "general considerations or students' consideration," and this raised questions about ethnicity. He stated:

Somebody told me to have a look at the Heads of the Department and Deans. Now, these people [Heads of Department and Deans] are acting, and I used to choose not on seniority, which of course, is a problem from the Ministry [MOE] but more so for Deans you look at capacity. And it's only then I realized, I think I found out, I think I forgot it after, there should be consideration of some sort of equity or the other, but I actually more so believe in skills or ability than equity. So, I looked at it, and I recognized it might be skewed a bit. And when I gave

staff the rationale, I didn't bring up ethnicity at all because people wanted to know why these people were chosen. It's based on consideration or general consideration or students' consideration, students' behavior on what is taking place.

Further, to cope with the diversity, all principals incorporate celebrating and observing the variety of festivities from the varying ethnic compositions in the school curriculum. Hugh and Fran celebrate and observe the different religious celebrations even though they are denominational schools. However, ethnic issues still exist within the different fragments in the school. Hugh indicated:

We do celebrate everything, Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation... So, things like that are done. We have a very healthy RI [religious instruction] program in this school. So, it brings in the different religious persuasions from Hindu to Muslim to Christian to many different Christians. I once hoped that this would allow people to understand the importance of diversity and people coming together. Nonetheless, you will still hear perhaps a student saying something about ethnicity....

Race used as a detractor. Principals presented several situations where race was used as a detractor for parents when parents, teachers, or students want to get away or evade the underlying issue, which may not be ethnic. Jabari reiterated that race had been used by children to side-line the real issues. So, in dealing with ethnic issues, he "steers" the conversation away from the race to focus on the real issue to uproot the underlying issue, which is "never ethnic." Ian illustrated a case:

two little African boys who got into a fight with some other children, not Indians. These two boys were known in the school as the bad boys, and I kept begging them when we came to the last day, they were in form five. Listen, don't spoil the last day...no vendettas, and unfortunately, they had a fight, and what I did was I petitioned [the District Supervisor] at that time, and he supported me, and those two boys sat all their exams in [another school] ...And the way the boys' told their parents was to say Mr. [Ian] racial because it was two African boys.

Ian commented on how he had "documented" all evidence of their' behavior before the event and all the "warnings" given. "So, when the parents came in, and they talked about the race talk." Ian iterated that he had all the evidence to show where he warned the entire school. He said, "I could show you when I told the whole school that if anybody gets into violent conduct, you will not write your exams. It wasn't directed at them, and they went ahead... Therefore, the parents had no grounds..."

Level of disgust. Charlie said that he felt "disgusted that people are still at that level" when handling issues of race and marginalization. He shared an experience where he was accused of being racist by a parent. So, he asked the parent how he could be racist if the issue is between two children of the same race. "if I'm saying one right and one wrong...How is that being racist." Charlie asserted that his simple solution to the problem of dealing with race is to ask the children to talk freely and honestly about the way in which he treats them. He shared, "I tell the parent you not here all the time. I tell the child, listen, your parent here, nobody can pressure you... Speak honestly, that's all I want...." Then Charlie enquired from the children whether he treated them "unfairly

...with disrespect or treated them racial in any positive or negative” way. Charlie claimed, “Never once in my career have any child responded yes.”

Upon reflection, Jabari provided another example where race was used by the student to evade an issue. Jabari recalled that this issue as particularly “jokey,” where an irate parent came to see “Miss Sonnylal” [pseudonym] accusing her of being racial. He indicated that the child and parent were from Afro-Trinidadian backgrounds. He observed that the parent assumed that Miss Sonnylal was of East Indian orientation because her name was derived from East Indian heritage. He continued:

...then, Miss Sonnylal came. [She] is a very dark African lady who married an Indian man, Mr. Sonnylal. So immediately there...you could see. You have to figure out well if this is not racism, then your child doing nonsense. And so, I always use that story.

Jabari detailed:

...but sometimes they [the students] will agree that some teachers are a bit hard on a particular race ... When I ask for real evidence...I don't think any student has ever come here and indicated this...Perhaps one, a teacher came over and said he/she overheard a teacher speaking negatively about Afro-Trinidadians. But I don't think I got solid proof after that....

Jabari acknowledged:

...there is a possibility that I have not done requisite work in that area, if you are speaking about racial injustice, perhaps that is something that I really need to investigate, and I really have to investigate it properly.

Racial and ethnic issues. Several principals acknowledged that students were being marginalized because of their race. In one situation, Glenda said that she felt an East Indian teacher was not understanding the students because his background differed from theirs, and she had to call him in to address the issue. In another instance, Ian addressed a situation where five boys were making condescending remarks to their classmates of another race. Ian reflected on how he handled this situation and declared, “I realized I had to create peer pressure within the whole group in the other direction. I have to make those boys feel left out of something good that we have.” Ian recalled that he “never called them and neither was he harsh with them” Ian said:

I held assemblies, and I would talk openly about racism...people would laugh when I say this... I have no knowledge of race, so that I would stand up on the stage with the children. I would say things like alyuh [you all] watch me what am I? I black, I short, I skinny what am I? But you know one thing. I love myself; I love who I am. So, I don't care what you call me because I don't know what I am....

Then Ian recalled that he “brought out the issue in the open but without accusing any one of the five...” and he said, “I understand that a student said this... but I never said who said it, and he is there.” He then asked the assembly, “What do you all think?.” This strategy placed so much pressure on them that they eventually came to him one by one and confessed. Each one began “peeling away from the group...” and the issue “faded away without confrontation...” Ian iterated:

One of the things I tell people about this situation is you know when you act like that, they are looking for a confrontation. They are looking for a forum where they can express these racial views, so don't give in. Don't give them confrontation, don't give them the forum.

Charlie also commented on a teacher who wanted students to maintain a certain distance from her. Charlie stated that diversity and marginalization issues do exist, but he had difficulty in pinpointing which issue was most prevalent. He gave an example of a teacher who felt superior to the children.

Like I have a teacher here who tell the students point blank to keep two feet away from me. Do not touch me. Do not enter my space. She's from an extremely wealthy family, very high colored. The impression that everybody has is that they are below her level...

When Charlie asked him if he spoke about bias and unfairness with the staff, he commented that he actively addresses inequity issues.

Yeah, I was not going to stick my head in the sand and pretend it didn't exist... I let people know, people who know me know I speak my mind. I don't put water in my mouth for anybody, and it wasn't just a matter of ... throwing it out there for throwing it out sake. It was to let people know, especially those on the receiving end, ...just that they weren't being given the full opportunities as others... and that I'm aware of the situation...

Charlie reiterated that previously people were unwilling to step up if an opportunity presented itself because they felt that the qualification or the criteria didn't matter. He

gave the assurance that as the leader of the institution, he was willing to ensure that all individuals were treated fairly and were given equal opportunities for success.

I'm the head of the institution, and I'm willing to address the situation, so it is up to you now to step forward. And if you step forward, you will be given a fair opportunity like everybody else once you prove your worth. Whether it's [for a] position or for whatever else.... whereas before ... people weren't willing to step forward even though they may have been qualified for the position...because they know it would not have boiled down to their qualification...

Marginalization in denominational schools. While principals revealed that social justice issues were more prevalent in the lower end of the school performance continuum, examples of marginalization were also mentioned in high performing denominational school settings. These faith-based schools were governed by both the denominational boards and the MOE rules, regulations, and policies. One of the main characteristics of these schools is that the principals have the option to select 20% of the students based on the religion of the school. Therefore, a small group of students was sometimes selected by the principal because of their religion, although they did not make the academic benchmark required for placement in the school. Hence, their performance was not up to par with the rest of the students. Hugh explained that teachers and students would stigmatize these students and would make comments such as “you come in here from the 20 percent,” and the boys would feel bad. Hugh's strategy was to mix up these boys with all the students. After monitoring performance over a period of 5 years, he

found that these boys' performance was on par with the rest of the children. He underscored that solutions exist and are being attempted and supported by evidence.

Gender issues. Jabari felt that the boys in the secondary school system were marginalized based on pedagogical practices. He illustrated this disconnect with the curriculum delivery and the nature of boys. Jabari explained that his school was initially a coeducational secondary school and was one of the schools that were piloted as a single-sex boys' school. The results of this experiment were that the schools that were converted to single-sex girls' schools excelled, and those that were converted into single-sex boys' schools fell behind. He iterated his vision to his teachers was to use different strategies for the boys, and they rebelled at his school. He explained that the MOE eventually decided to reconvert these pilot schools to coeducational schools.

Jabari commented that this change from being a coeducational school to a single-sex school impacted everything: the schools' academic performance, teacher-motivation, and discipline. The discipline of the boys depreciated as teaching methods were not streamlined for them. Teachers resented this change and became less motivated. Jabari reflected:

It impacted on the CSEC [Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate] scores. It impacted on the NCSE [National Certificate of Secondary Education] scores, and it impacted on teachers' motivation to teach. Because the male students we got at that time were not as academic as the students before. The teachers here were accustomed to a third-tier type SEA [Secondary Entrance Assessment] intake, with around 30% passes at CSEC [Caribbean Secondary Examination

Certificate]. When the boys came, everything changed dramatically. It went down to less than 10%. Boys are different in terms of how they behave. They are boisterous, so it was difficult to teach them.

Principals' insights on social justice leadership. To ensure students obtain ample opportunities to achieve success, principals described how they led social justice issues. However, this appeared to have been done instinctively based on their core values and principles of fairness and natural justice. When asked to define social justice and to say what part it plays in achieving their strategic goals, several principals, Charlie, Ema, Jabari, Dan, and Anita, appeared to be unfamiliar with this term as a leader. Ema inquired, "social justice leadership?" Charlie's response was "social justice in terms of what?" After I provided them Theoharis's (2007) explanation where this type of leadership places emphasis on advocacy for the eradication of inequities and injustices, especially in marginalized educational institutions. Ema stated that "...you have to be perceived as being fair." Charlie conveyed with confidence how he went to the "extreme" and related this to the concept of social justice. Charlie explained, "...when I say the extreme, it's making sure everybody gets their fair share, equal opportunity, and really [go] to the extreme that people[normally] wouldn't do." Brad concurred with Charlie's stance that dealing with social justice issues requires the leader to move beyond addressing such matters superficially and be willing to delve deeper.

With most students at his school emerging from impoverished backgrounds where they regularly experienced social injustices, Charlie naturally gravitated towards leading to achieve equity and fairness, thus inherently emerging as a social justice leader. He

claimed that he actively sensitized the staff about these issues, but he also observed that it was to his “detriment” and “they got fed up with hearing it.” However, all principals agreed that it was an area in which people were not comfortable discussing and “people don’t like to talk about it.” Charlie said that it is “extremely” important to be a social justice leader in the school context.

On the other hand, Ian, Hugh, Fran, and Brad demonstrated a relatively good understanding of social justice leadership and indicated the issues they encountered in attempting to be a social justice leader. Brad shared his understanding and practice of social justice:

Social justice has to do with making sure that individuals have access to the facilities and experiences that will allow them to reach their fullest potential, regardless of disability, socioeconomic background, etc. What is the school doing? We are trying to support as many students as we can motivate them, inspire as best as we can. We do try to empathize, there are times we can help, and times we may not be able to. We try to ensure whatever programs/activities we are having are within the financial range of the vast majority of children, whether it be a field trip, class project...

Hugh, Fran, and Ian provided definitions related to equity, fairness, and “equality” of treatment for all. Both Hugh and Anita stated that they encountered social injustices because of minority religion. Both Fran and Hugh stated that even though they were in denominational schools and the denominational board might not be supportive. They delivered a very open curriculum incorporating all cultural and religious activities.

Fran elaborated that there was a need to remember that the schools are public schools, and according to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, “every creed and race must have an equal place.”

Brad believed that social justice challenges were not an uppermost concept in the minds of practitioners, and there is a lack of emphasis in this area. He shared:

Most principals I know are aware [of social justice leadership], to what extent they practice, I don't know. Most of us, as school leaders, we continue to unintentionally marginalize children who are socially and economically disadvantaged. I don't think we are doing as much as we possibly can. It may have to do with the fact that we are bogged down with so many things.

Power Dynamics in Schools

Power dynamics in the school surfaced as a fundamental determinant of how leadership was practiced and experienced by principals in their attempt to achieve strategic goals. Power refers to the capacity and capability that the principals possess to influence others, to affect their thoughts, mindset, behaviors, and actions. The legal power structures, or the power that comes from ones' organizational role and position in the school, are set up in fundamentally the same way. They follow a similar hierarchical structure with the principal at the top, assisted by the vice-principal, then below is the middle management team, the teachers, and the students.

The findings revealed that principals' experiences with power differed as they interacted with different individuals and groups in their schools. Principals' personality traits, the fundamental principles, and philosophies on which the schools were founded,

as well as the stage in the evolution of the school, all influenced how power issues manifested in the schools. Ema affirmed:

Each school will have a different culture and would be at a different stage, so I met my school at the stage where it did not have an administrator for a while, so you have to put things in place. It might have a school where the principal just left, and you came in, then you might still see things that could change.

The power dynamics pertaining to principals' operations might vary based on circumstance, and this would engender differences due to variations in the school culture. Therefore, varying dynamics of power were experienced by the principals as they assumed the roles and the responsibilities of principals. Thus, varying skillsets or approaches would be required in different schools to succeed.

Power issues with middle managers. Principals encountered power issues with members of their middle management teams. However, these matters were unique to the dynamics, and culture or climate of each school. Ema provided an example of the power issues that she encountered with members of her middle managers and claimed that it was one of the most significant challenges she encountered in leading her school successfully. She attributed the context and circumstances of the school to be directly related to the type of power issues that arose from direct interaction with her middle managers. Ema joined a school that was previously without both a principal and a vice-principal for over three years, and several members of the middle management team were acting in the position of principal and vice-principal. She suspected that the middle managers became settled in the roles of principal and vice-principal and so they either found it difficult or

were reluctant to reacclimatize to their prior roles and responsibilities as heads of departments and deans when she assumed duty. This dynamic created strained power relations between herself and the core members of the management team. Ema described a scenario where she was checking the minutes of the heads of department meetings that revealed that they were not focused on discussing curriculum issues or issues related to their core roles and responsibilities. Ema recounted that in attempting to correct issues, “you can be as gentle as you want, you are still going to ruffle feathers.” She had experienced conflict with most of the middle management since she has been there. While she never had an open conflict with members of the administration, she stated that when things were not in favor of certain individuals in the school, she would experience some level of pressure or “a silent rebellion.”

