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Principal supervisor professional learning in a community of practice.

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PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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DEDICATION

To my incomprehensibly supportive husband, Mark

You never bat an eye when I tell you about my big ideas and even bigger dreams, even when you know that my work and my passions often take away from our precious family. I hope that I can repay your generosity and understanding someday soon.

To my children, Neil and Tessa, my life's greatest blessings

You are about to have more of my time and attention than you could ever want, and I cannot wait! Thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders and my reason for wanting to contribute to this world in some small way.

To my fellow educators who have found their calling in making a difference in the lives of young people

Keep the fire alive, keep striving to change the world, and keep finding new and better ways to make things better for our students. Find the urgency in this work; our students are too important for us not to fight for them.

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ABSTRACT

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN
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Principal supervisor professional learning is an area of educational professionalism that is under-researched and under-developed (Casserly et al., 2013). Because K-12 students deserve to have the best leaders possible impacting their school experience, K-12 principal supervisors need professional learning that strengthens their ability to coach and evaluate K-12 principals (Waters & Marzano, 2006). This study utilized a principal supervisor community of practice as a form of role-specific professional learning. Semi-structured interviews occurring before and after four community of practice convenings along with transcripts from the convenings were used to answer questions that explored principal supervisors' characterization of a community of practice, themes that emerged from a principal supervisor community of practice, and principal supervisors' perception of the effect of a community of practice on their work. Using descriptive coding and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), the study found that a community of practice is a practical and appropriate form of role-specific professional learning for principal supervisors. The study also produced recommendations for school districts seeking to improve principal supervisor professional learning and for individuals or groups organizing communities of practice.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Even the smallest school district in America has at least one employee who evaluates the principal of each school. This person serves as a principal supervisor, an important but often overlooked role in the education community. While the role of principal receives significant professional attention through research, organizations, and role specific publications, the role of principal supervisor receives far less attention. Despite being a consistent position in every school district, the roles and responsibilities of a principal supervisor are outlined in varying and inconsistent ways across K-12 districts with differences in the number of principals that principal supervisors supervise, the title of the role, and the expected tasks of the principal supervisor (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2015). This unexplored but highly prevalent position is uniquely positioned to strengthen the support and growth of principals for the benefit of students at all K-12 schools.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the prevalence of the principal supervisor position in the K-12 education system, districts do not have a consistent understanding or definition of the role of principal supervisor (Casserly et al., 2013; CCSSO, 2015; National Institute for Excellence in Teaching [NIET], 2021). Therefore, increased understanding

around the role of principal supervisors and best practices for the role are significant needs in the research field. In 2012, the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) surveyed professionals who fit the role of principal supervisor in 2010 and again in 2012 to determine any changes in their professional experiences over the course of two years (Casserly et al., 2013). The participants indicated growth in several areas, but they continued to indicate a need for role-specific professional learning (Casserly et al., 2013). In turn, the need exists to establish best practices for principal supervisor role-specific professional learning.

Purpose of the Study

This research study explored the role of principal supervisor and how the individuals in the role can be supported in their ability to meet the expectations of their role through role-specific professional development. My interest in this professional role comes from personal experience. For five years, I have been a principal supervisor to 19 principals with an indirect impact on just under 20,000 public school students. When promoted to the role of principal supervisor, much of my anticipated professional performance was based on my previous success as a principal. Perhaps as a result, while I have engaged in numerous professional learning experiences through my district and externally, I have received very little professional training that is specific to coaching and supporting the leadership work of principals. This study explored principal supervisor professional development and contributed to the research field around the principal supervisor role and role-specific professional development. The study established a community of practice (CoP) with principal supervisors as a format for role-specific

professional learning and explored the influence of the community of practice on principal supervisors as a form of professional development.

Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?

Research Question 2: What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?

Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Efficacy

This study was practitioner participatory action research that explored the principal supervisors' experience in a CoP. One lens for exploring the principal supervisors' perception of the experience was to think about the changes in efficacy throughout the CoP. Efficacy is an individual's belief in how much or how little impact they have on their environment, including the people around them (Bandura, 1988; Bandura, 1993; Wood & Bandura, 1989). This is an important concept to explore for principal supervisors because their work is primarily to impact and influence the principals who are supervising K-12 schools. Without a strong sense of professional efficacy, principal supervisors are less likely to take on challenging tasks and engage deeply in the work of supervision (Bandura, 1988; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Practitioner Participatory Action Research

This practitioner participatory action research study was based in the methodological framework of action research. By taking on a framework and mentality

of action research, the study design honored the intersection of theory and practice and valued the contributions of each participant to the extent that the lines of researcher and participant blurred for all those involved (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). This particular action research approach fits into two additional subcategories: practitioner and participatory. These two subcategories acknowledge that the research participants, including the initiating researcher, were practitioners in the area of study. In other words, all participants were currently principal supervisors. Additionally, the dynamic of the action research was participatory with the goal of all participants engaging in research decisions, participating in the action, and establishing the outcomes.

Community of Practice

The selected methodology to engage principal supervisors in professional learning was a CoP. A CoP represents a group of people working together around a shared enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The CoP is an appropriate methodology for this study because the participants shared a common goal and a common role. In addition, this methodology values learning as a social experience as supported by socially situated theory in that participants gathered in a group and engaged in learning together (Conole et al., 2011).

Definition of Terms

Action Research: A research methodology that starts with a problematic social phenomenon that has been identified by a community or group of people and seeks to address that problem in concert with the community most affected by the problem

(Coenen & Khonraad, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Wicks et al., 2008)

Community of Practice: "A socially situated theory of learning where learning is seen as social participation and consists of four aspects: learning as community, learning as identity, learning as meaning, and learning as practice" (Conole et al., 2011, p. 123)

Efficacy: The extent to which a person believes that they can impact and influence their environment (Bandura, 1988; Bandura, 1993; Wood & Bandura, 1989)

Participatory Action Research: Research that includes participation of action by the researcher and the community affected by the research (Wadsworth, 1998)

Practitioner Action Research: Research in which a practitioner asks a question which leads to some kind of reflection and possibly action; an individual or collaborative process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Wadsworth, 1998)

Principal: A district employee who oversees "all school operations, including daily school activities," including supervising the work of teachers, managing the use of facilities, and serving students, families, and other stakeholders (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

Principal Supervisor: A person who is serving as an evaluator of one or more school principals (New Leaders, 2019)

Professional Learning: Learning that a person engages in either by choice or by requirement that directly applies to the person's professional work

Social Cognitive Theory: A social learning theory that explores how individuals seek to control and influence their environment (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021)

Organization of the Study

This study began with a general outline of the CoP plan in the form of draft agendas. However, a key element of participatory action research is that the participants are invited into the decision-making within the study (Alvarez & Guiterrez, 2001; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Wadsworth, 1998). Therefore, the plan served only as a starting point for conversation and shared decision-making within the CoP. Participants had multiple opportunities to reflect on the experience throughout the process and participate in the sense-making of the study. At the completion of the study, any additional analysis was shared with the participants for comment, feedback, other perspectives, and revision.

Procedures/Methodology

Six participants were identified through snowball and convenience sampling as they were solicited by word of mouth and recommendations. All participants agreed to participate based on their willingness and availability. A challenge of the study was in identifying principal supervisors who were willing to commit to participation in a CoP for six one-hour convenings over the course of two months, occurring every other week. Participants were required to be active principal supervisors and have a desire to improve in their role as principal supervisors. All aspects of the study were virtual with each person participating in an opening interview to review the informed consent document, understand the format, and begin thinking about the first CoP convening. Each CoP convening was recorded and included a time for individual and group reflection at each session. In addition, there was a time to set the next agenda at the end of each meeting.

This was also the time for the group to make decisions about the direction of the CoP. The first meeting was a one-hour pre-convening to get to know each other and attend to the focus of the study. The sixth meeting was a one-hour post-convening to provide time for reflection and feedback on the experience. If a participant was not able to attend the pre-convening, I spoke with the participant to ensure that they were fully aware of the study and the CoP, including the Institutional Review Board (IRB) components. If a participant was not able to attend the post-convening, I set up an individual meeting to gather feedback about the experience and engage that participant in identifying themes for data analysis.

Qualitative data included recordings of the convenings, artifacts that organically developed during the CoP convenings, parallel researcher notes, summaries of CoP convenings, individual participant reflections, and other documented communication among participants throughout the study used to draw out themes of professional development.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study primarily revolved around the involvement of the participants. Principal supervisors are busy professionals with many competing commitments. Even if a participant was fully committed to the study, three participants were required to miss one or more of our CoP convenings due to work commitments. An additional limitation was the level of engagement by participants. The study was dependent on participant engagement through agenda setting, facilitating, sharing, and reflection. Participants' comfort levels, willingness, or energy available to dedicate to the CoP was occasionally limited. I communicated the time commitment and specific dates

with the participants at the beginning of the study to increase the likelihood that their schedules would be able to accommodate the convenings.

Another limitation of the study, which may also be seen as an advantage, was the flexible nature of the direction that the CoP took. While I proposed a sample beginning agenda template, the participants contributed to how time in the CoP was used.

Summary

This practitioner participatory action research study contributed to current and usable research on how to support and strengthen principal supervisors. The study included a focus on opportunities for people to learn together as explained by social cognitive theory and supported by a CoP. In addition, the unique approach of practitioner participatory action allowed for an interesting exploration of the action research experience for all participants. Chapter Two begins with a comprehensive discussion of the principal supervisor role and the progression of research around that role. Then I outline the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory and the methodological framework of action research. These frameworks capture the approach to the study rather than the actual methodology. Lastly, I share the origin of the CoP methodology, the typical phases of a CoP, and how a CoP is situated among research on professional development.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2018, there were 98,469 public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). American schools are typically led by principals, and those principals have supervisors who come with many different titles and with many different roles (Casserly et al., 2013; CCSSO, 2015; NIET, 2021). The role of principal has a significant, indirect positive effect on student learning (Grissom et al., 2018; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), and the decisions and actions of a principal influence the learning environment which leads to student achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In fact, "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 28). The educational field focused less on the principal supervisors who coach, evaluate, monitor, and support principals than the principal role on its own. Therefore, there is limited evidence of the specific impact of principal supervisors on K-12 achievement. However, "districts generally do not see districtwide improvements in teaching and learning without substantial engagement by their central offices in helping all schools build their capacity for improvement" (Honig et al., 2010, p. iii).

The unexplored principal supervisor role holds significant importance in the improvement of K-12 education as the principal supervisor provides feedback to the principal regarding the principal's performance as well as any number of other ways of coaching and supporting the principals in their professional growth. The actions and decisions of a principal supervisor who is focused on identifying goals, developing plans, and providing resources that support student achievement has a statistically significant impact on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). In addition, the amount and perceived quality of feedback and coaching from principal supervisors to principals has a statistically significant effect on how teachers perceive their principals (Bickman et al., 2012). Principals who receive quality feedback and coaching from their supervisors are more positively perceived by their teachers, suggesting a correlation between quality feedback and coaching and principal performance. This practitioner participatory action research study placed a spotlight on the important role of principal supervisor and examined the experience of participating in a CoP. Examining how one type of role-specific professional development influences principal supervisors increased understanding around the principal supervisor role and provided ways to support principal supervisors in their professional learning.

Chapter 2 first outlines the research related to the role of principal supervisor with a specific focus on the professional needs of principal supervisors. Then the chapter details research for three key conceptual and methodological frameworks--social cognitive theory, action research, and communities of practice--starting at the theoretical level, moving into a more detailed aspect of each framework, and ending with research that supports a connection to the study of the principal supervisor role. The research

establishes the importance of studying principal supervisors and their professional learning through a CoP in a practitioner participatory action research study.

Principal Supervisors

The principal supervisor role is a central office position that is defined by and filled by a district's central office staff. All aspects of the role of principal supervisor vary across American K-12 districts; the title of the role, the person to whom the principal supervisor reports, the job description of the principal supervisor, the evaluation components, the required prerequisites, the number of principals supervised, and the specific job tasks all vary from district to district (Casserly et al., 2013; Cochran et al., 2020). In addition, a person serving as a principal supervisor may hold additional roles in a district up to and including superintendent of schools (NIET, 2021). However, the minimum definition of a principal supervisor is a district administrator who is responsible for evaluating and managing one or more school principals (NIET, 2021; New Leaders, 2019).

Research on the Principal Supervisor Role

Within the last ten years, the educational field has begun extracting the principal supervisor role from the broader collection of central office staff to explore the nuances of the role and how to better identify, support, and strengthen principal supervisors. In 2010, Vitcov and Bloom, a superintendent and a consultant, published a short article in *School Administrator* calling for a revisioning of the principal supervisor role, claiming that in their work with dozens of school districts across the country, none of the districts were satisfied with their work with principal supervision but all considered it to be an important area of focus. Keeping in mind that principal supervisors in a district often

have multiple roles as far reaching as director of instruction or even superintendent, Vitcov and Bloom (2010) provided recommendations for improving the work of principal supervisors including redefining the role to primarily focus on supervising principals without the addition of numerous other roles and responsibilities, holding principal supervisors accountable for supervision of principals, intentionally training principal supervisors on effective supervision of principals, and encouraging a collaborative coaching relationship between principal supervisors and principals. Also in 2010, a research study with three urban school districts found that central office administrators who worked with principals in specific ways were reported by the principals and other central office staff as being a support for principals in their development as instructional leaders (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2010). These specific impactful approaches were joint work, differentiation, modeling, developing and using tools, and brokering resources and support on the behalf of principals and schools (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2010). The converse was true for central office staff who did not practice these same skills (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2010).

In 2012, the CGCS, funded by a grant from the Wallace Foundation, sent surveys to 67 superintendents of its member public school districts asking the superintendents to forward the survey to their staff members who they identified as principal supervisors and asked numerous questions about the role and about how the role had changed from 2010 to 2012 (Casserly et al., 2013). The survey had 135 individual responses from 41 districts, providing the first glimpse into the role of principal supervisor in America's K-12 public schools (Casserly et al., 2013). The survey revealed that as the principal role was transitioning from an operational leader focused on the day-to-day logistics of a

school to an instructional leader focused on long-term teaching and learning goals, districts were asking principal supervisors to provide instructional support to principals in addition to the traditional administrative and operational support (Casserly et al., 2013). This change in role requires a dramatic shift in how principal supervisors interact with schools and orient themselves between schools and the central office. Unfortunately, less than a decade earlier, research indicated that most mid-level central office leaders had an authoritative approach in which they passed down their expertise to schools rather than a collaborative orientation in which they served as brokers between schools and central office to create a bi-directional flow of learning and informing (Burch & Spillane, 2004). The move from a focus on operations to a focus on instruction and school improvement defined by student outcomes requires principal supervisors to incorporate elements of coaching and dialogue over an authoritative orientation that historically defined the role (Burch & Spillane, 2004).

From the survey along with additional site visits, the CGCS identified nine recommendations for districts to strengthen the principal supervisor role and the overall effectiveness of principal support:

1. Define and clearly communicate throughout the organization the role and required competencies of principal supervisors.
2. Narrow principal supervisor responsibilities and spans of control.
3. Strategically select and deploy principal supervisors, matching skills and expertise to the needs of schools.
4. Provide principal supervisors with the professional development and training they need to assume new instructional leadership roles.

5. Establish information-sharing policies or procedures to ensure clear lines of communication and collaboration between principal supervisors and central office staff.
6. Provide early and sustained support to new principals in the form of coaches.
7. Hold principals—and principal supervisors—accountable for the progress of their schools, and ensure alignment in the processes and measures used to assess teacher, principal, and principal supervisor performance.
8. Provide clear, timely, and actionable evaluation data to principals.
9. Commit district resources and engage external partners in the process of developing future school and district leaders. (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49)

Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards 2015

In 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers with the support of The Wallace Foundation released a new set of standards specifically for supervisors of school principals. The *Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards 2015* (MPSPS) released by CCSSO were primarily informed by the standards created by the University of Washington's District Leadership Design Lab and are strongly aimed at utilizing principal supervisors to support principals in growing as instructional leaders rather than functioning solely as operational leaders of K-12 schools (CCSSO, 2015). Prior to the release of the MPSPS, the University of Washington College of Education (UWCE) (2015) released a website article titled *New Principal Supervisor Standards Promise to Boost Principal Success*. The article claims that the standards created by the University of Washington's District Leadership Design Lab will "help districts understand and use the emerging research based on principal supervision and to help improve how districts

support the success of their school principals" (UWCE, 2015, para 3). Other than publications for the Wallace Foundation, a contributor to the MPSPS, there has been very little critique of or acclaim for the principal supervisor standards, making it difficult to evaluate the standards as a tool for principal supervisor professional development.

The MPSPS Standards 2015 are designed to guide supervisors of principals who are working toward meeting the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015 (CCSSO, 2015). However, the MPSPS do not clearly align to or address all the PSEL Standards. For example, the MPSPS do not address ethics and professional norms (PSEL Standard 2) other than to describe ethics as a disposition that is woven through the principal supervisor standards (CCSSO, 2015; National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). Additionally, families and communities (PSEL Standard 8) are not mentioned in the MPSPS or in the accompanying materials (CCSSO, 2015; NPBEA, 2015). Most notable is the absence of reference to PSEL Standard 9: Operations and Management which includes staffing, scheduling, budgeting, purchasing of resources, integrating technology, and complying with local, state, and federal laws (NPBEA, 2015). By not including a reference to operations and management, the MPSPS communicated a hard shift away from the comprehensive role of the principal supervisor that may have skewed toward operational leadership to a laser-like, exclusive focus on instructional leadership.

Equity in Principal Supervisor Standards

In reflection of added language around equity in leadership from the PSEL Standards, the MPSPS Standards (CCSSO, 2015) includes Standard 3: "Principal Supervisors use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary

improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students" (CCSSO, p. 8) and Standard 6: "Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student" (CCSSO, p. 8).

Well before the establishment of the MPSPS, the need for establishing equity as a key priority in professional standards and eliminating inequitable values in principal preparation was raised by professionals in the field. In his critique of the 1996 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) principal standards, Anderson (2001) highlights sample questions and answers in the *School Leaders Licensure Assessment: 1999-2000 Registration Bulletin* based on the ISLLC Standards 1996 and published by Educational Testing Service (ETS) that directly undermine any focus on diversity and equity. For example, an answer that received a perfect score suggests that a parent should hire a tutor to assist the student in being more successful in school (p. 207). Anderson (2001) points out that "apparently the inability to understand that most poor parents cannot afford to hire a tutor is not viewed as problematic" by the ETS (p. 207). Another example is in a sample answer that is said to represent community relations by valuing the public relations aspect over the democratic process of including stakeholders in decision making with points being awarded in full to answers that "largely glossed over issues of class and race, seeing the new population as largely an annoying inconvenience with the potential to create conflict" (pp. 209-210).

The PSEL Standards 2015 received initial criticism from educators who contributed feedback in the draft phase when they realized that "three standards that

separately addressed ethical principles and professional norms, equity and cultural responsiveness, and curriculum and assessment" were removed (Superville, 2015). Beverly Hutton, a leader in the National Association of Secondary School Principals, "said she was disappointed to find the sections on ethics and the 'bold language' specifically addressing gender, race and the special status of students had been excised in the new version" (Superville, 2015). However, in the final version released by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) in October 2015, the two standards around ethics and professional norms, equity and cultural responsiveness were added back in, and curriculum and assessment were included in Standard 4 with instruction (NPBEA, p. v). The inclusion of these standards accounts for 11 of the 17 references to equity and diversity in the PSEL Standards (Appendix A). Without these standards, the new PSEL standards would have only been moderately more concerned with equity and the responsibility of the school leader to address the needs of traditionally marginalized students than the previous version of the standards.

