CONSTRUCTING SELF-EFFICACY:
A CASE STUDY OF THREE SECONDARY SCHOOL VICE PRINCIPALS

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Abstract

In this qualitative case study I hoped to enhance appreciation of the subjective reality of the vice principalship through descriptive analysis of how three secondary school vice principals in northern Ontario construct self-efficacy. I used interviews and job shadowing to investigate how participants navigated the inherent ambiguity and challenges of the vice principalship, how they knew if they were making a difference, and what criteria they used to measure their success.

Analysis of stories and metaphors was used to determine the relative importance given to individual sources of self-efficacy and how such decisions were affected by personal conceptions of the qualities of the ideal vice principal. I described the cognitive processes participants used to negotiate ambiguities and the principles they used to construct self-efficacy. Despite commonalities, each construct of self-efficacy was unique. I suggest that constructs of self-efficacy involve such factors as self-control, a positive outlook, self-forgiveness, humour, and balance.

*If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.*

- Mahatma Gandhi
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One of this thesis contains the rationale and purpose of my study, the study’s significance to our understanding of the vice principal role, as well as definitions of terms used. In Chapter Two my literature review spans a review of extant research of the vice principal role, job satisfaction, and concepts of self-efficacy. Chapter Three begins with an explanation of my theoretical framework which explains the theoretical basis of my study including sources and effects of self-efficacy and how self-efficacy may be used to better understand the vice principal reality. The theoretical framework is followed by an outline of my research methodology and method including selection of the study sample, vice principal profiles, description of how data were collected and analyzed, as well as ethical considerations. Chapter Four contains data and interpretation and a discussion of the findings. This fourth chapter is divided into three sections: sources of self-efficacy, weighing the sources of self-efficacy, and constructing self-efficacy. Chapter Five contains conclusions and implications for further study. Following Chapter Five are a bibliography and appendixes.

Rationale for the Study

A review of literature indicates a great deal of interest in educational leadership (Fullan, 2003, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 2006; Marzano, 2005). There is much written about the role of the principal (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al.), a growing recognition of the importance of leadership in affecting school change (Elmore & Burney, 2000; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2005; Fullan et al., 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano), and a growing interest in collaborative and shared leadership models (Foster, 2004; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Yet, the
position of the vice principal seems mostly ignored (Glanz, 2004; Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). The vice principalship has been described as the invisible role, the forgotten role, the neglected role (Glanz; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). The available research seems for the most part to involve normative surveying tasks, which do little to capture the essence of the vice principal role (Marshall & Hooley).

The vice principal position itself lacks a clear job description. The role is enveloped in ambiguity, varying dramatically depending on the school and the leadership style of the principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). It appears to be a middle role requiring the vice principal to be both a leader and a follower, driven by a juggling act of creative, practical, and political demands. The variety in the role defies any consistent job description (Armstrong, 2005; Marshall & Hooley). Many studies cite low job satisfaction associated with the vice principalship (Ribbins, 1997; Sutter, 1994; Thompson, 2006; Wynott, 2005) as well as a lack of mentoring and collegial support for newly appointed vice principals. There are some studies indicating little connection between what vice principals think is important in their role and what takes up most of their time (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2002; Glanz, 2004; Sutter). For example, Glanz found that while most vice principals considered instructional leadership an important part of their role, their time was mostly consumed with discipline and attendance issues. It is a job of high stress, often associated with a poor image – called in one instance “the armpit of the system” (Wynott, p. 48).

Newly-appointed vice principals claim that the role is not what they expected, not what they were trained for, and that they feel isolated (Armstrong, 2005; Daresh, 1986;
Drake, 1995; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1994; Thompson, 2006). The training disconnect is widely reported. What seems intriguing is that would-be vice principals are required to complete preparation courses that focus on leadership tasks most often performed by the principal. They consistently report that their formal training does not really prepare them for the vice principal role but more for the principalship itself (Armstrong). The vice principalship is only just beginning to be considered in university curricula (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), is not part of principal preparation courses, and is not mentioned in most handbooks of leadership used in university courses (Hartzell et al.; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Hooley; Weller & Weller, 2002).

There is a general lack of framework and structure to the vice principal role that results in disconnects in placements (Hartzell et al, 1994). For example, some vice principals report that they are frequently placed in schools without regard to the administrative leadership team and the effective mix of leadership styles. Some report that they are slotted into operational management roles that do not prepare them for the principalship (Hartzell et al.). And yet, it is generally agreed that the vice principal role is vital to school success (Armstrong, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Undervalued and often unacknowledged, the vice principal is the “often unseen, yet cohesive element that contributes to an efficient and effective school” (Glanz, 2004, p. 2). Researchers (Armstrong; Marshall & Hooley; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003) challenge that the role is underutilized and that a restructuring of the position is needed—a restructuring which would allow vice principals more impact on school change and enhance the general effectiveness of the administrative team.
Clearly, not enough is known about the scope and expectations associated with the vice principal position. There is a most obvious lack in research, training, preparation, and support and in the structure, framework, and description of the role itself. Many would agree with Elmore and Burney (2000) that the education sector is woefully “underdeveloped in its approach to the cultivation of leadership” (p. 2). The paucity of information can perhaps be partially attributed to a general lack of understanding of the depth and complexity of the vice principal role (Armstrong, 2005, Marshall & Hooley, 2006). More thought needs to be given to the overall conception of the vice principalship and to the importance of its contributory role in advancing school success (Armstrong; Marshall & Hooley).

**Purpose of the Study**

If, as Fullan (2003) suggests, leadership is the issue of the decade, we can not afford to ignore the vital leadership position of the vice principal. There is a need for greater administrative and system support for the vice principal role, both before and after the hiring process (Armstrong, 2005), and such support begins with more in-depth research and more consideration of the role in school leadership literature. The Ontario Principals’ Council recommends that the vice principal role needs to be more carefully “defined, examined, and scrutinized” (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003, p. 22), a suggestion with which current researchers agree (Armstrong; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). More study and research into the role may lead to an increased awareness that could assist educational policy makers in addressing the ambiguity and role disconnects.

To better structure and define the role of the vice principal and to build better training courses and better support networks, what is first needed is to develop and foster
a deeper understanding of the complexity and ambiguity of the role (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). What is most beneficial to foster deeper understanding of the vice principal role may be attention to the individual experiences of vice principals in the field. I would argue that a concerted effort must be exerted to develop a greater sense, not just of what vice principals do, but of how they think. In the absence of a definitive, consistent job description, for instance, how do vice principals know if they are doing a good job? How do they navigate their way through the ambiguity inherent in the role to create a comfortable niche? And once in that niche, how do they know if they are making a difference? How do they construct and measure self-efficacy? In the fast-paced, high-stress environment in which vice principals work, there needs to be a thorough appreciation of how vice principals rationalize within such a framework of immediacy.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) argue that we can make a leap forward in school improvement by recognizing “the personal and emotional aspects of administrators’ lives” (p. 110). “Tapping into the emotional dimensions of the daily work and the original career motivations of the assistant principal is a great place to start rethinking the structure of their roles and, on a larger scale, the kinds of leadership we want in schools” (p. 110). It is through such in-depth studies that a more profound appreciation of the inner culture of the vice principalship may be encouraged and valued (Hartzell et al, 1995; Marshall & Hooley; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). And it is only with such an appreciation that educational leaders can effectively address the complex issues of job satisfaction, support networks, role preparedness, and the re-imaging of the vice principal role so it is better aligned within a culture of school improvement (Marshall & Hooley).
Research Objectives

My current study focused on an exploration of vice principal concepts of self-efficacy – how vice principals measured self-efficacy and how they knew they were doing a good job. The concept of self-efficacy involves the application of personal beliefs and values – beliefs and values which are at the heart of one’s conception of a particular role. As such, exploring individual concepts of self-efficacy provided a window into the specific cultural values and beliefs of the vice principal and a much deeper exploration of the role than a study of general tasks and responsibilities would have provided. This exploration of concepts of self-efficacy involved personal reflection by the participants and self-identification of evolving beliefs and values associated with the vice principal role. The research approach selected for this study was a qualitative case study approach. The overarching research question of this study was: How does the secondary school vice principal construct self-efficacy?

Definitions

For the purposes of my study, it is helpful to have a common understanding of the terms used in my research, discussion, and analysis. To this end, specific terms used in my study and my understanding of them as they apply to my research are here defined.

Self-Efficacy

The term “self-efficacy” refers to an individual’s personal beliefs about how well they perform, how effective they are, and how much control they have over their environment (Bandura, 1997), in this case in the context of their professional role as a secondary school vice principal. See also “constructs of self-efficacy” below.
Constructs of Self-Efficacy

The individual construct of self-efficacy involves the application and measurement of personally established and perhaps only implicitly stated criteria (behaviours, knowledge, skills) which the individual values as valid and appropriate measures of efficiency on the job (Bandura, 1997). What those criteria are and how they are measured will vary, because no two individuals are exactly the same, nor may they hold exactly the same values and priorities.

Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC)

The Ontario Principals’ Council is a professional association that provides training and resources to Ontario’s elementary and secondary public school principals and vice principals. Some of the services provided include principal and supervisory officer qualification courses, research and grants, as well as professional development workshops and conferences.

Vice Principal

The vice principal is the second highest ranking administrator in a secondary school (grades 9-12), under the direct authority of the school principal. The position is also called the assistant principal (U.S.), the deputy head (U.K.), and the deputy principal (Australia).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this chapter my review of relevant literature on the role of the vice principal is organized into major themes such as role definitions, what makes a good vice principal, job satisfaction and concepts of self-efficacy. The chapter ends with a summary.

Role

**Lack of Definition**

The role of the vice principal (variously called the assistant principal in the U.S., the deputy head in Britain, and the deputy principal in Australia) is not well defined. In Ontario, for instance, the Education Act of Ontario makes scant reference to the role other than to say that the power of the principal may be delegated to the vice principal, that the vice principal will perform the duties assigned by the principal, and shall be in charge when the principal is absent (Education Act, 277.17(1) and Section 298, 12 (2)). Many of the duties of the vice principal are assumed by default in the description of the principal’s duties, which are, in contrast, outlined in great detail in the Ontario Education Act. The Ontario Principals’ Council *Handbook for School Leaders* (2002) provides an extensive outline of the role and duties of the principal, including the delegation of tasks to the vice principal, but does not describe a specific vice principal role, and in fact rarely mentions the title “vice principal.”

**Lack of Research**

The vice principal role is also underrepresented in literature on school leadership. While a few books have emerged recently, “a cursory examination of educational textbook indexes shows that assistant principals get much less mention than athletic programs” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. ix). Despite a plethora of writing on the
principalship, the role of the vice principal is one of the “least researched and least discussed topics in professional journals and books focusing on educational leadership” (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. xiii), “undervalued and often unacknowledged” (Glanz, 2004, p. 2), the “neglected variable” (Calabrese, 1991, p. 52). In their book *Being and Becoming a Principal. Role Conceptions for Contemporary Principals and Assistant Principals*, Matthews and Crow (2003) call the vice principalship “a mirror image” of the principal’s role “in that both usually function in a parallel fashion” (p. 20) – a description which, arguably, effectively negates much of the importance of the role.

**Job Description**

Despite this lack of definition and lack of attention, vice principals in the field attest to the highly demanding nature of the job that keeps them running all day, mostly putting out fires, metaphorically speaking, while simultaneously leaving them wondering if they make a difference. Their day is a microcosm representing the array of issues that arise when children bring society inside the school’s walls. As a result, they have developed into a prime group of individuals who could, if asked, generate a unique picture of the existing condition of public education (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

It is a job of many complaints and few “thank you’s.” Self-questioning is routine (Johnson, 2004).

Vice principals typically find themselves in charge of student discipline, assisting the principal in the supervision of teachers and other staff, doing yard duty, conducting formal observations, scheduling assemblies, listening to parents’ complaints, holding promotion/retention meetings with students and parents, filling in for the principal when he or she is attending meetings, attending sporting
events, chaperoning dances, attending school site council meetings and parent
teacher club meetings, and sitting on district committees. (Johnson, p. 34)

If a school board ran an employment ad describing the job of a vice principal, one
newspaper reporter writes, nobody would apply (Gibson, 2003, as cited in Johnson).

The role has become only more hectic since it was described over 20 years ago as
“a nearly chaotic and frenetic pattern of daily activity that precludes anything resembling
serious reflection, reading, study of new materials or programs, or professional training”
(Spady, 1985, p. 107). In a recent Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) research report,
vice principals say that the job can be overwhelming and that it has become busier in the
last 5 years, due to such challenges as increased EQAO responsibility and accountability,
more paper-intensive Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPAs), deteriorating relationships
between government and unions, and an increase in clerical duties because of funding
cuts to office administration (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). As one vice principal
reflected, “being an assistant principal is just like living in an Indiana Jones movie. It
seems like I’m into a new adventure every 8 minutes, and I never know what it’s going to
be” (Hartzell et al., 1995, p. 26). The job is “a seemingly unstoppable flow of
unpredictable and immediately demanding tasks” (Hartzell et al., p. 43). Often invisible
to others in the system, it is a position “lost in the shadow of the principal” (Hartzell et
al., p. 23). The job of the vice principal is a fast-paced frenzy of activity.

If policy doesn’t present a clear job description, it is no easier to amass a generic
description based on what vice principals actually do in the course of a school day, since
no two vice principals appear to have exactly the same role. Glanz (1994) has identified
typically make up the vice principal’s job. The distinctions are similar, but not identical. Marshall and Hooley (2006) identified four major duties: conferences with students and parents, dealing with behavioural issues, scheduling, and counseling. Vice principals “pick up multiple jobs every hour” including everything the principal chooses to hand down to them (Marshall & Hooley, p. 7). There is no consistent job description.

In a random sample of 150 vice principals in Maine, Gaston (2005) adapted his analysis to the built-in ambiguity of the role by categorizing vice principal duties into activity clusters—the top five clusters being student discipline, supervising and evaluating teachers, responding to teachers’ needs, contacting parents about children, and handling special needs student issues. Occasional clusters included personnel and student management, instructional leadership, professional development, interaction with the educational hierarchy, and public relations. In Gaston’s study, 95% of the 150 participants said their duties were assigned by the principal. The definition of the vice principal role according to principal assignment is found in the Education Act (277.17(1)), and in Regulation 298 (12 (2)), and somewhat explains the wide variance in vice principal roles. No two principals assign roles or delegate in the same way.

**Management Versus Leadership**

If the daily duties vary, practitioners and researchers do tend to agree that the vice principal role is generally more about management than leadership (Cantwell, 1993; Hartzell et al, 1995; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Weller & Weller, 2002). On a continuum from custodial to innovative, one study found that vice principals viewed their job as strongly custodial, as taking care of business (Cantwell, p. 51). They are the middle managers, whose job it is to implement the vision of the principal (Hartzell et al.).
Principals deal with the big picture, holistic thinking, and are concerned with vision, motivation, and organizational culture. The vice principal breaks the big goals into smaller ones and is a master of technical details. Timelines are shorter, and work is more managerial (Hartzell et al.). The vice principal job is more reactive than proactive, with “little real scope for leading innovation and change” (Muijs & Harris, p. 6), the main focus being stability and order (Weller & Weller, 2002). It is the job of a manager.

The role aligns with “Mintzberg’s classic 1973 description of managerial activity: a great deal of work, done at an unrelenting pace in an unpredictable environment of stimulus and response, characterized by variety, fragmentation and brevity” (Hartzell et al., 1995, p. 154). A recent Australian study revealed that the top three reported duties of deputy principals are student issues, management/administration, and operational matters—the bottom three duties being strategic leadership, curriculum (instructional) leadership, and community issues (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). Cantwell’s 1993 study of 72 schools in New York found that clerical duties took most of the assistant principal’s time.

Regardless of how one delineates the scope of leadership and management, researchers across the decades agree that today’s typical vice principal views the role much the same as it was viewed in 1985, as “the keeper of the social and moral order of the school – a position in which concern for disruption and violations of conventional values and role expectations is all-encompassing” (Spady, 1985, p. 108). In one of the earliest studies of the vice principal role in 1970, Austin and Brown surveyed 1,100 vice principals in the U.S. and reported that 83% of participants said discipline was their
number one duty, followed by attendance and scheduling. Participants also said they had a large variety of administrative tasks (Austin & Brown, 1970, as cited in Sutter, 1994).

**Discipline**

Discipline continues to top the list of vice principal duties. In a 2004 survey of 1,230 secondary assistant principals in Texas, participants reported that discipline was their number one job (L. Armstrong, 2004). The 2003 Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) study of one school board district in southern Ontario concurred that most of a vice principal’s time is eaten up by discipline issues (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). This finding is consistent with Hartzell et al.’s (1995) earlier study, in which responses from 90 new vice principals in the U.S. reported that discipline takes 80-90% of an assistant principal’s time. Discipline is described as “a black hole when it comes to time” (Hartzell et al., p. 13). For a newly appointed vice principal, discipline is the uncontrollable, unpredictable aspect of the job that demands a vice principal’s attention before all other tasks, often consuming much of the day, leaving little time to attend to other assigned duties (Hartzell et al.). Glanz’s (1994) study of 200 New York vice principals reported 94% of vice principals were assigned student discipline as part of their job.

The emphasis on discipline that the vice principalship entails is reminiscent of an earlier supervisory role identified by Glanz (2004). In the early 1900s, two support positions were created to assist the principal, the “special supervisor” – usually female, who mentored less experienced teachers, and a “general supervisor” – usually male, who assisted with administrative operations, attendance, and discipline. It might be interesting
to consider how these two earlier roles are reflected in the shifting ambiguity of today’s vice principal role.

**Lack of Effective Training**

The management focus of the vice principalship brings to the fore another inherent ambiguity in the role. Vice principal work is largely about management, yet the training would-be vice principals receive is about leadership. Most vice principals enter the role unprepared (Hartzell et al, 1995; Koru, 1993; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Such lack of preparation creates an understandable disconnect for those who find the job is not what they expected and not what they were trained for (Armstrong, 2005; Elmore, & Burney, 2000; Hausman et al., 2002; Weller & Weller, 2002). The Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) recognizes that vice principals need more information and training specific to their role and that the province needs to do a better job of managing vice principal paths (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003, p. 23). Vice principals often find the nature of the job a surprise (Koru; Marshall 1992; Marshall & Hooley). They report being unprepared for the effect the job has on them professionally and personally (Hartzell et al.). They claim they have not been trained to do what they are assigned to do, and their daily work does not afford them the experience to prepare for the principal role. “There is a significant flaw in the knowledge base required for effective preparation of future secondary school administrators” (Hartzell et al., p. 23). Vice principals feel unprepared for the role.

Hartzell et al. (1995) reported that the vice principal experience was not included in university curricula and that administrative certification textbooks rarely mention the role, concluding that “the assistant principalship seems invisible to universities” (Hartzell
et al., p.152)–a situation which the authors suggested represented a “failure of universities to recognize the assistant principalship as a distinct and important position” (p. 152). In a recent review, Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that despite the passage of 12 years since the release of Hartzell et al.’s findings, the vice principalship is only just beginning to be considered in university curricula, is not part of principal preparation courses, and is not mentioned in most handbooks of leadership used in university courses.

**Instructional Leadership**

The management and discipline bent of the vice principal role appears to be at odds with a growing body of literature which increasingly suggests that the vice principal role should be more about leadership and less about custodial issues (Armstrong, 2005; Glanz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). As mentioned earlier, the historic role of the “special supervisor” is in part rediscovered in the idea of the vice principal as an instructional leader. Beginning in the 1980s, research emerged which recommended a redefining of the vice principalship and a recognition of a leadership role in need of a much clearer definition (Armstrong; Marshall & Hooley; Norton et al., 1987, as cited in Cantwell, 1993).

The notion of a new vision of vice principals as instructional leaders began in earnest in the 1980s with the work of Greenfield (1985), who argued that the skills of the vice principal could be much better used by providing an opportunity to act more as instructional leaders in their schools (Greenfield; Spady, 1985). This course of action would “result in a more effective use of the administrative resources available to schools” (Greenfield, p. 85). Such adjustments would make the vice principal role more central to instruction and would also better promote system renewal (Greenfield). The role of the
vice principal is “not particularly rewarding and not very critical to the development of improved instruction” (Greenfield, p. 90). Greenfield argued strongly that “limiting [the vice principal’s] functions to monitoring student behaviour and maintaining organizational stability robs both teachers and school principals of a potentially vital instructional resource” (p. 92). Since then, the voice for a revisioning of the vice principal role has continued. Participants in Cantwell’s (1993) study felt that ideally they would like to spend far less time on student discipline and more time on curriculum development and instructional supervision.

The push for a more instructional leadership role persisted in the 2000s, fueled by both a growing acceptance of more collaborative theories of school leadership as well as studies suggesting that instructional leadership and professional collaboration have a positive impact on school change (Elmore & Burney, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Fullan et al., 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano, 2005). Instructional leadership is rated highly by vice principals in terms of importance and is considered an important factor leading to increased job satisfaction. Thompson’s (2006) study of 200 vice principals in five U.S. states found a correlation between job satisfaction and involvement in instructional leadership. This correlation was more strongly noted for female vice principals than their male counterparts (Thompson, p. 75). Vice principals in Thompson’s study reported that they wanted more involvement in instructional leadership. This finding is corroborated by other research (Cranston et al., 2002; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Koru, 1993; Marshall, 1992; Sutter, 1994). There is a substantial body of literature recommending that instructional leadership should be a high priority (Cranston et al.; Glanz 1994; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003; Williams, 1995). Elmore
and Burney go so far as to suggest that the education sector is “underdeveloped in its approach to the cultivation of leadership” (p. 2). More attention should be given to increasing vice principal opportunity for instructional leadership.

And yet, more often than not, instructional leadership does not make it to the top of a vice principal’s daily agenda. In a range of studies over the past 15 years (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Thompson, 2006), vice principals consistently report that they believe instructional leadership is important to their role, but they do not have enough time for it. Koru’s (1993) study revealed that vice principals had little involvement with instructional leadership beyond teacher performance appraisals. He concluded that the work of the vice principal continues to be focused on management, clerical duties, and student discipline and that the amount of time required for such custodial tasks left little time for instructional leadership.

Glanz’s (1994) study of 200 vice principals in New York City found that vice principals spent most of their time performing duties to which they assigned the least importance. More than 90% of the participants in Glanz’s study reported their main duties involved completing tasks that they ranked near the bottom in order of importance: student discipline, parental complaints, and scheduling. Tasks they ranked as most important included teacher training, staff and curriculum development, and instructional leadership, but they had little time for these. Vice principals felt their expertise on the whole was wasted.