Power issues with staff. In Anita’s situation, she encountered power issues in her relations with her staff. Anita emerged as the appointed principal from within her staff during a period of leadership instability at the school. Anita reflected on how she became the principal:

the way it happened. The then principal left on promotion to supervisor, and then the vice principal was acting as principal...she just acted for a couple of months...I believe... She said she was going to move on secondment to another department in the Ministry of Education [MOE]. It was very sudden, and I was thrust into this thing [principal position] with nothing. They did no handover. Neither of them....

Even though Anita was the most senior qualified person, she shared how being younger than members of her staff meant that she had difficulty in wielding power with certain older members of staff. Anita reflected on her lack of experience and the need to develop assertiveness as she assumed the role and responsibilities of the principal. She stated, “sometimes you have very strong personalities, a lot more assertive than I am, and they will challenge....”

Anita’s strategy in leading her school was to establish her power and authority with her students, which she claimed eventually filtered to the staff. She shared that the indiscipline issues were very high at the school, so teachers felt that she was too “soft” when she was not suspending the students. However, her approach was working with the students. Anita highlighted, “when I started to get them [the students] to come around, now that gave me power with the teachers.” Her approach was communication and discussion, so she had much one-on-one face to face conferences and group meetings with members of staff to reach them and try to win them over.

So, as I said continuously whether it was in a group in a staff meeting or whether it was to appeal to individual teachers, it was a lot of talking, explaining, and showing them what to do. Walking them through what I was doing, and showing them the results, and showing the little bit of progress, however little, and hoping that they would eventually turn and change their way of thinking. To be quite honest, some people did come around, but then some people did not at all. And, when the tide started to turn in the staff room, and they started to become a minority, their option was to leave, which I gladly facilitated.

Anita emphasized that being of the same age group or even younger than certain members of staff it took some time to establish the level of respect and trust in her leadership, especially since she chose to treat with issues differently. Also, Ian adopted a similar approach to Anita. Both principals did not believe in punitive strategies, so their strategy in leading and influencing people was to work towards empowering students and staff.

Power issues with cliques. Power issues concerning cliques were highlighted in Charlie's situation. Charlie became the principal of a school where the former principal and most of the staff were not of his race or ethnicity. He reflected on how the former principal led using a "powerful clique of teachers [who were of his race] who felt they had additional power and privileges." To establish equity and equality amongst the staff, Charlie explained how he had to assert and exercise his authority. Also, his leadership was dominated by race issues.

The previous principal is the one who started the school. He started the school with a majority of his race, and they ran the school. So, they developed a strong affiliation and bond with him. So, when I came here now, being East Indian, there was a bit of...I wouldn't say resentment... But unfamiliarity, different styles.... with the school being smaller at that time he had a group of people who were coworkers with him, and he relied on them solely to run the school.

When I came here now, I tried to dismantle that. I did dismantle that. The power, so to speak, shouldn't be in the hands of a few. So, I broke up the

responsibilities from as simple as the activities, the events, the functions, down to timetabling everything, to the various members of staff from all races... For staff to want their school to move forward, they must have a sense of ownership. You have to do something to feel that you are part and parcel of the institution. This didn't augur well with some members of staff because power is a funny thing. It goes to people's heads. And when they had all this power, they did what they wanted, when they wanted, how they wanted.

Power sharing. The research revealed that principals in the high performing schools such as Ian and Hugh were more comfortable to share power with members of their middle management team. While the principals such as Ema, Brad, and Jabari, who led on the lower performing end, expressed a level of dissatisfaction with their management team and their lack of enthusiasm to use data to make decisions. Hugh demonstrated how he led his school using more inclusive, democratic, and participatory leadership strategies with his middle management. Hugh reflected on his circumstance and the process of decision-making and managing his middle management meetings. He appeared to be sharing power by sharing leadership roles and responsibilities and involved more collaboration by a democratic decision-making process. Hugh expressed:

The interesting thing about those [middle management] meetings is that it is chaired by the vice principal, and the principal takes the backseat to listen. I will contribute, but I do not vote on any issue unless it is casting a vote to break a tie. So, our theme is diversity in discussion, unity in decision, so after the meeting, we go back to staff to let them know that these are the things that came to us a team,

and we discussed it in the management meetings, and this is the way we project to go forward.

Both Hugh and Ian not only empowered the middle managers but also encouraged the sharing of leadership with their students. In both schools, staff and students were integral in leading core teams and clubs in the school. Students were empowered by these principals to build relationships with staff and handled extensive responsibilities.

Coercive power. Principals such as Ian, Jabari, and Ema displayed several instances where they used coercive power or punitive measures to coerce or force someone to do something. Ian used coercive power to get people to conform to regularity and punctuality issues. Ema further discussed several cases where she used coercive power and followed the disciplinary process. In two cases, she made formal complaints against the safety officer and the security officer and removed them because they were not performing their assigned duties. Also, Jabari explained how a member of his staff involved the teacher's union when he tried to coerce the teacher to deliver a new curriculum that the MOE mandated.

Ema expressed that as a leader, if you are using coercive power, "you have to be strong," and if the staff is not performing their roles and responsibilities, then coercive power or disciplinary action must be taken. Her primary strategy is to focus on her goals and objectives and align these with people's roles and responsibilities. Ema commented, "if they are not falling in line, then I will try to coax them." However, if the situation does not improve, it becomes necessary to begin the disciplinary process with that

individual, especially when everyone knows that an individual is in breach of the regulations. She reflected:

I have a conflict with that teacher, and everybody agrees that she is not doing what she is supposed to be doing, meaning her colleagues in that department, her HOD [head of department], and so on. If you allow something like that to slip and you don't deal with that, then the other teachers will say anybody can do anything and get away with it. But when they see you pull up on people and go 'hardline,' then people realize that you are serious about what you are doing. I don't mean to antagonize anybody or pick on anyone or anything like that.

Coercion versus collaboration. All principals declared that collaboration was a preferred strategy. However, Jabari acknowledged his initial discomfort with this approach, explaining how his upbringing fell within a rigid, disciplinary style of leadership where power lies with authority. He recognized that individuals preferred increased collaboration, sharing power through inclusive decision making, and building relationships. He confessed, "I was steeped into the consideration of a disciplinary type movement and the consideration that things must be done at an appropriate time." Jabari explained that this disciplinary approach lends itself to an autocratic leadership style, which is more task-oriented, not focused on emotions, time bound, not collaborative. He described his approach as one which involves "telling rather than asking," and he makes decisions based on what he feels is right without negotiation and consultation.

In a disciplinary sense, meaning when a member of staff does not do what they are supposed to do, you let them know immediately in a very strong term without

demonstrating any kind of feeling towards it. That is what I call disciplinary sense. The understanding is that my talking to you means that you have to move now immediately and get to do what you are supposed to do, that disciplinary sense about it. It was much more like that. Instruction or telling rather than asking, not listening for any feedback at that point in time, a sort of a presumption that this person is doing something wrong without asking. That kind of no negotiation is involved...., based on what I feel is the right thing to do.

Changing strategy. Jabari claimed that from his experiences in education, he believed a more relational or influential style of leadership is preferred. However, he acknowledged that he was trying his best to change his leadership style from being more dictatorial and controlling to becoming more relational, collaborative, and influential. He shared:

I really believe that I am making this change....So, my leadership style today is really built on relationship building, which means that when I say that I am going to try to smile as much as possible, I will speak...positive things, I will say positive things, because I have learned...And still learning to do it. Some people may have it naturally, but for me, it is a learning experience.

Jabari further acknowledged that for him, "Leadership is relationship building so that people really understand and see the importance of working together to move the environment." He explained, "everything revolves around that relationship that you have with staff and the ability to empathize, the ability to listen, and understand how people are thinking with a consideration that there is one vision and one goal to work towards."

He elaborated that in leading, he thought “the major thing for anybody is people...” Upon reflection, Jabari indicated that some of the positive attributes of his leadership are “presence on campus, earliness on campus, my walking about... I am always there...Walking, talking, doing...Trying my best to be relational...and I have to say, trying because that is not an easy thing to do.”

Asked how he knew that he is leading, Jabari shared that people’s response to changes in the environment, culture, attitude of individuals, and curriculum delivery are significant indicators of leadership. Jabari said:

You can talk leadership; you can teach leadership. So that statement is easy to say, but to do, one will have to think...what is actually coming from other people. People who are more comfortable with you will tell you the negative statements clearly and will give you feedback...because sometimes people ...wouldn’t demonstrate their feelings.

Jabari asserted that there are tangible ways that leadership could be measured, “people may say the environment is better...Leadership should lead to an improvement in punctuality. It should lead to improved teaching and engagement...”

Principals’ Disposition

Principals shared feelings that span the two extremes of the emotional spectrum ranging from euphoria to frustration. However, the findings pointed to the principals in the high-middle and high performing schools expressing more positive emotional experiences that shifted to depict principals in at lower performing schools having more adverse experiences and dispositions. These variations in the experiences were attributed

to the extent of stakeholder involvement, socio-economic problems, and teacher-commitment issues that principals encountered.

Euphoria. Even though the principals in the high performing schools and high-middle performing schools experienced challenges, the positive sentiments related to their leadership outweighed whatever adversities they encountered. These principals described their experiences using positive words and phrases such as “euphoria”, “education is exciting”, and “never had a bad day”, despite the calamities they encountered. For example, Hugh revealed that he was able to remain “overwhelmingly positive because of all the positive experiences” he had in the past. Hugh recalled a scenario which demonstrated this:

We had a huge fire at the school that gutted the central wing and coming at 3 o'clock in the morning to watch the school burn was one of the lowest experiences of my life. And watching the tears roll down the teachers' faces, who went to school here as children and came back as teachers to see part of their culture here burning down...It wasn't nice at all. But out of the ashes and resilience...other schools would have had to wait for months, but we did what we had to do. The alumni rose up, the PTA rose up, the government again ...because this is a cherished school...people got off their desks, so we rebuild ironically better than we did before. So, the crisis [where you had several areas] of the school gutted and all the infrastructural damage. Millions and millions in damages. How does a school bounce back from that...But [this school] did it so well and so nicely that I felt euphoria at the end....

Education is exciting. Fran described herself as being “excited.” She said, “I am never a person who can sit quietly and passively. I think education is an exciting thing...I just feel there’s so much you can do and... I feel really satisfied when my children come to school....” Fran shared that she was instrumental in developing a school culture that fostered caring, respect, and built motivation for staff and students, and this made her feel “really excited.” She commented that she “can’t remain in a static environment...where nothing happens, where you are beating your head against a wall, and you have to tell parents and children, I am really sorry that we can’t do this because of XY and Z....”

Solution-oriented attitude. Dan claimed that he has “never had a bad day.” Like Charlie, Dan articulated that he thrives on a solution-oriented attitude. However, while Dan focused on the solution, he has managed to develop this school culture where “everybody agrees that we all need to be part of the solution not part of the problem.”

Being sociable. Ema established that personality played an integral role in her success as a leader. She shared that having an open, sociable personality is an asset as a leader.

You have to be open; I would not want to say friendly, but I would say sociable so that people know that they can come to you. I have an open-door policy, literally an open-door policy so that I welcome people, and I think that I am approachable so that people can come to me. To me, that is important... So, the principal is not someone that you have to be afraid of...You know they feel free to come and tell me what is going on and if they have an issue....

Frustration. At the lower end of the academic continuum, Charlie, Jabari, Ema, Anita, and Brad, commented on the levels of frustration as well as the emotional strain and stress experienced. While these principals listed various reasons for frustration levels, the underlying rationale was because of their inability to change certain circumstances or meet certain expectations.

Teachers' apathy toward students. For example, Charlie claimed that his frustration at his school stemmed from teachers' apathy towards the students. He said the "biggest issue" was "how to turn around the thinking of people to recognize they are actually doing an injustice where the child can do well." Charlie commented that these experiences have been disheartening, and he considered the option of transferring to another school. He shared:

I could cope with it. Like everybody else, I have my down moments, literally down. A few weeks ago, I was seriously giving consideration and still considering...to ask for a transfer to that [other] institution.

Charlie explained that the physical facilities of his current school are better, yet the greater appeal of the other school is a staff more focused on the children. "I know the staff there, the school itself is dilapidated but the staff they would give their life for their children."

Unfair advantage. Similarly, when I asked Anita to describe her emotional states in the process of leading to achieve her strategic goals and objectives, Anita expressed feelings of frustration. However, this emotional state stemmed from being misunderstood. She claimed that the MOE and the other stakeholders in education are

uninformed and “don’t know what is happening.” Anita felt that she was being compared to principals of high performing schools or ‘prestige’ schools. Anita claimed that because these prestigious schools are better performing academically, the principals in those schools do not have to overcome the same type of challenges. She deduced that those principals in the high performing schools may have an unfair advantage and may not even be as dedicated or assiduous. However, they were always recognized, “highlighted, appreciated, and celebrated.” Anita highlighted other colleagues in similar circumstances whose immense efforts would go unrecognized because the authorities only measure academic results. Anita affirmed that “they need to understand the context” and measure the growth or improvement of the students in each school. Anita expressed fervently:

I really want somebody to understand what I am saying because it was really rough. It was really rough. And sometimes, I feel people just look at numbers [the exam statistics]. And yes, I know that is what they have to use to gauge things, but every context is not the same...and every starting point is not the same. And therefore, you have to go through these phases because ...it was really difficult...