The MPSPS Standards 2015 are designed to guide supervisors of principals who are working toward meeting the PSEL Standards 2015. Therefore, the aspects of equity identified in the PSEL Standards are foundational but are not explicitly stated in the MPSPS 2015. For example, Standards 1, 2, and 4 specifically address supporting principals in their growth as instructional leaders through dedicated time, professional learning strategies, and the evaluation process (CCSSO, 2015, p. 8). This reference to instructional leaders incorporates the PSEL standards including the 17 references to equity as described previously (Appendix A). Standard 6, states that "Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they

engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 8). In addition, the MPSPS includes required dispositions, one of which is equity-minded: "transformational education leaders ensure that all students are treated fairly, equitably, and have access to excellent teachers and necessary resources" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 9). In the detailed outline of each standard, the MPSPS identify actions that principal supervisors will do. The MPSPS includes 8 actions related to supporting traditionally marginalized students:

- Model culturally responsive best practices and effective leadership behaviors such as self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior.
- Examine school-level goals and strategies to promote equity for students and ensure alignment with district vision, policies, and strategies.
- Ensure that each student is treated fairly and equitably and has physical access to the learning environment and academic access to excellent teachers.
- Ensure that teachers and staff are treated fairly and equitably and have physical access to a positive and collaborative work environment.
- Ensure that the school community has access to the full range of integrated services to meet the diverse cultural and learning needs of each student.
- Exhibit cultural competency in interaction and decision-making with principal and community.
- Protect students' equitable access to social capital within the school and to high-quality instructional practices.
- Monitor schools as affirming and inclusive places (CCSSO, 2015, pp 16-20).

While the inclusion of equity considerations and cultural competency in the standards is a powerful step toward supporting all students, especially those students who are traditionally marginalized, until the MPSPS are more widely adopted and utilized, their focus on equity does not have an impact on students.

Principal Supervisor Initiative

In 2014, the Wallace Foundation continued its focus on the principal supervisor role by starting a four-year Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI) that identified five core components that are tightly aligned with the first six recommendations identified by the CGCS (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi):

Table 1

Core Components of PSI Aligned with CGCS Recommendations

Core Components of PSI	CGCS Recommendation Alignment
"Revising the principal supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi)	1. "Define and clearly communicate throughout the organization the role and required competencies of principal supervisors" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49).
"Reducing principal supervisors' span of control (the number of principals they oversee) and changing how supervisors are assigned to principals" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi)	2. "Narrow principal supervisor responsibilities and spans of control" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49). 3. "Strategically select and deploy principal supervisors, matching skills and expertise to the needs of schools" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49).
"Training supervisors and developing their capacity to support principals" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi)	4. "Provide principal supervisors with the professional development and training they need to assume new instructional leadership roles" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49).

"Strengthening central office structures to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor's role" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi)	5. "Establish information-sharing policies or procedures to ensure clear lines of communication and collaboration between principal supervisors and central office staff" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49).
"Developing systems to identify and train new supervisors (succession planning)" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. xi)	6. "Provide early and sustained support to new principals in the form of coaches" (Corcoran, 2013, p. 49).

While the PSI started prior to the release of the MPSPS, the findings of the four-year project were not reported until 2020. Of the six participating districts, all six successfully shifted the principal supervisor role to be primarily about supporting and guiding schools and principals (Goldring, Clark, et al., 2020). The initiative found an improvement in principals' perceptions of their supervisors and a change in the expectations that they had around work with their supervisor (Goldring, Clark, et al., 2020). The districts involved in the initiative aligned their new job descriptions to the MPSPS which funneled principal supervisor work almost entirely toward supporting the instructional leadership aspect of the principal role. As a result, the principal supervisors spent less time supporting principals on operational tasks. The study found that when supervisors did not attend to their principals' operational needs the "operational challenges tended to worsen and ultimately distract from instructional leadership" (Goldring et al., 2018 p. 35). The tension between instructional and operational leadership in the recommendations of the PSI, the MPSPS, and the PSEL is a tangible manifestation of the newness of principal supervisor research in that there is no data that directly links specific principal

supervisory approaches to increases in student achievement (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring, Clark, et al., 2020).

Changes in Principal Supervision 2013 to 2018

In 2018, the CGCS administered a survey similar to their 2013 survey to professionals identified by their superintendents as principal supervisors (Cochran et al., 2020). The survey results indicated that districts had made significant strides in bringing consistency to the principal supervisor role within their districts by defining the role and decreasing the number of principals per supervisor from an average of 24 to 12 (Cochran et al., 2020). Principal supervisors reported that they were spending more time in schools and in classrooms with an increase in time spent working with principals on instruction and data, providing feedback, and modeling coaching and less time on operational activities than in previous years (Cochran et al., 2020). The survey indicated that the professional development of principal supervisors still needed improvement as "59% of respondents indicated that 'None' or only 'Some' of the training was tailored solely for principal supervisors" (Cochran et al., 2020, p. 13). The CGCS confirms that during site visits in 2012 and 2013 professional development "was largely ad hoc in nature, and was not part of a systematic, sustained program of professional learning focused on growing supervisors' expertise in curriculum and instruction" (Cochran et al., 2020, p. 13). It is this area of need for principal supervisors that served as the focus for this practitioner participatory action research study.

Principal Supervisor Professional Development

The call for increased attention to principal supervisor professional development and acknowledgement of its need is present in nearly every significant study on or review

of the principal supervisor role since 2010. Honig et al. (2010) identified that professional development for Instructional Leadership Directors that "provided them with regular opportunities for challenging conversations about the quality of their work with school principals and how to improve it" led to the Instructional Leadership Directors that were serving in the role of principal supervisor increasing the time spent working with their principals (p. 20). Corcoran (2013) stated that for principal supervisors to make the shift from managerial leadership to instructional leadership, the principal supervisors need professional development and training that directly supports that shift. The Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (MPSPS) acknowledge that even though "most principal supervisors are former principals who understand the complexities of the job, they aren't necessarily prepared to advise and guide principals" and that coaching a principal requires different skills than serving in a principal position (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2). Saltzman (2017) agrees by acknowledging that most principal supervisors have not had "specific training in how to do the job effectively" (p. 55). Therefore, the MPSPS stresses that principal supervisors need ongoing professional learning opportunities that address their role in the supervision process and overall support the development of their principal supervisor practice (CCSSO, 2015). Standard 7 of the MPSPS recommends that "Principal Supervisors engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 9). New Leaders (2019) goes on to declare that state level education departments should provide financial support or at a minimum encourage districts to support role specific professional learning for principal supervisors. Despite overwhelming agreement in the educational field in support of principal supervisor role-specific professional development, the

research on the types and effectiveness of principal supervisor professional development is limited.

Types of Principal Supervisor Professional Development

In the 2012 CGCS survey, 60% of principal supervisors reported that they received professional development in the areas of data analysis, classroom observation/looking at student learning and work, the shift in content areas presented by the Common Core Standards, data informed decision making in the classroom, and principal evaluations (Casserly et al., 2013). In the 2018 follow-up survey, 68% of principal supervisors reported participating in district professional development with 9% indicating that none of the professional development was designed specifically for principal supervisors and 41% reporting that most or all was designed for their role group (Cochran et al., 2020). In reflecting on the district-sponsored training or professional development, 77% of respondents communicated that professional development "was geared toward implementing district initiatives and programs," and 33% indicated that the professional development emphasized "skills for coaching principals" (Cochran et al., 2020, p. 16). While 52% of principal supervisors indicated that they discuss issues of equity in meetings with principals, the survey did not provide data on district-sponsored training or professional development that addressed equity (Cochran et al., 2020). An anecdotal review of the 2012 survey found that principal supervisor professional development that appears to be most supportive "focused on the instructional needs and goals of supervisors and principals," occurred over multiple sessions, was differentiated for individuals and schools, and was assessed on their impact on student learning (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 53). Lastly, the PSI in 2014 successfully increased consistency

among principal supervisors by providing professional development to principal supervisors on "classroom walk-throughs, feedback, coaching, facilitating principal learning communities, and principal evaluation" (Goldring, Rogers, et al., 2020, p. 28). Principal supervisors reported that job-embedded professional development that included personalized coaching and on-site calibration observations with other principal supervisors were valuable (Goldring et al., 2018).

Importance of Principal Supervisor Professional Development

The research only tells us what types of professional development principal supervisors are receiving with little evidence of the extended impact on school principals. However, leaders in K-12 research and education agree that the role of principal supervisor has the potential to positively impact the effectiveness of school principals, leading to an indirect but important impact on student learning and well-being. The professional development of principal supervisors is an important area to explore because it is the area that has shown the least improvement during the decade of attention on principal supervisors despite declarations from researchers and practitioners for making professional development a priority (Cochran et al., 2020). With the topic and importance of my study explained, in the next section, I will attend to the theoretical aspects of my research questions.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks for Research

Principal supervisors are among the highest-ranking district officials in public school districts. Their sphere of influence includes all principals in their district, all teachers in their district, and all students in their district. Additionally, they are either in close contact with the individuals who are making high level decisions or are themselves

the individuals who are making the decisions. To address a documented need for increased principal supervisor professional learning (Cochran et al., 2020), this study engaged in practitioner participatory action research to explore the principal supervisor's professional learning experience in a CoP. I will be discussing social cognitive theory as the theoretical framework that explains how individuals develop understanding and engage in learning through their environments. Next, I will be discussing action research as the methodological framework most appropriate for my particular interest in being both a practitioner and a participant in the study. Lastly, I will discuss communities of practice which provide an interaction structure that taps into the social learning described by social cognitive theory and the opportunity for action described by action research.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is a branch of social learning theory that focuses specifically on the cognitive processes that influence a person's behavior (APA, 2021; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Social cognitive theory accounts for the ways in which people seek to control their environment and, consequently, influence their environment. This change in environment results in a change in how the individual interacts with the environment and the cycle continues (APA, 2021). The causal structure of social cognitive theory captures how "behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors and environmental events operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, pp. 361-362). Psychologist Alfred Bandura defined the ability or perceived ability to change the environment as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). In this study, participants were asked to reflect on the CoP's impact on their professional self-efficacy by answering the question, "How do principal supervisors

perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?" after we collectively engaged in role-specific professional learning.

Self-Efficacy

A person with high self-efficacy believes first that their environment, including their team and others around them, can be influenced and second that they can exhibit that influence (Bandura, 1993). Multiple studies have demonstrated that people who have stronger self-belief in their abilities to control or impact events or their environment are more likely to achieve higher levels of performance than people who have weaker self-belief (Bandura, 1988; Bandura, 1993; Wood & Bandura, 1989). In addition, individuals with high self-efficacy are more willing to take on challenging tasks because they believe in their ability to do hard things or learn how to do hard things; they perceive failure as a lack of effort that can be overcome rather than a lack of ability (Bandura, 1988; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

As part of the causal structure of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is first established through past successes, but as a person experiences more successes, they start to see themselves as efficacious rather than referencing specific past performances (Bandura, 1993). As the person experiences additional successes, self-efficacy grows. As self-efficacy grows, the individual sees their potential to be successful in greater challenges and is excited to engage in those challenges rather than seeing them as a threat. In turn, the person experiences greater and greater accomplishments that are fueled by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). From an organizational standpoint, individuals who have high self-efficacy are more likely to enjoy the challenge of sticking with a problem until they come up with a solution and see learning and growing as an

opportunity rather than as a commentary on their personal value (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). This willingness to do hard things and grow from experiences in which a goal is not reached are applicable characteristics to the principal supervisor role in that the school environment is ever changing with ever changing variables. This study considered professional efficacy to be an asset in a principal supervisor that was worth acknowledging and examining.

Action Research

This participatory practitioner action research study was focused on principal supervisors and their professional learning needs. The research explored one way of providing principal supervisors with role-specific professional learning and to bring about change and improvement to the practice of the principal supervisors involved. Naturally, the methodological framework for this research acknowledges that research can and should lead to change within individuals and groups of people beyond just adding to the existing body of research. Action research recognizes and appreciates how theory and practice inform each other and that research can and should have an aim of positively impacting the participants (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Moreover, participatory action research enhances the participants' ownership of the problem-solution process, an idea that could lead to increased self-efficacy within the process if not also in the content of the action research experience (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Wicks, et. al., 2008).

Foundations of Action Research

Action research is an inquiry-based research approach that starts with a problematic social phenomenon that has been identified by a community or group of people (Coenen & Khonraad, 2003; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Stoecker & Brydon-

Miller, 2012; Wicks et al., 2008). The work of action research taps into all areas of applicable knowledge with distinct attention to bringing about positive change for participants through a layered and cyclical process of identification, examination, action, and reflection in which participants are included in as many ways as possible (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012). This type of research is uniquely different than positivist research methods in that action researchers do not seek to explain a phenomenon or a problem; rather they seek to understand the phenomenon or problem and then identify practical solutions alongside those most affected by the phenomenon (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Kemmis et al., 2014; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). To that end, action researchers should and do use the approach and the constructs that best serve their purpose in addressing the problem that they have identified (Lewin, 1939).

Kurt Lewin (1946) was the first researcher to use the term "action research" to describe research that helps the practitioner. Lewin (1939) combined his interest in group dynamics and his desire to approach research from a place of inclusive inquiry informing practice to lay a foundation for research that elevates sociology and social psychology as valid scientific research frameworks. Lewin (1939) referred to action research as field theory that took on a constellation perspective that looks at all the facts and details both in isolation *and* in combination to develop theories rather than focusing only on isolated facts and details as is more prevalent in traditional research methods. Over time, Lewin's action research perspective evolved into current day action research in which the researcher expressly enters the research not just with a goal of acting but with a goal of

changing (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Kemmis et al., 2014; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021).

In action research, change is centered around knowledge developed through the relationships and actions of the participants, including the researcher, and how the new knowledge benefits the participants and the broader research community, taking a constructivist paradigm (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). Action research attends to and values the lived experience of individuals and groups of people and how people interpret those events to make meaning out of their experiences (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Wicks, et. al., 2008). In a survey of researchers who gravitate toward action research, a common theme emerged–many of them turned to action research in direct response to a dissatisfaction with traditional research methods that were more focused on reporting out findings from a neutral researcher perspective than impacting change and engaging with research participants in a more human way (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Wicks et al., 2008). With this fundamental repurposing of research, action research also has a unique measure of success. Ultimately, the value of action research is measured in the improvement that it brings to the community and how that change can be transferred to other communities and other researchers (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012). When the broader scholarly research community questions the validity of action research, action researchers argue that action research is actually more valid than traditional methods because it combines expert research knowledge and local knowledge at each step, including research design and data analysis (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Models of Action Research

Lewin's model of action research had four steps: 1) planning a change, 2) putting the plan into action, 3) observing what happened, and 4) re-formulating the plan in light of what occurred (Kemmis et al., 2014). Over time, action researchers have developed and defended revised action research models that build on the original Lewin model (see Table 1). More recent models generally enhance the cyclical nature of action research, create space for observation prior to problem identification, add in pre-steps for preparation and planning, and highlight the continuous need for reflection and reevaluation (Coenen & Khonraad, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2000; Kemmis et al., 2014; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). While Lewin's model weighs action more heavily at the beginning of the process, the modern trend in action research is to spend significant time observing and analyzing before acting even within a cyclical model. Nearly all models continue to place value on research flexibility that allows for continued revision of the plan considering new learning and in response to the expertise and lived experiences of the participants, creating a balance of research and action throughout the process (Kemmis et al., 2014; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012).

Table 2

Action Research Models

Action Researcher	Cycle	Additional Characteristics
Lewin	1. Planning a change 2. Putting the plan into action 3. Observing what happened 4. Re-formulating the plan in the light of what had happened Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18	Maintains outsider researcher
Kemmis &	Lewin's steps but in a spiral and with overlapping steps	Argues against an

McTaggart (1988, 2014)	Kemmis et al., 2014	outside researcher
Calhoun (1993)	1. Selection of area of study 2. Collection of data 3. Analysis and interpretation 4. Taking action Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 9	
Wells (1994)	1. Observation 2. Interpretation 3. Planning 4. Action Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 9-10	Each step has a feedback loop.
Wadsworth (1998)	Participatory Action Research 1. Reflection on action 2. New Action 3. Repeat over and over; could occur multiple times within one hour even	
Coghlan and Brannick (2000)	Pre-Step Context and Purpose Cycle 1. Constructing 2. Planning Action 3. Taking Action 4. Evaluating Action Coghlan & Brannick, 2000, p. 9	
Coenen and Khonraad (2003)	**Exemplarian Action Research** 1. Thematic Stage: Collecting Data 2. Crystallization Stage: Formulating a Theory 3. Exemplarian Stage: Action Coenen & Khonraad, 2003	Seeks to honor the "dynamic nature of the reality of research" (p. 446)
Stringer (2008); Stringer & Ortiz Aragón (2021)	Look Think Act Stringer, 2008, p. 4 Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 9	

Hendricks (2016)	Reflect Act Evaluate Repeat Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 9	

Role of Participants and Researchers in Action Research

In addition to the commitment to action and improvement over simply observing a phenomenon, the second most significant aspect of action research is how action researchers regard the participants. In Lewin's (1939/1999) initial studies around group dynamics that also contributed to the development of action research, he explores democratic versus autocratic group leadership. His work demonstrates a strong argument for participant involvement and decision-making. Distinctly different from a positivist paradigm, action research bucks the idea that the researcher is the discoverer of universal knowledge. Instead, action researchers acknowledge the limitations of their own knowledge, involvement, and experience and take on a constructivist paradigm that appreciates that the subjects of research already have their own knowledge and the researcher is there to interpret that knowledge with the goal of assisting in change (Coenen & Khonraad, 2003; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Wadsworth, 1998). Even in traditional objective research approaches, the participant possesses the power of granting or revoking their consent to participate (Grant et al., 2008). This shared power dynamic is elevated in action research by acknowledging the opportunity for shared learning and the mutual benefits for the researcher, the participant, and the broader community (Grant et al., 2008).

The level of respect for participants in an action research study and the knowledge and experience that they bring to the process pushes action researchers not just to include participants in decision-making but to fully shift the decision-making authority to participants when desired by the participants (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012). Moreover, because the goal of action research is to bring about improvement for the involved participants, the research experience must be intentionally inclusive of the people who are most directly connected to the problem and are most likely to use or benefit from the results in as many ways and in as many stages of the process as possible (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). To achieve the desired inclusion of the most impacted people, rather than be as objective as possible, the researcher tries to get to know participants as well as possible (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021).

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is action research in which the research design places a higher priority on the participants, their involvement, and their closeness to the researcher than broader action research does and layers valuing the participant with an appreciation that relationships and sometimes conflict are key elements in the learning process (Alvarez & Gutierrez, 2001; Baum et al., 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Sohng, 1996; Swantz, 2008; Wadsworth, 1998). Simply put, it is participation, action, and research (Wadsworth, 1998). The researcher's role is to engage the participants in the research process as early in the process as possible so that participants have decision-making authority in identifying the research question, the methodology, the analysis, the action, and the reflection. Participatory action research takes the stance that all research should

be led by the participants of the research with assistance from outsiders only when needed and requested (Kemmis et al., 2014). As a result, participatory action research is the only research that brings a shared language, an understanding of practices and limitations, and an authentic shared ownership of the action and outcomes for participants and researchers (Baum et al., 2006; Kemmis et al., 2014). One model of participatory action research outlines the steps as development, negotiation, implementation, and evaluation in which the researcher is serving the participants and community in each of these stages, rather than directing each step in the process (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001).

Because the focus is on the participant, an additional key element of participatory action research is capturing the voices and accurately documenting the thoughts and actions of the participants throughout the process to ensure credible accounts (Grant et al., 2008; Wadsworth, 1998). In turn, the researcher's role shifts from gathering data to fully engaging in the lives of the participants as it relates to the study with the goal of building authentic and honest relationships so that the researcher has access to the true thoughts and voices of participants and the participants trust the researcher as an inside partner (Sohng, 1996).