Hausman et al.’s (2002) study of 125 vice principals in Maine similarly found that vice principals allot very little time to instructional leadership. Muijs and Harris (2003) reported similar results and argue that vice principals are underutilized as leaders (p. 8).
Gaston’s (2005) study of 150 vice principals in Virginia found that instructional leadership was not near the top of the duties they regularly performed. Thompson’s (2006) study found that vice principals felt discipline and activity supervision was their biggest role and that they wanted more involvement in instructional leadership.

Such findings (Gaston, 2005; Glanz 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Thompson, 2006) highlight the tension between real and ideal roles that characterizes much of the vice principal’s world – another inherent ambiguity in the role. Research suggesting possible solutions to such ambiguity haven’t gone far in bringing about change, though a possible direction is clear. In 1994, Harvey studied 403 vice principals in Australia, focusing on actual and ideal role perceptions. His analysis identified two vice principal roles: the “traditional” (management based) and the “emergent” (leadership based). The tasks of an “emergent” vice principal include curriculum development, promoting school goals, visioning with staff, working as a change agent (initiating programs and encouraging participation), and coaching staff. In another study of possible solutions, Glanz suggested a dean of discipline position be created to free the vice principal’s time for other tasks.

**Shared Leadership**

The current literature (Leithwood et al, 2006; Marzano, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004; Wagner & Keegan, 2006) recognizes the importance of a collaborative team approach to effective school leadership and has led us away from the notion that leadership is something held solely by the principal. Old models of the structured hierarchy in secondary schools are being replaced by new ideas of leadership. Spillane et al. note that the traditional focus in literature on the leadership role of the principal has
only reinforced the assumption that “school leadership is synonymous with the principal” (p. 4). In contrast, leadership activity, they argue, “is constituted in the interaction of multiple leaders and followers. What are critical are the interdependencies” (p. 16). True leadership is a collaborative process.

As the principal’s job becomes more complex, it becomes more difficult to maintain the idea of leadership in schools as a one-person-show (Leithwood et al, 2006; Marzano, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). No longer is the principal seen as the source of all answers, but as a leader-learner (Wagner & Keegan, 2006). Leadership is increasingly viewed as a collective entity (Foster, 2004) and a shared social process (Yukl, 1998). It has, in fact, been dubbed the central issue of the decade (Fullan, 2003).

But if the vice principal is part of a new vision of collaborative leadership, this is a mostly silent assumption, as the role itself is rarely mentioned specifically in leadership literature (Glanz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). More often than not, the concept of “team” is described as a combination of principal and teachers. It is likely that the vice principal is assumed in such cases, but there is scant direct mention of the role. In particular, little has been written that speaks directly to the idea of a shared team leadership comprised of the administrative team itself – of the principal and vice principal–perhaps arguably the most central team in the school.

Marshall (1992) suggests that principals who work with vice principals as administrative teams could multiply their effectiveness and increase school success – a finding corroborated by later research (Harvey, 1994). Harvey argued that schools
require an administrative team operating as a unified front in order to be able to effectively manage and lead school organizations in the 21st century.

Recent research (Connell & Klem, 2000; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003) has explored different models of shared leadership. Connell & Klem (2000) researched coprincipal models in a study of three schools in which all principal duties were equally shared. Participants reported more positive opportunities and mutual support than they achieved from the traditional school leadership model. Grubb and Flessa also suggested a system of coprincipals following their research of alternative leadership styles in nine California schools. Co-leadership was also a suggestion of the Ontario Principals’ Council (Nanavati & McCulloch).

But old habits are hard to break, and despite such ideas, the traditional maintenance view of the vice principal role persists (Gaston, 2005; Hausman et al., 2002; Ribbins, 1997; Thompson, 2006). As noted earlier, role-defining studies continue to demonstrate that, despite more recent thinking, the vice principal role remains firmly embedded in the custodial, management, and student discipline realm (Cranston et al., 2002; Gaston; Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al.; Hartzell et al., 1994; Koru, 1993; Marshall, 1992; Ribbins; Sutter, 1994; Thompson).

Neither is the conception of the vice principal as a collaborative instructional leader greeted with unanimous acceptance. Brown’s (1993) study of 10 Canadian secondary schools identified as successful in implementing change found that principals and department heads held the most visible leadership roles and that vice principals supported the change through efficient operation of the school. In this case, successful schools involved the vice principal not being involved as an instructional leader, but
rather taking care of business so that others could assume such instructional leadership roles.

Leonard and Leonard (1999) studied three schools in eastern Canada in which teachers felt that informal collaborative leadership was more effective for change than formal leadership involving the principal and vice principal. The authors further suggest that the instructional leadership role of the vice principal may be diminishing as this role is taken over by collaborative teacher teams, and suggest that a more supportive vice principal role may be emerging.

**Revisioning the Role**

Marshall and Hooley (2006) devote an entire chapter to a discussion of opportunities for improving the assistant principalship. They argue that a revisioning of the role is needed which will require more than quick fixes. It will require a deep shift in the cultural view of administrative leadership. According to Marshall and Hooley, the vice principal role is a good place to start such a revisioning being as it is an entry-level position into administration. “The position can be re-visioned so that incoming leaders structure their tasks for leading schools and their orientation to the functions of school leadership differently” (Marshall & Hooley, p. 142). The authors also consider other aspects of the role in need of attention, such as gender and racial equity. They argue that what is needed are new metaphors for leaders that honour symbolic leadership and that allow us to see management as being less about well-oiled machines and more about conversation and culture. Marshall and Hooley suggest a restructuring of administrative hierarchies which assume that people in higher positions are more important and which “cut off the possibility of cultivating a climate of professional dedication” and
“exacerbate the tension that assistant principals experience working between teachers and higher-level administrators” (Marshall & Hooley, p. 144). A new view of the role is required.

**Vice Principal Concepts of What Makes a Good Vice Principal**

If there is a lack of research and attention in the literature to the role of the vice principal, there is an even greater dearth of material dealing with the conceptions, thoughts, and beliefs of vice principals themselves on the question of what makes a good vice principal. In 2002, Weller and Weller conducted a study of 100 vice principals, asking them what skills and knowledge were necessary to be an effective vice principal. In order of priority, the top five responses were: people skills, good communication skills, knowledge of leadership theory, techniques for improving curriculum and instruction, and ability to work in teams. Other skills and knowledge cited as important included the ability to work with community leaders, knowledge of the politics and networks within the school, the ability to conduct effective meetings, and the ability to manage one’s time effectively. When Cranston et al. (2002) asked the same of 204 vice principals in Australia, participants identified similar criteria, reporting the most important vice principal skills were: interpersonal skills, the ability to inspire and vision change, delegation, empowering, and being a good manager. It is noteworthy that vice principals in both studies rank the people aspect of the job as the most important skill.

When teachers are asked what makes a good vice principal, they say they want a vice principal to bring order to chaos, solve problems, create a stable environment, support with student discipline, and to be a presence in the halls (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). Teachers say a good vice principal models behaviour to create a positive tone.
According to the teaching staff, a good vice principal is not remembered for timetabling abilities and “administrivia” but for leading by example, for knowing students’ names, for caring about staff. Teachers are skeptical of the high turnover of vice principals, noting that the role is often a revolving door for those on the way to the principal’s chair. They are skeptical of vice principals who do things because they are good for their portfolio rather than good for the school. Unfortunately, if a vice principal aspires to further career advancement, such is often the case. Marshall and Hooley (2006) observe that what is good for a vice principal’s advancement may not be specifically school based or student based:

> Interestingly, these opportunities to distinguish oneself and obtain recognition from district administrators almost always involve interactions with adults, not children. When assistant principals develop interpersonal skills with community people, superiors, and other adults, they can learn skills for career mobility. Assistant principals who assume such tasks are more likely to get the attention and sponsorship of superiors and the motivation to move into higher positions.

(Marshall & Hooley, p. 11)

Thus, a teacher’s idea of a good vice principal is not necessarily what is important for advancement in the role.

**Job Satisfaction**

In my review of literature I read several studies which addressed aspects of job satisfaction. These studies are outlined below under such subheadings as “satisfaction/dissatisfaction,” “ambiguity,” and “what would make it better.”
**Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction**

Studies on the job satisfaction of vice principals are not conclusive. When asked about the dissatisfactions of the job, 90 vice principals in Hartzell et al.’s (1995) American study noted such things as amount of time taken up by discipline and meetings, and the reactionary nature of the job that makes it difficult to plan. “You’re always worried that if you missed something it will come back to haunt you” (Hartzell et al., p. 43). Cranston et al.’s (2002) research involving 204 respondents in Australia found over 75% of vice principals were satisfied or very satisfied. Thompson’s (2006) study of 200 vice principals reported that 26% of participants claimed low job satisfaction, and 49% claimed moderate satisfaction. Austin and Brown’s earlier 1970 study of the role concluded that the job of vice principal held little satisfaction (Austin & Brown, 1970, as cited in Sutter, 1994). Glanz reported that nearly all of the 200 respondents in his 1994 study “indicated that their job was thankless and that morale was low” (Glanz, 2004, p. xi). Clearly findings on job satisfaction are not conclusive.

Edison’s (1992) study of career versus upwardly mobile vice principals found both groups equally satisfied with their job, a finding which was not what he expected. He concluded there was a strong relationship between job satisfaction and self-efficacy and that the strongest predictor for job satisfaction was how the vice principal perceived the job, followed by his/her sense of self-efficacy.

Delving a little more deeply into the root causes of dissatisfaction, Drake’s (1995) study of self-perceived needs fulfillment, which he based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, found 66% of vice principals reported a deficiency in higher order needs such as social needs, esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization. He concluded that “there is
something about the job itself in which assistant principals are not finding fulfillment” (Drake, p. 170). Drake suggests that higher order needs are an important component of job satisfaction.

In 1997, Ribbins interviewed 34 principals in the U.K. (head teachers), many of whom did not rate their time in the vice principal chair as a positive experience. His study found vice principals frustrated or disappointed, often because of a lack of leadership opportunity. Wynott’s (2005) study of vice principal stress involved a case study of 2 newly appointed vice principals in northern Ontario. She documented stressors caused by career change, appointment time, workload, outside agencies, parents, and employment unrest.

The variance in studies of job satisfaction is compounded both by the aforementioned ambiguities of the role and by the lack of research into vice principals’ personal beliefs and role constructions. Hartzell et al. (1995) found that vice principals who report they are dissatisfied with the job cite reasons such as a lack of clear role description, stress created by the fast-paced nature of the role, and a lack of opportunity for instructional leadership. Other reasons for dissatisfaction included the fact that vice principals spend most of their time on discipline and mundane management tasks, and that the role lacks the opportunity to develop leadership skills vice principals claim they want to develop for the principal role (Hartzell et al). Yet even within such reasoning, ambiguity prevails. Hartzell et al. found that while most vice principals report that the overwhelming workload and fast pace are a negative aspect of the job, there are some who clearly feed off such things: “This is the goddamnedest roller coaster ride! I’m
pulled in every direction at once, and they all want it yesterday. It’s great” (Hartzell et al., p. 44). Vice principals do not agree on satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the role.

**Ambiguity**

There are still more ambiguities in the role that factor into the satisfaction equation. For instance, as Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggest, educational leaders are taught in formal training to value risk taking and innovation, and yet most vice principals learn on the job to avoid taking risks as this often leads to being viewed as a misfit who may not be a safe choice for a higher leadership position. The vice principal role encourages a conservative approach. Marshall and Hooley’s work points to another ambiguity of the role in the conflict of interest created when vice principals assume the role of instructional leaders—a situation which demands that the vice principal operate as both coach and evaluator at the same time. Glanz (1994) notes the same tension resulting from being asked to both evaluate staff in formal performance appraisals and coach them towards improvement. Being an inspector of teachers is very likely to decrease a vice principal’s credibility with teachers as a resource for instructional improvement (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The conflict centers around the fact that while instructional improvement generally focuses on student achievement, teacher evaluation focuses on the performance of the teacher. As previously mentioned, in the earliest beginnings of the vice principalship, the two roles of coach and evaluator were assumed by two different individuals, both of whom worked in support of the principal, thus avoiding such conflicts of interest.

A further cause of ambiguity in the role is the political nature of the vice principalship. Vice principals, for example, are expected to be loyal to the principal and
as such they must modify their perspectives, ethics, and morality to conform to the
dominant values of the school administration (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews &
Crow, 2003). As second-in-command, vice principals must limit their risk-taking,
remake policy quietly, avoid moral dilemmas, not display divergent values, and build
administrative team trust (Matthews & Crow). Vice principals learn that while they are
expected to be decision makers, in reality much of their work depends on the agenda of
others – parents, principals, teachers. “The priorities always seem to be set by others. I
can’t control my day” (Hartzell et al., 1995, p. 13). Vice principals often find they do
not have the control they had expected.

What Would Make It Better?

Researchers have identified several factors that enhance job satisfaction in the
vice principal role. Austin and Brown’s 1970 study reported 66% of the 1,100 vice
principals they surveyed believed that more involvement in instructional leadership
would increase their job satisfaction (as cited in Sutter, 1994). Marshall (1993) made the
case for greater instructional leadership responsibilities for vice principals, concluding
that merely dealing with attendance and discipline is not fulfilling for vice principals.
Principals and school boards were urged to develop comprehensive vice principal job
descriptions because “under current conditions and structures, the assistant principal can
be an instructional leader only in rare instances” (Marshall, p. 26). Marshall identified
dominant patterns of job satisfaction related to the following five themes: shaping
students’ lives, solving problems, helping teachers, control of the culture, and preserving
time for a personal life. She concluded that vice principals with high levels of job
satisfaction have a strong inner sense that they make a difference. Her focus on the
career vice principal encourages a broader view of the role, not as just a stepping stone to the principalship but as a valued role in its own right, with its own need for inherent rewards and values.

Edison (1992) studied 174 vice principals in Detroit in relation to job satisfaction and self-efficacy. He found that career vice principals had more positive perceptions of their job than upwardly mobile vice principals. Edison concluded that the strongest predictor of job satisfaction was individual perceptions of the job, followed by the individual’s sense of self-efficacy. These findings were not corroborated by Sutter’s research (1996), which revealed greater job satisfaction among upwardly mobile vice principals. Sutter reported that greater job satisfaction was found among vice principals who had achieved a sense of accomplishment on the job, who had opportunity to use their talents, and who perceived the availability of advancement opportunities. He noted greater job satisfaction among those who had positive perceptions of district policy and practice. He found that vice principals have difficulty taking credit for being effective administrators because discipline problems never go away. He also reported that female assistant principals claimed more job satisfaction than their male counterparts. Cranston et al. (2004) found that the level of job satisfaction amongst vice principals was directly related to the sense of team leadership created by the administrative team in the school. Annous (2006) argued that job satisfaction would improve with increased empowerment of vice principals in that empowerment could provide a way to harness the “commitment, creativity, energy, knowledge and potential of assistant principals” (p. 26). Such studies suggest various ways to improve job satisfaction.
Self-Efficacy

What follows is a review of the relevant literature on self-efficacy including the sources and effects of self-efficacy.

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as an individual’s sense of his/her power to make things happen. It is a reflective and self-evaluative concept that involves both cognitive and emotional processes and is concerned “not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have, under a variety of circumstances” (Bandura, p. 37). Self-efficacy does not mean self-concept and self-esteem, though it is perhaps rooted in such ideas (Pajares, 1998).

Self-efficacy is measured in relation to a goal (Bandura 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995), so an individual’s measure of self-efficacy will also be affected by how that goal is defined and how realistic that goal is. For example if workers felt that the skills of their job were inherent rather than learned, their self-efficacy might be lower. If, on the other hand, they felt that making mistakes was a natural part of the job, their self-efficacy might be higher (Bandura; Pajares, 1998). Self-efficacy is considered to be an important consideration in the study of motivation (Graham & Weiner, 1996) and is reported to affect academic motivation and self-regulation in educational research (Pintrich & Schunk).

Thus self-efficacy is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1998). It is difficult to define and will vary widely from person to person. Nevertheless, self-efficacy is an essential indicator of how an individual will perform (Pajares). In his review of current directions in self-efficacy research, Pajares reported
that self-efficacy beliefs have been found to affect such areas as addiction, depression, social skills, assertiveness, stress levels, pain control, general health, and athletic performance. Emerging evidence suggests that achievers, innovators, social reformers, the sociable, the nonanxious, and the nondespondent take an optimistic view of their personal efficacy to exercise control over events that affect their lives. If not unrealistically exaggerated, such self-beliefs sustain the motivation needed for personal and social accomplishments (Bandura; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995).

Bandura (1997) identified 4 distinct categorical sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience (successes increase self-efficacy, while failures decrease self-efficacy), vicarious experience (seeing others model the behaviour builds self-efficacy), verbal persuasion/social influences (having others believe/say you can do something builds self-efficacy), and physiological and affective states (positive emotions increase self-efficacy, while negative emotions decrease self-efficacy). That is, the information an individual uses to judge self-efficacy is enactive (something they did), vicarious (something they saw modeled in a peer), persuasive (something someone told them), and physiological/affective (something their body told them).

Other studies align with Bandura’s interpretation. For instance, Schunk (1987) demonstrated that the effect of models on self-efficacy is high. Zeldin and Pajares (1997) found that persuasion by others had an important role in the development of self-beliefs. Bouffard-Bouchard’s (1990) study of self-efficacy in college students found that providing positive feedback raised self-efficacy in college students, which led to the use of more efficient problem-solving strategies.
Bandura (1997) concluded that mastery experiences have the strongest effect but that these are susceptible to the power of “preset efficacy beliefs” (p. 82), which are determined by past performance and how such past performance was interpreted and reconstructed by the individual. Mastery experience, according to Bandura, is also highly affected by fluctuations in attention, physical, and emotional states. “People often read their physiological activation in stressful or taxing situations as a sign of vulnerability to dysfunction” (p. 106). Thus, efficacy beliefs are “the product of cognitive processing of diverse sources of efficacy information” (p. 115). There are powerful self beliefs which influence conceptions of self-efficacy.

**Effects of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy affects how one thinks, how one acts, how motivated one is, and the decisions one makes (Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pajares, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set higher goals (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk). “Employees of high perceived efficacy are likely to perform occupational roles innovatively, whereas those of low perceived efficacy are prone to discharge occupational roles conventionally with little personal embellishment” (Bandura, p. 446). How effective employees see themselves on the job also affects their stress levels and their physical health as well as their ability to manage stress and health issues (O’Leary, 1985). It may be that individuals with higher self-efficacy suffer fewer health complaints than those with lower self-efficacy (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). Bandura noted that individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy are more likely to suffer from “anxiety, health problems, and health-impairing habits such as heavy drinking and sleep disturbances” (Bandura, p. 464). Pajares concluded that:
people with a strong sense of personal competence in a domain approach difficult
tasks in that domain as challenges to be mastered rather than as dangers to be
avoided, have greater intrinsic interest in activities, set challenging goals and
maintain a strong commitment to them, heighten their efforts in the face of
failure, more easily recover their confidence after failures or setbacks, and
attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which they
believe they are capable of acquiring. High self-efficacy helps create feelings of
serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities…. Self-efficacy beliefs are
strong determinants and predictors of the level of accomplishment that individuals
finally attain. (p.5)

Self-efficacy beliefs have far-reaching effects on human functioning.

**Vice Principal Concepts of Self-Efficacy**

There is a notable lack of attention to vice principal concepts of self-efficacy in
the literature. Certain aspects of self-efficacy, as outlined in the paragraphs which
follow, are suggested in the work of Daresh (1986), Drake (1995), Edison (1992),

In 1986 Daresh reported first-year vice principals experienced a lack of feedback
about whether they were doing a good job and that they felt a general anxiety and lack of
confidence—qualities which may impact on the concept of self-efficacy, though this
aspect was not explored in his study. Sutter’s (1996) findings suggested possible criteria
to measure self-efficacy: a sense of accomplishment on the job, an opportunity to use
their talents, and a sense that one could get ahead in the job with hard work (that
advancement opportunities existed)–though his study related to job satisfaction rather than to self-efficacy specifically.

Edison’s (1992) study made a connection between job satisfaction and self-efficacy. He suggested that personal values were undergoing change in the early 1990s and that “new value workers” (p. 7) might include other criteria in their definitions of self-efficacy, such as a sense of balance between professional and personal lives.

Drake’s (1995) study of higher level needs deficiencies among vice principals, using Maslow’s (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, suggested that the concept of self-efficacy might involve the fulfillment of higher level needs in the areas of social, esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization. Drake reported that his findings aligned with Marshall’s (1992) findings that vice principals who had little say in how they organized their time experienced a sense of powerlessness. Similarly, Marshall (1993) concluded that autonomy and job satisfaction of vice principals were related and that the precise task performed by a vice principal was less important than the chance to work with a team and to have control and flexibility—a finding which might suggest a construct of self-efficacy equating control with efficiency.

Annous’s (2006) study of empowerment may suggest a way to approach the construct of self-efficacy. If self-efficacy is about a personal sense of power, then Annous’s empowering strategies—delegating important work, appointing the vice principal as the final authority, providing the opportunity for the vice principal to select job responsibilities, encouraging open discussion of conflicts, encouraging the vice principal to master multiple skills, encouraging the vice principal to take risks, and
encouraging a diversity of styles – could be important considerations in the construction of self-efficacy.

**Vice Principal Culture**

Within the small range of literature on the vice principal role, there is little research of vice principals as a cultural group. As has been noted, vice principals are a complex group, with widely divergent roles and personalities. Of the studies already mentioned, here are three which used a more qualitative approach involving the collection of vice principal stories and conversations and which thereby illuminated cultural aspects of the vice principalship. These are: Marshall’s (1993) study, Hartzell et al.’s (1995) study, and, to a lesser extent, Nanavati and McCulloch’s (2006) Ontario report. While each of these studies has been addressed in this literature review, what follows is a brief description of the cultural illuminations achieved by each.

Marshall’s *The Unsung Role of the Career Assistant Principal* (1993) is a descriptive study which highlights the values, philosophies, and priorities of vice principals. Published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the report is based on research of 50 career vice principals, including interviews and observations of 10 vice principals, surveys of 26 vice principals, and focus groups with 14 award-winning vice principals. Additional information was collected from colleagues and spouses. The tone is upbeat. For the purposes of her study, Marshall chose vice principals who love the job. In analysis of vice principal stories, Marshall categorized vice principal comments on rewards of the job into themes such as: shaping students’ lives, solving problems, helping teachers, having control of the culture, and preserving time for a personal life.
Marshall recorded that vice principals who felt successful in their work had a strong inner sense that they made a difference. Vice principals who felt successful on the job maintained that they were doing the best job they could for their students and that they never gave up on them. Marshall described vice principals as “complex, contradictory individuals” (p. 35), who “don’t always agree on discipline policy, but who have a clear sense of what keeps them happy in the job – namely consistent policy from above, non-interference with their job” (p. 39), and “a well-used set of coping strategies” (p. 42), including humour, a positive outlook, a trust level with students and staff, positive interaction with students, a supportive family, and organizational skills.