Anita proceeded to give an example of her frustration with parents that she encountered who encouraged the indiscipline by telling their children to physically fight back if they were provoked. She shared:

Imagine, these children who feel that the first thing that they have to do is to stand up for their rights.... That kind of mentality.... They can’t take that...And that is what the parents say to them. The parents...when you are trying to talk to

them...when we have conferences, the parents will say to you that I tell my daughter, doh [don't] take that, no lash, hit back.

Emotional attachment. Ian's frustration arose from his strong emotional attachment to the children and his inability to help all of them. He reflected:

I think most of my emotions are based on my children, and I believe I am the kind of person who does not accept failure very well, so when I lose children, and we all lose children along the way. It is a very emotional thing for me.

Ian provided an example of an experience:

There's a little boy, he's on Facebook now. His dad and mom broke up, a very, very hard divorce. He loves his mom, and he loves his dad, but he lives with his mom, and she tells him a lot of negative things about his dad. And as a young boy growing up...and as he started to become a man, he started to do things to hurt himself...like he started to smoke weed [cannabis or marijuana]. He wanted to lime [mingle or socialize] with the big boys...I tried, and tried, and tried and eventually, I started seeing pictures of him on Facebook, holding up a two-piece, and talking about weed. I cried...[Laughs]...I am very emotional where children are concerned.

Isolation and loneliness. All principals stated that they felt some level of isolation or loneliness. Glenda expressed, "lonely is the head that wears the crown" and commented, "I feel as the leader I'm giving, giving...and it's not being reciprocated." Both Ema and Ian felt that too much association with any one individual or group would give the perception that they were biased. So, both principals consciously felt that they

need to maintain a level of “aleness” so that they would be perceived as being a just, objectivity, and unbiased principal.

Ema, Jabari, Ian, and Bran felt that the loneliness came from their responsibility to ensure staff perform their duties and responsibilities so that the strategic goals and objectives of the school can be achieved. They shared that this process took a lot of strength, courage, bravery, tact, and diplomacy, as its implementation may require that they institute disciplinary action against staff who have breached regulations. Ema affirmed, “this is why they keep saying it’s lonely at the top.” She articulated very explicitly that “you are not here for friends. And that is the attitude you have to take.” Ema specified that while performing the duties and responsibilities of the principal, she doesn’t take people’s responses to any situation personally. In one instance, where she reprimanded an officer who was not performing her duties, the officer stopped speaking to her. Ema reflected that her focus on them remains related to the job.

I don’t care. My approach is you don’t have to tell me good morning once you do what you have to do. You are not working with me directly. You are not in contact with me all the time. You just do what you have to do, so I don’t have to take it personally...In other words, she was defiant, and she was still not doing what she was supposed to be doing, so I had to take the hardline. It really does not bother me; you really have to be hard.

Coping strategies. Principals reflected on various techniques and strategies such as delay tactics, unwinding with friends, smoking, exercise, meditation, and prayers that they utilized as a means of coping with frustration, stress, and emotionally draining

situations and challenges. Principals indicated that they used strategies such as positive deportment and appearance, socialization, physical exercises, and delaying tactics as a means of coping with their frustration, stress, and emotionally draining situations.

While Brad endorsed the leadership experiences of principals to be “emotionally draining and demotivating, especially when dealing with difficult people.” He claimed that for him to deal with these situations, “you have to show a good face and you have to be strong.” Brad explained that principals’ need to be emotionally healthy to cope with situations which swing from being totally elated to frustrating.” On the other hand, Dan characterized their coping strategy as a combination of their relationship with the divine and personality. Dan attributed his success as a leader to “relying on the grace of God” and a natural “part of his personality is to be optimistic.” Ema stated that meditation helped in relieving stress. Ema emphasized her emotions and how she handled the challenges and stress she faced as she led her school to achieve success. She expressed:

it is not an eight-hour job. It is a 24-hour job...You have to meditate. You have to pray every day because this is a very stressful job. Because if you have people in middle management coming after you, let me see how to put it, planning for you, strategizing on how to make your life miserable...it is plenty of stress, but my personality trait is a big thing. Like if you are a worrier who is what my VP [vice principal] is. It will stress you out and have you harassed. But I am not a worrier, and my mantra every day is they wouldn't kill me...but it is a very stressful job. Because you will know people are doing things to undermine you. You will see

things happening, and you must counteract that. So, it is a mind game a lot of times. It is a very stressful thing.

Charlie said that to cope, he would unwind on a Friday evening with a group of friends over some drinks. "I would...take a drink on a Friday evening. I have my group of friends who would old blag [talk]." However, if he underwent extreme stress during school, he would resort to delaying dealing with the problem for a while. Charlie shared that he would leave the compound and might even resort to smoking to help destress. He claimed, "I'm not one of those who sit down and groan over something, I look for a solution, whether it is the popular solution or not doesn't matter...it is the correct solution I look for."

Similarly, Jabari shared how he used delay tactics or "not dealing with the situation right away" especially when 'dealing with race issues." He commented, "if it's about race, I leave. And if you still here in five minutes, I'll come back and deal with it. That's how I deal with race. Maybe I run away from it." Jabari claimed that if the work becomes overwhelming, it may a sign that you need to take a break. He said, "it is only one time when I think I faced that stumbling block where I think I broke down and I needed to take a break" and get involved in other activities. He indicated that he has a recording studio, and he is involved in sports. Also, Glenda's stated that she used exercise as her coping mechanism when she is stressed or "emotionally drained." Jabari concluded that one must enjoy his job as a leader to cope with the challenges. He said:

you must like your work as a principal or a leader. If you don't, well, you would have a mental situation. I generally look at issues as a challenge. Sometimes I enjoy the challenge. Otherwise, the work will be very, very boring.

The five themes and the subthemes discussed in this section related to the first research subquestion (see Table 2). These themes represent the essence of what was shared and offer a structure for summarizing how principals experience leadership as they attempt to achieve their strategic goals and objectives. This lays a foundation for understanding the principals' experiences leading schools, but it says little about how these principals developed their leadership capacity and capability. Hence, the need for the second research question that explored how principals evolved and developed skills and abilities to wade through the challenges encountered by educational leaders.

Findings for Research Subquestion 2: Evolution as Leaders

For the second research question, principals' introspection by reliving, reflecting, and thinking about experiences since childhood enabled them to describe how they evolved and developed as leaders capable of coping with leadership issues and challenges. They initially reflected on their earliest experiences as a child and how they continued to be molded and were supported by nature. The interview probed principals to think critically about the issues they faced and stimulate insights about their evolution and growth throughout the process.

Several principals indicated that they only became conscious or aware of their actions through observations and reflective discourse from the interviews. Throughout the process, principals evaluated and enhanced their understanding of themselves, their

disposition, their philosophy on leadership, and the issues in leading their schools. The findings from the study uncovered how principals evolved as leaders and acquired their epistemological, ontological, axiological understandings of leadership. These leaders were pragmatic in their approach and derived their knowledge by engaging in a critical iterative reflective process generated from tacit, educational, and theoretical insights and experiences throughout their lives.

Influencers

Principals discerned that their leadership qualities and skills were influenced by their family, religious, and educational contexts that formed the pillars for their development as school leaders. Principals also identified mentors in the form of senior educators and principals they encountered as young teachers who propelled them into senior positions. However, they all shared that the most substantial part of their development as a principal occurred when they assumed the full duties and responsibilities as a principal. Ema declared, “that nothing could have prepared her” for the full responsibility of principalship. Anita recalled that “...it was a huge challenge...it was difficult to get a handle on...” and she was “under a lot of pressure.”

Family. All principals attributed practical experiences as an essential part of the fundamental learning about leadership and provided different examples. Anita, Ian, Charlie, and Ema clarified how their “family background” was integral to their leadership development as they emerged from parents, siblings, and close relatives that were in the teaching profession. Ian claimed that “a lot of what he learned was around the dinner table,” and his “parents had a large part to play.” He shared, “I have been exercising

leadership since I was a little boy.” Anita said that her parent was an educator and being a leader in the education field felt very innate and a natural part of her being.

Charlie emerged from a family of teachers and had the opportunity to work with his father and uncle; The former was a teacher, and the latter was a principal. Also, Charlie sensed that he had an innate propensity for educational leadership that was strengthened by his strong affinity for learning. He would have been socialized into this leadership role initially by his family and subsequently by his interactions and experiences at school. Charlie substantiated, “I came from a teaching family and started young in the business.”

Jabari felt that he was “always prepared to be a leader” and reflected, “I think that I always had the foresight.” However, he indicated that he was influenced by his family members who were disciplinarians. “It may have been inside of me because I came from a family that was sticklers for disciplined.” He also attributed his keen sense of discipline to one of his former principals. On the other hand, Glenda said that her family emphasized the “value of education,” which was a principle that she observed and was integral to her success as a leader.

Mentors. All principals claimed that a crucial part of their development was fostered and molded by mentors. These mentors included their teachers, principals, school supervisors, peers, and relatives. Apart from having family support, Charlie felt that the principal of his school noticed some innate leadership qualities in him. He urged him to apply for promotion for both the dean post and the vice principal post, which led

to him becoming a principal at an early age of 35 years. Likewise, Ema and Fran were encouraged to apply for an administration position by their past principal. Ema shared:

If you had asked me as a young teacher or even as a Dip. Ed. [Post Graduate Diploma in Education] teacher, I don't think I was heading in the direction of the administration. But when I was at [M secondary school], I became a Dean and that principal, he pushed me and said, why don't you apply you would be a good VP [vice principal] that is what made me apply. I wasn't bothered; I didn't want to get into it and then I said all right let me try. I did that, and then I said well, I can always turn it down. But I think at that time, I also wanted some change, so I decided to take it [the position], but there is nothing really to prepare you for it [principal leadership]...

Ian and Dan also attested to being labeled as natural leaders by teachers from a very young age. Dan said from standard one at the primary school he was “nurtured, supported, and encouraged as a leader.” This support continued throughout his school life as he moved into “secondary school through debating and participation in clubs.” Fran also shared that she was naïve of her principal's intention when she was being given a lot of extra responsibilities. Unknowingly, she was being trained for a leadership position, and she was recommended to the denominational board when the vacancy arose. Likewise, Hugh and Anita claimed that their denominational boards recommended them because of their leadership ability.

Charlie concurred with Ema that they benefited and learned from their exposure with excellent and bad examples of principals. Charlies stated that he “learned what not to do.” Ema elaborated:

I had a good principal as an example when I was at [a prior school]. My principal was a strong principal, so I had a good example to follow, and that is what gave me the confidence to do it...but is not a job for the weak-hearted.”

Ema demonstrated how she was influenced by her principal as she continued to use the exact words of her past mentor with her current Vice Principal. She stated, “that same principal said something to me at [K secondary school], and I was saying it to my VP [vice principal] only last week.” She stated that one of her past principals, who was very adversarial, also provided experiences of negative leadership practices that one should not engage in as a principal. She clarified, “You know what you wouldn’t want to be like, some principals you look at them and say I would never treat people like that...”

Jabari attributed his perception of what a school should be like to his background experiences in the schools that he attended and taught. These experiences formed the benchmark he used to compare against his current work environment.

Must be my history.... I attended [a prestigious school], so I had consideration of where students are supposed to be, where teachers are supposed to be. So, when I entered an environment where students are walking about the place, and teachers are not where they are supposed to be. Well, obviously, something is wrong. That is not an environment for knowledge....

Jabari stated that his previous principals influenced him. [Ms. X] impacted on me. The principal of [a prestigious secondary school] with her consideration for discipline and punctuality and what students must wear and how students must talk. So...a lot of what I do is based on what the former principal of [secondary school] did.

Peers and district supervisors. In the process of leading to the achievement of strategic goals and objectives, Ema, Anita, and Charlie explained how they acquired support from their peers and district supervisors. Ema elaborated:

If you are seeing a case where you have to speak to a teacher, or you have to do something about a situation, you can think it over, talk it over with your VP [vice principal], talk it over with your supervisor....”

Ema shared her idea for tapping on the experiences of peers in the principals’ forum:

Sometimes it is good when you have a problem to bring it up in a forum like that where you have other principals who have more experience than you...can guide you in which direction you should go. So, it is not only you, but sometimes you have to get support.

Anita expressed how her supervisor provided direct support for her as a new principal.

What I did was that I was not afraid to ask for help and the person I had as my supervisor at that time...might come across with a strong tone, she gave me good support. She guided me through a lot of things.

Charlie commented, “Fortunately, the other VP and I use to get on well, so we use to put things in place and basically run the school.” He reiterated the peers and school

supervisors' support informed his leadership: "as I say I get feedback from others, guidance from the supervisor whenever I am in doubt."

Religious organizations. Three of the principals, Brad, Dan, and Anita, divulged how their strong involvement in religious and cultural activities at school influenced their notions of leadership. Brad explained how his involvement in planning and organizing religious functions provided insights that edified his development as a leader. Both Dan and Brad reflected on the servant leadership philosophy that was practiced through their involvement in the church. Anita described how she considered her strong spiritual upbringing that centered her leading from the heart.

Schools. Principals across the academic continuum reported similar experiences during their development as leaders. How these principals learned about leadership included learning from both implicit and explicit means. These approaches included their practical experiences, journaling, and critical reflections. However, principals' epistemological understanding of leadership would have been strongly influenced by the category of their schools. It was noted that principals adjusted and applied leadership styles according to the needs of their school context. Both Ian and Hugh provided examples of their experiences working in low performing schools and reflected on how they had to readjust their leadership styles. These two principals who worked in low performing schools previously revealed that they adopted a more and authoritative approach in the low performing schools. While in the high performing school that they were now leading, they needed to adopt a more collaborative leadership style.

Also, the findings from this study pointed to different leadership styles being practiced by principals in the lower performing schools and the high performing schools. It was noted that the principals in the low performing schools were more directly involved in the teaching-learning process and dealing with social justice issues that resulted from socio-economic issues. Therefore, principals such as Ema, Charlie, Anita, and Brad were more directly focused on practicing instructional leadership and social justice leadership than the principals in the performing schools. Hugh, Fran, and Ian employed a more collaborative and democratic style to their leadership and encouraged sharing leadership.