In participatory action research, a consideration is that the process and findings cannot typically be generalized due to the fluid research process (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001). Limitations are small sample size, scheduling challenges as participants must be included in all steps of the process, and general slowdowns that occur when working in real-life settings (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001). Despite the unique aspects of this type of research, the outcomes of participatory action research have the potential to be life-changing for the participants and the research (Kemmis et al., 2014). When deciding on

the appropriateness of participatory action research, the participants and researcher should consider the fit of the project with the researcher, the community, the topic and purpose, the organizational context, and the constraints (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001). This type of research requires an openness to participants that is not present in typical research so that the research may change shape throughout the process based on what is important to participants and what is happening to them in the real situation (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001; Wadsworth, 1998). In this participatory action research study, I brought a practitioner's desire to improve in my work, a researcher's drive to bring about improvement for those serving as principal supervisors, an awareness of the situational context, and a day-by-day understanding of the constraints for principal supervisors and anything in which they were involved.

Practitioner Participatory Action Research

Wadsworth (1998) declares, "Pretty much every initiative we now see around us as A Good Thing happened in this way: as a product of people who 'knew their turf,' knew who they were doing it for, and had the imagination to collectively envision a desirable new state and attract others who shared that vision" (p. 5). My goal for this study was to join with others who were currently serving in the same professional capacity as I was and possessed great knowledge of their field so that we could develop a vision for our work that helped us grow and serve our principals, schools, districts, and students better. Even in participatory action research, the most desirable researcher situation is one in which the researcher is part of the community and has intimate knowledge of the participants' lived experiences as they relate to the study (Sohng, 1996). Therefore, this action research study falls into the more specific category of practitioner

participatory action research in that I was a practicing principal supervisor participating in the action research with other participants. This more specific subset of action research has an actor/director dynamic in which the researcher does work behind the camera in preparation for the action research process and during the process in a kind of meta-analysis but then gets in costume and participates fully in each scene as an acting member of the cast (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). In practitioner action research, the practitioner asks a question which leads to some kind of reflection and possibly action; however, even the decision not to act is a decision that changes the practitioner's experience and understanding (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Wadsworth, 1998). My journey as a practitioner of questioning my role and how to improve in it led me organically to this research study and to this framework of practitioner participatory action research.

Community of Practice

The methodology of this study is a community of practice. Wenger (1998) coined the term "community of practice" and defined it as a group of people who come together for a joint enterprise with mutual engagement to develop a repertoire of shared resources. A community of practice is unique from a team or network because the focus is on the knowledge that is brought to the CoP and generated by the CoP rather than focusing solely on tasks to be accomplished or being just about the relationships of the members (Wenger, 1998, 2000). Linking to social cognitive theory, the theoretical underpinnings of a CoP are constructivist in nature, valuing the social aspects of learning and knowledge generation (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Wenger, 2000). CoPs are also closely linked to socially situated theory where social participation leads to "learning as community,

learning as identity, learning as meaning, and learning as practice" (Conole et al., 2011, p. 123). Interestingly, there is an organic nature to a CoP; a key element of a CoP is that participation is voluntary (Annan & Carpenter, 2015) and often self-organizing (Wenger, 1998).

CoP Structure

A CoP can develop in nearly any context if there is a shared focus among individuals who bring some knowledge or experience with that focus to the group (Annan & Carpenter, 2015). CoPs are beneficial because they connect people who may not typically connect and they create a defined space for people to share knowledge and learning; they encourage a flow of ideas (Cambridge et al., 2005). To maximize the opportunity for a valuable and sustainable CoP, the group should have a defined and agreed upon purpose (Cambridge et al., 2005), keeping in mind that the purpose is what Wenger (1998) described as a joint enterprise that is "continually renegotiated by its members" (p. 2). It is this renegotiation or redefining of the CoP that makes it a living, breathing collaboration and ultimately allows it to move through various forms of development as it engages in collective inquiry (Wenger, 1998, 2000).

Lifespan of a CoP

Wenger (1998) identified five stages of development in a CoP:

- Potential: "People face similar situations without the benefit of a shared practice" (p. 3).
- Coalescing: "Members come together and recognize their potential" (p. 3).
- Active: "Members engage in developing a practice" (p. 3).

- Dispersed: “Members no longer engage very intensely, but the community is still alive as a force and a center of knowledge” (p. 3).
- Memorable: “The community is no longer central, but people still remember it as a significant part of their identities” (p. 3).

Cambridge et al., (2005) stretch out the potential phase to represent inquiry, design, and prototype. The coalescing and active stages become launch and growth with the dispersed and memorable phases being replaced with simply sustain (Cambridge et al., 2005). Ultimately, the value of a CoP primarily resides in the learning experience of the participants and the knowledge disseminated to the larger organization or community. Once that value has faded, the CoP’s lifespan is likely complete.

Alignment with the Qualities of Effective Professional Development

In the absence of research on the impact of principal supervisor professional development, research on teacher professional development provides insight into professional development within education. The types of professional development districts are providing for teachers is likely similar to the type of professional development that they are providing to principal supervisors. The research on professional development in education shows that school districts spend significant amounts of money supporting teacher improvement with no evidence of improvement in practice from year to year (Jacob et al., 2015). In fact, multiple studies indicate that while teacher knowledge and sometimes practice improves, there is no statistical impact on student achievement (Garet et al., 2016; Randel et al., 2016; What Works Clearinghouse, 2010). Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) claim that these studies serve as

examples of ineffective professional development rather than explain the impact of professional development when it is designed and delivered effectively.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identify seven characteristics of effective professional development:

1. Is content focused.
2. Incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory.
3. Supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts.
4. Uses models and modeling of effective practice.
5. Provides coaching and expert support.
6. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection.
7. Is of sustained duration.

Allen et al. (2022) extend these elements to specifically address adult learning needs in professional learning settings by reminding professional development organizers of five theoretical orientations for adult learning: cognitivist, behaviorist, humanistic, social cognitive, and constructivist. The recognition of the professional as an adult learner and the most important consideration in designing and implementing professional learning is congruent with the theoretical foundations of a CoP as participants are bound together around a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire of communal resources created and collected by the CoP (Smith et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998).

Connection to Research Questions

This research study originated out of an authentic interest in the role of principal supervisor and ways in which the role could be better supported. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, principal supervisors and those studying the principal supervisor

role have identified a need for increased opportunities for role-specific professional development (AASA, 2021; Corcoran et al., 2013; CCSSO, 2015; Goldring et al., 2018; Honig et al., 2010; New Leaders, 2019; Rainey & Honig, 2015; Saltzman, 2017). CoPs are a form of professional development that does not require district organization and does not require extensive oversight or infrastructure other than the commitment of time spent together (Wenger, 1998). Moreover, CoPs are evidenced to build participants' understanding of competence through shared learning (Wenger, 2000) and show promise of directly impacting self-efficacy in the same way that shared learning groups of teachers have exhibited (De Jong et al., 2016). CoPs share the values of practitioner participatory action research by creating a space for individuals to work collaboratively through problem-solving, inquiry, and exchange of ideas for mutually beneficial experiences, making the CoP an appropriate and exciting methodology for this particular action research project (Cambridge et al., 2005).

Summary

As much as this chapter serves as a literature review for this dissertation, it also represents the full process of my journey in settling on the research questions: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience? What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors? How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

I started with a personal interest in the role of principal supervisor. In my in-depth exploration of the principal supervisor role, I was looking for holes in the research–holes that if filled would positively support principal supervisors and those engaged with

them. The glaring hole that I found was insufficient role-specific professional development. From there, I worked to identify the theoretical underpinnings of professional learning and a research approach that would allow me to engage in the process not just as a researcher but as a participant. I found both of those things in Bandura's (1988) social cognitive theory, Lewin's (1939) action research, and Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) description of practitioner participatory action research. Lastly, I identified communities of practice as a research methodology that aligned with my theoretical constructs and my methodological framework (Wenger, 1998). This chapter captures the literature that defines each of the elements of my research and brings them together to demonstrate the fullness of my study.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) simplify action research to these three things: "a good story, rigorous reflection on that story and an extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection of the story" (p. 16). In Chapter 3, I will share the beginning of this action research story and my plan for ensuring rigorous reflection and the mining of knowledge and theory from the experience.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this study were to explore communities of practice as a professional learning format for principal supervisors and to contribute to the limited research on principal supervisors as a contributing role to the field of education. Cochran et al. (2020) report that based on qualitative data gathered from a series of site visits in United States school districts conducted by the CGCS in 2012 and 2013, professional development for principal supervisors is provided on an as needed basis rather than as part of an on-going, intentional, and targeted system of professional learning. Furthermore, only about half of principal supervisors consider their professional development to be related to the specific challenges that they face in their role (Cochran et al., 2020). Corcoran et al. (2013) identified nine recommendations for supporting principal supervisors, specifically addressing the need for professional development to "take into account the specific roles and competencies a district identifies for its principal supervisors" (p. 43) and to develop professional learning "not only to address individual needs as they arise, but also to support continuous growth and improvement" (p. 43). Furthermore, principal supervisor professional development that is most effective is "differentiated according to the skills and experience of personnel and the needs of the [principal supervisor's] schools" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 53). This study provided

principal supervisors with a professional learning experience that was role specific and differentiated to each individual principal supervisor through practitioner participatory action research of a CoP, a group of individuals with a joint endeavor and mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998).

The focus of this research was to address the needs of people in the overlooked role of principal supervisor. The circle of influence of a principal supervisor includes most closely principals and district leaders but quickly expands to encompass all K-12 teachers, families, and, most importantly, students. The success and well-being of our K-12 students, our most vulnerable demographic, affects all aspects of social change. Improvement, growth, or insight into any area that impacts our students is relevant and significant.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?

Research Question 2: What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?

Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

My intent in identifying these research questions was to explore a role-specific professional learning opportunity for principal supervisors and study how participants experience participation in a community of practice. These questions were relevant considering the pervasiveness of the principal supervisor role in every district with a principal and the absence of substantial scholarly or professional consideration of the

role. More personally, these questions were relevant in my own journey of professional growth and improvement as I sought to have a better understanding of my role.

Researcher Positionality

Consistent with participatory action research, I blurred the lines of researcher and participant during the CoP. After four years as a middle school and high school teacher, two years as a principal intern, and nine years as an elementary principal, I moved out of a school-based role in my large urban school district and became a principal supervisor of 19 middle schools. At the time of the study, I was in my fifth year as a principal supervisor and had spent time reflecting more universally about the unique position of a principal supervisor and the professional aspects of the job. I had participated in countless hours of professional learning provided by my district, by professional organizations, by consultants, and by self-study. Very little if any of my professional learning had been role specific. Rather, most of my professional learning was the same learning and development in which principals engage for the purpose of school improvement. The intent of my involvement in these professional developments was presumably to know what principals know and what they should be able to do so that I could better support them in their planning and implementation. In addition to in-role professional development, I had also completed a university superintendent certification program that included course work and an internship, resulting in state superintendent certification. In my superintendent certification program, my classes were primarily focused on organizational leadership or educational leadership but skipped over the unique aspects of supporting, coaching, and evaluating principals in ways that strengthened them and led to increased student achievement and well-being. In addition,

my internship consisted of project-based work that was peripheral to principal supervision.

My interest in this area of research derived from my own dissatisfaction in the professional learning and support of principal supervisors. This dissatisfaction with the status quo and traditional research methods is a common catalyst for initial engagement in action research by action researchers (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). My dissatisfaction and my desire to explore an area that would ultimately strengthen me as a professional led me to the topic of principal supervisors, but the promise of how action research allows for iterative cycles and uncapped growth and development that ultimately changes the action researcher (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003) highlighted participatory action research as the most appropriate research approach for studying principal supervisor professional learning and perceptions. By engaging more fully as a co-participant, I was liberated to be fully transparent and genuine with other participants. When researchers are restricted in their openness regarding their own positions, values, beliefs, experiences, and personal purposes, "other participants may never be properly informed about the nature and purposes of the research," (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 7) preventing participants other than the researcher from accessing the benefits of collectively generated purpose and knowledge from the research experience.

As outlined in Chapter 2, research on principals and superintendents is plentiful, but research on principal supervisors is limited at best. The Wallace Foundation, the CGCS, and Vanderbilt University have aimed to provide professional insight into the principal supervisor role through the development of Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015) and a series of articles and studies around the role

of the principal supervisor (Casserly, 2013; Cochran et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018; Goldring, Clark, et al., 2020; Goldring, Rogers, et al., 2020). In addition, Baker & Bloom (2017) outline two models for professional learning for principal supervisors: the principal supervisor professional learning community and a learning lab, both of which are likely to be present only if established by district leaders. Because my position did not allow me to redefine my district's professional learning approach for principal supervisors and because there is unique value in participants self-selecting to participate, my specific research interest was to explore the professional learning opportunities that exist in a CoP that is more organically established and managed by the willing participants rather than required as a district professional learning experience.

My Role in the Research

As a researcher and a participant, I was responsible for being specific and transparent with my co-participants from the start of the research and throughout the research about my two roles and how I would distinguish them. I needed to be just as specific and transparent in my published writing about the research. In the researcher role, I wrote and presented the research proposal, completed the IRB process, and identified the participants. All participants had access to the data and artifacts, but I was the primary collector of data and artifacts since I needed to have access to all documentation for the completion of data analysis. After the initial identification of the participants and the explanation of the research, I intended for my role to shift dramatically to co-participant (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012) so that I could be a co-participant engaged in the professional learning experience as a principal supervisor

practitioner. Due to the nature of my involvement in the research, I was more reflective on processes, interactions, and progression of the CoP than other participants, but I also made my reflections available to all participants just as any participant would do in a CoP.

Methodology

My methodology was practitioner participatory action research of a CoP consisting of multiple live virtual meetings with a small group of principal supervisors who were willing to engage in role-specific professional development. I utilized whole group semi-structured interviews during a pre-convening and a post-convening, collection of CoP artifacts, recordings of the virtual meetings, and researcher notes to conduct a practitioner participatory action research that examined how principal supervisors characterized their CoP experience, how they perceived the effects of role-specific professional development on their principal supervisor roles, and what themes emerged from the CoP.

Participants

Participant Identification

The participants for the CoP, including me, were individuals who were principal supervisors at the time of the CoP who expressed a desire to improve in their role and to think creatively about how to do that in a CoP. As suggested by J. Richard Hackman's research on effective teams, I kept my participation number below ten (Coutu & Beschloss, 2009). The smaller size also supports conditions that will be more likely to build trust and create space for mutual engagement, necessities in a CoP (Prenger et al., 2021; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016; Smith et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998, 2000).

Through snowball and convenience sampling, I attempted to identify participants with diverse lived professional and cultural experiences–racial diversity, geographical diversity, diversity in school district demographics, and diversity in years of professional experience. I sought out participants by reaching out to my professional contacts and their contacts across the country to solicit names of individuals who fit the criteria and might be interested in participating. I also sent emails to principal supervisors around the country by identifying principal supervisors from large, urban school districts as identified on their school district websites.

Pre-Convening

Prior to the first CoP convening, the participants and I met as a group virtually for a pre-convening. I distinguished this as a pre-convening and not our first CoP convening because I facilitated the meeting. In the CoP convenings, I intended to take on a participatory role rather than serve as the facilitator. During the pre-convening, I utilized a semi-structured interview to explain the study and gather some baseline qualitative data regarding participants' perceptions of their professional development (see Table 3). All meetings, including the pre-convening, were recorded with video and audio.

Table 3

Pre-Convening Agenda

Community of Practice Pre-Convening
DATE
TIME
MEETING LINK

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES/QUESTIONS
Informed Consent		

Inclusion Activity and Introductions		• How much time have you spent in the role of principal supervisor? • Describe your preparation for the role of principal supervisor. • Provide an explanation of the nature of your role as principal supervisor.
Tenets of a Community of Practice		
Focus of Study: Professional Learning		
Reflection on Professional Role		What are your areas of greatest effectiveness? What are your areas of least effectiveness?
Learning Together		
Discussion		
Reflection		
Agenda for Next Time		

Community of Practice

Establishing the Community of Practice

Because the approach was practitioner participatory action research, the details of the research were outlined but almost entirely subject to revision based on the direction that the participants took the process. Prior to the pre-convening, participants agreed to the following research requirements:

Each participant must

- be a current principal supervisor,

- be willing to participate in a virtual community of practice for a minimum of 60 minutes twice a month for three months (six meetings including the pre and post convening with the possibility of four additional convenings for a total not to exceed 10),
- have a desire to improve in the role of principal supervisor,
- be willing to think creatively about the support and development of the role and of the community of practice,
- and be willing to reflect on the experience and provide honest feedback about the experience of engaging in a community of practice specific to the role of principal supervisor.

In the pre-convening, I explained each of these specific aspects of the CoP in order to start with some common language and understanding of the CoP. Prior to each convening, participants had access to a shared agenda to which they were able to add items or elements of a protocol as they saw fit. The shared agenda or protocol assisted me in transitioning to a participant. As a final logistical consideration, I added to the end of each agenda a time for the group to reflect on the session and decide on changes to the next agenda or protocol (see Table 4). The items in gray were the only two parts of the agenda that needed to consistently occur to collect data for the study.

Table 4

CoP Convening #1 DRAFT Agenda

Community of Practice Convening #1 DRAFT
DATE
TIME
ZOOM LINK

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Inclusion Activity		
Check-In		
Learning Together		
Discussion		
Reflection		
Agenda for Next Time		

While the participants determined the learning together and discussion aspects of the CoP, I entered the CoP with the following role-specific areas as possible topics:

- Equity-Centered Leadership
- Coaching Models for Coaching Principals
- Leadership Pipelines
- District Effectiveness
- Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards 2015 (CCSSO, 2015)
- Opportunity Myth/Effectiveness Myth

Engaging in a Community of Practice

I recorded the sessions to review later from the researcher perspective, but as a co-participant, I engaged in the CoP in the same way that other participants engaged. The transformation to shared ownership of the research by the CoP was consistent with a practitioner participatory action research approach. The CoP process is not linear or confined by time, and the cycle of reflection on action may or may not happen within the CoP. Wadsworth (1998) declares:

> Action research, like the discovery phase of any science, knows it is coming from somewhere and going to somewhere, even though it does not know in advance

> where precisely it is going to end up or what the new state will look like. Participatory action research, unlike conventional science, does not consider this to be an embarrassment! (p. 5)

While the destination of the CoP was unknown, the journey was interesting, and something meaningful came out of the experience that can be gleaned and shared with the professional community.

Data Collection

In addition to any notes or artifacts that were produced in or around the CoP like agendas, shared resources, or participant communication in-between meetings, I recorded the virtual interview and the CoP meetings. Because of the nature of action research, I anticipated what types of data would be available to me, but I knew I had to be flexible in my expectations of what types of data might arise during this practitioner participatory action research study. At a minimum, I knew I would have the CoP reflections from each participant, the agendas, my researcher notes, and the recordings of each meeting. Table 5 presents the connections between possible data sources to the research questions.

Table 5

Data Sources by Research Question

Research Question	**Possible Data Source**
Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?	● Researcher Notes ● Post-Convening Recording and Transcript ● Participant Written Reflections (All Convenings) ● Communication Among Participants During Convenings and Outside of the Convenings in the Days Between the Pre-Convening and Post-Convening
Research Question 2: What role-	● Researcher notes

specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?	• CoP Generated Agendas • Convening Recordings and Transcripts (All Convenings) • Participant Written Reflections (All Convenings) • Resources Shared by Participants • Resources Created in the CoP • Communication Among Participants During Convenings and Outside of the Convenings in the Days Between the Pre-Convening and Post-Convening
Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?	• Researcher Notes • Post-Convening Recording and Transcript • Participant Written Reflections (All Convenings) • Communication Among Participants During Convenings and Outside of the Convenings in the Days Between the Pre-Convening and Post-Convening

Post-Convening

The final meeting of the CoP was a post-convening in which participants reflected on the experience, identified themes that emerged from the CoP, and reflected on the effect of the CoP on their work as principal supervisors. Table 6 outlines the agenda for the post-convening of the CoP.