Vice principals in Marshall’s (1993) study unanimously agreed that university course work was irrelevant to their jobs. Their pet peeves included policies that disrupt, and being left out of the loop. Above all, they felt that vice principals stick together. They advise each other but “never tell the principal if one of them makes a mistake” (p. 47). They would have liked more time to sit and think and to be creative. They had “an ingrained commitment to making things work” (p. 16) and to helping kids:

Assistant principals have to have some kind of kid contact. You can teach a wonderful seminar to faculty, or you can work with support services and at-risk teenagers. But when you notch your gun belt, it’s ‘I think I helped this kid, or I think I helped that kid.’ (p. 17)

Hartzell et al.’s book, New Voices in the Field (1995), was intended to give readers a sense of what it feels like to be a secondary school vice principal. It was written using the personal stories of 90 first-year vice principals, gathered over a 5-year period from 1989 to 1994, in California, Washington, and Nebraska. An attempt was made to
select informants who varied enough among themselves to represent a relevant spectrum of experience. Hartzell et al. also used a number of member checks to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Each chapter traces a different theme in the new vice principal experience and illustrates the stresses and challenges associated with discipline, the pace of the job, the isolation, redefining relationships with staff, initiation into the administrative peer group, and the emotional impact.

Hartzell et al.’s (1995) vice principal stories capture a sense of how vice principals defined success – “I’m right in the middle of things; and I can influence some very important decisions. More of them are more individual than institutional, but they’re important” (Hartzell et al., p. 19). Success on the job involved “the ability to manage student behaviour by developing skills in crime prevention, investigation, interrogation, counseling and security” (p. 66). The stories also illuminated lessons learned—“I thought schedules were mechanical, but they’re also political” (p. 31). Personal vice principal stories further illuminated the frustrations:

He does the same thing with us he does with the teachers. He says we’re all really talented and he wants to know what we think, but he does most of the talking every time we get together. He says we’re empowered, but what we’re really empowered to do is what he wants us to do. (p. 115)

Hartzell et al. concluded that most new assistant principals reported that the job affected them more than any other job they had ever held.

Nanavati and McCulloch’s (2003) research report was commissioned by the Ontario Principals’ Council. The authors stated their intent to immerse the reader “in the culture of the vice principals” (Nanavati & McCulloch, p. 5). This qualitative study
focused on one Ontario school district in southern Ontario, with the goal of determining how secondary school vice principals viewed the impact their role had on school culture. The authors used a focus group of vice principals, two focus groups of teachers at two schools, and interviews with 6 secondary school vice principals. The report highlighted the large rate of turnover in the vice principal role – only 12% of participants had more than 6 years experience in the role. Fifty-two percent of participants had fewer than three years experience.

Vice principals in the Nanavati and McCulloch (2003) study reported that they found the job overwhelming. They saw their role as an operational manager, mediator, advocate, creator of safe schools, and as the one who keeps staff happy, with little time for thinking about school culture. “You have to remind yourself to make time to work on the culture piece” (p. 11). Vice principals said they wanted to be known as caring about kids and that every vice principal had a student success story. They said it was important to achieve balance, and that nurturing school leaders was more satisfying than discipline. Participants shared that going beyond the professional role to a more personal caring level of involvement and making meaningful connections were important aspects of the job. Things they found dissatisfying included the size of the operational role, the turnover in administration, and the overwhelming volume of work. Other difficulties included dealing with skeptical staff who were not easily led after a decade of rapid reform, funding cuts, and tension between the ministry and the teachers’ union.

Participants in the Nanavati and McCulloch (2003) study reported that finding balance was a challenge. Job satisfaction came from having the time to devote to the more meaningful parts of the job that have a positive impact on school culture, such as
celebrating success and rewarding positive student behaviour. They disliked administrative assignments that gave no thought to a match of leadership styles within the administrative team. Participants said that being slotted as an operational vice principal stifled their opportunity for growth. They gained satisfaction from knowing they were the one who made things happen. The researchers noted that most vice principals spoke positively about their jobs and the opportunities to make a positive difference in a school. “I don’t think you ever have a day you don’t make a difference. We just don’t always know we make a difference” (p. 18). Participants were not always aware of the effect they had.

**Summary**

The role of the vice principal suffers historically from a lack of attention. Since the role was conceived in North America in the early 1900s, it has been underrepresented in the research literature, underrepresented in university school leadership courses and principal preparation courses, and underrepresented in theoretical discussion and proposed models of collaborative and shared school leadership (Glanz 2004; Hartzell et al., 1995; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). Labelled alternatively as the invisible role, the neglected role, the underutilized role, (Calabrese, 1991; Glanz, 2004; Hartzell et al.) the vice principal is a position which has never been blessed with a clear and consistent role definition, despite ongoing recommendations of research, from the 1970s to the present day, that such a definition is badly needed (Armstrong, 2005; Greenfield, 1985; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). Yet paradoxically, there is general consensus that the role of the vice
principal is a vitally important one (Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall & Hooley; Weller & Weller).

While findings are not conclusive as to the relative job satisfaction experienced by vice principals or the precise tasks that make up their day, research over the past 35 years does illuminate the inherent ambiguity of the role – an ambiguity so entrenched and widespread that it has become part of the very culture of the role. There is ambiguity in the role description, in the tension between what vice principals see as ideal versus real roles, and in the tension created by conflicting tasks (being both teacher evaluator and teacher coach for example). There is ambiguity in the tension between management and leadership roles (the frequent recommendations for instructional leadership for which the role leaves little time), and ambiguity in training and preparation (required preparation courses that don’t mention the role). Vice principals are described as people-persons, and yet report that isolation in the role is one of the biggest stressors of the job. Much of the role seems paradoxical. It is at once the most ambiguous and perhaps least understood leadership position in the education sector.

Recent literature (Armstrong 2005; Gaston, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003) may indicate that the vice principal role is getting more attention lately–this literature review, for instance, includes three 2006 doctoral studies of the subject (Annous, 2006; J. L. Armstrong, 2006; Thompson, 2006). There is, however, a persistent lack of study of vice principal voices–how vice principals perceive their role, their effectiveness, and how they define self-efficacy. There is very little mention of the vice principal culture. The studies led by Hartzell and Marshall in the 1990s are perhaps the most extensive qualitative approaches of the vice principalship to date, with extensive
reference to the perspectives of vice principals in the field. Such research points the way for further study into cultural aspects of the role. A recent Ontario Principals’ Council research report (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003) picks up this qualitative tone and begins a more introspective study of the vice principalship in Ontario, while at the same time paving the way for much more of the same in the future.
CHAPTER THREE: FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND METHOD

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework for my study, and is followed by a detailed description of methodology and method.

Theoretical Framework

As outlined in the Literature Review in Chapter Two, most simply put, self-efficacy is made up of individual beliefs about how well one performs, how effective one is, and how much control one has over one’s environment. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as an individual’s sense of his/her power to make things happen. It is a reflective and self-evaluative concept that involves both cognitive and emotional processes and is concerned “not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have, under a variety of circumstances” (Bandura, p. 37). Self-efficacy does not mean self-concept and self-esteem, though it is perhaps rooted in such ideas (Pajares, 1998).

Self-efficacy is a highly complex concept, not easily defined or measured. First, it is a deeply contextualized concept, so that an individual may have a high sense of self-efficacy in one area of his/her life, in a career position for instance, and a low sense of self-efficacy in another, such as a parent role (Pajares, 1998). As well, self-efficacy is a highly individual and personal measure. No two individuals measure self-efficacy in exactly the same way, or use the same criteria, or give each the same degree of importance. When participants were asked at the beginning of my study to define self-efficacy, they did not define it in the same way. For instance, one participant defined self-efficacy as:
being able to make big and small decisions all day every day with calmness, credibility, and integrity, with a focus on collaboration and on what is best for the learners. It is also, however, the ability to correct and openly acknowledge when a better decision could have been made.

A second participant defined self-efficacy as “strategically allowing yourself to be influenced in areas of need of growth, and then producing these changes in our own practice and in those that you yourself can influence.” While there are similar elements in the above personal definitions, it is also clear that these two individuals used different measuring sticks to get a sense of their own self-efficacy on the job.

Most of us do not have a clear sense of how we develop our personal sense of how well we are doing in a given context, though we may be aware that we do indeed possess such a sense of how we are doing (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy involves the application and measurement of personally established and perhaps only implicitly stated criteria which an individual values as valid and appropriate measures of efficacy. Furthermore, self-efficacy is strongly affected by external forces, such as the influence of others or the difficulty of the task (Bandura, Shunk, 1987; Zeldin & Pajares, 1997).

Appraising self-efficacy is a personal inferential process in which the individual weighs many factors (Bandura, 1997; Sutter, 1996). How individuals judge their self-efficacy depends on many factors, such as their preconceptions of their ability, how challenging they perceive the task to be, how much effort they need to expend, how much external aid they receive, the circumstances under which they perform, their pattern of successes and failures, and also how they cognitively organize and reconstruct such experiences in memory (Bandura). Individual perceptions of self-efficacy may be
affected by a sense of accomplishment on the job, an opportunity to use personal talents, and a sense that one could get ahead with hard work (Sutter, 1996). Edison (1992) suggests another criterion for measuring self-efficacy might be the ability to maintain a sense of balance between professional and personal lives. Annous (2006), Drake (1995), and Marshall (1993) suggest that empowerment and autonomy might be further criteria for determining self-efficacy. The research further suggests that self-efficacy is measured in relation to a goal (Bandura 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995), so that an individual’s perception of self-efficacy may also be affected by how that goal is defined and how realistic it is.

Sources of self-efficacy also differ by individual, and there is no definitive list of sources upon which scholars agree. The literature on self-efficacy, as outlined in the Literature Review in Chapter Two, offers a variety of sources (Annous, 2006; Drake, 1995; Edison, 1992; Sutter, 1996; Marshall, 1993). The most definitive exploration of the sources of self-efficacy is offered by Bandura (1997).

In my study, I used Bandura’s (1997) sources of self-efficacy to interpret participant sources of self-efficacy. Bandura identified 4 distinct categorical sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience (successes increase self-efficacy, while failures decrease self-efficacy), vicarious experience (seeing others model the behaviour builds self-efficacy), verbal persuasion/social influences (having others believe/say you can do something builds self-efficacy), and physiological and affective states (positive emotions increase self-efficacy, while negative emotions decrease self-efficacy). That is, the information an individual uses to judge self-efficacy is enactive (something they did),
vicarious (something they saw modeled in a peer), persuasive (something someone told them), and physiological/affective (something their body told them).

If self-efficacy is hard to measure, it is arguably more so for the vice principal, whose role is fraught with built-in ambiguities over which vice principals feel they have little control, including: the frenetic pace of the job, the amount of time consumed by paperwork, the shortage of time to devote to satisfying projects, the existence of conflicting expectations that make satisfying all stakeholders a major challenge, the difficulty of being able to allot enough time to adequately do justice to many issues, and the fact that they are judged by their ability to control issues (such as student attendance) over which they may have only limited control (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

In light of such observations, one could view the vice principalship as a role fraught with difficulty. The three secondary school vice principals who participated in my study each rated the job a 10 out of 10 for difficulty. As one participant observed:

I am bothered by the amount of ineffectuality I get from this job. It bothers me because the needs of the school you are trying to impact are so great, and I’m bothered by the inefficiency of my role. I always see it as being ineffectual to some percentage. I’d like to be 100%, right?

Marshall and Hooley (2006) described the vice principalship as a “vulnerable, ambiguous position” (p. 85) in which one must work within assumptive worlds that are not always clearly stated or defined.

Such descriptions raise a burning question—in a role that seems to frequently defy effectiveness, how do vice principals construct their worlds so that they can see themselves as effective? The literature suggests that high job performance and high
motivation are a result of a strong sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pajares, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). Thus, being able to see themselves as effective is essential to how well vice principals will perform (Bandura, 1997; Pajares). Yet the ambiguous and sometimes seemingly paradoxical parameters of the role make effectiveness challenging. How, then, do vice principals personally construct self-efficacy so that they are able to create and maintain a belief that they are being effective?

Methodology and Method

My research used a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998) involving one-on-one interviews (Seidman, 2006) and observation of 3 secondary school vice principals at their specific school sites. The participants worked at three different secondary schools within the same school board in northern Ontario.

Qualitative Research

As the research suggests (Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Thompson, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002), the reality of the vice principalship is not the same for all vice principals. The literature review in Chapter Two illustrates that studies on the role of the vice principalship show wide variance in job descriptions (Glanz; Marshall & Hooley; Weller & Weller) and in job satisfaction (Cranston et al., 2002; Glanz; Thompson). Therefore, the vice principalship is not a fixed, quantifiable entity but is personally constructed by each vice principal (Hartzell et al.; Marshall & Hooley). The world of the vice principal is a very unique and personal reality. The purpose of my study was to investigate and explore the personally held beliefs of individual secondary school vice principals in the field rather than to determine broad,
general truths that might apply to all vice principals. I was interested, specifically, in participants’ personally held beliefs about self-efficacy and how, in their own words, they construct self-efficacy.

I determined that the best way to approach a study of individual constructs of self-efficacy was by using qualitative, rather than quantitative research. A primary assumption of qualitative research is that reality is personally constructed (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is interested in “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, p. 6). A qualitative approach assumes the existence of multiple truths. In this way truth, in all its multiplicity, is found not by examining commonalities of experience across a wide study group, but through in-depth examination of the unique experience of individuals. “Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (Patton, 1985, as cited in Merriam, p. 6). Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration and discovery (Patton). It is a form of naturalistic inquiry, focused on the study of real world situations as they unfold naturally and in context (Patton). A qualitative approach seemed most suited to my study which focuses on the individual reality of the secondary school vice principal role, and on the personally established and individually measured sense of self-efficacy.

As befits their phenomenological roots, qualitative studies often use purposeful sampling in which cases are chosen because they are “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Purposeful sampling is “aimed at insight, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (p. 40). Qualitative research includes such data collection
methods as observation and interviews and the generation of thick descriptions (Anderson, 1990; Merriam, 1998; Patton). I used observation and interview research strategies to probe for a close and personal understanding of the individual realities of the study participants (Anderson). Qualitative research also involves “personal experience and engagement” on the part of the researcher (Patton, p.40), whereby the interviewer’s insights become an important part of the inquiry and of understanding the phenomenon under study (Patton).

A further aspect of qualitative research involves “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 2002, p. 40), a stance through which the researcher attempts to achieve a “vicarious understanding without judgement” (p. 40). As researcher, I was interested in understanding the phenomenon from the participants’ (“emic”) perspectives rather than my own outsider (“etic”) view (Merriam 1998; Patton). It was important, however, to keep in mind that the “etic” perspective was an integral part of my study. As Anderson observed, “how you see the world is largely a function of where you view it from, what you look at, what tools you use to help you see and what you reflect on and report to others” (Anderson, 1990, p. 11).

Qualitative research generally uses an open, emergent design, meaning that the design is not entirely preset and can be altered as understanding deepens, allowing the researcher to follow new paths of discovery (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research rests on an inductive research strategy which builds theory rather than testing existing theory (Merriam; Patton). Such an emergent approach, based on inductive research, was an important aspect of my study. Had I been constrained by theoretical assumptions, I felt I would not have had the flexibility or openness required for a full
understanding of the personal truths of the participants. Emergent design implies a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Patton), traits which, as mentioned earlier, are embedded in the role of the vice principal. For all of the above reasons, I determined that a qualitative framework was the most suitable approach to my study of the vice principalship.

**Case Study Approach**

I chose case study as the most effective technique to delve into personal constructions of self-efficacy, a concept for which everyone must create their own definition. As Stake (1995) observed, case studies allow us to explore a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context, “especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). I used case study practices such as observation and personal interviews (Merriam, 1998) to obtain a sense of implicit theories and beliefs that may not have been so easily captured by other methods (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). Merriam suggests that in studies in which the variables are so engrained in a situation that they are impossible to identify ahead of time, a case study is the best choice. Case studies can reveal aspects about a phenomenon, in this case the role of the vice principal, to which we would not otherwise have access (Merriam).

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social issues consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. (Merriam, p. 41)
A case study approach allowed me, as researcher, to document how vice principals construct their world of experience by interpreting how they talk about it (Donmoyer, 1984).

My study could be described as an interpretive case study (Merriam, 1998) as it is filled with thick description, which was then used to develop conceptual categories of understanding self-efficacy. It was my intent to gain as much information about secondary school vice principal self-efficacy as I could from the participants so that I could interpret and theorize about the concept of vice principal self-efficacy (Merriam).

**Interview as Method**

I interviewed and observed three secondary school vice principals in their work environment over the course of a 2 month period from May to June of 2006. I chose interviewing as a research method as it best fit my purpose of describing and interpreting the subjective reality of participants, particularly around how they construct self-efficacy in the context of their own personal experience in the role of the vice principal. As Seidman suggests (2006), interviewing is perhaps the best avenue of inquiry to research subjective understanding. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, p. 9). The process of interviewing allowed me to listen to the personal stories of individual participants which, as Seidman explains, is essentially a meaning-making process.

When people tell stories, they select details, they reflect on them, and they create order to make sense of them, all of which are important aspects of meaning-making (Seidman, 2006). As well, individuals reveal how they construct their world of
experience through their conversation (Anderson, 1990; Donmoyer, 1984; Seidman). Many intrinsic beliefs and values are conveyed through stories and metaphors in the conversational language used by participants in the field (Pugh, 1987). Examining language and word choice is an effective way to better understand implicitly held beliefs and values (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

To this end, in my questioning I listened for “markers” (Weiss, 1994, in Seidman, 2006, p. 86)–words or phrases that might indicate something that may be very important to the participant. I asked participants to elaborate on these phrases. This was a process of mining for deeper understanding. For instance, one participant’s frequent use of the verb “manage” to describe her daily interactions, and her cognitive and affective challenges, was indicative of the importance she attributed to having a sense of control over the events of her day. Another participant’s frequent use of the phrase “I choose” was indicative of her deeply held belief that despite the uncontrollable aspects of her role, she saw herself as ultimately in control of her own world.

Metaphors are another aspect of language which can illuminate assumptions about everyday actions and roles (Lakoff, 1993). As Lakoff observed, “metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary” (p. 210). Vygotsky suggests that every word and image reflects personal consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987, cited in Seidman, 2006). I paid attention to metaphors as valuable insights into how participants visualized themselves in the vice principal role. In some cases, the metaphors used by participants illuminated a visual landscape that gave insight into their self-efficacy. Images such as sinking or swimming, moving forward or spinning their wheels, suggested not only into how well the participants thought they were doing, but
also what their particular path to efficiency in the vice principal role looked like, such as a battlefield or a winding road. In this way, metaphors created a window into participants’ unique constructions of self-efficacy (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By using an interview approach, I was able to focus on stories and metaphors (Lakoff; Lakoff & Johnson; Pugh). I considered that such an approach would be the most suitable to gather an understanding of personal constructs of self-efficacy.

**Observation as Method**

Concurrently with the interviews, I used purposeful observation as a research strategy and kept field notes of my observations. Observation and field journals were an important aspect of the data collection process (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). While interview transcripts provided me a record of what was heard, observation and field notes allowed me to collect careful descriptions of what I saw and intuited (Anderson, 1990). Observation is an important secondary way of listening, since transcripts themselves do not always capture all nuances of meaning (Merriam). Field notes allowed me to record body language, gestures, and facial expressions, which added to my understanding of participants’ experiences.

At times, I believed that observation of body language allowed me a truer understanding of the participants’ intended meaning. For example, when one participant observed in our first interview that “there is always a new challenge waiting around the corner,” her energetic, bent-arm marching gesture, coupled with an exaggerated side-to-side tilting of her head, created the image of a sort of crazed marching band, thereby suggesting a possible feeling of stress behind her comparatively neutral words and perhaps a feeling that her vice principal role was controlled by an external drummer – an
image which then led me to ask her about a possible sense of powerlessness associated with the vice principal role. In this example, it was the participant’s gestures which suggested the next question I should ask.

In this way, I used observation and interview techniques concurrently as I mined for a deeper understanding of individual participants’ realities. As Merriam (1998) suggests, observation offers “a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviewing, allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 111). Thus, using observation and interview techniques together afforded a more indepth understanding of individual participants’ realities. The field journals also included my own commentaries as observer (Merriam). During the process of interviewing, the field journals afforded me the opportunity to jot down my own ideas, hunches, and working hypotheses.

**Reflecting on Emergent Design**

I assumed that the three vice principals involved in this study may not have clearly developed ideas about their own conceptions of self-efficacy and that this would be an evolving understanding that might change as the individual progressed in the role. I further assumed that the participants’ ideas might evolve over the course of the research study (Patton, 2002, Seidman, 2006). I designed the stages of data collection to encourage personal reflection along the way. I anticipated that participants would be able to use this research project as an opportunity for self-exploration of their own ideas of self-efficacy and theories of school leadership.

I did not begin the interviews with theories of self-efficacy which would then be tested, but assumed, rather, that theories would emerge through the course of the
interviewing and through the self-reflection of the study participants (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). In keeping with this assumption, my interview design allowed for flexibility in subsequent interview questions, to reflect emergent theories (Patton; Seidman). The first interview began with a set of semistructured questions which were used as entry points into more individualized questions that arose during the course of the interview (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). My first questions allowed me to further explore participant values—what participants believed an ideal vice principal should be doing. As my intent was to identify personal and unique constructs, my line of questioning was unprescribed beyond this point and remained flexible to the particular stories and words and metaphors (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) used by the participants to describe their worlds.

I designed each subsequent meeting in the three-step interview process (Seidman, 2006) to allow for changes in participants’ personally held beliefs and assumptions and to allow for the inclusion of additional insights and personal discoveries as the study progressed. As well, I suggested to participants that they might choose to keep a personal journal of their thoughts during the interview process, as the project was intended to be a useful self-reflective activity. Journal entries were not strictly required, and only 1 participant, Loretta, chose to keep a journal. I discussed this with her in the interviews and incorporated our conversation into my interpretation.

**Sample**

I used a purposive sample of convenience (Seidman, 2006) in selecting three secondary school vice principals, two female and one male, in the same northern Ontario School Board. The three participants represented, in my estimation, typical cases
Participants were chosen for their enthusiasm in the project, and for their belief that participation in this study would be a growth experience for themselves. The participants were given pseudonyms for the purpose of this study to help preserve anonymity (Merriam, 1998; Seidman).