Administrative experiences. Both Ema and Charlie elaborated on details of their acquisition of leadership capacity and capability as they assumed the role of vice principals. Ema stated that even though she could have applied for the position of principal two years after being appointed as vice principal, she waited until she felt that she had acquired adequate experience to prepare her for the post.

I think when you are the VP, that is really when you train...I feel because my VP is about two years [was appointed for two years], and she was acting in the position for years before, so I would feel comfortable to leave the school in her charge because she has been a VP for about five years. I think that it is important that you have training as a VP before you actually get into the hot seat. It is very, very important. Training is needed for sure because you tend to rely on it when you get in it [the position of principal], you tend to rely on your personality,

instincts, and some previous experience that you had because there's nothing formal to prepare you for this.

For Charlie, the learning curve for leadership spiraled upwards because of the experiences he acquired serving in administration positions, initially as a vice-principal and then as a principal. In both positions, Charlie indicated that interactions from his superior officers provided a base to support his leadership. Charlie shared an experience in his role as a vice principal, where he "learned what not to do" from his principal. He felt the actions of his principal were unjust and irrational as they were not supporting positive student outcomes. Charlie recalled:

One day three guys came on the school compound with knives to stab a student. They went on the block; they jumped a wall and went on the block. Remember, I was now [promoted] from a dean [position]. Instinct kicked in, and I ran down the hall, up to three flights of stairs and ran down these fellas [fellows]. I came back to the office, blowing, catching my breath, then I said, 'miss call the police.' She said very casually, 'sit down, catch your breath, do you want some water, then we will talk.' I said, 'Miss, call the police!' I was amazed. She didn't want to call the police right away, to cause a scene on the compound, or make papers [get media coverage]. I thought in my mind we aren't know who's going to get stab or who's not going to get stab and you [the principal] worried about how things will look. So, that's why I said, [I learned] 'what not to do.'

Charlie reflected that the principal's decisions in this circumstance were contrary to his philosophy, principles, and practices. He subsequently expressed his dissatisfaction

with how she handled the situation, and he continued performing his role and responsibilities as a vice principal using his initiative.

Critical Reflection

Principals described how, through an interactive process of reflection, they assess their actions and decision-making processes. Principals employed several strategies to critically reflect on their experiences, including journaling, discussion with peers, mentors, and supervisors as well as critical thinking about issues and exploration of viable options. All principals endorsed critical reflection as paramount to their growth as leaders and provided examples of how they reflected as a leader. Anita explained how she reflected critically on various plausible options before making a decision.

What I would have done is to document my experiences and kind of organize something like, a how to.... What I did in this situation and that situation. What worked and what didn't work in this situation or that situation, so like a journal...and what I decided to do...sometimes like mapping out, if I do this, this will happen, and if I did it another way, that would happen and make decisions based on that.

Brad reflected on his experiences in a very systematic way and shared the process of how he learned and developed as a leader. He asserted:

...to come up with creative ways to move forward, it is necessary to reflect on the issue critically...So, I think the way is to sit down...On evenings, I will sit here and look at what is the best way forward to deal with a situation that is not working and how to enjoy doing it.

Jabari discussed how, upon reflection, he realized that he was saying something and acting in a contrary manner. He shared where he would think about the talks and would have with his students about working in a “peaceful” manner,” and then he as “the principal comes in class and behaves opposite...., it’s just something is wrong with that...So, afterward, I will go back to the class...and will apologize....” Also, Jabari reflected on his journey as a leader and told us how he is attempted to move from being a disciplinarian to a more relational leader by understanding and developing a greater appreciation about the power of relationships.

Using student progress as his base, Charlie’s recounted how critical reflective experiences had aided him in refining his knowledge, actions, and behaviors as a principal. Charlie reflected on the decision-making process step-by-step while reliving a lesson and said what he would have done differently. Charlie felt that if he had to change one thing, it would be how he dealt with some members of staff. In speaking about a specific member of his staff, Charlie expressed utter disappointment with himself and regretted misreading the motives of a member of his team. Regretfully, he commented that he “wasted 5 years in terms of getting to see the real value of what they were doing.” He said that he regretted not assessing the situation himself and gave in to the vice principal’s assessment of the person, which turned out to be wrong. He stated:

I gave a lot of leeways [to this person]...I didn’t stop and assess the person for who they really were and gave in to the VP’s assessment...If I were to do it all over again, I would reassess the person and put a little more pressure on that

person... they were doing a lot of things correct but for the wrong reasons to achieve the wrong outcome....

Charlie said that principals need to realize how “important it is to stop and examine your decisions because of the impact those decisions have on the lives of students.”

Think aloud strategy. While principals indicated that they reflected on their experiences, they claimed that the interviewing process and the think aloud strategies that were used in the interview enabled them to reflect and to relive her experiences in a more in-depth way. For example, Ema claimed that while she would typically reflect at the end of the day while writing her log entries; However, she never thought intensely enough to realize that there was a structure or a philosophy that guides her thought processes. She shared, “like you do your thing every day, and you know where you want to be, but you don’t think of the process... you don’t give it any thought.” Ema seemed to be in awe as she discovered, “there is a method to what you do without even knowing it.” Several principals such as Ema, Hugh, and Brad, expressed a desire to become more reflective and to engage in the process of journaling to develop greater awareness and clarity of the underlying process guiding her actions.

Observations

Principals indicated that observations were vital to their leadership planning and decision making. For example, when I asked Charlie to reflect on his growth as a leader and to discuss how he developed his leadership capacity and capability to reach this point in his leadership, he confidently replied, “Observation.” He continued to explain:

Listening to children to see what they want. Education is to provide to the needs of the child and to do so in a palatable manner in which the child could gladly consume and if it is not being done, they get frustrated, they get fed up...of course, other parameters must be met...My product here is children. I want to produce a child that's neat, tidy, pleasant to talk to, very efficient in what he does, comfortable to look at. So that an employer will be rushing to employ... To me, that is the basis of it. That is my responsibility. If that is my job, which I take seriously, then I must do everything within my power to ensure those factors I listed are met.

Charlie described his experience, whereas a new principal he had difficulty in implementing changes due to staff resistance. Charlie had to reassess his situation and adjust his approach to build trust and to acquire support from the staff to make the desired changes. Charlie shared that for incoming principals, it is necessary to win the staff, to observe, and to refrain from making rapid changes. He contributed, "Take six months in the position and observe. Don't go in there and make changes, in as much as you need to let the months pass observing and winning over people."

Gaps in Principal Leadership

Principals identified gaps in their leadership practices that would highlight the areas for leadership development. Charlie intensely conveyed that there is a gap in the transition process from vice-principal to the principal. He stated that even though the vice principal is given responsibility and work, "when they reach in this seat [principal], it's impossible to pick up right away." Charlie commented on the MOE's lack of foresight

and their bureaucratic process, which hinders principals' from becoming more effective and efficient leaders. He made suggestions for easier transition periods for principals and improving principal leadership by utilizing a period of internship, mentoring, and rotation programs for principals, as well as revamping the recruitment process for both principals and teachers.

Succession planning. Ema and Charlie discussed the logistics of succession planning. Ema claimed:

It is always a nerve-wracking thing to walk into a new school even as a teacher, so to come to a new school as a principal, it could be overwhelming...as each school will have a different culture and would be at a different stage...so you have to put things in place.

Charlie suggested that at least three months before a principal retire, a new principal should be selected to work alongside the outgoing principal. He felt that this type of mentoring from the outgoing principals would enable new principals to understand areas or gaps in principal leadership that they were not privy too as a vice principal. He suggested:

Conduct your interviews three months earlier, select the person, and if you are going to be my replacement, they know three months exactly the day I am going to retire, or the day I go on leave. Why don't they send you the three months before I leave, and you sit by my side? I show you the running of the school. You have no idea how a school is run until you sit in the chair. As much as you feel you know as VP, you don't...Then, there will be a transition period with the staff.

They will see you and their existing principal, who is their friend, getting along or whatever it is that makes it easier on the incoming principal. There is a whole ease in transition...All these things will make life extremely easy.

Hugh suggested that the MOE:

should try as much as possible looking for longevity and people to impact on the system...and to make the requisite changes...It could even be a term, but these days you have Principals who get appointed for two years and you, they reach 60, which I have a problem with that...What could you do in the school during this time? It takes three years to make a change or six years to make a change in a school...if you are going to settle down a term to learn the environment, and you are 58 years....

Developing relationships. Charlie suggested that as an incoming principal, it is necessary to develop positive relationships with staff, parents, peers, and members of the community. He recommended that it is necessary to pay attention to the culture of the school and the community. Charlie suggested building support from peers and district supervisors. He said, “Get that support group, whatever district you’re in, get familiar with the other principals, have an excellent rapport with your school supervisor.”

Community building. Charlie, Ian, Hugh, and Fran recognized the need to develop to build relationships within members of the community so that they see the school as part of the community and would feel a sense of ownership. Both Charlie and Ian stated that it was important for the school to be seen as promoting the growth and development of individuals within the community. Charlie recommended strengthening

the connection between the school and the community. He suggested making purchases from the community businesses, inviting key stakeholders from the community for functions, and sharing school facilities with the community for sports and other developmental activities. Charlie outlined:

I allow the fellas in the neighborhood to use the field to play football. Before, it used to be locked to prevent damage to the field...I'd rather play and dig up the ground than be on the road pushing drugs. They're allowed to use the facilities. The school is part of the community.

Formal training and development. Ema identified the need for training and development even before the acquisition of a principal post. She said, “a lot of what the principal did, I would look and say to myself they should train people before they get into management positions.” This perspective became even more concrete as she became an administrator. Ema stated that it was necessary to get training “just as you get into VP [vice principal] post.” She recommended, “one year off it where you do some type of formal training not where you want to be taken out of the school for the entire year,” but both working in tandem with each other. Ema affirmed that in assuming the roles and responsibilities of a principal, she was not equipped to handle some areas. She identified the operationalization of schools, goal setting, human resource management, financial management, transitioning into the principal post, succession planning, leading diversity, and reflective thinking as areas that she would recommend for training.

Financial management was another vital area that Ema felt that she was not adequately prepared to handle in assuming the principal's duties. She emphasized:

If you don't know that financial aspect and you have a clerk III who could be dishonest or a clerk III who is not as efficient. It could really mess you up. They could do real underhanded things to mess you up and that is a part of the job as an administrator you are not prepared for at all.

Further, Charlie advised that a rotation process be implemented to aid in the growth of principals. He claimed that a principal from a low performing school could be rotated with a principal from a high performing school and vice versa. He said while the schools may be performing at different levels, he suggested that learning experience would be different so that he could return to his school with a "wealth of knowledge." Charlie further clarified by explaining after a while, being in the same environment does not enhance his learning experiences.

If I am in the same school all the time, the same level, same quality, same staff, what am I doing differently? All I have to do is let an idea pop in my head, yeah it sounds nice, let me try that whereas I go onto the system and observe....

Control and autonomy. Jabari claimed that for principals to achieve their strategic goals and objectives, they need more control and independence to be able to hire and fire people. He maintained that in the denominational schools that the principals are part of the selection process, and he feels that principals "should have a little power to do that." He reiterated the lack of consequences for the indiscipline of staff, and the lengthy, systemic, and bureaucratic process in dealing with the issues results in inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the performance of the staff. Also, Ian complained about the lethargy of the bureaucratic systems in Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to disciplinary issues that

result in a disconnect between actions and outcomes. Jabari expounded on his interaction with this system:

Principals have little power to punish, we all know that in the public service, there is something called the Service Commission and the Service Commissions works very slowly, and even when there are misdeeds or disciplinary breaches, you can't expect much support immediately. Sometimes it will happen so late, that the effect of the disciplinary action is nonexistent because it is not being related to what they did because it happens years later.

Increasing accountability. Jabari added that the current system of teacher evaluation, using the confidential staff report “doesn't make any sense at all” so he added that other tools which make you accountable for student success based on objectives and goals that you develop for yourself and having to “give reasons why you did it well or why you didn't do well and what you are going to do to make the difference.”

Jabari advocated for proper data management systems to lead the school forward. He observed:

I think a lot of people, Principals in government secondary schools more so, we don't really take on data because there isn't a history of school success. When I went to X secondary school, no files. So, in both schools, I started data management systems where we could actually use data too, to move the school forward. Some people...don't think it's important.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study facilitated the exploration of the principal leadership phenomenon in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The research questions steered the semi-structured interview questions that encouraged a rich, thoughtful flow of responses that unfolded the structures and complexities of this leadership phenomenon. The main research question explored the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. The first research subquestion inquired about how secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives. The second subquestion queried how principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools.

Drawing on Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis and Van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis to aid in the data reduction process, six themes emerged in response to the research questions and subquestion. These themes include leadership philosophies, context, diversity, marginalization and social justice issues, power dynamics, principals' disposition, and evolution as leaders. These themes were subsequently aligned to the two subquestions.

From the analysis, it can be highlighted that principals in responding to the research questions demonstrated intentional relations or awareness of themselves and the objective realities of their context. Thus, in response to the first research subquestion, the first theme, leadership philosophies, and the fifth theme, principals' dispositions, provided that deep-seated beliefs and concepts about themselves. These beliefs emerged

from deep reflection and introspection and awareness of the self. This base provided the lens and facilitated the intentional relations or interconnectedness with the realities of the people, culture, school, and the system. Therefore, the second theme, context and strategies, the third theme, diversity, marginalization, and social justice, as well as the fourth theme power dynamics, were connected and responded to this first subquestion. Emerging from the findings is the uniqueness of self-reflected from one's deep-seated beliefs. These intrinsic philosophies created intentional relations or interconnectedness with principal' cognitions and aspects of context; people, place, and system in Trinidad and Tobago.

The second subquestion inquired about how principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools. The interview questions for this second research subquestion utilized the think aloud strategy, where participants were asked to select and challenge and relive the experience. Then probing questions were asked that involved critical reflections, rationalizing, assessing, and evaluating the process of overcoming the challenging experience. This philosophical approach provided the support for understanding the actions of leaders as an outcome of engagement in introspection, self-reflection, and self-awareness involving cognitive and metacognitive processes related to ontology, axiology, and epistemology.