Table 6

Post-Convening Agenda

Community of Practice Post-Convening
DATE
TIME
MEETING LINK

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Inclusion Activity		

Individual Reflection (Written) ● **Describe your experience in the CoP.** ● **What themes emerged in the CoP?** ● **Did the CoP impact your work? If so, how?**		
Share-Out on Reflection Questions		
Additional Discussion ***Possible Questions*** ● **What was worthwhile about the CoP?** ● **Was it worth it?** ● **Did it affect your day-to-day professional work? If so, how?** ● **Would you participate in a CoP again?** ● **Evaluate the quality of this CoP.** ● **How would you describe the CoP to a colleague?**		
Reflection on Professional Role		Areas of greatest effectiveness Areas of least effectiveness
Closing		

Data Analysis

I used qualitative coding methods to analyze my data and identify themes for the process and for the purpose. I started with descriptive coding to code the topics in my notes, the artifacts, and the transcripts from the interviews and the meetings (Saldaña,

2013). In the post-convening session, I asked participants if they saw themes emerge– this was one way in which they were engaged in the data analysis process. I used in vivo coding for the pre-convening and post-convening and written reflections from all convenings to capture and honor the individual voices of participants (Saldaña, 2013). I made my coding and notes from the CoP available to participants and invited input during the analysis part of the study.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research Approach and Method

The strength of using a CoP as a methodology within practitioner participatory action research is the philosophical alignment of the method and the research approach. Both place a priority on actionable research and intentional inclusion of participants throughout the process. While action research is a relatively newly accepted research method in academia, the leaders in action research have paved the way for not just the legitimacy of the approach but the very real need for research that leads to meaningful positive societal change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Kemmis et al., 2014). Therefore, a research topic that pertains to a professional role that impacts the well-being and success of students deserves to be supported by action research that amplifies the voices of the individuals who are in that role and seeks to produce actionable research that ultimately leads to a positive impact on our K-12 students. On a more granular level, an added strength was that I had relevant and current experience in the role of principal supervisor and a personal investment in seeing the research through until it was actionable, whether that occurred within the CoP or outside of the CoP. In other words, even a failed CoP would result in lessons learned that other practitioners and I could use in the iterative reflective process to develop a new plan for strengthening and supporting principal

supervisors.

In action research there are unknowns in every direction. As Wadsworth (1998) identifies, action researchers have come to terms with “the inevitability” (p. 4) of research going one way or another based on the questions asked or not asked, the people involved or not involved, and the action taken or not taken. However, all research has these same limitations; “participatory action research simply attempts to make these decisions more consciously and in relation to more clearly-worked out purposes, and using more appropriate designs and techniques for exploring them" than other types of research (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 4).

Another limitation was in identifying individuals to participate. Principal supervisors are typically high-level administrators in their districts with many responsibilities outside of just supervising principals. Even if a principal supervisor was interested in growing professionally, they may not have felt like they could commit to the research process at the time of this study. Once a principal supervisor did commit to participating, the level of their participation and reflection was unique to them and outside of the control of the study, including inconsistent attendance due to work demands or emergency situations. By being as clear as possible at the onset of the research and by keeping the requirements of participation low, I hoped to secure participants who saw the process through to the end or beyond. The research experience intended to be professionally and personally beneficial to each participant, including me. Because the research was mutually beneficial, I hoped to have a high level of engagement in the process from all participants.

Research Integrity

As the researcher and a co-participant, I was responsible for ensuring credibility, transferability, and dependability of my research. Above all, I was responsible for ethical consideration of my participants and their involvement.

Credibility

To establish credibility as a researcher, I was fully transparent in my role, my process, and my intentions by laying out the required flexibility and adaptations that come with participatory action research, including my dual roles of researcher and co-participant. While there was some uncertainty in the direction that the participatory action research might take, the expectations for me as a researcher to document accurately, collect and analyze data objectively, and, even while being a co-participant, maintain the weighty responsibility of researcher in how I respect my participants and their experience in the study remained constant (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

To provide additional clarity and openness about the project, I fully account for the process by detailing each part of the study with an emphasis on parts of the study that changed and developed based on the progression of the CoP. This account is included in Chapters 4 and 5 and captures each participant's voice to provide a complete picture of the experience and its impact on participants and the community (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012). All parts of the data analysis were shared with participants prior to completion of the research study to check for inaccuracies and provide them an opportunity to confirm the findings.

Trustworthiness

A goal of the research was to produce findings that are trustworthy and can be utilized to bring awareness or attention to the professional learning specific to the role group of principal supervisors. If the participants in the study are the only people who benefit from the learning of the study, there is a missed opportunity to positively impact the larger education community. My responsibility as a researcher will be to communicate the experience gained from the study in a way that is accessible, relatable, actionable, and trustworthy to individuals, groups, and organizations who are able to support and engage principal supervisors in their role-specific needs (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). I will do so by summarizing my learning and research implications with publications that target district leaders and by offering my services to districts seeking to enhance their existing principal supervisor professional learning opportunities.

Dependability

More traditional researchers may question the dependability of the results of action research. However, Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003) along with a collection of other leaders in the field of action research provide an alternative argument that action research "is much more able to produce 'valid' results than ordinary or conventional social science...because expert research knowledge and local knowledges are combined and because the interpretation of the results and the design of actions based on those results involve those best positioned to understand the processes: the local stakeholders" (p. 25). I utilized widely accepted research methods of interviewing, artifact collection, and coding in the context of a well-known participatory action research. My final research includes documentation of transcripts, artifacts, and coding

to ensure validity and accuracy.

Ethical Assurances for Participants

My primary responsibility as the researcher was ensuring the well-being of the participants while addressing the research questions. Therefore, I was abundantly clear about the expectations of the study and did not add to those expectations in my role as researcher or co-participant. All participants received this information through the IRB permissions, and the process was reviewed again at the pre-convening. In the final publication of the study, participants were given the option to have pseudonyms to protect their personal and professional identities. Participants were given an opportunity to review the research prior to publication with the knowledge of their pseudonym, if applicable, so that they could provide clarity, add information, or request revisions. Their voices were honored at each stage of the process, a critical component of participatory action research. The goal of the research was to positively impact our educational community which started with ensuring that participants have a positive experience, as well.

Assumptions

I entered this study with a handful of assumptions. I assumed that the participants who agreed to the CoP were interested in growing professionally in a group setting. I assumed that the CoP would fill a gap in the professional learning needs of principal supervisors. Lastly, I assumed that the participants would have a perception change of their professional development during the CoP, and I would be able to document that through data analysis.

Summary

Principal supervisors have long experienced a deficit in role specific professional learning opportunities. This study seeks to explore one type of role specific professional learning through a CoP using practitioner participatory action research as a foundational approach. I started my study with research questions that explored a principal supervisor's experience in engaging in a CoP. However, the intent of the study was to engage in the participatory action research process which meant that participants had the opportunity to establish research questions and foci within the CoP. In addition, I joined the participants as a co-participant and current principal supervisor.

Participants were selected through snowball and convenience sampling based on their willingness to participate and their status as a current principal supervisor. I outlined and planned for the process by creating an initial shared agenda within the CoP to free me up to act more as a participant than as a facilitator. Data collection included recordings of each CoP meeting, artifacts produced by the CoP, participant reflections, and communication among participants that was shared with me. The strengths and limitations of the study were consistent with the method of a CoP and the research approach of participatory action research. I maintained ethical considerations of credibility, trustworthiness, dependability, and participant involvement for all parts of the study and recognized the layer of ethical responsibility added by my dual role of researcher and co-participant.

Chapters 4 and 5 offer a full telling of the CoP experience and findings, as well as my reflections on the study. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the larger principal supervisor community by sharing the findings and analysis of

professional learning that brings principal supervisors together around a joint enterprise with the goal of learning and growing together to improve in our roles that ultimately impact student learning and development.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study was to explore the role of principal supervisor and how role-specific professional development can support principal supervisors in their role by answering the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?

Research Question 2: What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?

Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

This study established a community of practice with principal supervisors from several states and three geographical regions of the country: Midwest, South, and Southwest. Participants met a total of six times on Zoom beginning with two pre-convenings of the split group on February 15 and 17, 2023 and concluding with a post-convening on April 25, 2023, and a post-convening follow-up with one participant on May 11, 2023.

Participants were asked to participate in a virtual community of practice with five other principal supervisors for an hour every other week. In addition to their presence and engagement, participants were asked to complete a written reflection at the end of

each convening. Any resources shared or produced and any communication that included me were considered data for the purpose of the study. Including me, six participants agreed to take part in the community of practice and the study. Because this was a practitioner participatory action research study, I acted as both a participant and the researcher. To distinguish the two roles, in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, when presenting and discussing the findings, I utilize first person when I was acting as the researcher and my pseudonym when I was acting as a participant.

The Participants

Marie Baker, Bedford School District

In the 8th grade, Marie was having a difficult time in school. She met the superintendent of a district which changed the course of her life. She knew then that she wanted to potentially be a school superintendent one day. After completing an undergraduate degree in education, Marie became a teacher and then a principal of an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. She then became a director at a rural, fast growth district, and then a director of human capital. Feeling a pull back to more day-to-day school interaction, she became a principal supervisor overseeing 12 middle schools and high schools. She sees her many experiences as preparation to be a school superintendent in the future or running a corporation and is looking forward to being back at a district level that advises the superintendent and participates in more of the district leadership and decision-making.

Carolyn Foster, Daniels School District

Carolyn is in her first year as a principal supervisor of 22 high schools. Prior to becoming a principal supervisor, Carolyn was a principal for 11 years at two different

high schools in the same district and, more recently, she served as the operations manager for the same schools. The change in roles moved her from significant work with addressing parent complaints and parent needs to coaching and supporting principals. In addition, she supervises several other categories of district employees who support the schools that she supervises. In her district, the principal supervisors are the people who "get things done" and "do a lot of two-way communications." In addition to the district level work, anything that is happening at her schools including emergencies becomes her work on a day-to-day basis.

Lauren Jennings, Vernon School District

Lauren has been in the role of principal supervisor for seven years. Prior to serving as a principal supervisor, she was an assistant principal and principal for a total of five years and an instructional coach for four years. She is highly trained in coaching techniques and building professional communities within schools, and she holds an advanced degree in district level supervision.

In her current role, Lauren sees herself as a mentor and coach first and an evaluator second. She models for her principals the same coaching and leadership that she expects them to do with their staff and sees it as her responsibility to build the capacity of her principals to serve their schools as instructional leaders.

Ben Johnson, Taylor School District

Ben spent the first nine years of his educational career as a high school English teacher. He then became an elementary assistant principal and then principal at the same school for six years. Before becoming a principal, Ben completed a principal mentorship program provided by his district. After the principalship, Ben moved into a central office

role as a director and has completed his first year as an assistant superintendent. Ben shares the responsibility of evaluating of principals with his superintendent. His role includes many other areas of district leadership, including curriculum and instruction.

Tracy Miller, Jones School District

Tracy is in her third year as a principal supervisor of high schools, middle schools, and alternative schools, totaling 12 schools. While most of Tracy's principals have been in the role for four years or longer, the principal supervisor role has a short tenure, so some principals have experienced four or five supervisors during their time as principals. Recently, the district is making an intentional shift away from school-level autonomy to "more of a strategic centralized programming of support." This has also changed the expectations placed on school and district leaders**.** In her role, Tracy is able to work "cross-functionally with other departments and identify strategic planning" including budget, school improvement, processes, and protocols.

Tracy started her career as an elementary special education teacher and later became an assistant principal at a middle school and then a high school. She was then named the principal of her school after there was a significant disruption in school leadership. She served as a principal for a total of ten years between two states and elementary and high school.

Katherine Smith, Kenwood School District

Katherine has served as a principal supervisor in her district for five years. Prior to her work as a principal supervisor, she was a principal for nine years in the same district and a teacher in another district. Her preparation for school and district

leadership started with a master's program in school leadership which included a year-long principal internship followed by a district sponsored year-long principal internship.

Much of her work as a principal supervisor is supporting new principals and helping them be successful. In addition, as a district leader, she frequently participates in district-level decision-making by providing feedback, engaging in special projects, and working closely with leaders of other district departments. She describes her primary role as being an advocate for the schools of the principals that she supervises and proposing things that will move the district forward.

Pre-Convening of the Community of Practice

Due to initial scheduling challenges of participants, I had to schedule two pre-convenings to accommodate everyone. The pre-convenings served as an opportunity for participants to get to know each other, for me to establish a common understanding of what a community of practice is and how it is meant to benefit all participants, and for the CoP to identify areas of focus for our upcoming CoP convenings. The two groups generated a list of topics to discuss as a group after I asked them to brainstorm topics "that we might like to have discussion about over the course of our community of practice…topics that we might want to just really hone in on as a group and share resources and ideas and have conversation about." Participants shared topics and then spoke briefly about why they identified that topic. Often after one participant shared a topic, the topic would bring to mind something else that another participant wanted to consider. For example, when Ben brought up that there had been a significant demographic shift in his district, Marie brought up that her district is growing rapidly which has led to a change in her demographics, as well, which led to the topics of

supporting student needs and challenges with adult and student behavior. In the second pre-convening, I shared the list generated by the first group. The participants added women of color in leadership, gender dynamics in leadership, pushing back without being a problem, and aggressive versus assertive. I listed all brainstormed topics on the shared chart (see Table 7). Items highlighted were the topics that we ultimately selected for each convening. At the conclusion of the second pre-convening, I told the group that since they were the second group, they got to pick the topic for our first convening. Neither participant verbalized a selection, so I suggested that we focus on personal positionality since it was a commonality between the two groups and captured several of the topics generated by the second group.

Table 7

CoP Topics/Ideas for Discussion

Topics/Ideas for Discussion

- **Transformational Leadership through Adversity**
- **Safety/Security (Convening #3)**
- **Instructional Focus**
- **Underperforming Schools**
- **Supporting New Principals**
- **Balancing Transactional vs. Transformational (Convening #2)**
- **Developing Future Leaders (Convening #4)**
- **Racial Equity**
- **Demographic Shifts-Supporting Newcomer Students**
- **Charter Schools**
- **Behavioral Supports for Students**
- **Behavioral Supports for Personnel**
- **Identification of Student Needs (special education, mental health)**
- **Personal Positionality (How people perceive us vs. how we perceive ourselves) (Convening #1)**
- **Funds of Knowledge**
- **Women of Color in Leadership/Principal Supervisors**
- **Gender Dynamics in Leadership**
- **Pushing Back without Being a Problem (Or is it okay to be a problem?)**

- **Aggressive vs. Assertive**

In addition to generating the list of topics, I also asked participants to answer the questions verbally, "What are your areas of greatest effectiveness?" and "What are your areas of least effectiveness?" to get a sense of how they perceive their work as principal supervisors.

Pre-Convening Themes

Even though I did much of the talking and presenting in the pre-convening due to the informed consent process and the need to lay out the general outline of the CoP, the participants were quick to share and have conversation with each other. In that conversation, several themes emerged.

Shift from an Operational Focus to an Instructional Focus

Katherine shared that her area of effectiveness was staying focused on the academic goals of our work as school and district leaders in which we cannot let up because our most marginalized students are not learning as evidenced by the district data. She added, "It is not to minimize all the other things that we have to do in order for kids to learn, but we can never be even remotely satisfied if our students are not learning." This seemed to resonate with Ben who shared that he has been using data to bring some balance between serving as a cheerleader for schools and also pushing for academic growth, stating, "Yes, our job is still to primarily support and encourage and cheerlead [the principals] that we are evaluating, but at the end of the day, we also have to show some type of academic growth." To keep the focus on academic progress, Ben has been preparing longitudinal data sets for each principal so that they can trace the trajectory of a student who is currently in the third grade back to kindergarten. This data set has also

allowed for conversations about how the student was performing pre-COVID. Ultimately, the goal is for students to be moving upward. The use of these data sets has helped move from the "operationally focused mindset" that we all moved into because of COVID back to the "student achievement realm."

Departmental Collaboration and Influence

Marie brought up the unique role that Ben is in because of his ability to impact both curriculum/instruction and principal performance. This has been an area of frustration for her because the two are so tightly linked, but if they are separated by departments or individuals and the collaboration is not there, then an opportunity to impact student success is lost.

Katherine shared that there are efforts of department collaboration in her district but due to the size there is a hierarchy that requires vertical communication from the principal supervisors to the superintendent level before going directly to another department–communication travels up, over, and then down instead of directly from one department to the other. She expounded by adding, "There are limits to my authority to be able to break down the silos, [divisions or people acting independently]." Even if individuals seek to break down silos, the political dynamics, the power of personal preference, and the comfort of silos persists.

Limits to Decision-Making and Pushing Back

In the discussion about cross collaboration, Katherine shared that there are limits to her authority, so even if she shares a concern or a need that could be best supported by another department, she does not have the formal or informal authority to push the concern or need through to the point of it being fully addressed. Marie provided verbal

agreement. Carolyn brought up a similar concern regarding the balance of pushing back and getting along by sharing, "I'm good at managing up, but I'm not necessarily good at pushing up, if that makes sense."

Supporting Special Populations

Regardless of the district, we each shared a desire to learn more about serving and supporting specific populations in our districts. This included students with special needs, multilingual learners, students new to the United States, students with behavioral needs, and students needing support with mental health. These topics were added to our Community of Practice Topics/Ideas for Discussion list, but the CoP ultimately ended up choosing other topics to prioritize in our four sessions together.

Synthesizing Information to Support Principals

Carolyn shared that one of her strengths is putting together information for principals in a supportive and manageable way so that they can be more effective in their work, "helping principals navigate the bureaucracy." Tracy and Katherine visibly agreed with the importance of this work as indicated by head nods and follow-up discussion.

CoP Principal Supervisor Characterizations After Pre-Convening

At the end of each session, including the pre-convening and post-convening, participants were asked to complete a written reflection answering the following questions:

- At this point in the CoP, how would you characterize your community of practice experience?
- At this point in the CoP, how do you perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on your work as a principal supervisor?

- What additional reflections do you have about today's convening or the experience as a whole?

At the conclusion of the pre-convening, participants expressed positivity toward the experience. Ben stated, "I already appreciate the transparency and trust that is being established among the members." Katherine wrote, "I had high hopes for what the CoP could be. I did not expect individuals to connect with each other so quickly and be ready and willing to engage in topics that might be considered personal so quickly or at all." In reflecting on role-specific professional development, Ben indicated that "role-specific PD simply does not exist," and "I would love ANY structured and specifically tailored PD regarding principal supervision." Tracy added, "Professional development for school supervisors is a space that has not been fully explored, and so my hope is that all involved will develop a network lasting beyond this experience."

CoP Convening #1: Professional Positionality

In the pre-convening, I worked with participants to identify a time that would work for a one-hour meeting every other week for the next few months. Two days prior to the CoP, I sent an email to the group with a reminder about the convening and the topic along with some possible resources to discuss and a draft agenda (see Appendices B and C). All participants anticipated being present at the first convening, but at the last minute, Ben could not attend due to a district issue that he had to address because the superintendent was out of the district. As a result, all participants in the first convening were women. Tracy was not feeling well, so she elected to keep her camera off for most of the convening.

The topic for the first convening was professional positionality. After about 13 minutes of checking in with each other, I pulled up a social identity wheel (Kalish et al., 2021) that I found in an internet search prior to the convening. I had been exposed to social identity wheels in professional learning sessions about self-awareness, especially in relation to race. A social identity wheel typically consists of different aspects of visible identity and invisible identity. The graphic is meant to stimulate reflection and conversation. After giving participants time to look at the wheel, I opened the floor for participants to share how the social identity wheel plays into our work as principal supervisors. Each person took a turn identifying items from the social identity wheel that play into our professional positionality. Marie started the conversation by talking about race and her experience with people having a perception of her as a White woman that does not align with her lived experiences of having a racially diverse family. She also talked about how her hair color and the way that she comes into a space loudly may lead people to have preconceptions of her. She stated that she is "just unapologetically who I am, and if people don't like it, you know it's not really about if you like me; it's do we have the same common language of what's right for kids."