My participants had many characteristics in common. They each worked with a principal in a secondary school in which they were the only vice principal. They were in the same age range – late 30s to early 40s. Their experience in the vice principal role varied from 2 to 4 years. All had career goals of becoming a principal, all came from the position of secondary guidance counselor, and all had young families. Such similarity of situation was not an initial criterion of selection for this study, but it became a secondary point of interest to me to note whether or not the participants would also demonstrate similarity in how they constructed individual self-efficacy.

*Loretta*

Loretta, 41, had been a vice principal for almost 3 years in three different secondary schools, ranging in size from 100 to 1000, in three different communities. She described herself as an idealist and despite not finding enough time for instructional leadership, innovation, and research, she rated her job satisfaction as “exceedingly high.”

*Quinton*

Quinton was 37 years old. He had been a vice principal for 2 years in one rural secondary school of approximately 400 students. He had worked with two different principals and described his strengths as communication and counseling. He was “bothered by the inefficiency of the vice principal role” and looked for more time for instructional leadership and more opportunities to practice leadership activities.
Irene

Irene, 40, had been a vice principal for 4 years in two relatively large urban secondary schools with student populations of 700 and 1,100. She had worked with two principals with different leadership styles and in two very different school cultures. She described the vice principal as the manager who does the grunt work and keeps things running smoothly. She identified her strengths as organization and conflict resolution.

Procedures

In designing my interview research, I used a variation of Seidman’s (2006) three-step interview process. Participants were initially contacted via telephone, and subsequent communication was carried out through telephone and email correspondence. Arrangements to meet were established individually and were scheduled to best fit the work schedules of the individual participants.

Interview

The first and third interviews in the three-step interview process (Seidman, 2006) were approximately 75 minutes in length, and the second interview was an extended running conversation that took place during a scheduled 4-hour job shadowing. The first and third interviews were held at times of convenience to the participants, their schedules, and personal preferences. Most interviews were conducted in the participants’ school offices after school was dismissed, except for Quinton’s interviews, which were held in the morning so as to avoid conflicts with coaching activities after school. The interview times and settings were left to participant choice so that they would be most comfortable and at ease during the interview process. I assumed that the comfort of the participant would produce a better interview (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman).
As mentioned earlier, the first interview began with a set of semistructured questions which were used as entry points into more individualized questions that arose during the course of the interview (Merriam, 1998; Seidman).

Each job-shadowing lasted approximately 4 hours and was scheduled on a day and time most convenient for each participant. Quinton’s and Irene’s job shadows began at approximately 7:30 a.m. and lasted until approximately 11:30 a.m. During this time I shadowed Quinton and Irene through the tasks of their morning. I made extensive field notes and, when possible, asked questions to clarify what I had observed and how I had interpreted certain events. I audio-taped and transcribed the interviews and field notes myself.

Observation

Throughout the interviews and job shadowing, I recorded observations and reflections in field notes, which I kept for each interview and job shadowing as an additional source of data. In the field notes I noted such things as body language, gestures, and facial expressions, which furthered my understanding of participants’ experiences (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006) and provided a point of comparison with the interview transcripts. The field notes contained descriptions of the settings, direct quotations, and summaries of comments and my own observer’s comments (Merriam). Observations from field notes were often shared with participants in subsequent interviews and were sometimes useful to identify further questions or comments. I used the field notes and the interview transcripts concurrently in data analysis.
**Participant Surveys**

As well as interview transcripts and observational field notes, I also interpreted the results of personal surveys which each participant was asked to complete during the research process. These surveys included: “Preliminary Survey Questions” (Appendix A), “Glanz’s Ranking Exercise” (Appendix B), and “The Ideal Vice Principal Survey” (Appendix C). The preliminary survey questions were given to participants before the first interview and were intended to provide a framework for participants and starting points for conversation, and well as to identify areas of interest for further questioning. The preliminary survey questions were also used in the first interview. The second survey, the ranking exercise, was completed during the first interview and was intended to help participants define, on a personal level, the role of the secondary school vice principal and to explore their perception of task values, as well as areas of tension or challenge that could be explored in later questioning. Lastly, the ideal vice principal survey was completed via email correspondence following the final interviews. This survey provided additional data to further interpret participants’ perceptions of the vice principalship and their self-efficacy in that role.

**Researcher’s Journal**

Along with the field notes, I also kept a researcher’s journal throughout the process, which was used as a place to capture my thoughts throughout the process of research and interpretation (Merriam 1998, Seidman 2006). I found it was valuable to keep careful track of personal reflection and emerging theory and to revisit these as my ideas changed with further investigation. The routine of regularly writing in a journal was an important impetus to engage in ongoing personal reflection throughout the study.
Interpretation of Data

I interpreted and codified interview transcripts, field notes and surveys to determine themes and constructs of vice principal self-efficacy (Merriam, 1998). These were shared with participants as member checks to enhance the trustworthiness of the observations (Merriam). I asked participants if they wanted to make any changes to their interview transcripts.

I revisited transcriptions, field notes and surveys several times in different combinations of comparison. I used the constant comparative method developed by Glaser & Strauss (cited in Merriam, 1998). The cases were interpreted in two stages—first as a within-case analysis and second as a cross-case analysis. In the within-case interpretation, I categorized ideas and listed recurring words, phrases, and metaphors (Anderson, 1990; Merriam). In cross-case analysis, the categories and recurring phrases and metaphors of each transcription were compared for consistency (Merriam). I developed categories as data collection took place and continuously reworked these to incorporate new ideas and to better reflect the growing body of data and emergent theory (Anderson; Merriam). As such, interpretation happened simultaneously and continuously throughout the data collection process (Anderson; Merriam).

It was important to reread earlier transcripts and field notes after the later interviews, as each rereading unearthed new connections not noted earlier. This second stage involved the establishment of connection points between the interviews and also among the three participants. As the categories were interpreted inductively, it was not my intention to address the data with a set of hypotheses to test. Interpretation was
intuitive—and was based on my sense of what was important and interesting in the
transcripts (Patton; Seidman, 2006).

I endeavoured to approach each transcript and field note with an open mind “to let
the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). I used personal
judgement about what was significant in transcripts and field notes, with a view to best
illuminate aspects of each participant’s construction of self-efficacy and the fundamental
values and beliefs upon which their construction of self-efficacy was based. I paid
particular attention to descriptions of challenges and stressors and to how individuals
handled the ambiguities of their role. The reason for this was that, as mentioned earlier,
self-efficacy is strongly affected by external forces such as the difficulty of the task
(Bandura, 1997). How individuals judge self-efficacy depends partly on how challenging
they perceive the task to be, how much effort they need to expend, and their pattern of
successes and failures. Thus paying attention to challenges and stressors and ambiguities
I felt may reveal further aspects of how each individual constructed self-efficacy.

I also paid attention, as mentioned earlier, to repeated phrases and metaphors and
to value statements such as “that’s important,” “this is more valuable,” “that was a waste
of time,” “that really bugged me,” and “that made me feel great.” Examining language
and word choice is an effective way to better understand implicitly held beliefs and
values (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). I paid attention both to how the participants defined
their own effectiveness and to how they spoke indirectly about their effectiveness through
the stories they told of instances in which they felt either particularly effective or
particularly ineffective.
In the interpretation, I tried to avoid the temptation to make linear assumptions more common to quantitative analysis (Patton, 2002), endeavoring instead to represent the complexity of the reality of each vice principal in the study. However, as mentioned earlier, it should be recognized that imposing any inductive categorical analysis at all is still a form of restriction upon reality (Seidman 2006).

Validity

In conducting my research I considered factors that would enhance both the internal and external validity of my study, as outlined below.

Internal Validity

Internal validity was achieved by comparing transcripts and field journals over time for internal consistency (Anderson, 1990; Seidman, 2006) and by continuously sharing emerging ideas with participants to see if they agreed with my interpretation. After each interview session, the transcripts were shared with participants along with my interpretations and ideas. Participants were asked whether or not they agreed with my interpretations and also whether they had any further ideas to add.

As I interpreted the transcripts, I listened and read for three things: what was said (the directly stated message), what was alluded to (what might be the implied message), and what was not said. Each level of listening was important to acquiring an understanding of the personal landscape. As well, when creating personal lists of indicators of self-efficacy, I used both what the participant told me in direct response to the question, “What makes an effective vice principal?” as well as value statements that came up elsewhere in the interviews but were not perhaps addressed specifically in a direct question, such as “I hate that,” “that’s so important,” “what really matters is,” and
so on. In this way I used both direct and indirect means to determine what each individual valued and how they envisioned an effective vice principal. Such listening on multiple levels also allowed me to exercise a form of cross-checking to determine whether what participants said they valued matched what their stories indicated that they valued (Seidman, 2006).

Although all three participants spoke with great candour and expressed a desire to be as honest as possible in their responses, I did find instances of a lack of accord between what a participant said and what he/she might actually believe. For example, one participant indicated that instructional leadership was a very important trait of an effective vice principal, and yet the concept was rarely mentioned in the subsequent hours of conversation and not identified at all in specific questioning in a later interview as being something which affected self-efficacy in either a strongly positive or strongly negative way. It may be that the participant felt that instructional leadership was a high priority to superiors and that there was a need to toe-the-party-line in our initial discussion about instructional leadership. Such inconsistencies were not common however, and may be partially attributed to the nature of the vice principal role which, as a training ground for future principals, makes it vital for a principal-aspiring vice principal to take on the priorities of the higher administration for which they work, perhaps even at the expense of their own privately held beliefs (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Internal validity was also achieved by using open-ended questions, such as “take me through a typical day on the job” (Seidman, 2006). These allowed participants to reconstruct events in terms of what they considered important. Listening to participant
responses to open-ended questions allowed me to gather specific details and also, by the choices they made as they spoke, to gain a sense of what was more important to them, and what was less important—a window into their personal value systems—which could then be cross-referenced by a direct question about personal values (Seidman).

Internal validity was further achieved by my remaining quiet during the storytelling, so that the stories told were given the emphasis of the participant, and not a super-imposed meaning by me (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). In this way I endeavored to create a situation in which the stories would reflect the values and priorities and concerns of the participants themselves. I also attempted to maximize internal validity by paying attention to syntax, diction, pauses, and nonverbal cues (Seidman).

**Triangulation of Data**

Internal validity was further achieved through triangulation of data. I used three sources of data: interview transcripts, observational field notes, and responses to individual surveys to determine and cross-check the validity of my findings (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The use of multiple data sources brought me closer to a true estimation of participants’ realities (Merriam; Seidman). The study report which follows uses such various sources of data collection to describe a valid “chain of evidence” (Anderson, 1990, p. 163) to suggest that other researchers would achieve similar findings.

**External Validity**

The purpose of this study was not the identification of abstract universals. As with all qualitative research, this study does not intend to provide general truths, but a
greater depth of insight into three specific examples of subjective truth (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). As such, it should be understood that results of this study may not be valid for all secondary school vice principals. My findings are valid for the individuals involved in the study at that particular point in time in their professional practice (Merriam; Patton; Seidman). Beyond this, the findings are offered only as examples for readers of how three individual secondary school vice principals construct self-efficacy. The findings of this study represent three particular realities, and these may or may not apply to other vice principals. As Erickson suggests (Erickson, 1986, cited in Merriam) the general lies in the particular, and it may be that other vice principals find valuable ideas in the personal truths of the three vice principals involved in this study. But such conclusions must be made by the reader. Readers will determine for themselves, from the perspective of their own personal reality, how valid the results of this study are (Patton; Seidman).

I Situate Myself in the Study

Reliability was affected by my position as researcher. As researcher, I brought my own reality to this study (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). I determined the questions to ask. What was significant in the interviews was determined by me, using my personal judgement. I decided what to include in field notes. My choices were affected by my personal position at the time of the interviewing. Since it is my own reality which in part provides the context for my findings, it is important that I provide some personal background.

During my study I was working as a secondary school program co-ordinator for the same school board as the study participants. At the time of the research I was actively
pursuing a secondary school vice principal position, which involved going through a vice principal selection process – a series of activities including a portfolio, a site visit, assessment centre, and personal interview. During the research period of my study, I was hired as a secondary school vice principal, to begin the following fall. Thus I had a personal interest in learning as much as I could from the participants in my study. I wanted to learn both what they did and how their activity varied from school to school. I had a personal interest in understanding how participants navigated the ambiguity of the vice principal role and how they knew if they were doing a good job, as I knew I would soon be called upon to do the same. I have been in the field of education for 15 years and have taught grades 8 through 12. I have taught in a variety of rural and urban schools, ranging in size from 100 to 1,000, in both southern and northern Ontario.

I found the experience of interviewing and job shadowing three vice principals within my own school board, on the eve of taking on the responsibility myself, a highly valuable learning experience on a personal level. I was able to see firsthand, how three vice principals went about their work in three different secondary schools. Aside from my research study, in my view this experience has helped prepare me for the vice principal role more fully than any formal training I have had to date.

**Issues of Ethics, Bias, and Reliability**

The reliability, or extent to which the results and interpretations of this study may be replicated by other researchers, is in part constrained by the parameters of qualitative case study research itself (Anderson, 1990; Seidman, 2006). As primary researcher, I became part of the research process and therefore had an effect on the results (Seidman). I asked the questions, I responded to participants’ answers, I decided what to ask next, I
decided what to include in the field notes and the interpretive categories. As primary researcher, I acknowledge that my views were biased. My background and perspective naturally had an influence on which questions I chose to ask and what I chose to find important in the participants’ responses, which analytical categories I chose to create, as well as the emergent theory that I created and explored (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman). Both data collection and interpretation were influenced by my own beliefs and interests.

In order to minimize such bias as much as possible, and to maximize reliability, I made every attempt in my data collection and interpretation to remain true to the words and intent of the participants. I studied the transcripts numerous times to recheck my thinking against the participants’ actual words. In my interpretation I used as many of the participants’ actual words as possible (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). As well, I shared my thinking with participants throughout the interview process to confirm that I had correctly interpreted their narratives and to verify that they felt my interpretation was correct (Merriam, 1998, Seidman).

As well, I endeavoured to keep the three divergent realities of my participants in my mind at the same time—to maintain a trifocal vision as it were—and to avoid the temptation to make oversimplified judgements. I attempted to maintain a view of three equally viable realities at the same time (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). This task felt at times like a delicate juggling act. I made every effort to avoid being partial to any particular emerging set of beliefs, in that I have faithfully reported participants’ words and feelings, within their intended context, as much as is possible.
I kept a researcher’s journal throughout the process, which captured emerging theories, lines of questioning for the next meeting, and personal reflections on my own process of researching. I discovered, for instance, the importance of reimmersing myself in the transcripts, in the actual words of the participants, as the first line of verifying if what I was thinking was correct (Seidman, 2006). I also paid careful attention to the influence of my own thinking on my analysis (Merriam 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman). I was aware, for instance, that my analysis was influenced by the theoretical reading I was doing at the time, such as Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy work.

Reliability was further enhanced by the use of various sources of data: interviews, field journals, and participant surveys. Such triangulation of data allowed me to describe a valid “chain of evidence” (Anderson, 1990, p. 163) to suggest that other researchers would achieve similar findings.

**Further Ethical Considerations**

In conducting my study I paid attention to such ethical considerations as anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, withdrawal, and debriefing.

**Anonymity**

Participant names and work site details were kept strictly confidential (Anderson, 1990; Seidman 2006) so as to try to maintain anonymity of participants. The school board agreeing to partake in the study was not named, further than to identify it as a northern Ontario board. It was important to include a northern Ontario identification so as to provide a context for the qualitative data findings. It may be that the vice principal subculture that exists in northern Ontario is not the same as that of southern or central Ontario. Anonymity could not be completely guaranteed, as there is always the
possibility that a reader may be able to deduce identity in such a small participating sample.

Confidentiality

Assuring confidentiality, on the other hand, was not difficult. As I was the only researcher and writer involved in this project, confidentiality was carefully maintained (Anderson, 1990; Merriam 1998). I made every effort to protect field notes and audiotapes and manuscript drafts from public viewing by securing them under lock and key. Access to field notes and audiotapes was restricted to myself and my thesis supervisor. The provision of access to my thesis supervisor proved to be unnecessary. As well, I used a computer access code to ensure that only I would have access to data stored on computer files. After successful defense of the thesis, I will destroy all data collection material.

Informed Consent

Participants were asked to sign a letter of consent before becoming involved in the project (Anderson, 1990; Merriam 1998). The letter described the parameters of the study and all participant responsibilities. One copy of the letter was left with participants and a copy was kept by me in a confidential file. As well, I obtained and filed a letter of consent from the participating school board.

Withdrawal

Participants were informed at the start of the project that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time and for any reason. It was understood that the work and/or personal lives of the participants may have necessitated withdrawal from this
study. The participants would not have been asked to elaborate on reasons for deciding to withdraw from the project at any time. As it was, none withdrew from the project.

Debriefing

All interpretations, including transcriptions, from this research project were shared with participants and their feedback was requested. As well, during the process of the study, participants were involved in the interpretation. For example, during the final interviews I presented my interpretations to date and engaged participants in a discussion of the interpretations. Such sharing sessions were important for the member checks and also as a further data gathering and interpretation stage. I expected that participants would engage in their own self-reflective analysis during the opportunities to discuss findings and that this process would add depth and insight to the overall findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA INTERPRETATION

The three vice principals involved in this study presented three different views on the vice principalship, and also three different realities. While they shared many of the same issues and concerns, faced many of the same challenges and stressors, their behaviours, values, and priorities, as indicated by their interview responses, were not identical. They have each shaped their professional lives in their own unique way. In the same manner, their personal constructions of self-efficacy are equally unique. As my study sought to understand the highly personal nature of self-efficacy and the specific constructs of self-efficacy of three vice principals, it is fitting to begin with an interpretive description of the three participants.

Three Interpretations of the Vice Principalship

Each of the three participants in my study held a different interpretation of the vice principalship as is evidenced in the participant descriptions which follow.

Loretta

I feel a lot of potential. I remember somebody said to me once, you don’t want to be a vice principal for 10 years. You know, it always seems to be about being a vice principal in order to move on to being the principal. It’s like a stopover kind of thing. And I’ve never seen it that way. I don’t see it that way because I think it’s what you make of it. And because I really – and not that my colleagues don’t either – but I really, really like kids. I like being a vice principal. A lot. And I like having that interaction. So if you were to throw at me all sorts of other stuff, like when I get thrown duties to prepare graduation, when I get thrown organizing assemblies, budgeting—you know, not that I don’t want to learn about budgeting,
because I know that’s a big part of my role as a principal – but those things
detract from me being a good person with the kids. Do you know what I mean?
The kid part is the central part. Well, emergency arrangements happen. You
always need a leader in the building to do that. Instructional media? (reading
down a list of vice principal duties). Just let me work with the kids.

Researcher: A lot of the reading I’ve done suggests that administrators, not
necessarily just vice principals, but principals as well, feel there’s a big difference
between what they have to do and what they want to be able to do.

Loretta: It is about defining your role and about the approach you take. And we
all have our skills, right? So we tend not to enjoy things that we’re not good at.
I’m not the least bit talented at timetabling. Not that I don’t want to learn? But I
don’t see things in that way. I don’t see things in boxes and squares and time
slots. It takes me a lot longer to do stuff like that. Likewise with any kind of
supervision schedules, and those sorts of things. Those aren’t my talent areas. So
they’re a struggle. I do them because they’re a part of my job, but if I didn’t have
to do them I wouldn’t be unhappy at all.

Loretta’s description demonstrated a leadership style which was relational and
collaborative (Leithwood et al., 2006; Marzano, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004). Her
greatest success was collaborative team work and professional learning communities, and
she viewed herself as first and foremost a people-person. “You don’t ever want people to
think you are so mired in your administrative tasks that you’ve forgotten about them as
people.” She did not relish management tasks such as timetabling. She described her
vice principal role as “having the principal’s back” and believed that administrators work
most effectively as a team (Leithwood; Spillane et al.). She discussed student discipline proactively, and described herself as a “character educator.” She believed that the vice principal role is what one makes of it and dismissed negative views of the role.

Participants in the case studies of Marshall (1993) and Hartzell et al. (1995) held similar views. Loretta’s stories were filled with metaphors of journeys and battles, of choices, and of lessons learned along the way. She had a strong self-reflective tendency and made journal entries throughout our interview process. She recognized that the vice principal job “has the potential to strip away your character” and the importance of “making sure you are really well balanced.” Participants in the studies of Marshall and Hartzell et al. had similar comments.

**Quinton**

Excerpt from job shadow field notes, May 28, 2007, 7:15 a.m.:

It is Monday morning. Quinton’s is one of two cars in the parking lot. He tells me he usually gets to school at 6:30 a.m., so he has quiet time to get things done. When I arrive at 7:15 a.m. he is getting his teacher supervision on-calls ready for the day. He has a video monitor set up so he can see nine different cameras around the school while sitting at his desk. The monitor used to be in the main office at the secretary’s desk, but he has moved it to his office so he can keep a closer eye on the halls. He hopes today will be a quiet day. There was a fire in the nearby bush on Friday, perhaps set by a student. He will be talking to some students today about it. He normally does paperwork for one hour from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. Staff call in between 7:00 a.m. and 7:15 a.m. if they are going to be away.
His work space is organized. He has a monthly planner spread on the desk. A bulletin board full of paper is beside it, and a laptop, phone, and printer. In the filing cabinet behind him is a student incident binder and individual files on students. In the corner of the room, two baseball bats and a guitar. Up on a high shelf in a corner, a basketball, sitting in a trophy. Behind his chair, a small poster about respect which reads: “When children are treated with respect, they conclude that they deserve respect and hence develop self-respect. When children are treated with acceptance, they develop self-acceptance. When they are cherished they conclude that they deserve to be loved, and they develop self-esteem” (anonymous).

Early teachers filter in. One comes into the office to speak to Quinton. He puts on-calls in teachers’ mailboxes.

7:30 a.m. – Quinton opens a door for a breakfast club volunteer. Breakfast food is funded by the Human League. One hundred students make use of the breakfast club on a daily basis. A retired teacher comes in on his way up to Windy Lake to go fishing, asking where’s the best place in town to buy bait. He’s got his fishing jacket on, rubber shoes, a wide grin. It’s an old teacher from Quinton’s former school. Then we are up and walking the school. Quinton tours me around the classrooms, shows me the hydroponics lab, the grade 7/8 wing. He says good morning to every student we pass, calling them Mr. or Miss and they greet him back. Hats come off heads as we come in sight around the school corners.

Quinton: That’s a broken record kind of thing (talking about the hats). Some staff want to hang kids for wearing a hat. I’m thinking that’s a problem that’s
been around since the ‘50s. For me it’s more of a gentle reminder. I want to get a relationship with them in the first place. So it’s, hi, what’s your name? Do you mind taking your hat off? Anyway you can kind of get their attention. And what you saw just there, I didn’t have to say a thing. Now we can walk around back the other way and they’ll probably have the hats back on again (laughing).