Consequently, it was found that principals' development of their leadership capacity and capability to overcome the challenges encountered occurred at various phases of life. Principals highlighted that the development of their leadership capacity

commenced during the early phases of childhood and continued during various phases of their lives through various mediums and experiences. Hence, it was deduced that principals evolved as leaders through experiences acquired through their lives from influential people, critical reflective experiences, observations, and theoretical learning. Through this level of introspection, metacognition, and self-analysis, principals also identified gaps in their understanding of principals' leadership.

The first theme identified introspection about the self where principals' leadership philosophies provided the basis for understanding how principals' experienced leadership in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Primary findings under this theme revealed that principals valued a humanistic approach to leadership, where they believed in leading from the heart and adopting a relational approach to their leadership style. It further showed that principals' belief in being exemplars and this type of leadership cognitions influenced their actions and decisions.

The second theme that emerged was contexts and strategies. The verbatim transcripts provided evidence that leaders were developing their strategic plans based on the schools' contexts. Findings indicated that the principals targeted their students' academic ability, aptitude, and needs in developing strategic goals. The contexts of their schools impacted their leadership experiences as principals differing experiences were articulated in different historical, political, social, economic, academic, systemic, or bureaucratic contexts. The differences in experiences of the principals were exacerbated in schools at either end of the academic performance continuum.

The findings revealed that there was greater stakeholder involvement in higher-performing schools than the lower performing schools. This participation was vital to the success of the schools and the achievement of strategic goals. The findings also revealed variation in the demographic factors that informed the third theme: diversity, marginalization, and social justice. Marginalization issues were detected as related to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic issues. However, principals identified socioeconomic issues as the primary reason for social justice issues arising out of inequities and inequalities in the education system.

Principals in the lower performing schools felt they were victims of inequities and believed they were unjustly stigmatized. They advocated for a change in the benchmarks for measuring the success and effectiveness of schools. These principals recommended that students' progress or growth be the benchmark for successful and effective schools instead of merely measuring academic outcomes.

This transcendental qualitative phenomenological research design for this study facilitated the emergence of the theme power dynamics. This theme revealed issues of power emerging as an integral element in the contextual experiences of the 10 principals while leading. Principals recounted power issues with their middle managers, their staff, and the cliques within the staff. A critical revelation was that the principals' strategies in lower-performing schools were more coercive, while the principals in higher-performing schools reported using more collaborative strategies. However, the power issues appeared to be most apparent as newly appointed principals.

The school administrators' leadership experiences at both ends of the school's academic performance continuum could be summarized as distinctly different. Reflecting on their dispositions, principals in the higher-performing schools reported having more positive experiences, using expressions such as euphoria, exciting, and solution-oriented. On the contrary, adverse expressions were reportedly more predominant in the lower performing schools. Principals' dispositions led them to use different coping mechanisms such as meditation, prayers, and various socialization tactics.

For the second research subquestion, principals' evolution as leaders is the theme that best captured the insights principals shared regarding how they developed their capacities and capabilities and overcame challenges. Principals' sentiments about their leadership growth and developmental opportunities had similar trends. They indicated that their learning to lead effectively was influenced by activities and individuals from as early as their childhood in their families, schools, and religious organizations. Principals noted that the process of critical reflection, observation, and academic learning was central to their self-learning and guided their decision-making process. Further, principals indicated that the experiential knowledge that they garnered when as they assumed the role and responsibilities as a principal proved to be the most effective means of knowledge acquisition.

Also, principals identified areas they felt posed challenges to their leadership, such as succession planning, relational leadership, community building, control and autonomy, and increasing accountability. The principals also recognized that complementing their practical experiences with academic learning about leadership

would enable them to enhance their leadership effectiveness by improving their ability to overcome challenges and achieve strategic goals and objectives, thus enhancing their effectiveness as secondary school leaders in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the final section of this dissertation, Chapter 5, I present an analytical discussion and interpretation of the findings of this study and relate it to the empirical literature and the conceptual framework. After commenting on limitations, I move on to make research-informed recommendations for improving current practice and offer suggestions for future research. The chapter closes with considerations regarding methodological and social change implications and ends with concluding thoughts on the contributions offered by this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This transcendental phenomenological study was developed to explore and understand the leadership of principals in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Attempts to plan leadership training, development, and preparation programs for secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago have been met with a lack of empirical evidence. Heightened awareness, understanding, and appreciation of principals' lived experiences can empower principals, stakeholders, and policymakers in education to plan strategically for success (Souba, 2014). To become effective leaders, principals must acquire epistemological insights of their school contexts considering the four positions: "people, place, self, and context" (Clarke & Wildy, 2016, p. 45).

To explore the principal leadership phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago's secondary schools, I developed one overarching research question and two subquestions. The main question was "What is the nature of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago?" The themes emerging from this research that informed the quality of the leadership experiences of secondary school principals in this society were:

1. Leadership philosophies.
2. Strategies and contexts.
3. Diversity, marginalization, and social justice issues.
4. Power dynamics.
5. Principals' disposition.

6. Evolution as leaders.

From a phenomenological perspective, these themes targeted principals' awareness of themselves and their interconnectedness with their school environment, the people, the place, and the system. The nature of principals' realities was dependent on their philosophies, their dispositions, and the intersubjective relations with their context. One of the prime factors affecting the context of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago was its stratification based on academia, which created a distinction in the students' academic performance from the lower end of the academic performance continuum to the higher end.

I aligned the emergent themes to inform the first research subquestion "How do secondary school principals experience leadership as they strive to achieve their strategic goals and objectives?" The findings revealed more elements responding to change in relation to the people and the place involving this subquestion. Hence, the first five themes link the first subquestion, and one theme responds to the second subquestion. For example, the school's racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic composition affected how principals experience leadership. This diversity was compounded with the various types of schools and the historical, political, and social context of the schools. Additionally, the schools were categorized as public denominational and public government schools, along with the varying academic categories in which the schools fell. Further, the academic performance categories affected the strategic goals and objectives of the schools. All these factors would have affected how principals

experienced leadership; therefore, the first five themes were related to the first subquestion.

The findings also revealed that inherent to principals' perceptions and introspections of the self were captured by the two themes: leadership philosophies and principals' dispositions. Leadership philosophies captured the tenets that guide principals' actions. Their dispositions spoke to their perceptions and introspections about their inherent quality of mind and character. This introspection of the self was then connected to the contextual elements in Trinidad and Tobago. These themes that reflected the context of this country were strategies and contexts, diversity, marginalization, and social justice issues along with the power dynamics experienced in the schools.

The theme evolution as principals responded to the second research subquestion "How do principals perceive the development of their capacity and capability to cope with the challenges encountered in secondary schools?" To answer this research subquestion, I blended the traditional open-ended questions with the think aloud strategy. Participants were asked to engage in cognitive and metacognitive processes as they were asked to analyze how they overcame their challenges as leaders. There was greater agreement among the participants in response to this subquestion as they explained how they acquired their leadership abilities. Principals noted that their learning of leadership occurred as they were socialized in the family, religious institutions, schools, peers, mentors as well as engaging in critical reflective experiences. A couple of principals indicated that they engaged in academic learning about leadership as a matter of personal agency. However, all principals agreed that the greatest development of their leadership

capacity and capability occurred through their tacit or implicit experiences when they assumed the duties and responsibilities as principals in the secondary schools. This approach provide support for understanding the actions of leaders as an outcome of their engagement in the process of introspection, self-reflection, and self-awareness that engages philosophical cognitions, related to areas such as ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the findings and demonstrate how it extends the knowledge in the field by comparing it to the literature. After, I explain the appropriateness and applicability of the conceptual framework, after which I discuss the limitations to the trustworthiness that arose from executing the study. Then, I make recommendations for practice and further research. Finally, I discuss the implications for practice and positive social change that can occur pragmatically, systemically, and methodologically, ending with a robust statement.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I summarize and describe ways in which the findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing them with what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature. This phenomenological transcendental study is the first research to be conducted in Trinidad and Tobago with this framework to provide an in-depth analysis of the leadership experiences of the secondary school principals in the local context. First, I interpret the study through the conceptual lens related to and referencing the research question. Then I deduce the findings from the emergent themes associated with each of the research subquestions.

Conceptual Framework

With respect to the primary research question, I employed a conceptual framework that integrated two leadership theories: instructional leadership theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Neumerski, 2013; Tian & Huber, 2019) and social justice leadership theory (Berkovich, 2014; Miller & Martin, 2015; Theoharis, 2007). This lens enhanced the development of insights about principal leadership in this setting. It facilitated the alignment of the findings with De Lisle's (2012a) notion of quality and Deosaran's (2016) conception of equity. Thus, the research confirmed the axiological emphasis placed on academia and the demand being placed on principals as instructional leaders and leaders of learning. Further, the conceptual lens shed light on the stratified educational context based on academic performance, revealing inequity and social justice issues that emphasized the demand for social justice leadership theory.

Instructional leadership. Principals validated De Lisle's (2012a) position that academic quality is the primary benchmark used for measuring the success and effectiveness of schools. Some principals, especially those at the lower end of the academic spectrum, acknowledged that they understood the value placed on academic quality in the local context. However, they did not feel or perceive it as fair for this to serve as the primary standard to measure successful and productive schools. These principals claimed that students entering secondary schools were ranked and placed based on academic performance in their secondary placement examination. Therefore, the students were not of the same academic quality.

The principals in the low performing schools echoed unanimous sentiments of frustration and claimed that amidst their best efforts, their schools may still never be able to meet the district and national academic benchmarks. These principals explained that the principals in the higher-performing schools would always perform better academically even though these principals might have expended less effort. Hence, principals in the lower-performing schools advocated for the benchmarks for success to be changed to encompass individual students' growth and the schools' improvement to provide a fairer assessment. The reports from the principals also indicated that academic performance is the primary benchmark used for measuring success, which was consistent with Noman et al. (2016), who claimed that learning and instruction or academia played a primary role as the ranking of schools became a priority. Thus, instructional leadership theory, which is leading with a premier focus on learning and instruction, was an asset in the exploration and understanding of the leadership experiences of the principals in Trinidad and Tobago.

Social justice leadership. The integration of the social justice leadership lens was useful to the understanding of diversity, marginalization, and inequity issues related to school leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Principals in deprived contexts need to adapt and frame their leadership based on their evaluation and conceptualization of the best possible results (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). Hence, principals' calls for change to the quality benchmarks, especially for schools in deprived contexts, appeared to be justified. Further, a one-size-fit-all is not a suitable measure of success (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). A more equitable approach to learning that caters to students' individual differences is

necessary. Principals in the low performing schools encounter socioeconomic challenges, low stakeholder interest and involvement, and social justice concerns (Bhengu & Myende, 2016), so they are consistently evaluating their decisions to ensure the best possible outcomes for the students. Hence, principals adapted and adopted their strategic goals and objectives to suit the challenges specific to their school contexts. For example, the strategic goals of principals in the higher-performing schools leaned toward academia and obtaining scholarships; however, the principals' goals in the lower-performing schools were focused on improving the health and well-being of students, improvement in sports, and the performing arts.

This study's findings also upheld Deosaran's (2016) observations that the stratification and the diversified nature of secondary schools fosters inequities and injustices in the system. Several researchers have suggested that schools' function as a mechanism of social reproduction (Lee & Hallinger, 2012; Reichelt, Collischon, & Eberl, 2019). As such, the placement of students in the secondary school based on academic performance ranking will further affect their educational and social mobility (Deosaran, 2016). These inequities and social injustices emerging from the varying school contexts substantiated the requisite for increased awareness and appreciation of social justice leadership principles and practices.

Further, the combination of the various elements of the environment historically, politically, academically, socially, and culturally give Trinidad and Tobago a unique contextual dimension. Principals highlighted that though they would have had challenges based on various types of diversity issues, gender, religion, race, and ethnicity to a minor

extent, the main cause of inequity issues was due to socioeconomic issues. Social, cultural, and economic considerations are important in attempting to close the achievement gap to ensure all students succeed (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). Hence, in Trinidad and Tobago, primary emphasis on the context might be a critical factor in closing the acknowledgment gap, and by extension, this perceived achievement gap. With this realization, attention and improvement on academic achievement can be better aligned with the cultural emphasis placed on academia in Trinidad and Tobago.

This research extended the body of knowledge in the field of leadership by providing evidence-based findings of the similarities and differences detected within and among the different strata of secondary schools: the low performing, low-middle performing, high-middle performing, and the high performing. Principals' descriptions of their experiences characterized the context and culture. As such, principals' dispositions differed from exasperation to exhilaration and were often reflective of the category or type of school that they were leading. Generally, principals in the schools at the lower end of the academic spectrum echoed adverse and frustrating experiences, whereas their counterparts reported positive and euphoric experiences.

Integrated conceptual lens. Using this integrated conceptual lens of instructional leadership theory and social justice leadership for the analysis and interpretation of the findings helped show that an achievement gap exists between the low performing and the high performing schools. Most schools lie on the extreme ends of the academic continuum, which points to a potential issue of inequity in the school system and a noticeable achievement gap. The performance reports used to stratify the schools

indicated a consistent disparity in the performance of the students between the low-performing and high-performing schools. An achievement gap exists when there is a persistent disparity between the academic performance of one group and another (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Wagner, 2014).

This study also uncovered principals' perceptions that socioeconomic issues may be the underlying issue in the low performing schools, even though principals reported some inequity, and marginalization issues arising from gender, religion, racial and ethnic issues. To improve academic performance, it is necessary first to identify the underlying cause of the problem (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016), which is revealed in this study to be related to socioeconomic concerns. This can be characterized as an acknowledgment gap, which refers to a disparity in understanding that can affect student success (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). These findings affirm Deosaran (2016) and De Lisle's (2012a) theory that Trinidad and Tobago education system functions on an elitist principle where there may be a direct relationship with students' social class and the secondary schools that students attend.