Tracy had her camera off because she was not feeling well but started her share out as the only Black participant with, "so I think I may be the only Black female in the group. You guys don't see me yet, but I am." She also shared that she is a transplant to her region, so "as I introduce myself to people, I've learned to announce that I do have resting b**** face." She added, "so I have to let everyone know, if you see my face doing this weird, funky thing, it's not about the conversation that we're in. It is me processing." Tracy shared that even though she has a wealth of experience, she still

sometimes has imposter syndrome where she feels like she must prove herself to other people. She shared that she leads with an explanation of her communication style every time that she comes into a new space so that she is not perceived as being too serious or aggressive.

Like Tracy, Carolyn also identified race and gender as identities that are most present in her experiences. She pointed out that even though we are "in a female dominated profession and even the top leaders…in our district have been female for like a good 20 to 30 years at this point…it's really disturbing to see how…the same idea can be said by a woman and then a man, and it's not picked up until the man says something." She cited a specific example of an activity that she created and presented in the past that resulted in hours-long sessions with "wailing and gnashing of teeth." When her male colleague did the same activity with the same people, it took 25 minutes because there were no questions, only accolades.

Carolyn also explained that her leadership team is all White but they "serve the predominantly Black section of our city. She added:

> That's something we're trying to work through…because most of our principals are leaders of color, as well, and so to have a top team that's all White is such a mismatch both in terms of the community we serve and the leaders we serve.

As a White woman, Katherine also addressed race by saying:

> Over my years in our district, as we have done more racial equity work, I have become more aware of race. I can pinpoint times in my life in which race has definitely been an identity that I'm trying to make sense of, but I really did need the work that our district did in order to really think through [my race].

Katherine also expressed some uncertainty about whether things that occur in her professional interactions are related to gender or related to personality:

> You know, it's so hard to say, is this just a gender thing or is it that I am very detail oriented? I have this sense of urgency that we need to get these things done, so, therefore, I do all these things…[My male supervisor may be] thinking, "I don't know why she's so worried about doing all these things all the time."

Katherine also added that, like Tracy, she is not from the district in which she now works which is a unique identity when "a lot of people have grown up in the state or can say which elementary, middle, and high school they went to in the district [as] a point of pride, and I cannot say that."

Lauren added that after listening to Katherine and Carolyn, context defines "which identities come to the forefront of importance." She continued by sharing that, like Tracy and Katherine, she is also from out of district, and "so I have to face that outsider mentality." Lauren shared additional family information in explaining that "I also think that your life experience and things that you have going on in your life bring different things to the forefront."

In addition to the commonalities of the positionality identities, an additional emerging theme was a narrative around using one identity to counter possible bias for another identity. The common thread was a desire to "correct" the positionalities that other people might think we have. For example, Marie and Katherine both shared that they communicate their professional work experience as credibility that counters their ages which are younger than most people in their positions.

Positionality Transparency

As the conversation continued, Lauren, Tracy, and Marie elaborated on a need to know who you are and then be transparent about that with your colleagues and principals to be able to do the work. Lauren stated in response to Tracy and Marie's reflections on how they explain to others about how they enter a space:

> I think as leaders supporting principals and other leaders, you've got to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses, and where you stand on things, and how that can impact those that you are leading and working with and being transparent with those that you are involved with and interacting with in your awareness of that.

I shared a few resources from the agenda on developing your own positionality statement as a connection to the idea of being transparent about your identities and positionality. Lauren, Carolyn, and Marie each had different versions of similar approaches that they have used in their districts–creating an equity stance, sharing a personal user manual, and defining your why. I added each of the resources that were shared to a shared resources document for the group.

The Positionalities of Our Principals

Much of the conversation pertained to our identities and how we want to be perceived by others without people making assumptions about us due to our identities. However, Marie, Lauren, and Katherine suggested using our roles to be understanding of other people's positionalities and working to uncover them when possible. Katherine identified the tools for creating a positionality statement as a helpful way for principals to communicate with us and their school communities. Marie pointed out, "It goes back to

relationships. That you can't break barriers down if you don't extend the table and allow people to sit to talk and to get to know people, and then to allow their voice to be elevated." Lauren stated the importance of "having the understanding of where everyone else is coming from, you know, and just being really transparent in their positionality and your positionality, so that you can find common ground. And as Marie said, we're here for the students."

CoP Principal Supervisor Characterizations After CoP #1

Everyone in this first CoP was meeting at least a few of the participants for the first time because there were two pre-convening groups, yet all participants engaged and shared personal information about their professional and personal positionality. Tracy reflected, "This CoP experience is what I need to finish this year. To be with like-minded women facing similar challenges and celebrations is exhilarating." Carolyn wrote, "I think it is crucial to be able to talk about the work with role-alike peers," and "I am getting more and more excited about working with similar roles outside of my district…this is going to help me expand my view of leadership coaching." From a process perspective, Tracy wondered if there could be more of a focus on actionable next steps or take-aways, and Carolyn wanted to be sure that resources are being collected for future reference.

CoP Convening #2: Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Again, two days prior to the CoP, I sent out an email reminder of the topic and a draft agenda with resources (see Appendices D and E). To engage participants as facilitators so that I could step more into a participant role, I included an additional invitation in my email, "If you are feeling moved to facilitate our meeting on Tuesday,

please let me know before or at the meeting. I am willing and ready to hand over the reins." I also added a section in the reflection portion for actionable steps and sharing of resources in response to the reflections shared by Tracy and Carolyn at the conclusion of Convening #1.

At the previous convening, Marie shared that she would likely not be attending because she would be on spring break at the beach with her family. Carolyn also communicated that she had a recertification class during the time of our CoP, but that the agenda appeared to indicate that it was work time. She was hoping to attend the CoP and complete the recertification homework later. Ultimately, all six participants were able to attend and be present for the duration of the CoP even though Marie was driving home from a day at the beach with her children in the car, and Ben also had his children in the car. This was the only CoP in which all participants were present.

To start the meeting, I asked participants how they were doing on a scale of one to 10 with one being the worst and 10 being the best. All participants answered, and numbers ranged from five to 10, with Marie being at a 10 while on vacation. We then transitioned into the selected topic of discussion: transactional leadership and transformational leadership.

Transactional and Transformational Leadership Defined and Discussed

Because no one offered to facilitate, I began with a five-minute video to allow us to have a common definition of transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The video provided a definition for each term that allowed the CoP participants to have a common understanding, starting with transactional leadership: "Transactional leadership is a management approach where the leader uses rewards and punishments to motivate

employees" (Jelix, 2023, 0:27). Transformational leadership, on the other hand, "is a management approach where the leader uses charisma and enthusiasm to inspire employees" (Jelix, 2023, 1:36). At the conclusion of the video, I invited feedback and conversation. The conversation centered around how we function as transactional and transformational leaders in our roles as principal supervisors. In our roles, we are required to function in three unique roles: evaluator of principals, coach of principals, and contributor to district-level work. Every participant addressed the reality that based on the situation and the person with whom we are working, we have to be skilled in being both transactional and transformational.

Middle Managers

While it is not a desirable title for us as principal supervisors, we recognize that we are middle managers, not the vision setters for our school districts or even for the schools that we supervise. Carolyn shared:

> I'm not the head of the district, right? I'm a middle manager…I'm expected to be transformational with my principals and have this charisma and lead them, but I'm not leading them to brand new fertile soil; I am leading them to where I have been told to arrive.

While our superintendents and department leaders are transformational by focusing on the vision and intrinsic motivation, we are tasked with ensuring that the goals are met and addressing our principals if goals are not met. The way in which we work with our principals can be transformational in nature, but if the work is not getting done, we must switch to transactional.

Public Employees and Accountability

Because public school districts operate on public funds, there is significant fiscal and student outcome accountability. As a result, as district leaders, we are all aware that there are some things that simply must get done. Many of these things are never going to happen purely from an intrinsic motivation approach. Tracy put this work into perspective by saying:

> Student achievement is a transaction, right?...You have to be able to identify this transactional work that needs to be done because this is how the bills get paid essentially for state assessment and accountability…but you have to be transformational in motivating the people to look beyond those numbers and those figures and those data points to say our greatest accomplishment is to make sure our students have what they need."

Carolyn wondered that even though we are government employees, what ensures that we keep pushing ourselves in our work "because I think there can sometimes be a temptation, especially when the work is vague, and I checked all of my 'get it done' boxes green, [to think] I'm killing it."

Moving from Transactional to Transformational

With everyone agreeing that we cannot be only transactional or transformational, Lauren suggested that we must be transparent with our principals when we are shifting back and forth between transactional and transformational leadership. This connected with the conversation at the previous convening on professional positionality. Lauren continued by explaining, "I think so much of it comes down to development versus evaluation, and if you're focused on evaluation, then you're looking at a checkbox, and

you're not trying to grow people." This led to conversation about if a leader can move from transactional to transformational and if being transactional for too long prevents the leader from shifting to transformational. Marie shared a story in which she had to move from her usual transformational approach to a more transactional approach when the principal was not meeting Marie's expectations. The principal was more upset about the change in Marie's approach than the outcome of the situation. After the event was over, Marie was able to re-engage with transformational leadership and walk the principal through a reflection of the situation that reestablished the previous coach/principal dynamic, further illustrating Lauren's suggestion about transparency in which leadership approach we are using and why.

CoP Participant Dynamics

In this second CoP, participants started to become much more conversational and open with each other. There were several times during the opening and closing that we joked with each other with movie references and our shared Type A personalities. In the first convening, most of the discussion was filtered through me; a participant would speak, I provided wait time, and then I would speak and prompt someone else to contribute. In the second convening, there were noticeably more times that participants spoke in response to each other without me intervening as a facilitator compared to the first convening. In the written reflection, Lauren noted, "Really like how we naturally started piggybacking during conversations. It is amazing how quickly we have made connections."

CoP Principal Supervisor Characterizations After CoP #2

Following the second CoP, participants communicated positively about the experience. Marie wrote, “We’re all in this together. It’s nice to be in this space.” Carolyn appreciated the collaborative discussion and wrote, “I like cohort learning in general. I think it is thought-provoking, even if I am not yet sure what is measurably different.” Ben shared that one of his next steps is “to be more intentional about transformational lenses, especially with those who need that affirmation.”

CoP Convening #3: Safety and Security

Per the established routine, I sent out a reminder email to the participants two days prior to the convening with a draft agenda linked (see Appendices F and G). The day prior to the convening I received an email from Lauren that she would not be able to attend due to professional travel, and Tracy also sent an email sharing that she was moving and would not be able to attend. I emailed back and forth with both participants about their adventures and communicated that they would be missed. Ten minutes prior to the convening, Carolyn received a call from her supervisor that required her attention. She communicated that she might be late. Once the Zoom began, Marie shared that she would have to be in and out of the call–she was walking around and in a space with other people. Katherine had technology issues and needed to change to a different device. After some initial conversation about spring break and the challenges of this time of the year, there were four participants present: Carolyn, Ben, Katherine, and Marie. While she was on the Zoom for most of the meeting, Marie was not able to participate other than through the chat. The decrease in participants also led to a decrease in the participant-to-participant exchange as more of the talking was through me rather than participants talking directly to each other without me speaking in between.

In the beginning check-in with participants providing a number from one to 10 representing their headspace for the day, two participants were on the lower end with a four and a five. The other two participants were non-committal saying that the number depends on the minute right now and that they are hanging in there but on the edge with the potential for any one thing to throw everything off.

Safety and Security Discussed

Since the topic that we selected at the end of Convening #2 was safety and security, I suggested that we use our time to share where we are with safety and security in our own districts, have some conversation, and then identify actionable next steps. Each participant shared details regarding the most current issues and challenges in their district with safety and security. There were several similarities across school districts and several significant themes that emerged from the conversation.

Our Worst Days are Days that Involve Safety and Security

Carolyn started by sharing, "One of the reasons why my face looks like this is because of the state of safety and security in our district." Drug use, weapons, mental health, and extreme behaviors are present in all our schools and are the defining categories of safety and security from the perspective of our roles. This puts us in a difficult position as principal supervisors because we do not have the authority to establish programs but are charged with supporting principals. As Ben said, "It sounds like we're all dealing with just the institutional breakdown of what happens when the answer that we need is two steps out of reach."

Drug Use

Drug use has moved well beyond marijuana to things like Percocet and fentanyl. One participant shared,

> All of the high schools just smell like a Grateful Dead concert. I could even get past the fact that everybody's high all day, but now we're starting to see Percocet…Now bad opiates have gone out, so then kids nearly die in the middle of the hallways.

At least two participants shared that they do not have clinical support for drug use by teenagers from the district, and the city substance abuse programs have long waitlists. Ben shared that his district has a grant for drug and alcohol counseling that includes wrap-around services and follow-up. Other participants were eager to hear more about the details of the grant for potential application for their districts.

Morale

Ben and Marie brought up trying to keep up morale amid on-going safety and security challenges. Ben shared when working with a student with extreme behaviors:

> It's tough from our end because we are going through the legal channels…we're going to do what we can to support, but then, just trying to keep morale up when you're dealing with the principal [and staff who have been injured]; it's dealing with the hearts and minds.

The conversation included consideration of our students of color who are most affected by blanket policies that do not account for implementer implicit racial bias. Likewise, as educational institutions working with young people, we recognize that our education

mandate extends beyond academics to behavior. As a result, there is a teaching and learning component that is deeply embedded in safety and security.

Conflicting Dynamics

School board decisions, city politics, state law requirements, and school needs are not aligned. Some of our districts are making the mindset shift from punishment to support for our students in terms of mental health and drug use, but even the most open-minded person changes to a mindset of punishment when their child is identified as a victim. Carolyn stated, "Even the people that seem to get it until it's like your school, then the most progressive person, is like 'Out! Get them out! Get them out!'" Students with extreme behavioral needs due to diagnosed disabilities have legal rights that must be protected. The challenge is in the experience that other students and staff have when they are being exposed to extreme behavior and, at times, sustaining injuries as a result of the behavior. Carolyn shared that in her state, there is a state law stating "no out of school suspension unless you can prove that it's a danger to self and others for them to come back to school, and you're not a danger to yourself or others if you're getting high in the bathroom." Katherine shared that her state has a law that states that if a student is a significant disruption in the classroom they must be suspended. Despite the varying degrees of state intervention, all participants acknowledged that safety and security is one of the most challenging aspects of our work.

CoP Principal Supervisor Characterizations After CoP #3

Even with a follow-up email requesting completion of the written reflection following CoP #3 (see Appendix H), only two participants responded. Ben shared that "it is affirming to hear our group share similar stories and experiences" and that "this

experience makes me realize the immense value that role-specific professional learning can have on principal supervisors, as it is an area where little to nothing is offered." Katherine stated that "even with a smaller group, the conversation was impactful." She spoke about the benefit of knowing that other districts are facing the same challenges as her district and that there is opportunity to find better solutions to the problems by looking to other districts.

CoP Convening #4: Developing Future Leaders

For the final CoP convening, I continued with the routine of sending out an email reminder with the agenda and topic (see Appendices I and J). The agendas became noticeably less detailed in the third and fourth convenings as the group relied less on resources and more on sharing experiences and engaging in conversation. Carolyn sent a follow up email the day before the convening with an apology that she would not be able to attend. Tracy sent an email that I did not see until after the convening requesting the link be sent again since she was driving. However, she was able to join the convening a little late. Carolyn surprised us by joining in about halfway through the CoP, as well. Ben was not able to join in the final convening, so the group was all women.

Recap of Safety and Security

Since Lauren and Marie were not able to engage in the safety and security conversation the week before, I invited them to share anything that seemed relevant from their districts or roles. Lauren asked if there was anything that stood out from the conversation, so I provided a general recap of the discussion. Marie followed up by telling us about a recent experience in which a student had a detailed plan for conducting a school shooting. Fortunately, the plan was discovered when his notebook fell out of his

backpack. The story aligns with the theme that emerged in convening #3 that our worst days as principal supervisors are the days that involve extreme situations of student safety and school security. At the end of her story, Marie said, "I want to talk about something inspiring today, though." Lauren responded, "Let's talk about the way we can grow good leaders. That would be good."

CoP Participant Dynamics

Tracy was able to join at this point. She apologized for being in the car but surprisingly wanted to start by saying, "I appreciate this group, so if you all want to connect after, I am willing to share my personal information because this has really been cathartic for me in doing this work. I appreciate you all." Lauren echoed, "I feel the same way, Tracy." Katherine added:

> That's awesome. That's fantastic. I've been considering a role change coming up pretty soon and have thought I will need to learn from some other people and other districts, and how lucky am I that I've got this group of people that I can say, 'Can you tell me what you do in your district for this? And what's this? Or can I come visit and see what things are looking like? I just feel really fortunate to have gotten to meet each of you and grateful that you all said yes to participate. Thanks for saying that, Tracy.

Developing Future Leaders Discussed

I reminded participants that our agenda had adopted a pattern of each of us sharing about our district or roles as it relates to the topic and then processing as a group. Tracy started the conversation by sharing about her district's leadership development approach and others joined in to ask questions or provide connections. As each person's

share-out died down, another participant would jump in to share about their district. The conversation resulted in several key themes regarding the development of future leaders.

Identifying Future Leaders

Everyone who shared brought up outside consultants or university partnerships that support their districts in leadership development. Katherine and Carolyn also spoke about the departments that exist within their districts to develop future leaders and mentor/support principals and assistant principals new to their roles. Tracy described that in addition to utilizing a consulting organization to revamp the leader development structure in the district, the other thing that has been most impactful is that they "have taken the time to identify talent beyond what our principals are suggesting and meeting with those persons…on our rotational schedule of conversations and find out what it is that you want to do." The goal is to "build a bench" of potential leaders to pull from when positions open and "including them in our tiered support to find out how they are taking leadership within the building." Tracy also shared, "I think sometimes we lean on what we know so much and what we know may be antiquated or may not necessarily identify the needs that we have." Katherine added:

> To your point, Tracy, it's also about looking for people outside of the principals' [recommendations]. We're at schools. We're paying attention to who's asking questions, who's talking to us when we're in [teacher groups]. I mean, we're trying to think five, ten years down the road. Who do we need to get into any kind of leadership pipeline and start working on their certification?

Carolyn shared, "In our district there is an eligibility process to become a principal. So you go through a pretty robust essay, writing, interview, and performance

tasks routine to get on the list to be able to accept a principal position." This process is both transparent and effective in that future leaders know how to get on the bench and the bench stays full. Lauren brought up an additional challenge in building the bench of future leaders in a district that does not have high turnover. In her district, they "partnered with a local university a few years ago to have a principal prep program and built a pipeline…but our turnover here in admin is not very rapid and so because there weren't opportunities here, they went elsewhere." Now her district has a hiring gap because people are retiring, and they don't have a pipeline. This highlights the importance of the timing of identifying and developing new leaders at a rate that prepares them just in time for available positions.

Preparing Future Leaders

From her experience as an adjunct professor, Lauren addressed the leadership mindset that she tries to establish with her principal certification students: "I'm having conversations with people that I think are future leaders in my district. I'm always trying to pose questions, to get them to think in that perspective. If you were in the leader's shoes, how would you respond? Or how would that be perceived? Because I think that is the biggest struggle when you shift from a classroom that is your four walls to a school. That is the four exterior walls, and you know you've expanded."