Quinton’s leadership style was relational and conversational. He was a firm believer in face-to-face interactions, and prefered them to email. He walked the halls, the classrooms, and courtyards regularly, doing business as he went, usually in one-on-one conversations. Community members and retired teachers visited him in his office. In prioritizing his time, Quinton strived for a balance between dealing with student discipline and engaging in school improvement activities, and guarded against any one task consuming all his time. He believed that a caring, encouraging adult had a greater impact on student behaviour than negative consequences, and spent much time counseling students. He described the vice principal role as one of “being groomed for the principalship”. He used political metaphors of compromise and the balance of power, of switching hats, getting around roadblocks, of knowing how the system worked, and “seeing the big picture.” He was very aware of how differently everyone saw his role and how different groups might have different opinions were they to evaluate his performance (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

**Irene**

If a teacher’s away in the day, that’s me. I’m taking care of that. I take care of supply teachers and managing door postings. If a teacher is going to need an LTO [Long Term Occasional teacher replacement] I’m going to find somebody to take
on that position. If there needs to be a new schedule because there’s an assembly coming up, that’s my job. So the running of the school, making sure it’s running smoothly every single day – that’s me.

Irene said it was important to be on top of things, to be highly visible in the school, and to know what was going on. She managed negativity through a rational approach, by thinking of ways to make things better. She spoke of formulated goals, planned courses of action, and used data to measure success. She described technical programs she had initiated to make her job easier. “You try to control everything that’s big, so that you’ve got all that taken care of. Then when little things are happening throughout the day, at least the big stuff’s covered.” Irene would have liked more time for professional reading and for instructional leadership. “I know that it’s important. It just seems to me that the managerial role seems to sort of consume time.” Similar responses are reported in several studies of the vice principalship (Johnson, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Irene saw the vice principal role as having strong potential to impact school culture, but that this is limited by the leadership capacity and skills of the principal (Marshall & Hooley; Matthews & Crow, 2003).

**Overview of the Interpretive Process**

In analysis of individual transcripts, field notes, and surveys, I first noted the specific criteria each participant said they used to measure self-efficacy. I then categorized individually identified sources of self-efficacy, using Bandura’s 4 sources (Bandura, 1997), mentioned in Chapter Three. Bandura’s 4 sources of self-efficacy accounted for almost all the specific criteria mentioned by participants. The remaining criteria created a fifth category, which I called “moral purpose.” I then shared this
organization, in person, with participants as a member check. To further illuminate individual variations in self-efficacy constructs, I then analyzed how much importance participants gave to each of Bandura’s sources of self-efficacy. I did this by using participants’ words to create individual “effective vice principal profiles.” Member checks were again used to verify the validity of these profiles.

Working from the premise that self-efficacy is measured in relation to the achievement of a goal (Bandura, 1997), I then asked each participant to measure themselves against their own “effective vice principal profile,” using self-efficacy scales (Bandura). I paid particular attention to the ambiguities, challenges, and stressors identified by each participant and to how they measured their self-efficacy against these particular elements of the role. I found that participants measured their self-efficacy lowest in relation to the ambiguities and challenges they described.

This finding led me to explore self-identified ambiguities and challenges more closely. I asked for more information about particular ambiguities and challenges they had identified, making note of language, metaphors, and stories that participants used to explore these aspects of their job. My intent was to determine the cognitive processes and self-reflective processes that each participant used to construct self-efficacy in these most difficult aspects of their professional roles. Using such personal stories and metaphors, I identified underlying guiding principles, or basic building blocks, of self-efficacy for each individual. To ensure internal reliability, these guiding principles were shared with participants in the last of the three interviews for a further member check. Further interpretation and additional ideas that arose from the final interviews were shared with participants by email.
Detailed findings and discussion of each of the above-mentioned phases of interpretation are provided below in the following three stages:

1. Sources of Self-Efficacy
2. Weighing the Sources of Self-Efficacy
3. Constructing Self-Efficacy

**Sources of Self-Efficacy**

When participants related how they knew they were doing a good job as a secondary school vice principal, what they found most satisfying and most challenging about the job, responses generally fit into Bandura’s 4 sources of self-efficacy (1997)–mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion/social influences, and physiological/affective states. These findings are evidenced below.

**Mastery Experience**

*Success stories*

Participants related that successfully mastering tasks and projects on the job was their most powerful indicator of self-efficacy. Each related success stories and the confidence that such experiences created. Loretta talked about professional learning communities she had been instrumental in establishing. Quinton elaborated on a new horticultural program for students. Irene spoke about creating a database permitting multiple users to access and amend the student detention list during the course of a day.

Loretta talked about her feelings of success around her pursuit of a character education program:

At [my previous school] we did see some racial tension, but it was manageable because of the community. …That was a really special experience. And when I
say community I don’t mean one. There were several. There were lots and lots of little communities. But the one thing they had in common was that they were small communities, and their kids were their number one most valuable resource. And you had your bad kids, but you never got the sense that they were too far gone, you know. Every single one of them was workable to some degree. So, I really liked that school. Really liked the staff. A really good staff. They have the same mentality that I buy into. They are a team. You have a job.

Irene explained that she felt effective when her plans met with success:

You know, we used to have a parking problem—remember how the cars used to park two by two, in a circle? And I was getting a lot of complaints. I thought of a way to fix that. And it’s fixed. And that’s satisfying. That’s satisfying.

She related another success story from a previous school:

We had 30 fights in one year, and we developed a plan for how to make that better. And last year we had 8 fights. We were able to formulate some goals to make things better, and our goals actually panned out. They worked. So that tells you you’re doing a good job.

Quinton spoke of the feeling of effectiveness he got from working with new teachers and feeling that he had an impact on instructional practice and classroom management:

I really value the role that I’m in right now. The most job satisfaction I get would be being able to influence the practice of new teachers. And seeing them implement some of these strategies that I’ve shared with them, and having success with that.
Participants reported that their successes gave them a sense of accomplishment on the job (Sutter, 1996). They also indicated that they felt most effective when they had an opportunity to use their talents (Sutter). For Irene it was having the opportunity and time to map out the master schedule. For Quinton it was having time to counsel students. For Loretta it was time to work collaboratively with teachers. Participants felt effective when they were given space and autonomy to do their jobs. Irene commented:

I tend to be somebody who is organized, and I think I can be a pretty good manager of a school. So I appreciate [a principal] who’s going to allow me to do some of those things. I think I’ve been a pretty good timetabler in my career, so for example, I appreciate [a principal] who’s going to take my advice about timetabling, and let me do my thing. Give me the space. I don’t appreciate being micromanaged. I think I would have a really difficult time with somebody who wanted to know every little thing I was doing, looking over my shoulder, and double guessing what I was doing. [A principal] who has the ability to have confidence in what I’m doing, and say yeah, that’s a good idea, go ahead and do it.

Job satisfaction

Participants also reported that their successes gave them a sense of satisfaction and that the connection between job satisfaction and self-efficacy was important. As Loretta expressed, “If you feel satisfied with the job, then you are going to feel effective. The two go together.” This aligns with Edison’s (1992) findings that there is a strong relationship between job satisfaction and self-efficacy and that the strongest predictor of
Job satisfaction is how the vice principal perceives the job, followed by his/her sense of self-efficacy.

Participants rated their job satisfaction as high or exceedingly high. The major source of job satisfaction identified by all three participants was student success and their belief that they had a hand in achieving student success. Other sources of job satisfaction included having a good fit with the leadership style of the principal, having autonomy on the job, and having the opportunity to engage in leadership activities. For instance, Loretta said she got satisfaction from being a member of a good administrative team. This response echoed Cranston et al.’s (2004) findings that the level of job satisfaction amongst vice principals was directly related to the sense of team leadership created by the administrative team in the school. Quinton felt satisfaction when he was given the opportunity to engage in leadership activities and when he had the sense that he could get ahead with hard work (Sutter, 1996).

Participants said that having more time for instructional leadership would increase their job satisfaction. This agreed with studies mentioned in the literature review that connect job satisfaction and instructional leadership. Austin and Brown’s (1970) study reported that 66% of the 1100 vice principals they surveyed believed that more involvement in instructional leadership would increase their job satisfaction (cited in Sutter, 1994).

Task completion

While participants identified mastery experiences as their most important source of self-efficacy, they also explained that the very nature of their jobs, with the sometimes seemingly unstoppable flow of tasks, often made task completion one of their biggest
challenges. They often gained a sense of effectiveness simply by being able to complete tasks. All participants noted the importance to their sense of self-efficacy of completing tasks. As Loretta explained:

I feel effective when I get the desk cleared off, the paperwork done, so I’m moving forward rather than just spinning my wheels. I have to be done. I’ve started tasks, they’re done. I don’t feel effective when I walk away and I still have all this stuff to do. Then I’ll say, okay, I’m going to come in a half hour early tomorrow and I’m going to do this, because I don’t like having things left undone. And yet when it’s really very busy, that’s frequently how you have to end your day. Reconciling that is hard.

Irene related a similar interpretation:

I feel effective when I am able to get done the things that I want to get done in a day. At the end of the day knowing that you accomplished the things that you wanted to get done during the day, at the end of the week, or at the end of the month. That something big is done, and that you’ve done it well.

Quinton also said that completing tasks was important:

It’s almost like a checklist you have in your head. Okay, yep, I talked to this teacher about some instructional thing, that’s good. I saw this student before the day began, and I’m developing a relationship there, so that’s good.

When asked how he knew if he was doing a good job, Quinton replied:

At the end of the day I walk home going, sure I’ve had some part to play in a hundred different things today. How well did I do at that? Right? What do I do in the follow-up? How can I ensure that that student or that staff member is going
to carry on with that? And to get the answers I need to go and do my follow-up. I need to communicate with that teacher and that student on a regular basis. Take the time, make the time.

Quinton’s mention of the importance of follow-up in the above description illustrates his desire to achieve a sense of completion in relation to the interactions of his day. The process of follow-up is, for him, an essential element of task completion, one that often involves the additional challenge of finding time and making time for such follow-up.

Personal systems

To deal with the challenges of task completion imposed by the sheer amount of work they had to do, each participant had created personal systems to maximize time use and thus increase performance efficiency, which in turn allowed them to feel more efficient on the job. As Loretta explained:

My day’s over after nine hours, and if I still have work to do, then I have to come up with systems. And that’s a really important part of the job. You invent systems to make you more efficient.

While all participants mentioned common personal systems as “to-do” lists, running hit lists, and emailing parents at night, they also created their own personal organizational systems to facilitate task completion. Being able to then adhere to their systems allowed them to feel a personal sense of accomplishment. For each participant, gaining that sense of accomplishment in the face of the challenge of task completion was said to be a personal measure of self-efficacy. When asked to describe what self-efficacy meant to them, each participant mentioned personal efficiency and the ability to get things done as an important indicator of self-efficacy.
1. “*The Office in a Binder.*” Loretta personalized a system she called “the office in a binder.” By keeping a binder with all relevant papers, behavioral notes, and memos from the day, along with phone numbers and teacher schedules, she was able to be a vice principal wherever she found herself, which included the long car ride home. Her cell phone was programmed with call recognition, and she used this on the way home to get to the phone calls that she couldn’t get to during the day.

2. “*The Trolley Routine.*” Irene’s system, which she called “the trolley routine,” allowed her to quickly and efficiently wheel her way to the classrooms of all students with outstanding attendance issues, and to speak to each student, before the bell rang to end the first period of the day. On the trolley she carried attendance sheets, past attendance records, notes, and sometimes a laptop with instant access to the student database. She called students with attendance concerns directly out of class, spoke with them briefly in the hall, assigned detentions when necessary, and was off to the next classroom. I observed this routine in its entirety during the job shadowing. Irene considered this system an effective one in terms of time management, but explained that it was not having the effect on attendance and truancy that she would like.

3. “*The Walk and Talk.*” To streamline the process of dealing with many teacher and student issues, Quinton adopted a walk-and-talk strategy that permitted him to deal with many issues quickly and face-to-face, thus reducing paperwork, response time, and red flags in his email. As the walk-and-talk kept Quinton highly visible in the school, it also afforded him opportunities to practice proactive discipline through relationship-building talk with students, as well as the opportunity for instructional leadership when
his walk-and-talk found him in a particular classroom. Quinton’s walk-and-talk allowed him to multitask, thus maximizing his time management.

**Vicarious Experience**

Bandura’s (1997) second source of self-efficacy—developing a sense of ability for a specific task by watching others do it—was not considered a strong source of self-efficacy by participants, nor did their conversation make much reference to such experiences. Participants’ stories indicated that they valued the existence of the vice principal network—which was a group of 12 secondary school vice principals from the same school board who met once a month to share ideas and network—but that they did not rely heavily on such peer presence in constructing self-efficacy. Participants said they valued the monthly meetings of the vice principal group and learned from them. Irene explained:

> The vice principal group is a close-knit group. It’s a group where our philosophy is that this job has to do with getting at things from all angles. We have afternoon meetings once a month to vent about anything and everything. We get support, ask advice, learn how others would have handled things differently. We have a vice principal of the month trophy for the best story of the month. I won it last month. Our mantra is that what’s said in the group stays in the group. It’s very important to establish that trust.

This sentiment echoed the findings of Marshall (1993), who reported that vice principals were a loyal group. However, participants’ perspectives on the vice principal group dynamics differed. Loretta felt group conversations often got stuck on policing issues, such as discipline and investigative techniques. She felt a sense of competition within the
group, which Quinton, who also belonged to the same support group, did not. Despite such differences, for most part participants did not feel that seeing other vice principals perform tasks impacted strongly on their own sense of self-efficacy. As Loretta explained: “Watching people? Not at all. If I don’t go through it myself, I don’t get any value out of watching somebody else do it.” In later conversation, Loretta was able to talk about ways in which she compared herself to other vice principals:

Well, I do [compare myself to others]. For example, someone like [another vice principal] I see as exceedingly organized, and efficient, and experienced, and I might aspire to some of those things. But I don’t know necessarily that I would ever achieve that level. Because for her, that’s something that comes very naturally. But I’m a completely different person. I don’t know really, I’ve never seen her in action as far as working with students, but a completely different approach. Someone like [a second vice principal], I would share a lot of the same beliefs with. I mean, we both use humour a lot to communicate. Ah, easygoing but also caring. And again, I don’t know her very well, but it’s just the sense that I get about her approach to leadership and to the tasks of her job. [A third vice principal] is still working out systems right now. And I find I just look at him and I think, oh you are making me tired. And it almost makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable, if you can believe that, because I almost believe that it reflects on me. But every single one of us is really different.

When asked if he ever measured how well he was doing in relation to other vice principals, Quinton explained:
Sometimes. It depends. But keep in mind that the cultures are different. Every school is different. Another vice principal’s challenge will be different from my challenge. But we are very much alone in this job. It’s nice to have a supportive principal, and from what I can tell already [my principal is] a very supportive and inclusive principal. However a principal also has their job, and one of the things is supervising vice principals. Right? So we are an employee. Keep that in mind. And we are measured by how well we do our task that’s laid out by them. The superintendent isn’t going to come up and say, you know what [Quinton], I notice you are struggling in this area. The superintendent is going to say, [to the principal], what are you doing with [Quinton]? Why can’t you get [Quinton] to perform better in this area? Right? So, now [my principal is] going to come down on me. It’s nice to know that we can all get together collectively as a group, once a month and support one another.

Participants’ sense that vicarious experience was not a strong source of self-efficacy may be due in part to the nature of their initiation into the vice principal role, which did not involve any opportunities to observe experienced vice principals modeling typical vice principal behaviour. These three vice principals learned the ropes as they went, and operated as the sole vice principals in their schools. None had ever had a partner vice principal – a situation which may have afforded more opportunity for developing vicarious sources of self-efficacy. In their roles at the time of this study, all three participants worked alone and had always done so.

However, Loretta did describe a mentorship relationship with her principal, whereby she had learned the ropes of administration. “It’s part of what their job is, to
mentor me. Because I’m training for their role at some point.” All participants mentioned they had learned things from their respective principals. Irene said, “I’m really learning an awful lot from [the principal] about instructional leadership. I came from a void in that area I would say.”

**Verbal Persuasion/Social Influences**

Participants’ responses demonstrated wide variance in terms of Bandura’s (1997) third source of self-efficacy – knowing one is effective because others say so. Quinton considered verbal persuasion a more powerful source of self-efficacy than did the others:

I never view my job in terms of whether I’m doing a good job or not. I don’t think I can evaluate myself in that role. I think everyone else has to tell me if I’m doing a good job.

Quinton explained that he did not believe that he had a clear picture of whether or not he was effective on the job, that his own judgement in this area was less valid than that of others. For Quinton, self measurement was not meaningful:

For someone to look and say, well, let’s rank Quinton’s job. If I’m doing that I have trouble with that. Because I’ll be doing a good job when every student’s succeeding, right? Everybody’s healthy. Everybody’s happy and the school is run in a routine fashion. Those challenges [laughs] are still before me.

He also expressed caution that the judgement of others could vary substantially, depending on their particular point of view. Quinton explained his sense of varying perspectives: “You are torn between whether or not you think [your performance] is good or someone else thinks it’s good.”
It is important to note at this point that Quinton and I discovered a semantic difference in what we meant by the term “self-evaluation.” For Quinton, self-evaluation meant the assigning of a final grade at the end of a set period of time, say a term in office. I, on the other hand, thought of self-evaluation as a process of continuous reflective self-checking during the course of one’s work. Quinton expressed that he did engage in such reflective self-checking, on a regular basis:

I will reflect, let’s say, what needs to be done. Have I done that yet? Have I done enough of it yet? For example, one of my caring adult students, right? Have I talked to her enough? Have I met up with her? I remember I talked to her last week. Okay, I want to talk to her again. So I make a note of that. Am I doing enough there in terms of communicating with that student? So I won’t say, oh I did it three times that week, so okay, phew, let’s move on. It’s all based on, what have I done? Have I done enough to make sure things are operational? You know, what’s next? What are the initiatives that are happening in the school? Am I aware of everything that’s going on with the people who are running that particular initiative. I want to make sure that they know I’m supporting them. And if they need anything from me, I want to give them the opportunity to ask. So, it’s daily reflection. It’s weekly reflection. It’s always thinking about the future and trying to learn from the past.

Loretta considered verbal persuasion a less important source of self-efficacy and relied more strongly on her own judgement of her effectiveness on the job. “I need to be able to assess that [self-efficacy] myself. I don’t need other people to tell me. I tell myself.” In a later interview, Loretta talked about the importance of feedback from parents:
When you are getting [feedback] from people who have seen something good happen, or feel valued because you maintained contact with them and you’ve demonstrated your commitment to their child, that’s the biggest endorsement for your work, really. And it’s also the biggest criticism of your work. If the kid has gotten through the cracks and the parent has not heard from you, that’s one battle you didn’t choose well.

Loretta spoke of the need to be aware of the limitations of feedback from administrators. “Principals and vice principals become close, and they become friends. So they are not always given to appraising, criticizing.” Quinton considered feedback from staff to be a very important indicator of self-efficacy, but also spoke of its limitations:

Another important thing for me [as an indicator of self-efficacy] would be the feedback from staff. Not necessarily about a PD session but about what’s happening in general with the school. I guess you can get really involved with that statement. Feedback from staff can be a whole bunch of things. So it all depends on what you’re using that feedback for. If you say, is the school running smoothly? Well, not every teacher is going to see that. They are not going to understand the concept of what is a balanced school. They might think, well Johnny hasn’t been in my class for two days, and he’s not really doing the work that’s expected of him, so we’ve got a problem. But really, in the big picture, that’s something we can work at and manage over a period of time. But they might not see that. So I’d say it’s individual. But anyway, nonetheless, the feedback from staff is very important. And then also important [as an indicator of self-efficacy] is parents. Getting the feedback, parents telling you that you are
doing a good job, or that they are happy with their kid’s progress, that their child is comfortable and happy within the school and growing socially as well as academically. That’s important.

Quinton explored the ambiguity of feedback further, explaining that while he can’t always trust what he hears, he needs to hear from staff:

If you believe everything you are hearing, then it might influence your practice. You’ll have people on staff who want to say things just to say things – “you’re the vice principal, yeah, you’re doing a great job.” Fantastic. I want the person who’s going to criticize me, within reason. So that I can either defend myself and say, well this is the reason why we do that. And have an intelligent person either say yes, okay, I can see that, or, I think you’re missing the point here, and you need to consider this. It’s not the best process to go through, but you need it.

For Irene it was important to have two or three critical friends on staff. “I think it’s key to have two or three people on staff that you develop a relationship with, who will tell you [if you are doing a good job].” Irene also acknowledged the importance of feedback from her principal:

It’s important now and then to get the good word from [the principal]. Sometimes it can be a particular time of year or a situation that you are in, and I just think it’s important for me that I hear from him every now and then that I’m on the right track. I need to know that I’m going in the right direction. Hearing it from your principal goes a long way to building and keeping your confidence in yourself, your self-esteem.
Irene also spoke of the importance of recognition by superintendents:

[The superintendent] is good at letting you know when you’ve done something really well. And I said this to her last week, that what I’ve learned from that is when you get a book or a card from her and she’s told you about how much she’s appreciated something, it gives you the idea that you want to turn around and do the same with other people on your staff. I think it builds a tremendous amount of loyalty. I said to her, when I see something like that from you I feel like, that’s it, I’ll do anything you ask me to do. Because you are taking time to show me how much you appreciate what I’ve done, and that means a lot to me.

**Physiological and Affective States**

Bandura’s 4th source of self-efficacy—physiological and affective states—encompassed many indicators of self-efficacy mentioned by Irene and Loretta, such as “feeling in control,” and “feeling on top of things.” Both women acknowledged physiological/affective states to be an important source of self-efficacy. Irene elucidated the impact that affective states could have on her performance and indirectly on her self-efficacy:

I think mood is really important. Like yesterday, I discover that we’re missing a 0.5 in our staffing. I discovered it yesterday. It was just a total miscommunication. And it’s just missed. That, that’s just, I can not deal with anybody, I can not talk to anybody, because as far as I’m concerned, this is probably huge. This is so huge that until I get this straight in my mind, I can’t function. So I might as well close the door. And I know that if people are going
to come in and try to talk to me that I’m pretty much useless, because I’m so worried about this situation. That’s all I can really think about.

Loretta recognized that self-efficacy increases with confidence and time and that confidence positively affects self-efficacy. “When I feel confident I don’t even think about it. I just do it.”