The results of this research revealed a vast disparity in academic performance, culture, context, and climate of the lower performing schools and the higher performing schools. Over a 3-year period, 26% of the schools were considered high performing where more than 75% of students passed five subjects or more in their Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate exits exams. Passes in five subjects are customarily considered the benchmark to measure success in secondary schools. However, in 44% of

the schools were considered low performing, where less than 25% of students were achieving this academic benchmark in their exit exams after 5 years.

Further analysis of the data revealed that 30% of the schools were in the middle-performing category; 18% and 12% belonged to low-middle performing schools and high-middle performing schools, respectively. The lower-middle performing schools and high-middle exhibited higher affinity and greater alignment with the corresponding schools at the lower and higher end of the academic continuum. More explicitly, 18% of the schools that fell in the low-middle performing category displayed more similarities and characteristics with the low performing schools. Therefore, 62% of the schools belonged to the lower half or lower end of the academic performance continuum and 38% of the schools represent the upper half of the academic continuum or the schools. The schools at the lower end of the academic performance continuum were all mainly public government schools, and the other schools were mostly public denominational schools.

The context of these schools at the lower end was characterized by low socioeconomic status, low parental involvement, attendance issues, and discipline issues. These principals in the lower performing schools recognized and stated that no matter how much effort they put in; their students will not be able to compare academically with students of high performing schools. Hence, students' academic performance were normally reflective and highly predictive of students' social class and standing in society and students were stigmatized based on the schools they attend. Principals expressed a desire for psychosocial, financial, and economic support as well as strategies to increase stakeholder engagement. These contextual needs shared, differed from those principals in

the high performing schools who reported that their student population belongs primarily to the middle and upper socioeconomic class and they had influential parental, alumni, and community support. Therefore, it bears reiterating that socioeconomic factors appeared to be one of the primary sources of principals' frustration related to their leadership in the lower performing schools.

Furthermore, the principals' reports were consistent with Hughes et al. (2010), who demonstrated that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel deprived and unsupported by the systems and policies that limit their prospects for success. It also reflected the research of Carr-Hill, Rolleston, Schendel, and Waddington (2018) that highlighted the reduced impact of school-based decision reforms on deprived or underprivileged communities.

To become social justice leaders, it is vital for principals to develop the skillset required to discuss these issues freely and openly (Theoharis, 2007). Principals expressed their apprehensiveness in discussing issues surrounding race and religion and acknowledged that they were inadequately prepared to be social justice leaders. While describing their regular duties, principals mentioned that while they were not consciously trying to be unfair or unjust, they were also not actively advocating for equity, democracy, social justice, or fairness. However, the innuendos in their speech highlighted elements of bias.

In addition, using this integrated conceptual lens enabled me to understand the emphasis placed on academia from an instructional leadership perspective and understand the achievement gap between the low and high performing schools. Interconnecting the

social justice leadership theory provided a better understanding and exploration of how leaders active advocacy for equity, fairness, and democracy can enhance the learning and instruction process and improve academic performance. Therefore, there is an apparent gap in the understanding of social justice leadership theory for the principals in Trinidad and Tobago. This epistemological understanding can help meet the social, economic, and academic needs of this diverse twin-island nation.

First Research Subquestion: Leadership Experiences

The findings from the first research subquestion demonstrated that the development of strategic goals was highly dependent on principals' leadership philosophies, the schools' contextual dimensions and gaps, or areas identified for improvement. As suggested in the literature, understanding the contextual dynamics of the schools' that the principals led provided a vital and relevant foundation for understanding and exploring the principals' experiences (Akkary, 2014; Clarke & Wildy, 2016; Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Noman et al., 2016; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016; Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). In keeping with this thinking, the principals articulated their understandings about leadership as being highly contextualized and developed based on interactions in their milieu, backgrounds, situations, and perspectives.

Philosophies of leadership. Principals' underlying philosophies, beliefs, and notions of leadership influenced their leadership experiences and the strategies they used to achieve their goals. The emergence of these findings was consistent with Northouse's (2013) ideology that leaders develop varying conceptions of leadership. Mitchell and

Sackney (2016) affirmed that perceptions of leadership might differ conceptually, sociologically, relationally, territorially, and even in structure. However, this contextual study captured that leaders' belief systems would have been nurtured from the influences and experiences of principals throughout their lives.

The phenomenological research design facilitated an in-depth understanding of the nature of the leadership experiences from an epistemological, axiological, and ontological perspective. Hence, it was easier to capture differing ideologies about leadership as it was aligned with the philosophical nature of the phenomenological design. By inviting principals to relive their experiences, I was able to discern the nature of their lived realities, the gaps in their knowledge, and their value system that drives their decision making, actions, and experiences.

The need to adopt a humanistic approach to leadership was a belief or ideology common to all the leaders in this research. The essence of humanistic leadership was elaborated on by Chapman and Sisodia (2015), who proposed that leaders should operate from a deep sense of purpose and caring for their people to build cultures based on authenticity and trust to ensure that each human being will feel safe and valued in the organization. Similarly, all principals in this study affirmed Salleh and Khalid's (2018) findings that leading by example was a predominant practice of principals. This research suggested that principals felt that leading by example was an approach that provided a model for others to follow and inspired others to act.

Botha (2013) discussed the construction of the philosophies of leadership as espoused by principals. Botha construed that principals are central figures in their

schools' leadership and governance, and when faced with challenges, they rely on their knowledge and experience to develop creative and innovative strategies and approaches to lead their schools. Clarke and Wildy (2016) suggested that as leaders that are central to learning, principals have a sense of personal agency that promotes responsibility for self-learning that is a natural fit. Ultimately, the principal's conception of leadership appears to be an integration of their different personality traits (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016), their epistemological assumptions, their beliefs about the nature of the human species, and their learning styles (Botha, 2013). The findings of this study were consistent with this research literature, with many examples pointing to how principals' beliefs, ideologies, or notions of leadership worked to ground and guide their actions.

Overall, the principals in this study appeared to be contextually intelligent and were adapting to suit their context. However, there appeared to be a certain level of deficiency in their epistemological understanding of leadership due to the lack of professional development support. For example, at least six of the principals were not familiar with the concept of social justice leadership. Also, in their conversation, concepts such as leadership and management were used interchangeably. Northouse (2013) explained that both concepts leadership and management demonstrated various levels of influences regarding outcomes related to people and accomplishing goals. The practices described by the principals in the lower performing schools are more aligned with management practices, which, according to Northouse (2013), engender greater order and stability. For principals in the higher performing schools, the leadership practices appeared to be more aligned with dynamism and greater fluidity.

This findings study revealed a lack of formal developmental programs and contextual adaptability to support principals' explicit learning experiences. After I provided explanations for social justice leadership, the principals claimed that while it was something they knew existed and they experienced such issues in their schools, however, they considered it very subtle and did not give it much attention. All principals observed and agreed it was an area that needed more attention.

Contexts and strategies. The contextual findings of this study were consistent with the literature. It supported the contemporary trend by researchers such as Hallinger (2016) and Pashiardis and Johansson (2016) to advocate for leadership studies to be contextualized to obtain more detailed insights about this phenomenon. Hallinger (2016) affirmed that different strategies were utilized in urban schools as opposed to rural schools as well as with learners and schools with varying socioeconomic conditions. The principals affirmed the findings in the literature as it was seen that schools within similar academic performance strata employed similar leadership strategies. In the high performing schools, the leadership styles tend to be more collaborative with a reduction in the power distance, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, instructional leadership was more top-down or autocratic and structured with an increase in power distance.

Gurr (2014) and Miller (2016) expressed their concerns about the level of emphasis being attributed to the contextual elements. They claimed that contextual sensitivity is synchronous or an inherent part of high-quality leadership and need not be separated from the axiological and ontological realities and experiences of principals. Also, Paletta et al. (2017) purported that principals, irrespective of context, would

inherently be able to overcome the challenges posed. From my analysis of the findings, it was observed that while principals demonstrated contextual sensitivity by adapting and adopting strategies to suit the needs in their context, and these may not have been explicitly conscious actions. Also, being mindful or aware of one's circumstance will drive a more proactive type of decision making and leadership.

Diversity, marginalization, and social justice. Principals appeared to have excellent epistemological, ontological, and axiological understanding of their schools' historical, social, political, economic, academic, and cultural contexts. They admitted that there were gaps in their approach to the issues related to diversity, marginalization, and social justice leadership. Principals claimed that they celebrated diversity in their schools through the various religious and cultural celebrations and observances. However, social justice leadership, as described by Theoharis (2007), was not practiced as the principals in this study, were not openly advocating for the eradication of marginalization and social justice issues.

The findings revealed that overcoming social justice challenges related to diversity and marginalization is one of the primary issues that principals in Trinidad and Tobago encounter. Also, the nature of the issues varied depending on the context. The observations in this study the lower performing schools were consistent with the findings of Carr-Hill et al. (2018). Carr-Hill studied school-based management in countries with socioeconomic issues and similarly found that principals had limited impact using these school-based strategies to achieve their goals. Principals positive discourse about their experiences in the high performing schools in Trinidad and Tobago provided evidence to

support Carr-Hill et al. assumption that school-based strategies in higher performing schools had greater chances of success.

Evident in the findings was that principals such as Brad, Ema, Anita, and Jabari preferred to downplay racial or diversity issues, especially in cases where addressing it directly had the potential to promote conflict. They vividly recalled situations where race issues were used as a detractor to derail or sidetrack pertinent or underlying issues. Several principals openly expressed their discomfort in having to handle race and marginalization issues while simultaneously claiming that they were advocates for fairness, and equity was an integral part of their leadership style. And yet, concurrently, principals were expressing unfamiliarity with the concept of social justice leadership. Principals also felt that social justice leadership might be critically needed to alleviate some of the socialization issues that emerge in Trinidad and Tobago. According to Tollefson and Magdaleno (2016), the lack of willingness to actively create awareness and deal with social justice issues will propagate injustices. Tollefson and Magdaleno emphasized that becoming social justice leaders is the only sure way to overcome marginalization issues and become better instructional leaders or principals.

Power dynamics. Congruent with MacBeath and Dempster's theory, the power dynamics in the various schools changed when principals were appointed and assumed their new role as the legitimate leader. This change upset the homeostasis in the institutions resulting in varying organizational dynamics within the staff and staff relations. MacBeath and Dempster's (2008) research identified an innate desire in all human beings for power and influence that follows a natural process of "fluidity and

interchangeability” (p. 2). However, this natural dynamic can be impeded by varying societal and institutional norms. Therefore, the formalization of leadership structures appeared to hinder the schools’ natural dynamic or equilibrium and power structures.

Schools in Trinidad and Tobago were built based on varying historical, political, sociological, economic, and educational influences and objectives. As such, schools in this study were at varying stages in their evolution when the principals were appointed, and each principal encountered a unique leadership context rife with its dynamics. So as new principals became the appointed legitimate leaders in schools, they upset the status quo or power equilibrium, and hence power challenges emerged. One principal was appointed from among her peers. She had difficulty asserting her authority or her legitimate power as she was younger than several members of her staff. In another school, a “silent rebellion” was experienced when a new principal appointment after several members of the middle management team acting as the principal for a prolonged time. This appointment resulted in them being returned to their original positions, and several issues related to power emerged. Such existing entry dynamics inform and govern how the principals experience leadership and its associated challenges.

Consistent with the findings of Starr (2014) as well as Urick and Bowers (2014), the principals’ leadership strategies in Trinidad and Tobago demonstrated an increased inclination towards collaboration, power-sharing, or distribution of leadership. All principals concurred that members of their staff preferred to be inclusive and included in their decision-making process. Nevertheless, the research demonstrated a distinct difference in the approaches of principals. In the higher performing schools,’ principals

were more collaborative and democratic approaches as opposed to the principals in the lower academic categories of schools who used more authoritative approaches.

Nevertheless, several principals at the lower end of the academic continuum expressed their understanding and inclination vividly to move towards more relational and collaborative approaches.

Second Research Subquestion: Evolution as Leaders

The findings from the second research subquestion described principals' development of their leadership capacity and capability evolved to be able to overcome the challenges encountered. The secondary schools' principals in Trinidad and Tobago described their evolutionary process developing as leaders as being nurtured from as early as their childhood and continuing throughout their school experiences and work life. The finding from this study was congruent with Northouse (2013) propositions that leaders' core values inspire their decisions and actions. Also, it can be ascertained that leadership notions comprise of an amalgamation of the varying leader dispositions (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2016), epistemological assumptions, and beliefs about the nature of the human species, and how leaders learn (Botha, 2013).

Principals reflected on how they acquired their knowledge through a process of trial and error or tacit means where their lived experiences would inform their practice. This approach corresponded to the explanation of Wipawayangkool and Teng (2016) who described how individuals iteratively acquired knowledge, building on prior learning experiences to strengthen themselves to overcome challenges. Further, Clarke and Wildy (2016) explained that this type of learning naturally facilitates the identification of areas

that need support and reinforcement. This method of learning empowers school leaders to act, to take responsibility, and to take control of one's situations, while also influencing and motivating others.

These research findings endorsed the perceptions that secondary schools' principals in Trinidad and Tobago obtained their understanding of leadership primarily from tacit or experiential leading. Discussions with principals about perceptions of their developmental capacity and capability flowed smoothly as I engaged them in reflecting and reliving their experiences using the think aloud strategy to conduct the interviews. Principals indicated that they were not aware that they were using a method or a process to make decisions with certain tenets or beliefs governing the process.

The findings of this research revealed that principals would have been acquiring knowledge in a very unintentional way through tacit or implicit experiences and critically reflecting on these experiences. By repeating this process, with a sense of personal agency or effort to improve or make informed decisions, they could identify the gaps for improvement. Continuous repetition and reinforcement of the process tacit knowledge are acquired. This finding affirmed the ideologies of key proponents of this implicit approach, including Polanyi's (1966) conception that tacit knowledge can be acquired unconsciously and Wipawayangkool and Teng's (2016) theory that this learning or understanding can occur by tacit means.