Katherine brought up that most people complete a principal certification and then become assistant principals (AP). They won't become principals for "five or six years down the line." Lauren added, "I haven't seen any APs getting trained or prepped to take the head role. They're kind of siloed into the things that fall under their realm, and very infrequently are brought into other things…but I do think that is a huge missing piece."

To be sure that APs were preparing for the principal role, Carolyn got an AP Professional Learning Community (PLC) started:

> The APs were very isolated in their own buildings. One of the things we realized is they didn't even know each other well enough to call [each other]. So I'm talking to [an AP]. It's like, oh, you should just call this person–that's their expertise, and they're like I don't know that person. So, we did finally get a quarterly PLC together. We always open with a community circle, and then we go into consultancy rounds, where we kind of have eight [people identified to lead a group] with a problem of practice, and then everyone else gets to pick which problem of practice they want to discuss.

Marie shared that her district has something like an assistant principal academy to "grow that person of interest into the next role, but then always giving them opportunities to get them into positions, or to observe." Marie added that she "was surprised, actually, that there wasn't an official mentoring program for our first-year principals…where they can meet up, and they do different things with human capital." From her perspective, she feels "like that mentorship piece is so critical for all of these roles that people are aspiring to be, and then also just get them networked."

Katherine provided an example that demonstrated that current principal supervisors need to be directly involved in the development of future leaders because they know from first-hand experience what qualities and skills we need to develop in future principals and assistant principals. In her district, there are mentors who are coaching and developing future and new leaders "without asking or talking to [the current principal supervisors] or creating a space to have conversation about what we're trying to

develop in our principals and assistant principals." As a result, there have been a few instances in which a mentor has told a new principal to do something that is inconsistent with current policy.

External Hires

Because all but one of the CoP participants were external hires when they came into their districts, the conversation led to what the onboarding looks like when or if people are hired from outside of the district. Tracy reflected, "If your system has a culture, a climate of achievement, they have good systems in place to help monitor and build capacity. So that's the good part of hiring within, right? But if you have a space where it's totally autonomous and there are no clear systems of student achievement, of monitoring work, of building capacity in place, then it's difficult because you become stagnant. And so the answer is to bring somebody in to do the work, but if that person isn't there to stay, then it just kind of rotates out again."

Ensuring Long-Term Leadership Effectiveness

Tracy shared an article that addressed leadership endurance. She framed the article for the group and explained why it resonated with her:

> [School leadership] is definitely a marathon. This is definitely uphill, downhill; the terrain for this work that we do is so rough. But we do it to a point, and when I say we, I am talking about building leaders. I'm talking about some district leaders. We do it to a point where we just look like we're swimming, and everything is okay, but it is very daunting. And so, for those leaders as we build the capacity of leaders coming behind us or around us, we have to make sure that they are ready for that level of endurance, as well. Because what I realized when I

> saw it from the outside, once I got on the inside of administration, it is totally different than what I thought it was.

Tracy offered a comment to the group that led to a rich discussion about maintaining effectiveness as district leaders:

> A curiosity that I have that I've experienced is that although there are not a plethora of roles, those persons that are in the role that have been in the role for an extended period of time…are not necessarily innovative or even totally effective at what they're doing when some people are in roles and are just holding positions.

She then connected to the evaluation process and wondered if the evaluative processes that we have at the district level are ensuring that leaders are effective. One participant said, "I might need to shut my door to respond." She referenced these district leaders as "a recycled group." Sometimes these people are former principals, and sometimes they are retired people that are brought back to stay in the community even if they have not demonstrated effectiveness previously or in their new roles.

Katherine shared that her advice to developing leaders is to take all the feedback that you can get now because the further along you are in your career, the less feedback people give you:

> You're either self-motivated to do the things that you think need to be done or older and brave enough to speak up about things or you're not, and you just sit in the seat. From my experience, nobody is really pushing for that innovation and change.

Another participant added:

> I actually got my evaluation from my superintendent today…and there's nothing on there that's going to push me or grow me or make me stretch, and I feel like that is what the evaluation process should do. I think it seems as though once you get to a point, particularly at the central office, it's just kind of like, "Here it is."

Another participant shared a story of her interim supervisor who is ineffective in communication which puts a burden on her to have individual clarifying conversations or follow-up conversations with many principals due to the lack of communication or ineffective communication from her supervisor.

Take-Aways

When I asked for take-aways at the end of the session, participants were ready to reflect and share, and their take-aways referenced things that other CoP participants brought up during the convening. Tracy shared:

> You know, like somebody said earlier, we were very much operational leaders. And now we've shifted to be much more focused on instructional leadership. But do those that are coming behind us or that we're training or building capacity have a full understanding of what that looks like? And how are we showing up in that work to reiterate the shifts in education? And somebody mentioned…some of our older leaders how they're not using technology or are not responsive, and what does that really look like? What does an effective school leader look like, walk like, talk like? Do we need to take time to redefine that even from our spaces…how are we moving that theory into practice in really presenting the wholeness of school leadership these days and into the future?

Katherine shared:

> I'm thinking about how Carolyn brought up the eligibility process in her district. When I first came [to my district] we had a [similar] process. It sounds similar to that, and also then actually opens the door for people outside of the district to be able to come in, as well. And then Tracy asks about the question of like, "Are these things consistent across your [the district]?" And my answer was quite clearly, "No." And I'm just thinking…really, I could be doing more to bring in some of the other [leaders in my district] and engaging in a conversation and creating space, and I think I have the autonomy to do that. I don't know why this isn't happening. Well, it's not happening, because I'm not putting it on my list of summer work to bring people together and have these conversations and see what great things we come up with.

Lauren shared:

> I think my big takeaway is just the intentionality. You know, very intentional with other systems that we have, you know, MTSS, school safety, all those things where you have everything very, very structured out with fidelity, you know, process checking, and all of that. But I really don't have a system in place to grow our own. And so, going back to the board and just thinking about what can I do in my small community to make sure that happens.

Anonymity and Participant Engagement

During this CoP, there was noticeably more back and forth among participants as participants posed questions that shifted the conversation and took it down paths that were relevant to the group but not necessarily anticipated based on the selected topic. In

addition, Tracy dropped a few links to articles in the chat. When I asked her to talk about them, she said:

> Ironically, these are some articles that I came across. I was on some mode of social media, and I was like, "Oh, my gosh! This is so good!" And then I saw our topic for today, and I was like, oh, my gosh! This directly aligns with what we're talking about, and so just curious articles to share for food of thought.

Prior to the pre-convening, all participants received a pseudonym name and district to be used in the CoP space. Tracy shared upon her entrance into the fourth CoP that she wanted to stay connected at the conclusion of the CoP. In a moment of participants taking ownership of the space, the following interaction occurred in the final two minutes of Convening #4.

> **Me:** We will be meeting again in two weeks, and it will be the last official time, unless, of course, there's a desire to keep things moving, and of course, if we did, it wouldn't have to be as formal as this has been because we could just be ourselves in that space because my part of the research can be finished. So, I just appreciate you all so much. I look forward to talking to you. I think about you all throughout the week, and I hope all is going well with you all. It is just nice to feel like I have these strings out in the country of different people who are doing this work and just thinking about you all and the kids you are impacting and the difference you are making. Thanks for showing up today. Anybody have any closing remarks? We've got 1 min.
>
> **Carolyn** (Who was not present for Tracy's comment about sharing contact information at the beginning): If I can just jump in and say, thanks so much,

because in 30 seconds I have to go see all of my principals and [assistant principals]. But thank you for creating this space, Jessica. I really appreciate it. And to all of these amazing women, I just appreciate the camaraderie and the community and all the expertise that you shared. Thank you so much. I don't know if this is for the thing, but like I'm [gives real name], I'm in [gives real city], and please feel free to share my contact information. I'd be very happy to be able to stay connected with anyone, and with that I'm sorry–I'll have to rush off! (Laughter and all cameras on)

Tracy: And I'll jump in just like Carolyn. I'm [gives real name], I'm in [gives city, district, and title], and I would love to continue to connect with you, ladies. So, this has been awesome.

Lauren: (Everyone is smiling and laughing so big as soon as Lauren starts talking, knowing what is about to come.) And I'm really [gives real name, city, and school district], and I would love to continue, as well.

Marie: Oh, my goodness, I didn't know we were all pseudonyms, I'm [gives real name, city, and position].

Katherine: Oh, my goodness, I'm [gives real name, city, and school district] .

Me: Oh, that was fun, you guys. Okay, have a great day, and we'll be back in 2 weeks, and we'll just close it all out. (Everyone says goodbye.)

In the written reflections, Lauren wrote:

I love hearing the different perspectives and the sharing of ideas. It really pushed my thinking. Obviously, it is something we are all craving based on the fact that we want to find a way to continue and that we all revealed our "true" identities.

Marie reflected, “It’s tough and we’re all in this together.”

Post Convening

Everyone was able to attend the post convening except for Tracy. She was interviewing for a new position during our post convening time. However, I followed up with her, and we had our own post convening several weeks later. Prior to the post convening, I sent out the agenda which included a link to a document specific to each participant and only accessible by them (Appendices K and L). The document included the following questions for participants to answer:

- Describe your experience in the CoP.
- What themes emerged in the CoP?
- Did the CoP impact your work? If so, how?
- BONUS QUESTIONS
    - What was worthwhile about the CoP?
    - Was it worth it?
    - Did it affect your day-to-day professional work? If so, how?
    - Would you participate in a CoP again?
    - Evaluate the quality of this CoP.
    - How would you describe the CoP to a colleague?

After our initial check-ins, including our current number on a scale of 1-10 (Lauren-6, Ben-6, Katherine-7, Carolyn-6, Marie-5), I thanked the participants again for their involvement and asked them to take some time to type responses to the questions on the document before we discussed as a group. Because Carolyn was in her car, I read the questions to her, and she completed the written reflection after she was back at her

computer. The research question findings are based on the written reflections and conversation that occurred during the post convening. The collected statements from each participant as they relate to the research questions are summarized below but can be found in their complete form in Appendix M.

Research Question Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question of the study was, "How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?" Participants were pleased with their CoP experience and were eager to stay connected with their new CoP colleagues at the end of the study. Marie stated:

> It was wonderful. It went really well, and the group members added value to me and my life as a leader and principal coach. Good for the work and soul. It was therapeutic, just being in a space with people that are dealing with it.

Carolyn shared, "I enjoyed meeting similar roles from outside the district. I have not had this opportunity before." Ben referenced the unusual characteristics of the principal supervisor role that all participants shared:

> I have immensely enjoyed my experience in the Community of Practice. It has been refreshing to candidly touch base with peers who are in similar positions and situations, as we are in incredibly unique, busy, and demanding jobs…It was just very pleasant being able to speak to like-minded colleagues across the country, and, just frankly, knowing that the seasons of life that we go through in this position are actually very similar, regardless of where you are.

Lauren captured the sentiments of most of the group in reflecting on the way that the group came together and had so many similarities despite being from different places and with different backgrounds:

> This was a great opportunity to connect with others in similar roles. It was so valuable to hear about their experiences, to share ideas, and to gain the perspectives and insights of others across the country. It is like a professional learning community about systems work in districts. It just amazed me as to how many similarities in our situations and the things that we deal with even though our contexts are so vastly different. It was just so nice to be able to connect…I really work in a silo, and so to be able to have these kinds of conversations with like-minded individuals, I just found it so fascinating. I feel like we are all very invested in our roles, and I feel like we are all very solution minded. For the randomness of the group coming together, just that really struck me.

Katherine agreed that the professional connections were a significant benefit by sharing:

> My experience was great. I love meeting new people and talking about our common work. I took a few good ideas from the group, but I think the biggest benefit for me is knowing that I have this group of people to lean on professionally in the future now that we have built this foundation for collaboration and trust. This CoP is a group of people in similar roles from different districts who gather together and discuss broad issues that are shared among participants in a judgment-free candid conversation space.

The reference to the space being a place where participants could speak candidly was resoundingly reinforced by other participants.

Tracy reflected on the CoP experience as being a place where the participants could put everything on the table:

> I am grateful to have been included in the CoP. This coalition of leaders provided a safe space to be vulnerable to share challenges and to discover the commonalities amongst strangers. The CoP was a coalition of district leaders in similar positions sharing common topics and experiences. This time allowed each leader a space to be vulnerable and realize the challenges and barriers were common regardless of geographic location. It was a great space to be in. It was great because our backgrounds, our experiences are seemingly so different, but yet we share these common challenges. I think it was good and cathartic to be able to just say it out loud, whatever it was that we were dealing with and know that somebody on the other end could relate to that.

Marie and Ben were explicit in explaining how the dynamics of the CoP allowed for more openness from them and other participants than a professional learning experience that is connected to their district would allow. Marie said:

> I can talk to my colleagues all day long, but at the end of the day, there's a competition level of what is your [team] doing versus mine, and it's real political. I like non-political learning and leading in a space where you can hear other people's ideas and learn from them all.

Ben defined the CoP as "a safe space for colleagues to collaborate and share ideas, struggles, and areas for professional growth." He then described the constant consideration of what we say and how we say it as a principal supervisor:

> I did appreciate the candor and the transparency, but as administrators, I also just think in the back of your mind, "Oh, this is being recorded." Truthfully, there's always that in our positions. I just naively assume that everything we say has the potential to be recorded and used in a different capacity.

Because of the unexpected focus on anonymity both in process and in the minds of the participants, anonymity is explored as a theme in connection to the second research question.

Participants also saw some ways in which the CoP could be improved. Carolyn pointed out that the make-up of the participants changed frequently, "It was like the first couple of meetings, it felt like it was a different selection of us all the time." The dynamics of the conversation did change based on the composition of participants in attendance. For example, the two sessions in which gender dynamics were heavily discussed by participants were the second pre-convening and Convening #1–both of which had only female participants. Likewise, participants connected quickly with each other in the pre-convenings. Even though they knew that there was a second group that would be joining the convenings, the familiarity and rapport built in the pre-convenings had to be reestablished once new participants were added.

In addition to the changing make-up of the group, Carolyn and Tracy both mentioned that there were some things missing from the structure of the CoP that they would have liked to have seen. Carolyn shared:

> I would have enjoyed some deliberate community building time**.** Community building icebreakers, all that stuff is not my forte, and I do enjoy hopping right into the work, but everyone on here is just so cool, and you see these glimpses of

> personality, and maybe part of it would have been difficult. We never really talked about participation or norms.

She then added that the reason she wanted these things was not because the CoP was not valuable but because "honestly…I want more from everybody on the screen right now. You're all amazing." Tracy added that if something could be added to the CoP, she would have liked to have had more that she could personally or professionally take from the topic discussions:

> I am that person [that asks], "What is something I can take that, whether I use it or not, what's one thing that I could take back and do differently?" So, that's just me, and if we don't ever get to that point, I'm good with it.

Collectively, a shared sentiment was that the participants enjoyed the CoP more than they expected to enjoy it. Marie, Ben, and Carolyn all indicated that they participated with the express intent of helping a fellow principal supervisor complete her doctoral work. However, in the end, they found the CoP to be personally beneficial, and all agreed that if given the opportunity, they would participate in another CoP.

Research Question 2

The second research question was "What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?" The themes of the CoP can be divided into two categories: themes identified by the participants and themes identified by the researcher through analysis of the CoP experience.

Themes Identified by Participants

Other than a brief reference by Tracy, none of the other participants referenced

the specific topics addressed in the four convenings as themes: personal positionality, transactional vs. transformational leadership, safety/security, and developing future leaders. In reflecting on the experience, participants were far more likely to identify themes relating to the dynamics of the CoP, their relationships with the participants, and their personal connection to the CoP experience than to the convening topics. The topics served as conversation points, but the discussion and interaction with each other was more prevalent as a thematic outcome than principal supervisor role-specific topics.

A Common Principal Supervisor Experience.

When asked, "What themes emerged from the CoP," the most prevalent theme was that the CoP helped participants recognize that other principal supervisors around the country are experiencing the same challenges that they are even if the contexts are different. Lauren noticed the similarities in the ways that participants approached their roles, adding that we are all invested in the work and solution-minded:

> No matter where we work, we face the same challenges. There are some strong common threads. I think the main one for me was the investment we each had in our roles. This was evident in the participation rate of the group and that members participated while they were in their car because they didn't want to miss. A second theme was that we all seemed to be solution minded. We may have posed wonderings but always shared some things we had tried and offered additional ideas to each other.

Marie, Ben, and Katherine also each referenced the theme of collaborative learning. Marie shared, "We're all going through similar experiences, and we're navigating through the crazy. We're not alone. We are open and willing to learn/grow from each

other." Ben listed similar themes, "Trust in colleagues; the power of authentic collegiality; and the importance of meaningful, continuous growth." Katherine added, "We are from different places but have similar needs and concerns. Each of our districts has strengths in different areas–we can learn from each other."

Gender Dynamics in the Principal Supervisor Role.

Carolyn, Tracy, and Katherine all brought up gender dynamics as a common theme. Katherine was brief in her reflection by adding, "From the women, there was a definite sense of gender dynamics at play in our work." Carolyn was also short in her reference, "Gender dynamics are real and commonly experienced." Tracy provided additional context. She said that a theme was "unsure confidence amongst the women in the group: while all leaders in the group were well qualified, many of the participants expressed some level of imposter syndrome and how their positionality affects the work."

Themes Identified by the Researcher

Complexity and Obligations of the Principal Supervisor Role.

Even though participants did not mention it in their reflection on themes, the complexity of the role emerged as a frequent theme in our discussions, especially as it related to the two major responsibilities of being a principal supervisor and a district leader. Every participant talked about the challenges of managing multiple contexts while being coaches and evaluators of principals and with managing other district responsibilities like instruction and human resources.

Additionally, the presence of conflicting obligations surfaced as a consistent theme during the CoP. As much as participants wanted to be present, even when they were present, they often had other obligations that distracted them from being fully

present. Several times, participants joined from their cars or were late to a convening because they were trying to log in from a mobile device. Other times, participants had meetings immediately following the convening that were on their minds. Two times, participants started the convening but then had to leave suddenly due to issues that needed to be addressed in their districts. Despite all the other obligations of the participants, everyone worked hard to be present at each convening even if they were on vacation, in the car, or moving through a building to get to their next meeting.

Anonymity.

Anonymity was a theme that was ever present in our CoP but not mentioned by participants in the post-convening reflection. Participants came to the CoP with varying concerns about anonymity. Nearly all the participants expressed at some point in the CoP that it was really difficult to remember their pseudonyms ("Sorry, I forgot my name"), and there were many moments of people trying to be authentic in their sharing but also trying to maintain anonymity. For example, on several occasions, participants would be mid-story and accidentally mention their district or a landmark in their community that is well-known to others. This would briefly stop the flow of their story as they stumbled over trying to regain anonymity. By the end of the study, the participants were eager and relieved to share their identities with each other so that they could maintain professional relationships outside of the study.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, "How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?" While all participants found the CoP to be valuable to them as individuals, Ben,

Katherine, and Tracy indicated that the CoP did not affect their work as principal supervisors. Ben provided an explanation of how the CoP was beneficial but did not necessarily translate to his day-to-day work as a principal supervisor:

> I appreciated being able to bounce ideas off of colleagues in similar positions as mine. It was also affirming and reassuring to know that the "stations of life" that our roles go through are the same everywhere, regardless of your state, community, situation, or circumstance. I wouldn't say it impacted my day-to-day work; however, it was reassuring to know that I had an outlet to candidly talk to peers who shared similar experiences as I did.
>
> An impact for us in our roles has a very different connotation in our day to day lives, especially when it comes to student achievement and effectiveness. So, it was hard for me to separate that from this, but in a great way. It felt very rewarding just to be able to talk to like-minded people who share similar struggles and successes, and I truly did not see that as a benefit of joining in the beginning. I thought it was just going to simply be talking about structured practices, so I actually ended up enjoying it a lot more because of [that].