Physiological/affective states were not, however, given the same importance by Quinton. When asked if his emotional state affected his self-efficacy, Quinton replied: “It can. It can. But I make it a point to not allow it to. Everything I do, I feel, is with purpose.” And later, when asked about the effects of stress: “I try to keep that aside from the job. I try not to use it as an excuse or anything like that.” Quinton’s stories did not include the references to physiological complaints mentioned above in the conversations of Loretta and Irene.

**Stress**

Other stressors identified by participants included parental lack of support, student apathy, and teachers’ unions. Loretta identified stress associated with the sense that as a vice principal she was constantly being evaluated – a feeling she described as being “in a fishbowl.” She spoke of always having to be mindful of what she said, and that innocent words could sometimes become “fodder at the next union meeting.” Loretta further identified having difficult conversations with teachers about performance as a source of stress. She spoke of the automatic assumption of an adversarial relationship between teachers and administration as a source of stress. All participants found balancing their work with their personal lives a source of stress.
Both Loretta and Irene talked of the impact of stress and about the physical discomfort which difficult tasks could cause them—things like butterflies and knots in the stomach. Irene spoke of the physiological impact of dealing with conflict all day:

You are not going to be able to get through the day if you’re like this [knocks fists together] constantly with people. If I get into one of these [knocks fists together] with one kid, my stomach hurts. And I know that that’s not healthy. That’s just not a healthy way to be. So you’ve got to be able to approach a conflict situation and be able to manage that so you’re not escalating the problem, and you’re coming to some kind of resolution. Whether you are dealing with a parent on the phone, or you’re dealing with a kid. So I think it’s very important that you are able to manage that kind of situation. And not to take things so personally. Realize that it’s a job. If you’ve got a kid who’s not being very respectful to you, well you know what, it’s not going to change who you are and what you do. Realize the source and try and manage that. Because if you deal with it as “how dare you speak to me that way, you have no right to speak to me that way,” it’s going to be more of this [knocks fists together]. And then you’re going to be dealing with the parent and there’s going to be more of this [knocks fists together], and then by the end of the day you’re just done. You’re just, you’re just done.

Loretta spoke of the debilitating effects of stress, such as lack of sleep, self-doubt, the tendency to dwell on issues, and the effect this can have on her job performance. She spoke, for instance, of the effect that lack of sleep had had on her decision-making capacity during a particularly stressful time:
I was handling too much, and I wasn’t sleeping. And I’ve never really known what sleep deprivation can do to the body and to the processing of your mind. You’re decision-making ability has to be sharp, and you are not going to get that if you are not well nourished, and well slept. You just don’t. I know that now. When you don’t have enough sleep you are slow to make decisions, you’re slow on the uptake, you’re slow.

Despite the discomfort, Loretta and Irene expressed that they were able to overcome their discomfort and perform difficult duties, and that dealing with such stress got easier with experience. In later discussion, both women said they considered the physical and psychological stresses of the job less threatening to their sense of self-efficacy than other aspects of the role.

In order to overcome the negative effects of stress, which can lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), Loretta explained that she took time to take care of herself: “I have to work a little harder to make sure that I’m doing things that are good for me. Getting enough sleep, going for pedicures.” Loretta spoke of the importance of humour as a coping strategy, which she found could “lighten the load.”

**Moral Purpose**

Another important source of self-efficacy identified by participants that may not fall within Bandura’s (1997) 4-source model is the concept of moral purpose. Paul T. Begley (2001) studied the way values and ethics influence administration practices, and proposed that authentic leadership involves understanding the influence of personal values on the actions of individuals. Begley argued that there has been too little emphasis on the moral aspects of educational administration (Begley, 1999). As well, Sergiovanni
(2001) suggested that “leadership is, after all, a struggle—a quest to do the right thing” (p. 2).

In keeping with the findings of Begley (2001) and Sergiovanni (2001), participants said that their greatest source of job satisfaction was student success and the sense that they had made a contribution to student success. Their stories echoed this sentiment and indicated concern that they were fulfilling a higher, moral purpose and that their hearts were in the right place, regardless of measurable outcomes. Participants used such indicators of effectiveness as: “when I know I’m doing it for the kids,” “when I’ve had one of those conversations with a student and you just feel how important it is that you are there,” and “when you know that you’re doing the best you can for those kids, no matter what.” As Loretta explained:

I really believe in the kids. So, if there’s any kind of faith, that’s where it comes from. Celebrating their successes, seeing their joy, and little conversations with them in the hall, those really special moments.

Irene said, “What I find most satisfying is when a kid who you’ve been working with long term is doing well. That’s great. That’s just great.”

Quinton explained:

I want kids to pass, to be successful. It’s all about the student. If the student’s not being successful, then we’re not operating well as a school. So sometimes I’ll get kids come up to me and say, nice to see you back, we missed you, hey look at the mark I got here, and so I know that they are thinking about conversations we’ve had and relationships we’ve had, to the point that they want to touch base with me. And that’s good, that’s good. Even the kids that come in to see me for a
discipline reason, I’m going to take the opportunity to talk about where they’re at in their classes, what areas they need to work at, what I can do to help, that kind of stuff. That kid is going to be the one who decides whether or not I’m doing a good job. They’re going to show it in the amount that they achieve.

*Personal variation in sources of self-efficacy*

When considering the 5 sources of self-efficacy identified above, it is clear that while participants generally referenced the same general sources of self-efficacy, they did not do so in exactly the same ways. Participants agreed that the above sources of self-efficacy were relevant to them, but it was clear that they were not all equally important. For instance, while agreeing that mastery experiences were their most important sources of self-efficacy, there were differences in the degree of importance attached to the other areas. As discussed earlier, Quinton said that others – teachers, students, parents – could evaluate his effectiveness on the job more reliably than he could, suggesting that he gave perhaps more emphasis to external sources of self-efficacy than did Loretta, who said that it was her own voice that was most important, suggesting a stronger emphasis on internal sources of self-efficacy. Similarly, physiological and affective states were a more important source of self-efficacy for Irene and Loretta than they were for Quinton.

Such personal variation in the relative importance of the sources of self-efficacy has been noted elsewhere. A study by Zeldin and Pajares (2000), exploring the self-efficacy beliefs of 15 women working in the field of mathematics, found that verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences were important sources of self-efficacy. Zeldin and Pajares suggested that these sources of self-efficacy may be more important for women working in male-dominated settings.
The multifaceted nature of self-efficacy

Participants in my study agreed that self-efficacy was difficult to measure because of its changeable and progressive nature (Pajares, 1998). They said that it could vary depending on their situation, their present school, whatever current projects and challenges they were involved in, and what was going on at home. As Irene explained, “Ask me if I’m doing a good job today, and you may get a different answer than you would have gotten yesterday. So much of that depends on what walks in my door.” As well, participants said that their self-efficacy depended in part on how much external aid they felt they were receiving. If they felt strong support from their principal and office workers, they said they were more likely to feel effective.

A participant’s sense of self-efficacy may be affected, as suggested by Zeldin and Pajares (2000), by the traditional gender assumptions associated with a particular work setting. The participants in my study, however, did not feel that gender was a factor in their sense of self-efficacy. A participant’s sense of self-efficacy may also be affected by how realistic their goals are (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). For instance, if a participant thought vice principal skills were inherent rather than learned, their self-efficacy might be less. In my study, all three participants felt vice principal skills were learned. If they believed an effective vice principal made mistakes and was always learning, their overall sense of professional self-efficacy was likely to be higher (Bandura; Pajares, 1998).

Determining their self-efficacy was made more difficult because of the challenging nature of the vice principalship. Participants rated their self-efficacy as high and described themselves as highly motivated. But they also said they wanted to be
better. Loretta: “Every single one of us is not confident at some part of our job.”

Quinton: “I don’t think I’m doing a good enough job all the time. I need to be better.”

Thus, while they did well in their own eyes, there was always room for improvement.

Being both good and not good enough was a paradoxical reality of the role that all three accepted. As Quinton elaborated:

If we evaluated even the perfect vice principal, they would never get a perfect mark, because there’s so much. If somebody says they are a perfect or exemplary vice principal, I would be cautious as to the criteria they used to evaluate themselves. Nobody can say they are an expert on anything. I really believe that.

**Weighing the Sources of Self-Efficacy**

Identifying sources of self-efficacy is an important aspect of understanding how self-efficacy is constructed. It is a starting point, if you will. But merely acknowledging the sources of self-efficacy is not enough to understand how self-efficacy is constructed. Identifying participants’ sources of self-efficacy, as I have above, raised new questions. How do study participants make use of such sources in their personal construction of self-efficacy? What made individual participants give different sources differing weights? Certainly each of us views the world through a slightly different lens—from a different angle if you will.

In exploration of the above question, I considered that self-efficacy is always measured in relation to a goal (Bandura, 1997). The stated goal of participants in this study was to be an effective vice principal – to be as good as they could possibly be. To understand how and why my three participants weighed sources of self-efficacy as they
did, I deemed it necessary to describe their individual conceptions of the ideal vice principal – their personal goal posts.

**Effective Vice Principal Profiles**

In order to answer the questions raised above – How do study participants make use of sources of self-efficacy in their personal constructions of self-efficacy? What makes individual participants give different weights to different sources? – I created an effective vice principal profile for each participant which was based on a combination of participants’ direct responses to the question of what makes an effective vice principal and direct responses to a survey which asked participants to rank a list of 25 vice principal duties in terms of both how much time they spent on each task and also how important each task was (see Appendix B). In creating the effective vice principal profiles I also used ideas gleaned indirectly from discussions of the satisfactions and dissatisfactions associated with the vice principal role.

I worked from the assumption that participants’ responses, the stories they chose to tell, and the metaphors they chose to use could reveal aspects of their personal value systems–value systems which informed their personal decisions about what was more and less important. For instance, Irene was bothered by the challenge of finding time for professional reading, suggesting that in her view, the ideal vice principal would engage in a fair amount of professional reading. What follows is an example of one such effective vice principal profile, this one belonging to Loretta.

**Loretta’s effective vice principal profile**

An effective vice principal:

1. -is a good communicator
2. -is empathetic
3. -knows how others see her/him (different views from different groups)–knows how to act/behave with different stakeholder groups–able to satisfy all stakeholders
4. -can switch hats–e.g., team player, then supervisor
5. -is good at massaging the relationship with the principal
6. -is very well organized (has systems)
7. -has good counseling ability
8. -has good intuition
9. -can take charge (“the buck stops here”)
10. -is in control of her/his environment (“I choose this”)
11. -can handle conflict
12. -recognizes her/his own bias (“You can’t always believe what you want to believe.”)
13. -can inspire and motivate staff
14. -is a role model for staff
15. -has all the information she/he needs to make decisions (“The worst position to be in is to have to tell a teacher you don’t know.”)
16. -is involved in instructional leadership activities, staff development, teacher training
17. -has time for research activities
18. -is not bogged down in tedious things
19. -bases decisions on the belief that students come first (“number one mantra”)
20. -has personal priorities in order, maintains balance
21. -is self-reflective
**Personal Value Systems**

The above profile revealed the personal value system that Loretta used to measure herself against her self-identified goal of being the most effective vice principal she could be. I inferred that it was this value system that Loretta used to determine how much weight or importance to attach to each of her sources of self-efficacy.

After sharing the effective vice principal profiles with participants for verification and agreement, I compared them to each other and noted the differences. For instance, Loretta’s profile was the only one that included “time for research activities.” Irene made a point of adding “high visibility” to her profile. But for the most part the criteria were similar. I inferred that the difference between the profiles rested not so much in the specific criteria but in the relative importance, or rank, that each participant gave to each item in their profile.

To get a better idea of what such variations in ranking might look like, each participant completed a survey in which they were asked to choose the top five ideal vice principal qualities from a common list of qualities that had been compiled from their combined responses (see Appendix C).

The ideal vice principal survey results provided a window into understanding participants’ differing value systems. For instance, all participants considered such things as being organized and being a good communicator as important, but they did not give them the same ranking when asked to identify and rank just their top five ideal vice principal qualities. The chart below shows participants’ responses to the survey.
### Top Five Qualities of the Ideal Vice Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loretta</th>
<th>Quinton</th>
<th>Irene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Good communicator</td>
<td>Influences teacher practice</td>
<td>Highly involved with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Able to be a team player</td>
<td>Highly visible in school</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Highly involved with</td>
<td>Good counseling skills</td>
<td>Good communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  students</td>
<td>Practices leadership</td>
<td>Well organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Conflict resolution</td>
<td>Practices leadership</td>
<td>Sets goals for school and personal improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Practices leadership</td>
<td>Good communicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart illustrates the similarities and differences in what participants said they most valued in the vice principalship. While participants said all the above qualities were important, in terms of relative importance there are noticeable differences. For instance, being a good communicator was important to all, and most put conflict resolution and leadership in their top five, but the responses are most interesting in how they differ. Relative to the other participants, Loretta gave more weight to being a team player, Quinton gave more weight to the ability to influence teacher practice, and Irene gave more weight to being well organized and setting goals. In conversation, Loretta spoke of the importance of organization, but she did not include it in her top five qualities, and this was consistent with her earlier dialogue:

> If it’s all about management, then you’re not really moving… I’m not the least bit talented at timetabling. Not that I don’t want to learn. But I don’t see things that way. I don’t see things in boxes and squares and time slots.
On the other hand, Loretta’s top-five placement of being a team player aligned with her comments on the importance of collaborative team work: “I have very much a team mentality, and I see that in my administrative team, and I also see that as part of the staff that I work with.”

Irene’s inclusion of organization as a top-five quality of an ideal vice principal was consistent with her dialogue, as is illustrated in the example below:

Because the school depends on you as the centre in a lot of organization of processes in the school, you feel good about what you are doing if everything is running smoothly. If I’m going to manage this place, then I need to be on top of what’s going on. And if I’m on top of what’s going on, then the communication is a whole lot better, and therefore the place just runs a little bit more smoothly. You can feel when everything’s going well. If something hasn’t been organized well, or something hasn’t been communicated well, then you know it in an instant. You just know it from the number of people that are coming through your door.

When asked about this directly, Irene agreed that she would give organization more weight when measuring her own self-efficacy. In later questioning, all participants agreed that their top-five qualities were the most important measures they would consider in determining their self-efficacy.

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the reasons for such variation of visions of the ideal vice principal, though it is perhaps dependent on such elements as life experience, inherent personality traits, personal decisions and choices, and leadership style.
Self-Efficacy Scales

To get a general sense of how participants measured their self-efficacy, they were asked to rate themselves, from 1 to 10, against each item in their effective vice principal profile, using Bandura’s idea of self-efficacy scales (Bandura, 1997). This was not always an easy task, as Quinton observed, “I would say that I’m pretty good at [the ability to react to the unknown] but then again it’s always up in the air. Exactly what do you mean by the unknown? Have I really been tested?” The self-efficacy scores varied, supporting Bandura’s finding that self-efficacy is task specific. Participants generally gave themselves scores that ranged from 5 to 10, which was consistent with their earlier assertions that they considered their self-efficacy to be fairly high.

Factors Most Influencing Self-Efficacy

Interestingly, in their self-efficacy scales, participants consistently scored themselves lowest in those areas of the vice principal’s role they found to be the most ambiguous and the most challenging. Loretta’s lowest score was against “being good at massaging the relationship with the principal.” Irene’s lowest scores were against “practicing instructional leadership,” “keeping up with professional reading,” and “maintaining a focus on school improvement.” Quinton’s lowest scores were against minimizing what he called “the inefficiencies of the role,” which he explained as maintaining consistency of approach and consistent attendance routines in the face of constant interruptions, new business, and conflicting expectations. These results indicated that participants found it most difficult to maintain high self-efficacy when faced with the ambiguous elements of the vice principal role.
Ambiguity

Participants aired the frustration and stress created by the ambiguity of the vice principal role with metaphors of lack of movement. There were parts of the job which had the capacity to make them feel “mired,” “bogged down,” and “spinning [their] wheels,” such as “roadblocks,” “slowdowns,” and “pitfalls.” Loretta described getting “getting bogged down” in the paperwork and “spinning your wheels.” She said, “If it’s all about paperwork, then you’re not really moving.” Loretta also said, “You get mired in everything else, bogged down in those little tedium things that weren’t moving forward.” Irene described the feeling of endless administrivia as “just mucking about in the trenches.” Quinton described being “taken back a couple of steps.” Their stories revealed the confusions, uncertainties, doubts, and lack of clarity they sometimes experienced when managing particularly ambiguous and challenging aspects of their roles. Participants described many of these ambiguities, which are outlined below in three categories: task ambiguity, positional ambiguity, and control ambiguity.

Task Ambiguity

Participants consistently mentioned the ambiguous nature of their duties, which were often only assumed, and which could vary from school to school and from principal to principal. Loretta spoke about the flexible nature of the job. “We all know what our duties are, but they’re not ever written down.” She spoke of the need to be able to fit with the principal’s leadership style and fill in the gaps if necessary:

A lot of your job is grey area. Having worked with three very different principals, and knowing how important good communication is, if the person you work with
is less inclined to construct communication, you have to sort of make it your mission to do that.

Irene echoed these sentiments:

There are times when you’ve got to step up and take on some roles. If it’s not happening, then the vice principal’s got to step up and take on some of it, for the culture of the school.

Participants identified time management as a major challenge. They struggled to avoid getting lost in paperwork and administrative tasks. As Quinton explained:

It’s easy to get bogged down in the administrative factor involved in the job. Pushing paper, calling home, detention, suspension, send home, those kinds of things.

Participants found instructional leadership difficult to fit into their routines. They wanted to practice instructional leadership, felt it was a priority in their school board, believed that instructional leadership was important to school improvement, and that it was what they should be doing. Yet the structure of the vice principal role, involving as it does such a vast amount of administrative detail, made it difficult to find time for instructional leadership. Irene described the frustration of this:

This time of year [June] is very top heavy in terms of administrative duties. And it kind of pushes everything else out. What was very apparent to me is that I simply don’t seem to make enough time within my practice for instructional leadership. And I know I have to. I know that I should be doing it. I know that it’s important. It just seems to me that the managerial role seems to sort of consume time.
Quinton spoke about wanting to be involved in leadership activities to prepare himself for a principalship, but not finding enough time for leadership tasks:

One thing that I would like to get more opportunity to do, and that’s demonstrate leadership. In a variety of different ways. The job, the way that it’s laid out right now, in my role in this school, doesn’t afford me a lot of time to do that. So I’m bothered with the management aspect of things versus leadership. And I always look for opportunities to do that. I want more.

Irene voiced her frustration with the ambiguity of task:

It’s horrible that I’ve got all these great books that I’m not getting to. And I feel that I’m getting farther and farther out of what’s current. You asked me the question, is this role preparing you for the principal’s position? Every time I have to go for a principal’s interview I’m studying. I’m studying, because a lot of this stuff I’m not practicing.

Quinton put his finger on an essential paradox of the role in terms of task management when he remarked:

You know what, everything’s important. And everything’s time consuming. And that’s just the way it is. You have to try to find a way through that. You have to balance your time so you have some time for everything. Everything has to happen at the same time. It’s a delicate balance. You could spend your entire day dealing with attendance. You could spend your entire day chasing dopers. But you have an obligation to everybody who goes to the school, good kids and bad kids, and if you’re going to make it to the next level, or apply any kind of
leadership in the school, you’re going to have to address everybody that’s in your building.

*Positional Ambiguity*

Participants described the vice principalship as a kind of middle ground, with uncertain and flexing positional rules. It is a world in which different stakeholders – teachers, students, parents, administration, community members – see the vice principal differently and have different expectations of the role. As Loretta illuminated:

For me, I don’t always see myself as “the boss” kind of thing. But I have to take myself out of that way I see myself, and know that other people do see me that way. And so, how am I making those two divergent expectations somehow meet? It’s not easy, but I’m working at that. I’m realizing that the way I see myself isn’t the way people see me all the time. So I have to fit the mold when the task requires it.

Loretta envisioned this ambiguity metaphorically as switching hats. “I’m a team member the rest of the time, but right now I’m the supervisor, and that’s not easy to do. It’s not easy to switch those hats.” Quinton illuminated another example of positional ambiguity when he explained that vice principals have to satisfy different stakeholders, all of whom have different agendas:

It’s not just about me. It’s also about how others view [my role] sometimes as opposed to how I view it. I still see people viewing the role as simply disciplinary. That might be a teacher’s point of view. You know, “I am referring this student to you, deal with it.” And parents. When they get a call from a vice principal it’s always negative, right? “What did he do now?” So the definition of
a vice principal’s role in terms of influencing teaching practice, influencing curriculum delivery and assessment and leadership, has yet to pervade all the other facets of the role. So my description of the role is very different from what a student might see, what a teacher might see, and what parents might see. This sense of conflicting views of the role is perhaps heightened by the hidden nature of much of the vice principal’s work. Rarely are teachers and parents aware of the variety of jobs that a vice principal does to keep a school running smoothly (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Control Ambiguity

Participants shared that while they occupy a position of formal authority, just how much control they have over their environment is limited. For instance, a vice principal’s discretionary authority is highly dependent on the style of the principal. Participants said their effectiveness was partly dependent on the principal’s style of leadership. Irene used a vivid example:

> If you have a principal with no vision, who doesn’t communicate with staff, doesn’t provide an avenue for communication for issues, doesn’t build personal relationships with people, then your dissenters in your school, the negative leaders, they’re given a voice, and that’s who the followers gravitate to. Then all of a sudden you go from having your principal, who should be the person with the voice and who people are following, not anymore. And they are following other people on the staff. I don’t know how you overcome that. I just don’t. It’s horrible. As a vice principal you can do everything you can to be a really emotional, intelligent leader and do all those things, but if you’ve got somebody
who ultimately is putting up the roadblocks, then you are only doing so much.

You’re not going to change how the school is going to operate if ultimately the
person who’s making the decisions is not listening and communicating with
people.

Quinton elaborated on how a vice principal’s power relies on others. “Your
effectiveness depends on everyone’s role around you, which you can’t control.”

He said that external forces affect how much control the vice principal has of
his/her environment:

Your day develops after 7:00 a.m. You have no real control over how your day is
going to go. Many factors come into play. It could be an issue with a student, it
could be an issue involving the police, the parents, CAS [Children’s Aid Society],
everything that you cannot ignore. You must give yourself to that. So, perhaps
that day you wanted to meet with a group of kids, perhaps you wanted to attack a
certain attendance problem, but you’re unable to be consistent with that on a daily
basis due to what might arise on that particular day. That bothers me.