It is vital to consider the cautions offered by St. Germain and Quinn (2005), that a significant drawback in the system is the lack of organized structures to capture the learning from tacit experiences. As from the research there is no systems or processes to

capture the tacit or implicit experience and make it explicit so that valuable knowledge can be gained to narrow the leadership gap for secondary school principals as recommended by St. Germain and Quinn (2005) and Miller 2016. St. Germain and Quinn acknowledged the need for authentic experiential learning to be used to inform leadership practices and stated that leadership research should not only be conducted using traditional quantitative approaches. Miller (2016), also reiterated the need to find a way to capture this tacit knowledge so that principals can create and apply their knowledge in leading schools successfully. However, Grandinetti's (2014) suggested that this understanding can also be applied consciously to tap into the tacit experiences to create explicit or theoretical learning.

The findings from the research also affirmed Clarke and Wildy's (2016) proposition that principals actively took responsibility for their learning. The findings from this research indicated that a few principals acquired some type of academic qualification in leadership, through their personal initiative. Overall, the principals that chose to pursue this learning about leadership exhibited personal agency or willingness to take personal responsibility for their growth and development.

Principals indicated that this academic learning of leadership was a great asset to their leadership capacity and capabilities. This perception can be seen in Bush's (2016) work, where he indicated that the changing global context of schools posed immense challenges in preparing leaders for the roles and responsibilities of leading successful schools. In this study, principals reported that one of the most fundamental accelerators for learning and leading comes from their practical experiences. Using data to make

decisions as well as employing reflections and journaling are critical to the learning process used by the participants in this study. That said, principals readily voiced their need for additional support to develop their leadership capacity and capability to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. It can be ascertained from the theoretical and practical insights shared in this study that leadership learning and development is a dynamic ongoing process.

Limitations

As I explored and tried to develop an understanding of secondary school principals' leadership experiences and ensure the trustworthiness that arose from the execution of this study, I encountered several limitations. While I used a stratified purposeful sampling strategy to identify and invite a representative range of principal participants from all levels of the academic performance continuum, participant selection was ultimately limited to those principals who volunteered to participate in the study. As such, while adequate, the resulting sample was not necessarily either as representative or as evenly distributed as would be considered ideal. Further, by nature of this qualitative design, generalizability is limited to any population beyond the sample and context selected.

A primary limitation that I encountered during the study was the scheduling of the participants for the study. I initially planned to conduct the first round of interviews with all 10 participants before moving to the second round. However, the participants' time schedules did not align with this plan. To accommodate the participants, I conducted the interviews based on the participants' availability, which meant that for some

participants, all three interviews would have been completed before the interviews for other participants even started.

One of the limitations that was anticipated in the study was the potential bias resulting from principals attempting to create a positive image of his or her school or themselves and possibly misrepresenting experiences in their responses. This desire to present our best selves could have resulted in principals overemphasizing positive experiences at their schools. However, a combination of my intuition and the range of both positive and negative accounts shared, contributed to my impression that principals appeared to be quite authentic in their verbatim accounts. Apart from a level of uncertainty that I detected when discussing racial and ethnic issues, which further bolstered my belief in their accounts, I did not detect any bias in how they presented themselves or their schools. However, the triangulation of data from my research journal helped me validate the data and present a balanced perspective. Member checking, bracketing, and other strategies were used to ensure trustworthiness and mitigate against additional limitations. Finally, this study was limited by my knowledge, abilities, and skills as a researcher.

Recommendations

The findings of this study provide a foundation for practice and future research on school leadership. It is essential to measure the value added to schools by effective leadership strategies and understand how principals contribute to the culture and success of schools and students. Educators are known to say that all students are equal and should be treated as such. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, our actions are not structured in a

way that supports this thinking. In the stratification of the sample, it was noted that 44% of the schools were classified in the low academic performing category and that many of these schools are the ones situated in contexts and communities dealing with socioeconomic and social justice issues. With this context and the study's findings, I offer suggestions for the leadership development programs, systemic changes, as well as developing strategies to make tacit learning explicit. Further, based on the research, I share recommendations for research that can further narrow the gap in understanding principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

Recommendations for Practice

Leadership development programs for principals. Principals need to acquire the epistemological, ontological, and axiological understandings of leaders in this field to become more effective and efficient principals. According to Senge (2010), they would need to develop an understanding of schools as learning organizations, along with an appreciation of the concept of total quality management. Well-developed leadership abilities would enable principals to change the culture of schools to empower students to adopt a growth mindset and equip them with the skills needed to cope with an unknown future. Based on my analysis of the literature and the deficits voice by current principals, leadership preparation programs for the principals of secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago should be designed to enable leaders to:

1. Develop and promote schools as learning environments referencing Senge's (2010) five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning.

2. Be stewards of their discipline and instructional leaders who foster the shared vision of learning and development of the learning culture for all staff, students, and other stakeholders. Towards this end, they should demonstrate their ability to:
 - a. aligns their personal philosophies with the vision of the school.
 - b. nurture and develop emotional intelligence and a human approach to leading.
3. Develop an awareness and practical understanding of the concept of social justice leadership and become conscious advocates for the eradication of inequities and injustices in the school system. This recommendation is based on the premise that schools are agents of social reproduction so that the long-term goal is to engender this type of thinking for societal and cultural reform.
4. Develop awareness of diversity, marginalization, and how it can manifest in the school's geographical location and unique context considering socioeconomic backgrounds, race, ethnicity, and religion.
5. Develop better understandings, insights, and awareness of concepts such as leadership, power, and the dynamics of the individuals within organizations.
6. Establish and improve stringent measuring, monitoring, and accountability systems to meet the need for accountability-driven learning and instruction as well as data-driven decision making.
7. Actively create and nurture a positive school environment.

8. Improve stakeholder relationships, increase stakeholder involvement, and parent advocacy groups to increase the success of schools.

Systemic analysis. It is recommended that the policies and practices of the MOE and the Teaching Service Commission be reexamined to:

1. Eliminate the bureaucracy in dealing with financial, disciplinary, recruitment, and data information systems.
2. Ensure equity and equality in the delivery of the products and services.
3. Create different benchmarks for school success and reexamine the processes and policies for the evaluation and the assessment of principals in secondary schools. Benchmarks should address and move beyond merely academic performance focused on testing and address schools' unique contexts and school improvement and student progress based on starting points and acknowledging socioeconomic and community challenges.
4. Incorporate diversity into the mission and vision statements and practices of the MOE and the school to ensure strategic alignment.
5. Conduct an equity audit across the nation's schools to examine the injustices in the system. This audit would enable policies to be developed that identify and prioritize challenges as well as implement an action plan with appropriate target dates.

Develop a community of principals to share best practices. In tailoring best practices to meet the needs of principals, communities of practice can be prompt sharing and growth in meaningful ways. According to the tacit-explicit learning theories, a wealth

of learning can be explicated from experiential knowledge. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, we do not have authentic structures to capture the lessons learned. Hence, a primary learning resource for principals can be the setting up of a networking site or a blog site where principals can discuss pending issues and problems in a respectful and safe environment. Such a site would provide real-time assistance from experienced principals. The evidence from this research suggests that principals' experiences and penchant for reflection enable them to engage in a dialogic inquiry immediately based on the situation or challenge they encounter. This forum can provide an avenue by which tacit experiences garnered by principals can be shared, thereby enhancing the quality of leadership in schools as well as accelerating the process of transformation of tacit experiences into explicit knowledge. Supporting this type of learning, researchers Kiggunda and Moorosi (2012) advocated for networking platforms for learning so that principals engaged in school improvement can benefit. Kiggunda and Moorosi suggested that this strategy can provide a robust platform for schools with similar contextual elements. Classifying the schools by academic or disciplinary foci can provide a subforum structure to connect and facilitate the growth and development of principals.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study has helped to reveal a need to develop principals to become social justice leaders, since teachers are the primary agents to improve students' success, it is essential to research ways to develop teachers to become social justice leaders in their classrooms. It is particularly important to study the influence of social justice

leadership on the culture of low performing schools while also tracking the success rates of students.

Further, while principals claimed to operate using the principle of equity, fairness, and justice, there was no scientific evidence of the various type of inequities that exists and how these inequities can affect student learning. The findings suggested that socioeconomic status may be the root of the inequities that emerge in schools. This information can strategically inform policies and practices in education at all levels. Being aware of this information, the policymakers can further analyze the situation and provide more resources to the lower performing schools to ensure that students achieve their full potential. Guiding topics or questions that flow from this study and might be potential interests or suggestions for further research:

1. The relationship between social justice leadership and academic performance.
2. An analysis of the policies and practices in Trinidad and Tobago that support or inhibit equity.
3. What relationship, if any, exists between students' poverty levels, their academic performance, and the academic performance level of the school they enter?
4. What strategies are most effective in increasing parental involvement in low performing schools?

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study will contribute to epistemological, ontological, and axiological understandings of principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. At the individual level or

the micro level, this study has the potential to empower principals by informing the enhancement and development of principal leadership development programs. By developing awareness of how institutional norms and practices in systemic structures and policies have the potential to lead to social, political, economic, and educational improvement. Hence, this study can inform and improve the bureaucratic systems, policies, and practices to increase efficiency and improve the quality of leadership by the principals.

The findings from this study have tremendous potential implications for positive social change. The findings can directly inform the development of principals' leadership capacity and capability in the secondary schools that can trigger strategic improvements in the school, the community, and the nation. As recommended above, principal development programs should include and ensure that principals develop an epistemological understanding of various fundamental concepts such as leadership and management, instructional leadership, social justice leadership, relational leadership and organizational dynamics as it related to power relations, all of which will enhance their ability to contribute to change at multiple levels.

Enhancing principals' social justice leadership skills can narrow the acknowledgment gap (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016). Understanding the acknowledgment gap and developing strategies to reduce it has the potential to improve academic performance or the achievement gap. Practically, this approach may improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates in secondary schools (Deosaran, 2016). It can also engender a positive school culture that can lead to increased equitable opportunities

for success (Theoharis, 2007). Also, Bonillo (2016) highlighted in the multidimensional study done by the United Nations to track poverty that inequality is one of the factors that is the basis for poverty, so that promoting a vision of equity and social justice, socioeconomic issues can be reduced.

Norberg et al. (2014) explained how the improvement in the academic performance of a school, coupled with a positive school climate, is likely to produce a ripple effect directly driving learners' success. Thus, this type of development can lead to an improved work environment, job satisfaction, and productivity that can promote economic growth and social mobility for individuals. Most importantly, development of social justice leadership awareness and skills in principals has the potential to lead to a reduction in many of the tensions in society resulting from issues of race, ethnicity, and trust; propagating the development of democratic and socially just communities and societies (Berkovich, 2014; Mafora, 2013; Norberg et al., 2014; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Slater et al., 2014).

The development of schools as learning organizations may enable the much-desired change in culture that can be adapted to meet the unique needs of the school and societal context. This enhancement of the school culture can prepare students to cope with global and technological advancements that they will be faced with in the future. The finding of this study may propagate a growth mindset that has the potential to shift the dynamics of principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

Methodological Implications

The methodological design for this transcendental phenomenological research facilitated the emergence of philosophical understanding, which formed the structures of principal leadership unique to the context of Trinidad and Tobago. Capturing the multifaceted and intricate nature of leadership proved to be a challenge. Also, the heavily value-laden aspect and contextual nature of leadership required a research design to capture the detailed insights and uniqueness of this phenomenon. However, while there are aspects of leadership that can be facilitated by using generic approaches and quantitative methodologies, these studies might be incomplete without presentation of a more in-depth analysis. This research endorsed Wright and da Costa's (2016) position that the dynamic, contextual, and unique nature of this phenomenon need to be captured from structured and unstructured situations as well as authentic settings. Since the study has a philosophical base, it will be able to increase the epistemological, ontological, and axiological appreciation, understanding, and structures of principal leadership. The research substantiated the movement of the leadership trend from generic, superficial, and ineffective to a context-specific study.

Conclusion

This research provides the impetus for the development of principal leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. It captured the vital structures of the principal leadership phenomenon in the secondary schools, which is hinged on leadership philosophies, strategies and contexts, diversity, marginalization and social justice, power dynamics, principals' dispositions, and their evolution as leaders. To achieve strategic goals,

principals need to find creative and innovative strategies to overcome challenges. The context of these schools is stratified, and students are placed based on their academic performance. Also, the societal axiological emphasis on academic performance has made it the prime benchmark to measure success. However, this emphasis on academia has disenfranchised principals from the lower performing schools. These principals claimed the growth and development of the students cannot match the higher-performing schools regardless of their effort as leaders, because the “starting point is not the same.”

Principals reported similar issues such as socioeconomic status, parental involvement, student discipline, and absenteeism within the respective academic category of schools: the low performing, the low-middle performing, the high-middle performing, and the high performing. However, these experiences were quite diverse at the opposing end of the academic performance spectrum and aligned with the schools. Principals identified socioeconomic issues as the reason for this achievement gap between the students in the low performing schools and high performing schools. It was also perceived as the prime cause of inequity, marginalization, and social justice issues. Thus, according to Tollefson and Magdaleno (2016) emphasis should be placed on closing this socioeconomic gap before closing the achievement gap. Also, from the conversation with the principals, a gap in the understanding of social justice leadership theory was apparent. Understanding and developing principals’ sensitivity, consciousness, and awareness as social justice leaders can enhance their capacity and capability to deal with diversity, marginalization, and social injustices.

Principals remain central figures in their schools (Botha, 2013). They have been described as the leader among leaders in schools, thus, the issue of power in this learning organization comes to the fore. Newly appointed principals, brings the power dynamic into disequilibrium, causing some unusual turbulence. Consequently, this study highlights the need for principals to understand power dynamics in learning institutions and be versed in relational leadership skills to be able to manage challenging situations.