Katherine shared similar sentiments to Ben:

> I didn't notice a change in my day-to-day work. Perhaps if I utilized the resources shared then I might. One of the biggest benefits that I don't think I expected was just to be able to speak candidly, without concern, that everything you say might go to someone else or be interpreted in a way that gets told to someone. Just being able to speak candidly and knowing that it's staying in this group, both because of the agreements that we've made, but also because of our roles and

> we're not in the same districts. I think if people looked at my work, they wouldn't be like, "Oh, wow! She's a different principal supervisor than I was when we started." I think it's more about how I felt than what I did.

Tracy also stated that the CoP, "did not impact my leadership actions; however, it provided support for my personal reflection as a leader. That self-reflection led to self-awareness of my reaction to experiences in this position."

Marie, Carolyn, and Lauren all said that the CoP did impact their principal supervisor work, but Marie and Carolyn's more detailed responses do not indicate how the CoP impacted their work other than serving a positive experience for Marie who brought up the therapeutic nature of the CoP again, "I am not alone in this work. This has been almost therapeutic. I just know a lot of this is so isolating." For Carolyn, her explanation was that the CoP increased her knowledge in one specific area, "I'm more aware of the interplay of state and [federal] rules with district policy and procedures."

Lauren had the most detailed response to how the CoP impacted her work as a principal supervisor:

> It was affirming because I was not alone in my thinking or the things that I have to deal with in my role. It was supportive in terms of giving me new perspectives from which to come at my work. It also pushed my thinking when members approached things in different ways. New ideas always help the day-to-day. Any time I can build my toolkit, there is a positive effect on my work. I think all of that has an impact on how I respond to things.

Commitment to the CoP

During the post convening conversation, I asked:

> There were multiple times when people said they weren't going to make it [to a convening] and then still came. In my experience professionally, if somebody already has the "out" not to come, they usually don't come. I'm just thinking, Carolyn, I think there was a time that you told me you weren't going to be able to come, and then you managed to make it work. And then, Marie, you gave us a heads up that you were going to be at the beach, and then you still came in the car with your kids. So, I just wonder, is that out of a sense of obligation, like "I signed up for this, so, therefore, I'm going to be there," or was there something else behind that?

Marie answered:

> Part of it is like you make a commitment you're doing something. I have a doctorate, and I know it was awful with my research, so I always feel really compelled when a doctoral student is trying to do their research. I feel very compelled to help them because that's very difficult…I guess you make a commitment for sure, but then I enjoyed having that therapeutic [experience], just being able to hear people and know that we're not in this alone.

Carolyn added:

> In fact, today I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to make it. I was like, you know what, no, I'm gonna. The principal [I needed to meet with today] is usually hyper prepared, so I'm going to roll the dice and hope that we can get through the budget in 60 minutes instead of 90…When you reached out [about participating in the CoP] I wanted to help and felt some obligation to keep those commitments, but, also, to the group, we're all in this work, and we all have impossible

> calendars, and when everyone else is doing their best to make it from the beach or from the car with kids, even if it can't be perfect, we're still going to be there.

Ben shared:

> I felt super guilty, missing the one or two that I had to, and it was just one of those pieces where there's only one person that would trump this. And I think we all know who that person is in our district…but I also had some comfort in knowing that if there's a group that was understanding of the commitment that we had to ultimately serve, it was this group. It was a really great experience.

Reflection on Areas of Greatest Effectiveness and Areas of Least Effectiveness

Just as I asked at the pre-convening that occurred two months previous, at the post-convening I asked participants to reflect on their areas of greatest and least effectiveness as a principal supervisor. At this point in the CoP experience, participants were noticeably more comfortable with each other and me. One participant said, "Am I the only one who could benefit from being reminded what six weeks ago my greatest strength and weakness was?" Everyone started laughing and talking over each other. One participant said, "I was cussing in my head, like sh**; I have no idea!" I said, "So here's what we're gonna do–I'm not going to tell you until after you tell me…deal?" They got on board, but then someone said, "What are the options?" and another added, "Was it like 1-5?" and everyone was laughing again.

Carolyn started the group off, and when she finished, I read the summary of her areas of greatest effectiveness and least effectiveness from the pre-convening. Everyone followed in suit, but the exercise became more of a game to see how right they were. One participant said, "this is a fun game…I feel like in three more hours this would be a

great drinking game." Laughter ensued again when I shared that Marie's area of least effectiveness at the pre-convening started out with vapes. Ben said, "Personal use, or…?" Holistically, participants shared very similar areas of greatest and least effectiveness from the pre-convening. The share-out in the post-convening was much more succinct and to the point and significantly less formal than the responses that participants gave in the pre-convening before we got to know each other. The themes for areas of greatest effectiveness were "operations, calendars, logistics, going big to small," "organization, especially when it comes to structures and systems and relationship building," "organization and just management of people and resources," "people, relationships," "staying instructionally minded," and "student achievement, data, analysis, and continuous improvement."

The themes for areas of least effectiveness were "community building, feelings, anything like that," "finding ways to meaningfully support principals," "I'm not a touchy feely person, and so some of the community pieces are much more of a struggle for me," "urban schools because that's new for me," "finding the time to do all the things that I know will actually make an impact on our leaders and our schools," and "influence and impact." The common themes of least effectiveness are concerns about being the type of leader that principals need and making a positive impact in the role despite the demands of the role.

CoP Continuation

When asked in the written reflection, "Would you participate in a CoP again?" all participants answered affirmatively. As I was closing out the post-convening, participants shared a little more about specifically where they live and their families. We

discovered that two of the participants were in the same city the previous weekend for professional conferences, not far from where another participant lives. We talked about how attending conferences together would be a good way to stay connected. I ended the post-convening by asking "Where do we want to go from here?" Ben suggested, "I wouldn't mind meeting again, maybe virtually in the summer. Maybe in June when things settle down a little bit more, students are out of buildings just to be able to touch base again." Carolyn seconded that, adding, "Quarterly feels like something that might be doable." All participants agreed. Lauren suggested that we all put our cell phone numbers and twitter handles in the chat. I offered to send out a group text so that everyone had each other's numbers. Lauren reminded everyone that we have a shared resources document that we can always add to, as well. The post-convening concluded. Since the post-convening, the group text thread has been used a few times by participants to make big career announcements and to share professional opportunities with each other. Next up will be using it to schedule our next virtual gathering.

Summary

The two-month CoP experience beginning with the pre-convening and concluding with the post-convening was a positive experience for all participants as evidenced by their written reflections, discussion reflections, and their genuine engagement with the process and each other. In Chapter Five, I will provide a high-level summary and discussion of the results as they relate to a CoP and the goals of the study. I will also discuss limitations of the study, implications of the results for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter includes my summaries, reflections, recommendations, and suggestions based on the full CoP experience. I will begin by reviewing the research questions as answered in the findings. I will then provide my reflections on three broad areas of the CoP experience that represent five key recommendations for practitioners; the first and last recommendations are specific to CoPs, and the middle three are specific to principal supervisor professional learning. I will then make additional connections between the findings of Chapter 4 and the literature of Chapter 2 and explore the limitations of the study. Based on the CoP experience, I provide several suggestions for further research. In a final reflection on the CoP, I share my personal growth and reflections before concluding the chapter.

Review of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?

The CoP participants characterized their community of practice experience as a positive experience that allowed them to connect with professionals who are facing the same challenges within their districts and their roles despite their geographic locations in the country or the nature of their districts. By the end of the CoP, participants saw similarities between themselves and each participant, often using the term “like-minded.”

Participants also saw the CoP as a safe place to speak candidly about their current situations in ways that they would not be able to do with a colleague within their district.

The purpose of this research question was to determine if a professional learning experience like a community of practice would fulfill the demonstrated need for role-specific professional learning for principal supervisors (Casserly et al., 2013; Cochran et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring, Grissom, et al., 2020). Based on the positive experience that all the participants had, including me, a CoP is a practical and appropriate option for principal supervisors to engage in professional learning that allows them to enter the learning with a solid foundation of shared experiences and understanding of each other's responsibilities and stresses as it relates to the principal supervisor role. This is further evidenced by the resounding appreciation of the participants that the CoP was with a group of people who understood them and made them feel less alone in a role that can be isolating because of workplace politics or because some districts only have one principal supervisor, making the position solo work.

Research Question 2: What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?

The role-specific themes that emerged were commonalities among challenges and experiences of the principal supervisor, gender dynamics for the women in the group, the opportunity to learn from each other, and the unique complexity of the principal supervisor role. From a process perspective, the importance of anonymity within the study but familiarity within the group emerged as a theme.

When identifying this research question, I anticipated that themes would be work related topics like principal evaluations, school board member interaction, and principal

coaching methods. Some of these were the types of topics identified in the pre-convening for discussion during the CoP. However, the themes that emerged from the pre-convening both from the topic list and from the discussion were not the themes that ultimately emerged from the CoP convenings with the participants. Instead, the themes that participants identified were much more personal to the principal supervisor experience and to how they are situated in their roles. There was a focus on the humanity of the principal supervisor and how each of us moves through our work not as professionals but as people. Considering that 77% of principal supervisors surveyed in 2020 indicated that their professional development was primarily focused on district initiatives and programs (Cochran et al., 2020), the role-specific professional development that principal supervisors are missing is the recognition of them as people who are in high leadership roles doing complex work with real implications on the lives of many adults and young people. The training on initiatives and programs cannot go away because those things represent the technical aspects of our work and our ability to be informed leaders in our school districts, but principal supervisors also need professional space to honor the person that they are as they navigate their complex roles. As discussed later, this may not be a professional experience that a school district can or should coordinate; however, the district can prioritize and encourage this type of professional learning by principal supervisors in formats that exist outside of the district's oversight.

Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

The principal supervisors saw benefit in the CoP as a role-specific professional

development because of the personal impact, but the professional impact was not evident for all participants. Participants described the personal effect of the experience as cathartic, therapeutic, and affirming. Participants could not identify specific professional impacts other than that the CoP offered "new perspectives from which to come at my work" and that the CoP impacted more of "how I felt than what I did."

The CoP revealed a need for a greater focus on the person behind the principal supervisor title and much of the discussion related to how each of us sees ourselves in our roles and how we make sense of who we are and how to best support our principals, but even within those discussions, there were many examples of each of us sharing information and engaging in discussion that addressed more traditional professional learning topics just within our four hours of CoP convenings. For example, Ben shared information about a grant that his district received to provide long-term support for students who needed drug or alcohol treatment, Carolyn described a detailed principal pipeline program that prepares educators to be future school leaders, and Katherine spoke about legislative changes and how her district is working through them. A conclusion that can be drawn from this CoP experience is that if principal supervisors are given a space to be themselves and to be vulnerable, topics that pertain to initiatives, programs, and the more technical work of being a principal supervisor will organically surface. A CoP can be a space that addresses a principal supervisor's need to be understood as a person without compromising on also being a place in which they can grow professionally.

Reflection on Shared Ownership of the CoP

I selected the CoP format as a method of role-specific professional learning because the CoP is specifically designed for a group of people who have knowledge to bring to a collective endeavor (Wenger, 1998, 2000). From my perspective as a participant and as a researcher, the CoP was a success because the people for whom it was designed found it to be valuable. However, I also hoped to get the CoP closer to an organic, self-organizing state (Wenger, 1998). One of the goals that I identified in my dual roles of participant and researcher was shifting the balance of ownership of the CoP to all the participants rather than just me. Ultimately, there were moments of shared ownership, but I struggled to function just as a participant for most of the experience.

Efforts to Create Shared Ownership of the CoP

Throughout the process, I tried to create space for all the voices of participants to be heard in the CoP. Because of the nature of Zoom, participants seemed more likely to take turns talking for stretches of time rather than having a natural flow of conversation in which people verbally affirm each other in the middle of a statement. For most of the CoP, I presented questions or topics and asked participants to share. As a result, much of the conversation was participant responses to my questions. However, as the CoP progressed, participants became more comfortable bringing up topics or shifting the conversation.

Leadership and Resources

I asked participants to lead the convenings in the pre-convening and the first convening. Marie offered to lead a future convening but was going to be on spring break for the second convening. I missed the opportunity to follow-up with her after the second convening to see if she was willing to facilitate a future convening. In addition to

seeking shared participation in leading the convening, I also asked participants to bring resources or tools based on the selected topic several times. Marie shared some resources that she pulled up during the first convening, and Tracy brought three articles with her to the fourth convening. This increased engagement by participants represented a growing shared ownership of the CoP.

Guiding the CoP

One of the less obvious but equally important ways in which participants took ownership of the CoP was in how they directed the conversation. Throughout the CoP, Tracy posed questions to the group for discussion. This seemed aligned to her desire to have "take-aways." When she wanted something from the CoP time, she spoke up and asked questions that moved the conversation toward a related topic that met more of her learning needs for the CoP time. At the fourth convening, after sharing a negative experience, Marie shifted the conversation by saying, "I want to talk about something inspiring today, though," and Lauren responded, "Let's talk about the way we can grow good leaders. That would be good." This was the first time that two participants took ownership of the conversation without me asking a question or pulling the group back to the topic. The redirecting of the conversation by Tracy, Marie, and Lauren has powerful implications for principal supervisor role-specific professional development through a connection to research on effective professional learning. By ensuring that the CoP focused on content, incorporated active learning consistent with adult learning theory, allowed for collaboration in job-embedded contexts, provided expert support from fellow principal supervisors, offered time and space for feedback and reflection, and existed

over time, the CoP hit on six of Darling-Hammond et al.'s seven characteristics of effective professional development (2017).

Challenges in Creating Shared Ownership of the CoP

My desire for this study was to include participants who would not typically interact professionally. I intentionally sought out participants who were not geographically close to each other. As a result, my platform had to be virtual due to the logistics of gathering people together. I felt that it was more important to have a variety of perspectives than to identify participants who were close by so that we could meet in person. Ultimately, the virtual platform had an additional benefit in that participants could log into the meeting from anywhere. Even without travel time, participants' time was strictly limited, and there were often work distractions during the convenings. I predict that attendance would have been significantly lower if participants were asked to meet in person even if they were geographically located in a way that made this logistically possible.

Since the global pandemic, most education professionals have become well-versed in virtual platforms like Zoom, so the platform itself did not serve as a challenge other than not having direct personal interaction. The more notable challenge was that because I was the host and owner of the Zoom, at every meeting, my role as the facilitator and researcher was reinforced psychologically for the participants since I was the person changing their names to pseudonyms and managing the waiting room.

My logistical leadership in managing the Zoom and my official leadership in establishing the CoP created a dynamic that made it difficult for all participants, including me, to see me as only a participant. By nature of their professional roles, every

CoP participant has significant leadership experience and has led many meetings and groups. Participants would have known this about me because of our shared positions. I was intentional during the CoP to watch my airtime, to allow for wait time, and to ask questions that I thought might lead to more dialogue among participants. However, at each CoP, it was still clear that I was the driving force behind the CoP because I was asking most of the questions. In reflection, I wonder how the CoP participants would have engaged differently if I had pulled back from being a participant and only engaged as a facilitator. At the same time, participants did not mention at any time that they would have liked to have had more control or leadership within the CoP. From my experience as a principal supervisor, I look forward to meetings where my only obligation is to be present and engage. There are so many responsibilities in the principal supervisor job that maybe having a facilitator of the CoP is liberating rather than restricting in that it is one less responsibility that the principal supervisor must bear.

From a personality perspective, I am extroverted, I process verbally, and I enjoy engaging with others and connecting to what others say. I saw these same qualities in Marie, as she would occasionally share something and then ask another participant directly, "What about you?" The other participants were slightly more reserved and waited for a space to share. With that said, the CoP is a unique environment in which participants are engaging based on the dynamics of the CoP and its participants. It is highly likely that each participant operates differently in our professional workspace than we did in the CoP, which might be another advantage of the CoP experience. I wonder if in a repeated study, if the participant/researcher was slightly more reserved how the CoP might operate differently.

An additional element that may have held the CoP back from shared ownership was that we did not establish a shared purpose or a joint enterprise beyond completing the convenings and post-convening for my doctoral work. Referring to Wenger's (1998) five stages of CoP development, the group moved through potential, coalescing, and active. At the conclusion of this study, the group was at the dispersed stage in which "members no longer engage very intensely, but the community is still alive as a force and a center of knowledge" (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). With that said, the group committed to meeting again a few months after the post-convening, and group members occasionally engaged in a group text thread following the CoP.

Implications of the Results on Shared Ownership of the CoP

Because the CoP was situated in a study, the organic nature of the CoP was somewhat lost. My hope is to re-engage with the CoP participants outside of the study to move us back to Wenger's (1998) active stage. The next step for the CoP will be to establish a shared purpose that goes beyond supporting my doctoral work. Fortunately, each participant left with positive feelings about the CoP and a willingness to re-engage, so it is possible that the CoP could move back into Wenger's (1998) active stage in which "members engage in developing a practice" (p. 3). For the CoP to be long lasting, participants would have to choose to engage for a specific purpose and commit to attendance and facilitation. Now that my doctoral study is complete, I will be able to move fully into participant mode which means that other participants can step into leadership of the CoP more easily if they so desire. The absence of research questions and forms for data collection will make the convenings feel more natural and shared. At the same time, because principal supervisors are all so busy and participation is

voluntary, without the compelling commitment to participate to support my data collection, some participants may not prioritize the CoP as much as they did during the study. As a result, identifying a new shared purpose of the CoP will be critical for the CoP to stay alive. Participants valued the space to be with like-minded professionals, and for some of the participants, that might be enough to warrant continued engagement. Other participants, however, expressed a desire to be more intentional in the CoP around getting to know each other and have professional take-aways from the experience. As part of a cycle of continuous improvement, this first stage of our CoP in which we were situated in a study has allowed for a natural break for us to reflect on the experience we just had and to refine what we collectively want our CoP to be. Another possible scenario is that the participants in this CoP identify different joint enterprises or purposes, providing the opportunity to split into two CoPs and invite additional participants to join based on their desire to engage in the joint enterprise.

In reflecting on this CoP, I did not establish a purpose other than to explore how a CoP serves as a source of professional learning for principal supervisors. I did not specify a specific purpose for two reasons; the first is that I wanted to let the participants have as much input and say in the direction of the CoP as possible, and the second is that I did not want to put restrictions on my participant pool out of concern that I would not be able to identify enough participants for the study. In a way, these four convenings along with the pre and post convenings have served as "getting to know you" space for a group of principal supervisors. To progress as a CoP, we will need to decide what our stated shared purpose or joint enterprise is for the group, leading to my first recommendation:

Recommendation #1: For practitioners seeking to establish a CoP, the participants

must have a clear, shared purpose from the start of the CoP so that there is full buy-in from all participants which leads to shared ownership. In addition, honor the nature of the CoP by revisiting the purpose frequently and working collaboratively as a CoP to determine if the purpose is still meeting the needs of the CoP or if it needs to be revised.

In the absence of an identified purpose for this CoP, the purpose became to provide data for my doctoral study. As a result, once the data was collected and the study was over, the participants did not continue to engage with each other in significant ways because the purpose had been fulfilled. By identifying a shared purpose from the start, principal supervisors across the country likely will want to engage in this type of learning together. Ideally, CoPs or something similar would become such a common practice among principal supervisors that district leaders start to see CoPs as a valuable and valid method of professional learning for their principal supervisors. A further implication for practice is that CoPs might also be beneficial to principals, teachers, other district level roles, and professionals outside of the field of education.

Reflections on Anonymity in the CoP

Even though participants did not directly identify anonymity as a theme of our CoP, the theme of anonymity was ever present in the experience. Before the CoP began, I assigned pseudonyms to participants and spent time in the IRB overview with participants talking about how their personal identities (names) and professional identities (districts and cities) would be protected throughout the study. As soon as a participant entered the Zoom waiting room, I changed their Zoom name to their pseudonym before they became visible to other participants. I also took steps to provide shared documents

in PDF form so that participant's identities would not be visible in a shared document with other participants. As previously discussed, participants often stumbled over their pseudonyms by not realizing that someone was talking to them, or they paused in their sharing when they realized that they had shared something that was identifying to their district or state. The cognitive dedication to anonymity likely stifled some, but not all, authentic sharing by participants.