The lack of control Quinton described above was clearly evidenced on site visits. Here
follows a description of the first half hour in his office on the morning of the first
interview:

We are now in a quiet little conference room at the back of the school. We had to
come here to find a quiet place to talk. In the vice principal’s office, it was one
person after another coming in, in just the 20 minutes I sat there waiting. When I
arrived, the vice principal was off finishing a TPA [Teacher Performance
Appraisal] somewhere in the school. While I waited, the principal and the
secretary waited as well, to get background on a particular student whose parent was waiting in the principal’s office to take him out of school–apparently a custody issue was brewing. When they left, another teacher came in with some urgent paperwork requiring the vice principal’s attention, which she left on his desk. It disappeared into a pile of other papers as soon as she put it down. A teacher came in to see the vice principal and decided to come back later. Then another teacher entered, this one with input on the parent waiting in the principal’s office.

During these opening minutes of the job shadowing day with Quinton, I found keeping field notes a challenging task. The pace was fast, each event seeming to fall on top of the one prior, in a cascade of business, all needing the vice principal’s attention:

The vice principal returned to the room, spoke briefly to two students waiting to see him on the bench outside his door, and closed the door behind him to confer with the principal and teacher about the student and parent custody situation. The principal left to speak to the parent in her office, and the vice principal and I rose to find a quieter room to talk. On our way out of his office the secretary came around the corner with two students, both angry, who had slammed down the office phone and were angry about something to do with somebody’s mother. The vice principal gave them incident report forms to fill in while they sat on the bench, and the two of us went off down the hall. This was all in about 20 minutes. I asked him if he would like to reschedule our appointment until after
school so he could deal with today’s issues. He laughed and said there would be a staff meeting after school, and then coaching. There wasn’t a better time.

Loretta voiced the sense of having limited control over her environment when speaking about facing the gang mentality at a previous school:

You could see it happening. It was almost like a gang mentality. You could just see that it was more about doing something just because, rather than doing something to cover up for a bad decision earlier. And you could see it happening. And other kids being attracted to that, and it was really growing. I thought it was kind of frightening. Big issues. Beyond what the administration has the ability to manage. There needs to be a pull-together approach with the community. And even still, a lot of those things come from the home. They come from parenting, they come from MSN. They come from things happening on the weekends.

Loretta’s anxiety in the face of such control ambiguity was evidenced in her choice of words when describing her role as that of “having the principal’s back”—a battle metaphor, suggesting the need to be prepared for unexpected surprises or undefined challenges. Loretta continued this metaphor in other conversations, referring to herself as a “front-line person,” who occasionally “gets bitten,” or experienced something that “came back to bite [her] in the butt.” Both she and Quinton talked about the importance of “picking battles.”

Participants all described student attendance as the one most frustrating and challenging aspect of their role, over which they felt they had limited control. As Loretta explained:
[Student attendance] is a really frustrating thing. I feel I have very little control over that. And given that that’s a major part of your job, in terms of self-efficacy, that would be an enormous impact on your self-view. It’s not like anybody’s really measuring you against that, but in a way, if you think about it—EQAO [Education Quality and Accountability Office] scores, and student achievement, and student success—all of those go back to whether or not the student is in the school, which is essentially your job. So you speak of all those enormous issues indirectly when you speak of attendance. And it’s really frustrating.

In the discourse above, Loretta views student attendance as connected to the much larger issue of student achievement and suggests that such connections mean increased accountability for the vice principal:

Attendance is your job. It really is. Half of your day will be spent dealing with attendance…. And then you look at the myriad of strategies that you would use to address attendance…. You pull all sorts of tricks out of your hat. You look at all those strategies, and you have to speak to the performance of the task. But in the grander scheme of things, what impact are they having? What impact does a detention have on your attendance unless you are a parent-fearing child? You know [laughing] in their world, my disdain for their poor attendance is not keeping them awake at night. … What do you do? This is something that really bugs me. Ask all the other vice principals, and this is their central frustration.

**Constructing Self-Efficacy**

The challenge of student attendance is an interesting element of the vice principal role. If, as participants agreed, student attendance was their number one job, and if, as
participants also agreed, student attendance was something over which they had limited control, then it followed that the issue of student attendance could cause vice principals to judge their self-efficacy as very low. To repeat Loretta’s words above, “Given that [student attendance is] a major part of your job, in terms of self-efficacy, that would be an enormous impact on your self-view.” Yet for the three participants in this study, this was not the case. As related earlier, participants rated their self-efficacy in the vice principal role as high.

This observation raised a further question: How do participants build self-efficacy in certain aspects of their role, such as student attendance, which sometimes appear to defy efficiency? How do they build self-efficacy when self-efficacy seems impossible? Loretta explains:

If I were to process the whole discipline and attendance conundrum, we could go over and over it. It’s like the war in Iraq. You can go on and on and on about that…. Those things that schools are accountable for, but yet have so little control over. And then of course [the vice principal] as an individual, [attendance] is your role. But attendance, staff or student, is part of a team effort. But you have to answer to it. It doesn’t make any sense.

To answer the questions above, participants were asked to speak at greater length about student absence/attendance, how they handled it, and how they were able to maintain self-efficacy. Their descriptions and insights revealed that participants created unique ways to handle the specific conundrum of attendance in such a way that they could build and maintain a personal sense of self-efficacy. That is, they cognitively processed and organized their experiences in such a way as to make it possible for them to build self-
efficacy. What follows are descriptions of three cognitive processes identified by participants which they used to tackle student attendance and reinterpret the issue in ways that could allow for a measure of personal success.

**Cognitive Processes**

*Revisioning – Loretta*

When discussing the student attendance challenge, Loretta demonstrated the ability to revision the issue. In other words, she looked at the issue of attendance from an entirely new perspective, a perspective which allowed her to create an alternative way to measure personal success:

Suspensions don’t work. Detentions don’t work. What do you do? This is something that really bugs me. What do you do? If you ask all the other vice principals, this is their central frustration…. Poor attendance happens for so many reasons. And so one of the things that’s happening that’s really positive, especially in this school, is that [the principal] is very much about expectations. She really does get involved in assessment and evaluation because her argument is, in a regular high school you have 110 hours to sit in that classroom and earn your credit. So there’s an hour expectation to it.

Departing from the traditional way of accounting for student attendance by counting hours, Loretta goes on to shift her view from counting hours to counting expectations:

But really, technically speaking, we’re talking about expectations. We’ve already said that a student need not be in that chair at all really. Or they could just be there for 25% of the time. If they can prove mastery of those expectations, they
get the credit. And that’s as it should be. That’s what education is. It’s not about time put in. It’s about the learning. So if you have a teacher with two or three students in a class, 110 hours? No, that’s ridiculous. You can sit with that student and expedite their progress through those expectations. You can combine expectations. Why would you have five assignments where one assignment could achieve a whole bunch of expectations at once? You can combine them with other curriculum. And in a small school you can do that.

Loretta relates this alternate way of viewing attendance with the notion of an increasingly flexible curriculum, which she considers an important facet of school improvement and increased student success:

So now the curriculum is becoming more flexible. Our work towards credit recovery and summer school, it gives kids another chance. If it’s about the learning, you can take those kids who would be chronic poor attenders and help turn it around. They can see themselves progressing at a pace that’s more satisfactory to them. They start to see their own success. And that’s where the grass roots comes from, because they see their own success, and then they are self-motivated. And then you can step back. And I’ve seen it here in just one year. I’ve seen it over and over and over again. It’s amazing. It’s just heartwarming when you can see that happen. And they just take charge and go on their own and do their own thing.

In the above description, Loretta cognitively revisioned student attendance so that it became more about curriculum, over which she felt she had more control and against which she felt she could more easily measure personal progress. She chose to focus not
on the number of hours a student spent sitting in a seat, but on how many expectations that student was covering. She did this in consultation with the student and the principal and thus created the sense of forward motion that was necessary for her to avoid her “spinning wheels” metaphor of lack of progress.

*Stepping Back From the Issue – Quinton*

Like Loretta, Quinton considered student attendance to be one of his greatest challenges. In conversation, Quinton demonstrated his own unique cognitive process for tackling the attendance challenge and creating room to build and measure personal self-efficacy. Quinton’s cognitive process involved stepping back from the issue:

So I talked to [a retired principal], and it was funny because we were just chatting it up one time, and it always goes back to, you know what, the problem existed 30 years ago. It’s not your problem. You can make the problem worse if you’re not giving it the attention it deserves, right? Or if you aren’t being consistent in your efforts to try to keep it at an operable level. But 40 years ago kids skipped. Forty years ago there was drug abuse, there was disrespect, there was student misbehaviour. Now, numbers might fluctuate, it doesn’t matter. Students wear their hats in the halls, yep. There are always ongoing things. If I measured myself against that on a daily basis, I would go insane. I’m thinking [the principal] must have had this down pat. He became a principal afterwards. He probably didn’t have any of these problems. Do I have to get these problems done before they’ll consider me for a principalship? I’d go mad, right?

Such distancing from the problem was an important process in Quinton’s construction of self-efficacy. Were he to allow himself to measure his self-efficacy too closely against
Quinton recognized that such a self-evaluation would be defeating and disabling. In order for him to be able to measure his success, he allowed a certain amount of protective distance, so that his personal sense of self-efficacy remained strong enough for him to be able to act.

Quinton’s cognitive process of stepping back from the issue aligned with his stated belief that “nobody is an expert,” a belief which also allowed him some wiggle room in terms of personal accountability:

If somebody says they are a perfect, or exemplary, vice principal, I would be cautious as to the criteria they used to evaluate themselves. Nobody can say they are an expert on anything. I really believe that.

As Bandura (1997) suggested, self-efficacy is in part dependent on how realistic an individual’s goals are. In this case, Quinton’s goal of being the most effective vice principal possible is not hampered by any personally held assumptions that effective vice principals are perfect in any way. It is important to note that Quinton’s cognitive process of stepping back from the issue did not mean he disowned the problem or relieved himself of responsibility. In fact, he considered himself highly responsible for student attendance. As mentioned previously, the process of stepping back simply allowed him to create room for personal action.

A Rational Plan of Action – Irene

Irene also labeled student attendance as one of her greatest challenges. Irene’s insights illustrated a third unique cognitive process for managing the challenge of student attendance, which I called creating a rational plan of action. When talking about specific challenges she faced, Irene frequently employed an analytical problem-solving approach
involving formulating goals, making a plan, and measuring the effect. Her stories contained multiple references to such phrases as “set a goal,” “made a plan,” “developed a plan.” When asked specifically how she handled issues, Irene said: “I try to think of ways to make that better.” When talking about a specific parking problem, she said, “I thought of a way to fix that, and it’s fixed.” Irene explained, “You develop ways to make it better.” She demonstrated such rational action planning when discussing student attendance:

[Student attendance] is a frustrating one. You’re asking probably the toughest question ever. Because that’s a vice principal’s thing, right? To try to control attendance. And if the plans you put in place at the beginning of the year aren’t working, you are screwed for the rest of the year. So I’m putting another plan in place for next year so I can try to control attendance. I’m going to go with one-hour detentions. And I’m taking that idea from two other vice principals. They’re doing this. I can do that. I’m going to try that. They tell me their attendance has improved remarkably. They’ve gone with this. I’m going to try it. I’m going to see if it has any effect…. But it is the negative consequence. We’re trying to control attendance by creating negative consequences. Whereas the instructional leader tries to improve attendance by making work more engaging in the classroom. So then I want to work with the teachers. What can we do to encourage kids to be in your classes a whole lot more?

Irene’s focus on formulating a plan of action to deal with difficult challenges aligned with the relative importance she put on being organized. She used metaphors of well-oiled machines, such as “running smoothly,” and being “on top of things.” She described
herself as “the go-to person at the centre of things,” whose efficiency “enables other people to do their job.” Irene’s explanations of how she dealt with the challenge of student attendance align with Bandura’s (1997) suggestion that people with high self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as “challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided” (p. 39). They commit to challenging goals with a high degree of effort, and when the going gets tough, they increase their effort.

The three processes outlined above provide examples of the unique cognitive patterns which participants used to build self-efficacy in a realm where building self-efficacy is not easy to do. As demonstrated above, participants used specific cognitive processes to deal with the attendance challenge so that they could build and maintain self-efficacy in challenging circumstances and be able to see themselves as effective and successful.

While the cognitive processes illuminated thus far were unique to each individual, another cognitive process was noted that was common to all three participants, that being the process of identifying successes and failures.

**Identifying Successes and Failures**

Participant descriptions exhibited a cognitive pattern of identifying successes and failures. Each participant elaborated on specific examples of things they felt they had done well, as evidenced earlier in discussion of mastery experience, and also on mistakes they had made or ideas that had failed to have the impact they had hoped for. As mentioned earlier, participants reported that successes increased their self-efficacy. However, they also reported that their failures did not have as strong an impact on decreasing their self-efficacy.
When discussing failures and mistakes, I observed that participants minimized their negative effect by processing failures in positive and constructive ways. Participants in this study interpreted failures not as black marks on their score cards but as opportunities for learning and growth. Failures provided opportunities for new ideas, new plans of action, and opportunities for creative problem solving. Irene’s words below illustrate both the identification of failure and the processing of that failure in a way that provided an opportunity for new ideas:

I’m constantly thinking, to try to come up with ways that are going to make those disappointments go away. I’m incredibly disappointed by the drug problem that we have. You take a look at our credit accumulation statistics, and we’re doing really well, right. But we have a small population of our school who are not doing so well, and they are the drug users and the skippers primarily. And I don’t think this year I’ve done very well in a couple of aspects in dealing with decreasing the drug use and decreasing the attendance issues. So, I’m thinking for next year. How are we going to make this better? I’m thinking of a different type of detention plan with consequences for skipping, and then thinking about as a whole school what we are going to do to try to make the drug problem better. And if those things work out, then that’s going to make me really happy.

In a similar way, Loretta spoke of the power of weaknesses to provide valuable lessons:

I just think that we’re all in this together, and every single one of us is not confident at some part of our job. Every single one of us. And when we can admit that and not feel badly or threatened, then we’re accepting of advice, we have questions, and it’s not an appraisal or an evaluative exercise. It’s a reflective
exercise. So we get better on our own. Because we always have to get better.

Every single one of us. So for me, that seems to make the most sense. The very most sense. That you would not have that fear.

Such a tendency to view mistakes in a positive light, as learning experiences, had a positive impact on participants’ self-efficacy and indicated that they were predisposed to view themselves and their performance in a positive light, with confidence and self-assurance.

**Self-Reflective Processes**

Another cognitive process common to all participants was self reflection, though they did not practice self reflection to the same degree. Participants used phrases such as “I remember,” “I am thinking of a time when,” “I thought to myself,” and “in hindsight.” Participants used self-reflection as a learning tool. If their reflection gave them the sense that they were learning and improving, they said that this positively impacted their self-efficacy. The following is an example of Irene’s reflective process, which demonstrated both her self-reflection and the lesson she had drawn from it:

One kid, I remember, I overheard a few years back, saying, “she’s always so grouchy. She’s always frowning. She looks at me, and she always gives me dirty looks.” And I thought to myself, that’s because I’m so busy, so consumed–tunnel vision–when I’m in the halls, that I’ve got blinders on, and I’m so serious, and that’s what the kids see. And so I said to myself, you know what, no matter what’s going on, I’m going to be in the hallways, I’m going to have a smile on my face, and I’m going to say hello to kids. And I’m going to do whatever I can to be open and personable, so that they can approach me. And so I tried to change,
basically, what my public face was going to look like. And as a result, I think it’s made me more aware of kids, you know, and, ah, hopefully they don’t see me as just the tyrant walking down the hall.

In much of their self-reflection, participants demonstrated that what was most important were the lessons learned. Mistakes were alright as long as they were learning. As well, participants said that being able to apologize was an important vice principal trait.

**Stepping Stone Stories**

As has been observed thus far, the stories participants chose to relate, like the metaphors they chose to use, were indicative of their priorities and values and served to illustrate how they cognitively processed their experiences. In discussion, participants sometimes related specific experiences which they had undergone that they considered to be particularly important learning experiences. They told these stories in great detail and spent some time elaborating on the specific lesson or lessons they took from them. These were generally important lessons that had helped to shape their professional practice or professional beliefs in some way. In my interpretation, I referred to such milestone stories as stepping stone stories, to indicate their importance as personal markers along the individual’s learning path.

I listened carefully to the metaphors participants used in their stepping stone stories and considered these as indicators of their internal landscapes—a more primitive, symbolic, internal visual of where they were, what they were up against, and how they were doing. All three participants referenced a metaphorical journey. Along the way there were things that could bite, and pitfalls, and drowning places, dark holes, and battle fields, places where their backs were up against walls. They traveled down roads,
sometimes getting mired and facing roadblocks. They spoke of “being taken back a
couple of steps,” of “not being there yet,” and of “getting back out there.” Loretta spoke
of events that “took the wind out of my sails,” and told how she “weathered the storm.”

Loretta’s ongoing self-reflective process is illustrated in the following stepping
stone story—a story from which she had not only learned something but continued to learn
in the retelling of it:

I can think of one time where I made a very bad call on a report of an incident in
class. In hindsight, I was affected by my view of the student. You know, we get
a sense. And it’s really funny now that I think of it. You get a sense of the kid–
you don’t see them in the main office very much, they’ve got good parents,
they’ve got good marks. So I had gotten this report, and I had spoken to this kid
once before about a bullying situation, and he explained to me that his
participation in it was rather innocent. He kind of rolled over on the people who
were really involved, and so I was thankful to him for that. So he helped me
solve a situation, even though he might have been slightly involved. I though he
might have been a bit of a follower.

Loretta explained above her first impressions of a student and what her initial
interpretation had been. She continued her dialogue, and explained how her impression
affected her judgement:

So, months later, this thing happens where this girl has her pants pulled down in
class, and it was this kid who did it. Good kid. So I just thought, you know,
practical joke gone bad. And I gave him a one-day suspension. Very bad call.
Very, very bad call. This girl’s underwear was exposed in front of the class. It
wasn’t sexual assault, but you know, if you were that girl’s parent. You know what I mean. And I didn’t assess it well at all. And ah, [the principal] was mad at me for it. When I did realize my mistake I apologized to the mother, and the mother was very gracious. I made a commitment to follow up, and I didn’t, well enough. We had to change the suspension. The severity of the kid’s actions were explained to him. He intended it as a practical joke. I mean, it was the way I saw it, but what I didn’t see was how that girl felt. I didn’t see that. I missed the ball. I dropped the ball on that one completely. So what I learned from that was, sometimes you have to not make a decision right away. Sometimes you really have to process it and read it over and over, gather data. I didn’t do enough research on that. Consult with your principal. And by all means, number one is follow up, always. Keep the parents in the loop.

As Loretta’s story continued, she reflected on the larger lessons this incident had taught her, and she generalized a truth from the situation to extend the learning to other situations:

Yeah, that was bad. I felt really bad about that. And that’s why being able to apologize is really key. Because people see you as human when you admit that you were wrong, and what you ought to have done. Without doing it too often, but people see you as human when you do that. That’s important.

Loretta’s recounting of this event and her self-reflection incorporated an understanding of why she had responded as she had:

When you’re having to make so many decisions in such close succession, you’re bound to miss a serious issue in a pile of not-so-serious ones, and that’s what I
did. I deemed something to be not as serious as what I had believed it to be initially. And I didn’t read the report well enough. I think it caused [the principal] to question my judgment. And rightly so, I mean, it was a bad call. And I don’t feel, I mean, we fixed it obviously, and the kid got the counseling that he ought to have.

Loretta then went on to incorporate her present perspective in her reflective process and suggested that this past event still contained important lessons for her. She also connected the situation with a similar situation at another school, which had happened more recently:

But now, in hindsight, I think he might have been much more involved in the initial bullying that I really believed. You have all the right beliefs about a kid, but sometimes they’re not founded. And that’s the sad part of it. It makes me think of an incident at [another school]. At the very end of the year we had a teacher walk in on a drug sale in the boys’ bathroom. And when we caught the kid, the teacher said “that’s the kid.” He was a scrawny little kid who played on the midget basketball team. And the coaches said, “oh no, no, absolutely not, he would never have done that. Absolutely not. It wasn’t him. That was a mistake.” So I went back to the teacher. “Are you sure?” “You’re damn right I’m sure! I saw him pass a baggie and take $20 bucks.” So you’re thinking, awww. And sure enough, it was him, and the coaches had to eat crow over that [laughs], because this little drug dealer was also a star athlete. And so, I should have learned my lesson then. You just can’t believe what you want to believe. And
what does that do to you though? What does it do to you? What does it do to your thinking?

In the above extended example, Loretta not only recounted a stepping stone story from which she had learned an important lesson, but in the very process of retelling it to me she reflected and processed the events yet again, from her current, changed perspective, as evidenced in her use of such phrases as “now that I think of it.” In her retelling, she also made a new connection to another event—a connection she had not noted before: “It makes me think of another incident at [another school]….” This demonstrated that what Loretta had learned from that one event had not ceased, but that her learning was an ongoing process of revisiting past events—cyclical and continuous—promoting ever higher levels of understanding. Thus, Loretta reevaluated past incidents from her present perspective to gain still further lessons. Her pattern of self-reflection could be represented visually as an upward-moving spiral, the epicenter of which, at the base of the spiral, was the original event—an event that was revisited more than once, from continuously higher and broader perspectives, forming a series of vertically aligned, time distanced points of reflection.

**Guiding Principles of Self-Efficacy**

In analysis of participants’ cognitive processes, certain core beliefs or guiding principles became evident—call them keys, secrets, building blocks, roots. The guiding principles were the basic echoes or self-messages upon which the cognitive processes and self-reflective processes described above were based. They were simple self-messages that were often noted in the words and images that became recurring themes in participants’ stories. They were high-potency self-messages, personal mantras of
effectiveness, self-control, and purpose, which I would argue helped participants to construct self-efficacy in a role where such a construct is challenging. What follows are seven guiding principles that were noted.

1. “Suck It Up”

This guiding principle or self-message was an important element in all participants’ stories. Irene perhaps elucidated the mindset best: “Everybody knows there’s struggle to being a leader, so suck it up.” This basic tenet was echoed by Quinton and Loretta as well. Quinton expressed, “You’ve got to do what you’ve got to do.” Loretta said, “You have to manage it. I know I just have to.” Such phrases, sprinkled as they were throughout the participants’ stories of challenge, ambiguity, and self-reflection, suggested traits such as persistence, determination, and a high degree of self-discipline.

The “suck it up” guiding principle is a powerful message of self-control and also of acceptance of things over which they have little control. As Bandura suggests, self-efficacy involves regulation of thought processes (1997). Irene illustrated another example of self-control when she related the story of the student whom she had overheard saying that she was always grouchy – a story Irene had kept as a personal reminder of her self-message that “no matter what, no matter what’s going on, I’m going to be in the hallways, I’m going to have a smile on my face, and I’m going to say hello to kids.” When asked, participants described themselves as being highly self-disciplined.