It was uncovered that principals evolved through a process of nature and nurture, as well as a personal agency where they take responsibility for their learning as they stepped into their leadership positions. Principals indicated that their leadership capacity and capability were developed primarily from pragmatic and reflective experiences as well as peer and mentoring support. Principals' leadership experiences in the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago were guided primarily by their implicit understanding of leadership. Learning through tacit experiences was not sufficient preparation for the task of leadership. However, the research on school leadership should aid in bridging the efforts to develop these school leaders and the increasing needs, challenges, and demands with which they are confronted. Hence, continuous training, learning, and engagement within the academic strata can promote effective leadership and learning across the organization. It can also provide a contextual slant and real-time learning for principals; thus, narrowing the leadership gap while adding value to the leadership of principals and ultimately benefiting their schools, students, community, and by extension Trinidad and Tobago.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Interview 1-Protocol

Leadership Experiences of Secondary School Principals in Trinidad and Tobago

Interview 1- Exploring the Meanings of Principals' Contextual Experiences**Interview Details:**

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Interviewee Code _____

Name _____

Interview Date/Time _____

Interview Location _____

Send copy of signed

consent form to

participant? Address. _____

Preliminary Actions:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview. Provide a short background of the researcher's connection to the study.

Script

I would like to take a few minutes to revisit the purpose and goal of the study. This study is an attempt to explore and understand principal lead their schools to achieve their strategic goals and how they develop this knowledge and skills to lead their schools.

As you may know that principals, globally are faced with an increasing difficult dilemma in meeting the demands of their school. In Trinidad and Tobago, apart from the global challenges, we are also faced with unique contextual issues such as the cultural, political, and social issues. We in Trinidad and Tobago do not understand how principals experience leadership as there a lack of research in this area, so that attempts to plan leadership preparation or developmental programs have the potential to be more effective with empirical data. Also, leadership is embedded in experience, hence the need to study the leadership experiences of the principals. Mostly importantly, this is not an attempt to evaluate your leadership practices.

I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral program. I am assistance principal and I have a background in educational leadership performing various roles such as teacher, dean, and now a vice principal. This role has no bearing on my role as a researcher.

2. Explain participant rights.

Script

Your response to my invitation to participate and your signature on the consent form, indicate your formal consent for this interview. Please note that all information will be held in the strictest confidence. This interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed by a transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality agreement with terms outlined by the IRB. The data collected from this interview will be viewed by me and my dissertation committee. In any report or copies of data that I disseminate or make, I will NOT include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Please note that your involvement is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer a question. Also, you have the option to stop the interview at any time. The interview should take no more than 90 minutes to complete. Thank you for agreeing to participate. Please sign the consent form.

3. Collect the signed consent form. Arrange for a signed and data copy to be given to the participant.

Would you like me to send a scanned copy of the form to you? [If yes, record address for copy delivery.] I plan for the interview to last no longer than 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions to cover.

4. Confirm that participant meets required profile.

Demographic Questions:

1. Are you currently an appointed principal at this secondary school? _____
2. How long have you worked for this organization? _____
3. Can you give me an idea of your religious orientation and ethnic background? _____
4. Can you give me an idea of the demographics or background of your school _____

Interview 1- Exploring the meanings of secondary school principals' contextual experiences

Interview Question 1: Describe what leadership means to you as a principal.

Possible probes/questions:

1a: How do you know when you are leading your school?

1b: Tell me about your leadership experiences related to people support (teaching and non-teaching staff, community, etc.) at your school.

1c: Describe your leadership experiences related to instructional quality at your school.

1d: Tell me about your school climate or culture and tell me about the role you play leading it?

Interview Question 2: What strategic goals and objectives do you aspire to achieve and how do you lead your school to achieve them?

Possible probes/questions:

2a: Describe the process in developing these goals and objectives?

2b: Tell me about your experiences when leading to achieve these goals?

2c: Describe your emotional state or how you feel during this process of leading to achieve your goals and objectives?

2d: Describe how mentally and intellectually prepared you are for the leadership experience?

Interview Question 3: How do your strategic goals and objectives align with quality standards and how do you determine whether these standards are being achieved at your school?

Possible probes/questions:

3a: What would you consider to be quality standards and how do these align with your strategic goals?

3b: How do your leadership teams assisted you with the assessment strategic goals and objectives? (e. g. types of instruction resources, teacher performance, student outcomes)?

3c: How have your teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and community provided support to ensure strategic goals related to your educational context were achieved (e.g. staff support, school culture, community context)?

Interview Question 4: Describe the challenges you experience as you attempt to set strategic goals and objectives to improve quality standards at your school and how you mitigated the challenges?

Possible probes/questions:

4a: Tell me about your successful experiences in leading to improve quality standards at your school. What you did to overcome the challenges experiences?

4b: Describe your unsuccessful experiences in achieving quality standards at your school (e.g. in areas of instruction and in the development of supportive school culture).

Interview Question 5: How have aspects of your leadership in this educational context (social, political, economic aspects) supported or hindered all students achieving improvement in their performance?

Possible probes/questions:

5a: What type of actions, interactions, and activities do you engage in to motivate staff and students in your context to improve their performance?

5b: How did you come up with the ideas about to perform those actions, interactions, and activities to motivate individuals to improve performance?

5c: On reflection, how relevant were your ideas?

Interview question 6: Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your leadership experience in your school?

General Probing Questions:

1. Can you give me an example?

2. Tell me more.

Debrief:Script

Thank you for helping me with this research study. I will contact you to confirm the next interview where I will have a brief, with you for no more than 30-minute at the beginning of the next interview to review, followed by the interview of about 60 minutes. The purpose of the brief is to ensure that I understand your perspective and you can clarify, ideas, issues, or misconceptions that you feel necessary. I will have a summary of the interview with my interpretation of your experiences. I would like you to review the summary to confirm that I captured the essence of what you have shared with me or to identify where I did not understand so that I can correct the interpretation. Do you have any questions? Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you!

Interview 2-Protocol

Leadership Experiences of Principals in Trinidad and Tobago

Interview 2 - Reconstructing Leadership Experiences with Greater Detail

Interview Details:

Interviewer _____
 Interviewee _____
 Interviewee Code _____
 Name _____
 Interview Date/Time _____
 Interview Location _____

Preliminary Actions:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview. Provide a short background of the researcher's connection to the study.

Script

I would like to take a few minutes to revisit the purpose and goal of the study. This study is an attempt to explore and understand principal lead their schools to achieve their strategic goals and how they develop this knowledge and skills to lead their schools. As a reminder I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral program. I am assistant principal and I have a background in educational leadership performing various roles such as teacher, dean, and now a vice principal. This role has no bearing on my role as a researcher.

Firstly, I would like to spend no more than 30 minutes with a brief (or a member check) to ensure that I understand your perspective and you can clarify, ideas, issues, or misconceptions that you feel necessary. I will present to you a summary of the interview with my interpretation of your experiences. I would like you to review the summary to confirm that I captured the essence of what you have shared with me or to identify where I did not understand so that I can correct the interpretation.

Secondary, I will continue with the second phase of the interview for 60 minutes, which require you to provide more detail and in-depth insights about your experiences. I may require you to use a Think Aloud strategy, where you share your thoughts processes as you reflect step by step on how the events happen or on how you deal with problems or challenges. Do you have any concerns or questions at this time?

Explain participant rights.

Script

Your response to my invitation to participate and your signature on the consent form, indicate your formal consent for this interview. Please note

that all information will be held in the strictest confidence. This interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement with terms outlined by the IRB. The data collected from this interview will be viewed by me and my dissertation committee. In any report or copies of data that I disseminate or make, I will NOT include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Please note that your involvement is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer a question. Also, you have the option to stop the interview at any time. The brief (or member check) and the interview should take no more 90 minutes.

Interview 2 - Reconstructing principal leadership experiences with greater detail within the educational context.

Interview Question 7: Describe in detail your decision-making process as you prioritize, handle, and overcome specific challenges, issues, or successes that you experience to achieve strategic goals and objectives at your school.

Possible probes/questions:

- 7a:** I would like you to think aloud and describe in detail the thought process you engaged in handling one of most challenging issues that you experience at your school that affected your achievements and how did you deal with the situation?
- 7b:** In retrospect, why did you choose that path, and do you think you would repeat this action, or would you choose another alternative?
- 7c:** Tell me how you make the decisions to prioritize, handle, and overcome challenges issues that emerge at your school? Is there a set strategy for decision making?
- 7d:** Are there successful experiences that you would like to share? Describe your though process that led to the decisions, and actions you made that caused you to arrive at this point.

Interview Question 8: Share thoughts/experiences you may have on how diversity and marginalization issues have influenced your strategic planning for success in terms of goals setting, decision-making, problem-solving, and direction of your leadership.

Possible probes/questions:

- 8a:** Describe in detail some of the prevalent issues that you experience that are related to the diversity (ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status) of your school population.
- 8b:** Tell me how and to what extent the issues influence instructional quality and school climate?
- 8c:** How are issues of race, inequity, marginalization, ethnicity addressed? What type of responses do you get from stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, community etc.?
- 8d:** How do you feel when handling social justice and inequity issues at your school? Is it easy to acknowledge and handle?

In your diverse school context (ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status) can you share some of your leadership experiences that would have hindered or helped in achieving your strategic goals and objectives?

Interview Question 9: In your own words, how would you define social justice leadership and what part does it play in achieving your strategic goals?

Possible probes/questions:

9a: How important is it for you to lead social justice issues in your school context? What do you do that makes you are a leader for social justice?

9b: Can you recollect and describe an uncomfortable situation that you encounter related to race, ethnicity, inequity that has now become easier to handle because of your leadership? Can you explain how the process got easier?

9c: How do you perceive and develop your leadership capacity and capability to deal with the racial tensions, inequities, marginalization, in the school and the achievement of strategic goals and objectives?

9d: How do you empower others such as your students and staff to deal with social justice and inequity issues that arise and how does this help in achieving goals?

9e: Are there any other thoughts, ideas, or insights you would like to share?

General Probing Questions:

1. Can you give me an example?
2. Tell me more.

Debrief:

Script

Thank you for helping me with this research study. I will contact you to confirm the next interview where I will have a brief, with you for no more than 30-minute at the beginning of the next interview to review, followed by the interview of about 60 minutes. The purpose of the brief is to ensure that I understand your perspective and you can clarify, ideas, issues, or misconceptions that you feel necessary. I will have a summary of the interview with my interpretation of your experiences. I would like you to review the summary to confirm that I captured the essence of what you have shared with me or to identify where I did not understand so that I can correct the interpretation. Do you have any questions? Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you!

Interview 3-Protocol

Leadership Experiences of Principals in Trinidad and Tobago

Interview 3 – Reflections on Experiences for Meanings

Interview Details:

Interviewer _____
 Interviewee _____
 Interviewee Code _____
 Name _____
 Interview Date/Time _____
 Interview Location _____

Preliminary Actions:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview. Provide a short background of the researcher's connection to the study.

Script

I would like to take a few minutes to revisit the purpose and goal of the study. This study is an attempt to explore and understand principal lead their schools to achieve their strategic goals and how they develop this knowledge and skills to lead their schools. As a reminder I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral program. I am assistant principal and I have a background in educational leadership performing various roles such as teacher, dean, and now a vice principal. This role has no bearing on my role as a researcher.

Firstly, I would like to spend no more than 30 minutes with a brief (or a member check) to ensure that I understand your perspective and you can clarify, ideas, issues, or misconceptions that you feel necessary. I will present to you a summary of the interview with my interpretation of your experiences. I would like you to review the summary to confirm that I captured the essence of what you have shared with me or to identify where I did not understand so that I can correct the interpretation. Secondly, I will continue with the second phase of the interview for 60 minutes, which require you to provide more reflective experiences look at how meaningful these experiences are to you. Do you have any concerns or questions at this time?

Explain participant rights.

Script

Your response to my invitation to participate and your signature on the consent form, indicate your formal consent for this interview. Please note that all information will be held in the strictest confidence. This interview

will be recorded digitally and transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement with terms outlined by the IRB. The data collected from this interview will be viewed by my dissertation committee and myself. In any report or copies of data that I disseminate or make, I will NOT include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Please note that your involvement is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer a question. Also, you have the option to stop the interview at any time. The total time for the brief (or member check) and the interview should take no more 90 minutes.

Interview 3- Encourage principals to provide reflections on how their leadership experiences are meaningful to them

Interview Question 10: Think back, and remember how you perceive and develop your leadership capacity and capability?

Possible probes/questions:

10a: Describe your thoughts and feelings during the process of your growth as a leader?

10b: Can you recall any leadership experience(s) where you feel if faced with it now you would handle it the same or differently?

10c: In retrospect, what additional support/ resources (e.g. activities, strategies, training) do you feel might have empowered you to lead a quality school more effectively?

Interview question 11: How have your awareness based on your reflection, perceptions, and cognitions about your leadership experiences changed as you became engaged in this process of exploration your leadership experiences?

11a: What type of reflections emerged as you analyzed your leadership by engaging in the interviews?

11b: Have you experienced any new thoughts or innovative ideas about leadership by bringing your awareness and consciousness on these leadership experiences at your school?

11c: Have you experience any shift in the way you deal with challenges you encounter at your school? How did these ideas come to you?

11d: Has your experimentation and exploration in leadership, using the Think Aloud strategies created in shift in the way you reflect on the leadership process or the overall leadership experience?

Interview question 12: As you reflect on your growth and developmental experience in attempting to meet strategic goals and objectives in your secondary school what advice, suggestions, or recommendations do you have for principals especially new or incoming principals?

Interview question 13: Is there any other thoughts or ideas that you would like to share about your learning to lead or leadership experiences at your school?

General Probing Questions:

1. Can you give me an example?
2. Tell me more.

Debrief:Script

Thank you for helping me with this research study. I will contact you for a final brief of no more than 30-minute meeting after I have transcribed our interview. I will have a summary of the interview with my interpretation of your experiences. I would like you to review the summary to confirm that I captured the essence of what you have shared with me or to identify where I did not understand so that I can correct the interpretation. Do you have any questions? Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you!