Another aspect of self-control that participants exhibited involved setting small goals, alternative courses of action, and personal self-incentives. For instance, Irene rewarded herself with a coffee and a cookie in the cafeteria when she had finished her trolley routine for the day. When he found it impossible to get to every truant student,
Quinton broke the task into smaller goals, such as addressing just grade 9 and 10 students, or just the chronic nonattenders. Such examples align with Bandura’s (1997) suggestion that individuals with a high personal sense of efficacy use such self-regulatory skills when dealing with difficult challenges.

2. “It Is What You Make It”

The guiding principal “it is what you make it” was another recurring theme in participants’ stories, most strongly in Loretta’s. Loretta frequently used phrases to indicate that she was taking ownership of her role and shaping it in ways that worked for her. She used such control words as “I choose that,” “I negotiate that,” and “my rule for that is….” She navigated through much of the ambiguity in the role with the explanation that “it’s about defining your role, and the approach you take.” In this way Loretta demonstrated that while her role may be an ambiguous one, she was going to take some control, set her own rules, and define her role as much as possible. Loretta was very clear on the importance of doing so, arguing that the role is what you make it. She firmly rejected negative views of the vice principalship:

It always seems to be about being a vice principal in order to move on to being a principal. It’s like a stopover kind of thing. And I’ve never seen it that way, and I don’t see it that way because I think it’s what you make of it.

The “it is what you make it” guiding principle, similar to the “suck it up” principle, is perhaps another aspect of self-regulation, and supports Marshall’s (1993) findings that vice principals who are most satisfied with their jobs report that they have established a measure of control over what they do. Marshall suggested that the precise nature of the vice principal role was less important than the chance to have control and
flexibility, which might suggest a construct of self-efficacy that equates control with efficiency.

3. “Number One Mantra”

The phrase “number one mantra,” originally coined by Loretta, was an important guiding principle for all participants. Observing the “number one mantra” meant that when faced with a difficult decision, the vice principal always put the student first. Loretta explained the origin of the mantra for her:

I remember reading in the annual board report two, three years ago. I was studying for my interview, and in the front page [the chairman of the board] wrote her blurb, and she said in that little blurb, probably not even realizing how much of an impact it had on me, that student success needs to be the number one guiding factor in all decision making. And that was it. That was all I needed to hear. So if you are making every single decision on what you believe is the best possible decision for the student at that time, not the school, not the teacher, but the student, then that’s how you approach all those sessions.

This capacity, Quinton referred to as “seeing the big picture” and “having a clear focus.” He explained, “The kids will decide if I’ve done a good job.” Irene’s stories maintained the same guiding principle through the use of such repeated phrases as “It’s all about the kids” and “As long as my heart is in the right place.” The “number one mantra” meant maintaining a higher moral purpose that helped participants navigate ambiguity and provided a kind of moral compass in times of difficult decision making. Loretta explained:
We are here for one reason, and that’s to educate these kids. And you do your best while you have them. And when you don’t have them anymore, you just remember that you did your best.

4. “The Delicate Balance”

The guiding principle “the delicate balance,” a phrase first coined by Quinton, was also an important principle echoed by all participants. It refers to the capacity to maintain a balance of both personal and professional lives and includes such concepts as having one’s priorities in order and having the ability to, as both Quinton and Loretta put it, “pick my battles.” It may not be surprising that such a sense of balance was important to the participants of this study, as they were all fairly new to the profession and had young families at home. It is interesting to note, however, that maintaining a balance was important to participants not just because they wanted to preserve valuable home time but because having the capacity to maintain balance was considered, in and of itself, a valuable life skill and a personal indicator of professional self-efficacy. As Loretta explained:

Who you are as a person and how you look after yourself are really key. If you choose to have good, healthy relationships in your personal life, and you have joy in your life, you’ll get less bogged down. So personal wellness, because of the exposure – you really are in a fishbowl – is really important.

“The delicate balance” guiding principle represents, perhaps, a change from the more traditional definition of professional success, a divergence from the historical Western, nose-to-the-grindstone work ethic and the emergence of a new understanding of the nature of work and play. Such a guiding principle is evidence of a different work
For the participants of this study, self-efficacy was not merely a measure of how many hours are spent on the job. They did not reason that the more hours they spent at work, the more effective they were. In fact, they found such a formula suspect and were more likely to question the toll that excessive work hours were taking on other areas of their lives. Loretta explained:

My rule was two hours of parenting a day. Nobody was going to interfere with that. Sometimes you just have to say no, at the risk of being viewed other than how you would choose to be. Sometimes your priorities are not consistent with others. A new vice principal who wants to do a good job and is very eager would perhaps risk changing their priorities and being inconsistent. And that struggle is going to make you very, very sad.

Hours spent at work were not inherently good but were weighed as a cost factor in the larger formula for a fulfilling life. Participants described professional success as involving the idea of personal choice, life style, and of balance. Quinton elaborated:

I try to live my life to the fullest I think, with everything concerned. My job, my family, my friends. I try to blend it all together. I think life is too short. You have to do the things that you enjoy as often as possible.

As Loretta said:

Because the job, because of all of these little factors, has the potential to strip away your character in some ways. And maybe that’s one of the reason why we see so many leaders change over time, harden, become less tolerant.

The concept of a balance of professional and personal goals agrees with the findings of Edison, whose 1992 study of the vice principalship suggested that personal values were
undergoing change in the early 1990s and that “new value workers” might include other criteria in their definitions of self-efficacy, such as a sense of balance between professional and personal lives (Edison, p. 7).

5. “Choose Your Battles”

A fifth guiding principal, “choose your battles,” was first voiced by Irene but was also referenced by all participants as an important personal reminder when the job became overwhelming. The idea of choosing battles involved the capacity to make quick decisions about how much energy, attention, and/or time to devote to any one particular issue or challenge at any one particular time. This principle is perhaps a further extension of the idea of balance expressed above, but it is a balance that relates strictly to the tasks of the vice principal job. Quinton spoke about the importance of continuously deciding, throughout the course of the day, where his attention was most needed:

You have to look at the job and make sure things are in balance. I have to make sure that I address all concerns, and not necessarily saying, well, this one’s more important, and I’ll get to this one when I can. Everything kind of has to happen at the same time.

Loretta described a particular incident involving a student with an inappropriate tattoo. Loretta described her principal as having drawn her battle lines:

[The principal] is going to the mat on this one. She’s not letting it go. [Some people] are saying that’s discrimination, but it’s not. We’re an educational facility. What are we teaching if we say it’s okay and just ignore it? I’m really behind [the principal] on this one. It’s not right. A tattoo of a naked woman is
offensive. So, all these issues and choices come up, and it’s really neat. All these little lessons.

Loretta’s metaphors of battle and struggle in the above example portrayed her awareness that choosing this particular battle would involve a substantial amount of time, conflict, and personal attachment. Despite this knowledge, she had made her decision to continue based on her firm belief that it was the right thing to do. She chose to involve herself in this battle on moral grounds. In describing the story, however, Loretta did not relinquish her belief that her involvement was her own choice.

6. “Don’t Take This Personally”

Another guiding principle observed as an echo throughout participants’ narratives, most strongly in Quinton’s stories, I dubbed “don’t take this personally.” This self-message allowed participants to distance themselves from issues and is closely related to the principle of the delicate balance described above. By reminding themselves not to take things personally, participants were able to balance their emotional involvement so that they were able to maintain a measured, objective perspective and perhaps a less biased view of their self-efficacy. As Loretta explained, “This job has the potential to strip away your character in some ways. Maybe that’s why we see so many leaders change over time, harden, become less tolerant.” When discussing the challenges of his role, Quinton took just such a personal step back and observed, “I’m starting to believe that that’s somewhat the nature of the beast.”

The principle “don’t take this personally” further involved for participants the ability to forgive themselves and to make room for humour on the job. Loretta said, “Humour just lightens the mood.” As we walked the school halls, Quinton relayed the
story which taught him that room changes were better left posted behind the glass of a
locked classroom door rather than just taped outside in the hallway. One day a student
managed to change a room posting, which resulted in an entire class being erroneously
sent to the cafeteria. Quinton laughed as he recounted this story. “Then we had to round
up the class from the caf’ pretty quickly! And the joke was on me.”

The “don’t take it personally” principle also involved humility. When asked if he
felt intimidated asking questions, Quinton replied, “Never. That’s just who I am. I’m the
first guy to stop and ask for directions [laughing].”

7. “Be Real”

Loretta probed a possible future personal guiding principle which she called
“being real” and which was based on personal reading she was doing at the time:

I have this book called *Credibility*, and that’s one of the things it talks about, is
just being real. You just get a whole lot more respect in the end. From the
naysayers, you’re always going to get criticism. Like, oh there she goes again,
right? But from the people who are real people, who have that central core set of
values about education and what we’re doing. Because there isn’t a single
response to every situation. It has to be assigned individually, and creatively, and
sometimes you can completely miss the mark. I think it’s really important. Not
just for yourself, so you can live with yourself, but if people see that you are
living with yourself, yep, I’ve got to suck that one up, and you move on, and
here’s what we learned, and you really mean it, then you send a message that
you’re not even thinking of.
Participants reported that their guiding principles helped them to stay focused, to stay motivated and energized. Through the use of such personal mantras, participants said that they lessened self-doubt and stress and found ways to navigate through the ambiguities of the vice principal role. Such guiding principles allowed them to forgive themselves and others, to accept their own mistakes, to apologize when they needed to, and to keep their eyes on the bigger picture. The guiding principles gave them the ability to approach their professional role with vigour and with a positive attitude and to accept mistakes they made along the way. In effect, their guiding principles kept them centred and strong. With such self-messages, participants were able to build and maintain a healthy sense of self-efficacy, which allowed them to be highly motivated and highly productive vice principals.

Such discussion relates to the work of Paul T. Begley (2001), whose research interpreted how values and ethics influence school leadership activities. Begley suggested that when school leaders understand how personal values influence the actions of individuals and organizational systems, they acquire administrative sophistication. Begley recommended that authentic school leadership should involve the pursuit of personal sophistication, sensitivity, and reflective practice. The seven guiding principles mentioned above also suggest a possible link to the concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998; Mayer, 2001), a factor which may itself play a role in constructing self-efficacy. Goleman suggests the five elements of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills are more important than IQ in determining outstanding job performance. Goleman argues that a set of specific
competencies including empathy, self-discipline, and initiative distinguish the most successful from those who were merely good enough to keep their jobs.

Without a sturdy set of self-checks, self-regulatory skills, personal sense of purpose, and emotional balance, it may be that vice principals could easily convince themselves that they were not successful. A professional role of such ambiguity and challenge could perhaps have the capacity to defeat individuals with underdeveloped emotional intelligence. While it is beyond the scope of this study to consider the aspects of emotional intelligence and how this might impact the construction of self-efficacy, this may be a useful area of study for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS

This study was inspired by the fact that the education sector, both in Canada and internationally, simply does not appear to know enough about the vice principal’s role (Glanz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). There is a severe lack of attention to the vice principalship in leadership preparation training (Armstrong, 2005; Marshall & Hooley), and a general dearth until recently of academic interest in this central school leadership position. The role suffers from a well-documented lack of consideration (Glanz; Hausman et al., 2002; Weller & Weller) and is perhaps one of the most ambiguous and least understood positions in the field of education (Marshall & Hooley).

If we know little about the vice principal role, we know even less about how vice principals construct self-efficacy and how self-efficacy relates to job satisfaction and effectiveness, motivation, and productivity. This qualitative case study explored how three secondary school vice principals in one northern Ontario school board constructed self-efficacy—what their sources of self-efficacy were, what criteria and personal values they used to measure such sources, what cognitive and reflective processes they used to construct self-efficacy, and the underlying guiding principles that made such constructs possible, particularly in the most challenging aspects of their roles that seemed to often defy any sense of professional effectiveness.

I found that my participants’ sources of self-efficacy generally aligned with Albert Bandura’s (1997) 4 sources of personal efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion/social influence, and physiological/affective states. A fifth source of self-efficacy, moral purpose, was also proposed.
While there were some similarities in how participating secondary school vice principals constructed self-efficacy, there were also marked variations, due perhaps to differences in personality, past experience, and personally established value systems. My study found that while participants used similar cognitive processes in the construction of self-efficacy, such as the identification of successes and failures, the reinterpretation of failure, and self-reflective tendencies, each also employed cognitive processes unique to themselves.

I further identified and discussed seven guiding principles which participants used in constructing self-efficacy, including notions of personal and professional balance, self-regulatory skills, and the ability to self-define their roles. Such findings relate to the work of Begley (2001), who suggests that in the face of challenging leadership issues, leaders pursue personal sophistication as well as sensitivity to others and reflective professional practice. I further suggest that emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998; Mayer, 2001) may play an important role in constructing self-efficacy.

**Importance of the Study**

My study may provide some inroads into understanding the unique criteria and value systems that vice principals use to construct self-efficacy. As such, it adds to the small body of qualitative studies of the vice principalship. Of the research that exists on the role of the vice principal, the majority is quantitative and normative (Marshall & Hooley, 2006) and targets vice principals outside Canada. There are some vice principal studies from England (the deputy head) and Australia (the deputy principal). In the United States, the past decade has seen the publication of several books on the vice principal role (Glanz, 2004; Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall & Hooley) however, there is
very little qualitative research in this area (Marshall & Hooley) and no direct research that addresses vice principal self-efficacy.

My study was intended to offer a deeper comprehension of the vice principal role than can usually be obtained from a quantitative study of what it means to be a secondary school vice principal. A better understanding of how self-efficacy is constructed may lead to a better understanding of how vice principals think, act, find motivation, and make decisions, all of which may lead to greater insight into the vice principal role.

My investigation into the sources of self-efficacy of study participants corroborates Bandura’s (1997) theory of sources of self-efficacy. I found manifestations of each of Bandura’s 4 sources of self-efficacy – mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion/verbal influences and physiological/affective states – in the stories and conversations of study participants. As well, my findings extend Bandura’s theory by suggesting a fifth source of self-efficacy, which I have called moral purpose. The identification of a fifth source of self-efficacy suggests that there is perhaps something about the role of the vice principal which necessitates additional ways to measure oneself, ways of measuring which encompass a sense of moral responsibility. It may be further speculated that moral purpose might be a source of self-efficacy for other occupations involving service to others.

As well, studying vice principal self-efficacy may be one important window into understanding the ambiguity, complexity, and unique challenges of the vice principalship. In this way, this and future studies of vice principal self-efficacy may perhaps help educational leaders and policymakers build better support systems for vice principals and better vice principal training strategies. Marshall and Hooley (2006) argue
that we can make a leap forward in school improvement by recognizing “the personal and emotional aspects of administrators’ lives” (p. 110).

Tapping into the emotional dimensions of the daily work and the original career motivations of the assistant principal is a great place to start rethinking the structure of their roles and, on a larger scale, the kinds of leadership we want in schools. (p. 110)

My study may also contribute to greater attention to the relationship between job satisfaction and self-efficacy in early training and mentoring, as well as support the need for a more specifically defined role for the vice principal. The understandings this study aimed to achieve may also provide relevant reflective concepts for individuals considering entering the role.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

As was outlined in my literature review, studies on vice principal job satisfaction are not conclusive. Drake’s (1995) study, based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, found 66% of vice principals reported a deficiency in higher order needs such as esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization. Participants in this study said they felt they had only partial control of their work environment and that more leadership opportunities, for instance, would improve things. What is satisfying or not is in part determined by whether the vice principal is upwardly mobile, or a career vice principal (Marshall, 2006). On the other hand, Edison (1992) found no difference in levels of satisfaction between career and upwardly-mobile vice principals. Clearly, there is a need to better understand aspects of the job that provide satisfaction and which allow vice principals to feel effective and in control of their environments.
A better sense of how vice principals construct self-efficacy may lead to happier vice principals who are more confident, more productive, and better motivated. Understanding self-efficacy may aid educational policymakers in helping vice principals to be more productive and effective in their roles. Self-efficacy affects how one thinks, how one acts, how motivated one is, and the decisions one makes. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set higher goals (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). As Bandura (1997) reported, workers with high self-efficacy are more likely to perform occupational roles innovatively, whereas those with low self-efficacy are likely to perform occupational roles more conventionally and with less creativity. Participants in my study rated their self-efficacy as high, and described themselves as productive, particularly when it came to problem solving. Irene spoke at length of assessing situations and making effective plans of action. Participants said that they were more likely to be productive if they felt confident and that confidence improved their performance and productivity.

Self-efficacy also affects an individual’s ability to cope with stress (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995), and has also been related to physical health problems of employees (Pajares, 1998). “Those with a low sense of self-efficacy suffer anxiety, health problems, and health-impairing habits such as heavy drinking and sleep disturbances” (Bandura, p. 464). Participants in my study described the negative effects of stress, involving such things as lack of sleep, stomach aches, and low level anxiety. They were more prone to rate their self-efficacy lower, and experienced more stress, when tackling the most challenging aspects of their role, such as dealing with conflict. Participants also identified positive effects of low level stress, such as an increase in creative energy and heightened anticipation. Wynott’s (2005) study, mentioned in the literature review, is
one of few studies investigating the effects of stress on the vice principal. Vice principals report that on the whole their job affects them more than any job they have ever had (Hartzell, 1995). A deeper understanding of vice principal self-efficacy and the effects of stress may allow educational policymakers to better understand the emotional impact of the role and how to better support vice principals in their role.

As well, a deeper understanding of self-efficacy could also enhance training and preparation programs for aspiring vice principals. If we have a better sense of what vice principals are up against, where they find satisfaction, and how they measure themselves, we will be better able to prepare aspiring and newly appointed vice principals for the challenges they will face in the role. Bandura suggests that “tailoring training strategies to employees’ perceived efficacy facilitates acquisition of occupational competencies. It also alleviates anxiety in newcomers over the ambiguities and uncertainties of organizational life” (p. 446). Taking self-efficacy into account may lead to improved training programs which are more relevant to the needs of aspiring vice principals, which might in turn lead to more effective vice principals. Thus, considering vice principal self-efficacy could lead to improved professional practice.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of This Study**

All research has inherent limitations and qualitative research is no exception. This study provides a depth of authenticity to the individual cases studied (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) rather than wide-reaching conclusions on vice principals’ conceptions of self-efficacy in general. In this study, I did not set out to identify broad generalizations regarding vice principal conceptions of self-efficacy but rather to shed light on the quietly held beliefs and perhaps not always self-evident truths that direct the
work lives and concepts of self-efficacy of three particular vice principals as they went about the business of getting things done. Whether other vice principals see a reflection of their own perspectives and beliefs in these case studies is beyond the scope of this study and rests ultimately with others to determine (Merriam; Patton; Seidman, 2006). The experience of being a vice principal, perhaps more than any other school leadership role, is a highly subjective and personal one, requiring innumerable personal decisions through role-inherent ambiguity which, at least in part, would seem to defy broad generalities and conclusions.

Suggestions for Further Study

This study raises some intriguing questions for further study in several fields. Some such questions are suggested below.

Is there a relationship between self-efficacy and emotional intelligence? How might this be construed? The guiding principles which I have identified suggest that in constructing self-efficacy the participants in my study made use of aspects of self-knowledge, such as self-regulation skills, which are often associated with discussions of emotional intelligence.

Does leadership style affect the construction of self-efficacy? Do inherent personality traits and experience affect the construction of self-efficacy? My study identified that participants had slightly different measuring sticks when considering what makes the most effective vice principal. Loretta placed more importance on team skills, Quinton placed more importance on impacting teaching practice, and Irene on being on top of things. It is possible that such differences affected how they constructed self-efficacy, though this was beyond the reach of my present study. It was also beyond the
reach of this study to speculate on how much effect past experience and personality traits affect self-efficacy.

How do vice principals’ conceptions of self-efficacy affect their job satisfaction, motivation, and performance? While it is clear that higher self-efficacy generally suggests higher job satisfaction and increased motivation, there is room for more study in this area.

How can educational leaders make use of self-efficacy in training and preparation sessions for would-be vice principals? While this study suggests that consideration of self-efficacy might be an important aspect of training models, more study is needed to determine how self-efficacy could be best incorporated into vice principal training programs.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Preliminary Survey Questions

1. Complete the ranking exercise (reproduced in Appendix B)

2. How do you define and describe the vice principal role?

3. What do you believe makes an effective vice principal?

4. a) How would you rate your job satisfaction?
   
   b) What factors do you see as influencing job satisfaction?

5. a) How do you know when you are doing a good job?
   
   b) How do you define self-efficacy?
Appendix B

Glanz’s Ranking Exercise
(based on Glanz, 2004, p. xii)

1. Rank the following duties in terms of what you think vice principals actually do in schools (#1 to the duty you think vice principals do most frequently, #2 for the next most frequent duty, etc.).

2. Rank them, in your view, in terms of the degree of importance (i.e., #1 to the duty vice principals should be engaged in, #2 to the next most important duty, etc)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duties</th>
<th>1. What Vice Principals Actually Do (from most frequent to least frequent)</th>
<th>2. What Vice Principals Should Do (from most important to least important)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Assemblies</td>
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<td>2 Teacher training</td>
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<td>3 Ordering textbooks</td>
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<td>4 Teacher evaluation</td>
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<td>5 Scheduling supply teachers</td>
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<td>6 Public relations</td>
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<td>7 Articulation (duties to prepare for graduation)</td>
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<td>8 Staff development (in-service)</td>
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<td>9 Student attendance</td>
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<td>11 Instructional media services</td>
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<td>12 Counseling students</td>
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<td>13 School clubs, etc.</td>
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<td>14 Assisting School Council</td>
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<td>15 Formulating goals</td>
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<td>16 School budgeting</td>
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<td>17 Staff meetings</td>
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<td>18 Student discipline</td>
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<td>19 Instructional leadership</td>
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<td>20 Administrative duties</td>
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<td>21 Curriculum development</td>
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<td>22 Innovations and research</td>
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<td>23 Parental meetings</td>
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<td>24 Teacher selection/hiring</td>
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<td>25 Lunch duty</td>
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Appendix C

The Ideal Vice Principal Survey

*Top Five Ideal Vice Principal Qualities*

From the 13 qualities of the ideal vice principal below, please pick what you consider to be the top five. (You may believe they are all important, or that some are equally important, but for this exercise you have to pick just five and put them in order of importance.)

Thank you!

1. _______________________________________

2. _______________________________________

3. _______________________________________

4. _______________________________________

5. _______________________________________

Co-creates effective working relationship with principal
Influences teacher practice
Good counseling skills
Practices leadership
Highly visible in school
Highly involved with students
Good at conflict resolution
Keeps school running smoothly
Sets goals for school improvement
Well organized
Good communicator
Empathic
Able to be both a team player and a supervisor