In reflecting on the entirety of the CoP, I wonder if the initial anonymity served as more of a benefit than I expected because it gave people an opportunity to share more freely because they were anonymous, which allowed them to build trust and rapport with each other. The trust and rapport then created relationships so that by the end of the CoP participants were not just willing but eager to reveal their identities to stay connected and to network with each other. This outcome may be specific to the anonymity dynamics of the principal supervisor role in that each of us serve as high level district administrators in a profession that is subject to significant critique and oversight. Principals and school district administrators are taught that everything that we do and say is subject to public comment and sometimes even legal action, so each participant brought that added layer of context to the CoP. From my experience, most of my principal colleagues have been subpoenaed at least once in their professional career for school related civil cases, and most of my principal supervisor colleagues have been named as a defendant in a civil suit that also includes the school district. Marie acknowledged this fear when sharing that she asked some of her colleagues if they wanted to participate in the CoP, and they were quick to decline because they were fearful that they may inadvertently say something that

would somehow negatively impact them professionally if it was tied to them and became public.

Implications of the Results on Anonymity in Professional Learning

Principal supervisors need role-specific professional learning opportunities that are safe and meaningful to their learning and growth. Participants repeatedly shared that this CoP was valuable because they could share in a way that would not negatively affect them professionally. In this CoP, participants initially were hesitant to share even with complete coverage of anonymity other than their physical appearance from their Zoom appearance and their general job description as a principal supervisor. As a participant, even knowing that I was the only one with access to the recordings, I still checked myself as I was sharing to make sure that I would be okay with anything I shared being known outside of the CoP. The missing element of a safe professional learning space for principal supervisors led to my second recommendation: **Recommendation #2: It stands to reason that until the culture of school districts change to be safer places for professional vulnerability, principal supervisors' professional learning that requires feedback and reflection needs to be disassociated entirely from the principal supervisors' district and conducted in a space in which details are not documented in writing or recorded.**

To have this kind of safe space, professional learning *for* principal supervisors must be conducted *by* principal supervisors. While communities of practice are not necessarily the only format that could support this type of professional learning, the nature of CoPs as being voluntary, self-organizing, and self-maintaining serves this purpose well (Annan & Carpenter, 2015; Cambridge et al., 2005; Wenger, 1998). I am

excited to see if sharing about our positive experience of participating in a principal supervisor CoP that was organized by principal supervisors might encourage other principal supervisors to engage in similar groups.

Reflection on the Complexity of the Principal Supervisor Role

As presented in Chapter 4, a significant theme that emerged from the CoP was that principal supervisors from a variety of districts with a range of demographics experience similar challenges and struggles in their daily work. From the perspective of a researcher sitting in the CoP and listening to participants, there were a few topics that were frustration points for participants as evidenced by the level of emotion in which they spoke about them and the frequency and depth with which they shared about specific topics.

Gender

The first topic that seemed to be a point of frustration was the role that gender plays in our positions within our districts. Several women participants said that they felt that their principals and colleagues were more open to hearing directions, information, and guidance from men than from them. While 80% of public-school teachers are women, only 25% of superintendents are women (Phillips, 2023). In addition, educators are seeing women who have been in high level positions be replaced with men–76% of superintendencies vacated by women during the pandemic were filled by men (Phillips, 2023).

One of the major challenges of the principal supervisor role is balancing being a coach and an evaluator. The participants in this CoP highlighted that this tightrope walk is a point of constant consideration for any principal supervisors but is made more

difficult when gender dynamics are involved because the female principal supervisors must find a way to acquire respect from their principals that does not come as naturally with positional authority as it does for the men with whom they work. I have experienced this gender dynamic in my work as a school principal, as a principal supervisor, and as a district administrator. From my female principal supervisor perspective, a woman with a strong, direct, and clear voice and perspective is unexpected and, therefore, sometimes unappreciated in the field of education which consists primarily of women but is run mostly by men. In the CoP, hearing from other women leaders who had similar experiences was validating for me. Hearing how they adjusted the way that they operate to make others more comfortable with their strength, seriousness, and clarity spoke to how concerning and prevalent the gender dynamics in leadership, specifically school district leadership, are. Even though none of us should be satisfied with the status quo, being able to conceptualize and generalize the female leadership experience was a gift that I gained from the CoP and has since helped me name what I am experiencing in my work as a principal supervisor.

Race

The CoP participants spoke about race when discussing positionality; however, we did not discuss race beyond our own racial identity even though each of us works in districts that are racially diverse, some more than others, but all have some percentage of students of color. Going into the CoP, I had hoped to spend more time talking about the work that each district was doing around racial equity, and I contributed racial equity to the list of possible topics during the pre-convening. If I had been a full participant and not a researcher, I would have pushed harder for racial equity to be a topic of discussion

in reference to the support we provide our students and families and not just reflecting on our own lenses, referencing the PSEL Standards that most of us use to evaluate principals. To provide more autonomy to the CoP as a whole, I did not push for a topic that I believe would have been beneficial to the group and supportive of my own professional learning in a desire to not over-manage the group from my seat as the researcher.

Unique Role of Principal Supervisor

The final aspect of the principal supervisor role that seemed to be a stress point was the tension between the work that we want to do and the work that we must do. Even attendance at the CoP was an example of participants wanting to be present but sometimes being pulled by the superintendent or other higher ranking district officials for a phone call, a meeting, or a task. When participants shared their headspace numbers to indicate how they were doing for the day, one participant said that she was not going to commit to a number because the number depended on the minute. We all knew exactly what she meant because of the unpredictability of the role and the fast-paced roller-coaster of good days and bad days, good hours and bad hours. Participants appeared to have known what they were getting into with the role of principal supervisor, but like any position, there are things that we enjoyed doing in the work and things that we did not enjoy doing.

The reality that principal supervisors have more to do in a day than can be done requires us constantly to prioritize our time and energy and negotiate and renegotiate with ourselves and others about what needs to be done and what would be nice to be done. Perhaps this dynamic is why many principal supervisors do not regularly engage in role-

specific professional learning either on their own or with the support of their district. In the absence of a full-scale restructuring of the way that school districts assign responsibilities to principal supervisors, I offer a third recommendation:

Recommendation #3: In order for principal supervisor role-specific professional learning to be established and maintained, whether that is in a CoP or some other format, principal supervisors have to come to the conclusion that the time, energy, and effort needed to start and continue a professional learning experience makes more doable a job that requires more time, energy, and effort than most principal supervisors have available.

Implications of the Results on Principal Supervisor Professional Learning

The CoP becomes most valuable to all participants when it is shared by all the participants in a way where each person can push for what they need professionally, and the group honors the need for the participant by engaging in discussion and sharing or developing resources that will help that person. This allows for sensitive but important topics to emerge in a setting that is psychologically safe enough for all participants to be open to learning and growing. The CoP undoubtedly demonstrated that principal supervisors feel alone, and they see value in knowing that other principal supervisors are going through the same "stations of life" as they are. Principal supervisors have a complex role and do not have role-specific professional learning opportunities to help them navigate that complex role. Principal supervisors are craving professional learning spaces in which they can learn with colleagues who understand the role. We know that only about 50% of principal supervisors consider their professional development to be related to the specific challenges that they face in their role (Cochran et al., 2020); this

may be because the professional development that they are receiving does not honor the complexity of the principal supervisor role and does not provide the conditions for principal supervisors to be vulnerable and open about their professional learning needs.

Recommendation #3 made clear that the CoP must be valuable to the individual participating principal supervisor. The next recommendation requires the CoP to be valuable to the principal supervisor community and those who promote principal supervisor professional learning: **Recommendation #4: An ideal next step in principal supervisor professional learning is that the larger professional culture in school districts shifts in a way that encourages principal supervisors to form learning groups that mimic communities of practice in that they are sustained overtime, include shared ownership, and have a purpose and focus that are valued by all participants.** Professional learning in education has changed over time, especially with the need for virtual options during the pandemic (Perry, 2023). However, the content is rarely revisited or monitored for implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The CoP model of professional learning is a significant departure from this type of learning in that the participants commit to an on-going relationship with other principal supervisors with whom they would not typically interact. If school district leadership valued CoPs or CoP-like professional learning, principal supervisors would be able to select this type of professional learning as part of their official growth plans and as an experience that their supervisors would credit in formal evaluations.

Additional Connections to the Literature

Chapter 2 provided a literature review that started by delving into the role of principal supervisor and then moved into the theoretical and methodological components

of this study: social cognitive theory, action research, and communities of practice. While I have already incorporated the connections from Wenger in my discussion of the findings as it relates to the community of practice, a meta-analysis of what occurred from a theoretical lens includes deeper connections to existing research.

The CoP as Principal Supervisor Professional Learning

During the CoP, the principal supervisors reflected many of the concerns that were addressed in recommendations by the CGCS to improve professional learning for principal supervisors, specifically the recommendation to, “provide principal supervisors with the professional development and training they need to assume new instructional leadership roles" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49). This recommendation, along with others, were provided because principal supervisors have such specific roles, and their professional learning needs are ever changing based on the new challenges of their role (Corcoran et al., 2013). The reflections and discussion provided by the participants in the CoP confirmed that role-specific professional learning for principal supervisors is a missing piece and a needed piece in their professional experiences. The positive feedback from the CoP supports Corcoran et al.’s (2013) claim that principal supervisor professional development should be “differentiated according to the skills and experience of personnel and the needs of the [principal supervisor’s] schools" (p. 53). A CoP is an accessible and low-stakes way to differentiate for principal supervisors, but it is not the only option. The key take-away is that there are other professional learning formats other than the types of professional learning currently used by school districts, and school districts should prioritize professional learning that benefits principal supervisors.

The CoP as Social Cognitive Theory

The theoretical foundation of the study was social cognitive theory. The CoP capitalized on people's ability to learn from each other in a social environment with role-similar colleagues. Social cognitive theory is based on the idea of a causal relationship between a person's behavior/cognition and their environment (Wood & Bandura, 1989). In the CoP, the participants responded to each other and were influenced by each other throughout the process. The learning was intertwined with the relationships that were being formed among participants. In the post-convening, participants identified the commonalities that they discovered that they have with other principal supervisor participants as one of the most beneficial aspects of the experience.

Research on self-efficacy indicates that if a person experiences successes, they change how they see themselves and how they operate in their professional roles; they shift to seeing themselves as being able to impact their environment rather than passively being impacted by their environment (Bandura, 1993). This is important in the principal supervisor role because principal supervisors are often the school district personnel who advocate for and with schools for positive change for students and staff, as several participants in the CoP described. By participating in a CoP, principal supervisors left each convening feeling more centered in their role and more connected to their principal supervisor community. This successful professional experience contributes to an overall sense of professional success and purpose and, therefore, leads to increased self-efficacy. Likewise, an increase in self-efficacy leads to endurance in problem-solving and a willingness to think creatively about solutions (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), a

mentality that ultimately strengthens school districts and provides K-12 students with a more positive school experience.

The CoP as Action Research

Before the CoP began, I knew that there would be times when I had to be flexible in how I proceeded with the CoP based on the needs and wants of the participants. A goal of action research is to value the relationship with theory and practice by striving for an experience that positively impacts the participants (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Lewin, 1946). Even though I would have liked for participants to take more immediate ownership of the CoP, I also hoped that the CoP would have professional substance. Therefore, I brought resources to each CoP and often linked additional materials to the agenda. Sometimes those materials were used in the CoP, and sometimes they were not. In the end, the participants communicated that they found more value in the CoP than they had originally expected because of the rich discussions and opportunities to interact with each other.

Even though not all participants stated that the CoP impacted their work as principal supervisors, we were all changed positively through the relationships we developed and time we spent together. This is consistent with how change occurs in action research through the creation of new knowledge generated by the relationships and actions of the participants, including the researcher (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Grant et al., 2008; Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). As we each shared stories and insights about our work as principal supervisors, we honored a tenet of action research that prioritizes the lived experiences of individuals and the process of

making meaning of their experiences (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021; Wicks, et. al., 2008).

This study's CoP went through Lewin's first three steps of action research: 1) planning a change, 2) putting the plan into action, and 3) observing what happened (Kemmis et al., 2014). If the CoP picks back up after the completion of this study, we would be at Lewin's fourth and final step: reformulating the plan in light of what occurred (Kemmis et al., 2014). All participants communicated a willingness to continue the CoP in some capacity, but the CoP demonstrated that a willingness to participate is not always enough for principal supervisors. When something must be cut because there is not enough time in the day or there are scheduling conflicts, the only way that the CoP survives is if the participants find it more valuable than any number of other professional and personal obligations. To ensure that principal supervisors are engaging in meaningful professional learning experiences, a culture shift around prioritizing professional learning, growth, and support needs to occur in public education. Principal supervisors bear responsibilities that match or exceed the professional and ethical responsibilities of the leaders of large private companies, ranging from human resources to budgeting and finances to accountability of outcomes. As demand for and investment in leadership development programs in the business industry are growing at rapid rates (Future Market Insights, 2023), school districts must do the same.

The CoP as Practitioner Participatory Action Research

This study's unique methodology of practitioner participatory action research put me in a dynamic position of researcher, participant, and practitioner throughout the CoP experience. By stating the context of my participation from the start of the study, I felt

liberated to move between the researcher and participant roles as frequently as needed. I also felt empowered to blur the lines of researcher and participant because of the nature of action research and the understanding that there is significant value in the researcher getting to know the participants as well as possible because they are the people that the study is meant to impact most (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021).

My initial draft agendas, which were the agendas we used throughout the CoP, were color-coded to show that there would be a shift from the beginning and core of the CoP to the end of the CoP when I would step back in as the researcher to collect needed data. I also served as the facilitator/researcher in the first few minutes of each CoP as I greeted people and communicated to the group if anyone would not be present, and then transitioned the group into the topic of discussion for the day. Despite having a clearly different role than the other participants, I do believe that I built authentic and honest relationships with the participants, a goal of participatory action research, as evidenced by the depth of our conversations and the number of non-CoP related one-on-one texts and calls that I had with participants after the conclusion of the CoP (Sohng, 1996).

Grant et al. (2008) suggest that when the researcher and the participants share the ownership in action research, there is an opportunity for greater benefits for the researcher, the participants, and the community. My experience in the CoP confirmed that participatory action research can lead to a powerfully positive experience for all involved. I left each CoP feeling better about my place in the larger professional community and feeling more connected to each of the participants. We addressed hard topics, but we also joked and laughed in every CoP convening. Because we were not

bound to a set outcome or a script for the convenings, it felt like the participants could take the discussion wherever they wanted without concern that we were "getting off topic" or taking up too much airtime. As a result, the conversations went where they went, and participants shared as much or as little as they wanted at a given convening. Even from a researcher perspective in which I was monitoring the time and making sure that we got to the survey at the end, I was relaxed and comfortable in the CoP convenings because the participants seemed comfortable, too.

A hallmark of action research is that the direction that the research takes is unknown and everyone involved has the opportunity to experience the inevitability of the research taking an unexpected path (Wadsworth, 1998). By planning the structure of the CoP in advance and keeping the content completely open, I did the behind the scenes work that was required for me to be the researcher first but then be a participant in the moment with other participants, similar to a dual director/actor dynamic (Coglan & Brannick, 2014). In reflection, I am grateful that the CoP moved through a series of topics in the way that it did because it gave all the participants a solid foundation for understanding each other and the commonalities of the work that we do. If the CoP reconvenes, we will continue to refine our purpose and the norms of our collective CoP as it exists outside of a formal study.

Limitations

Prior to the start of the CoP, I predicted three limitations for this study that are often present in action research: small sample size, scheduling challenges as participants must be included in all steps of the process, and general slowdowns that occur when working in real-life settings (Alverez & Guiterrez, 2001). While the size of the CoP does

represent a small sample, the sample size of six served this CoP well, especially in the virtual setting. When all six people were present, which only occurred one time, we were all much more systematic in our sharing. One person spoke and then another person took a turn. The flow was more of a presentation style than a conversation. When the convening included fewer people, there was more back and forth among participants. Because the sample size is small, the results of this study cannot be widely generalized for all principal supervisors participating in role-specific professional learning. It did result, however, in clear transferability of knowledge for each participant as they gained perspective and connection from the experience. In addition, all participants verified that our experiences were shockingly similar, suggesting that the results may be more generalizable than the sample size would typically allow.

Scheduling challenges did arise as a limitation as none of the participants other than me were able to attend for all the convenings. In addition, occasionally a present participant was not really present as the participant was attending to professional or personal distractions. By the end of the CoP, even with reminders, participants frequently did not complete the reflection survey. Other than Tracy, participants also did not share resources or link connections to the topics in between convenings. Participants communicated a desire to have a shared resources document and to add to it at the conclusion of the convenings, but even after the conclusion of the CoP, no one has added anything to the document other than me. My conclusion is that even though there may be a desire to engage with each other in between convenings, the principal supervisor schedule is so full that maintaining the CoP relationships does not take priority for individual principal supervisors.

A limitation that I predicted before the start of the CoP convenings was that because of the unpredictable nature of action research, I might have difficulty identifying participants, scheduling participants, and getting the CoP started. I did have difficulty identifying participants through my convenience sampling but when I engaged in snowball sampling by asking the people I knew to ask the people they knew, I was able to identify enough participants to begin the CoP. From the time I started seeking out participants, one month passed before I identified the final group for the CoP. It took another two weeks to schedule the pre-convenings to get started. This process took place over email. Once the pre-convenings were held and participants met each other and me "face-to-face" in a virtual setting, I did not have trouble scheduling with them or maintaining contact. My fifth recommendation is in response to the momentum that the group had once we engaged in voice-to-voice communication rather than writing back and forth to each other in email: **Recommendation #5: The sooner personal interactions can occur in a community of practice or any action research experience, the smoother the logistics of the collaboration will be because participants will be more engaged and more willing to communicate if there is a personal connection.** As a researcher, had I known that the process would flow naturally after the initial person-to-person contact, I would not have been as concerned about the viability of the CoP in the early stages of development.

Suggestions for Further Research

The participants in this study were mixed in their reflection on how the role-specific professional learning affected their work as principal supervisors. However, all participants agreed that they felt less alone and more connected because of the CoP

experience. This connection seemed to be important to the participants, and two described the connection as a therapeutic or cathartic experience. A recommendation for further research is to dig into how important a feeling of connectedness to other similar role group colleagues is for high level professionals. To take it even further, the participants in this CoP valued that this connectedness existed among colleagues who were not in their same organizations, suggesting a research study on the importance of the larger professional community and the establishment of authentic, enduring relationships with role-similar colleagues. This could be done by studying existing professional networks that have developed organically through social media or connections through conferences or organizations to determine the level of professional satisfaction or efficacy that individuals who are connected to role-group peers feel in comparison to those who are connected only within their organizations; this is applicable beyond the field of education into any professional role in which a person is the solo person in that role within their organization.

Anonymity was a surprisingly significant aspect of this CoP study both in terms of logistics but also in how participants perceived the experience and engaged in the experience. Further research might explore how initial anonymity in professional learning is more or less likely to lead to transparency and openness of participants. Further study could include the nature of a group moving from anonymity into a willingness and desire to identify themselves to each other. Additionally, this study only reflects the importance of anonymity for principal supervisors. Is anonymity a desirable context for professional growth for other professionals in the field of education? Does the need or want for anonymity extend to other professional fields?

In developing this CoP, I tried to plan for as many convenings as I thought reasonable to ask participants to attend in a voluntary study. A further study would be to identify existing principal supervisor CoPs that have been meeting for longer than this CoP to see if a longer CoP has a greater impact on the work of principal supervisors. In addition, if there are principal supervisor CoPs that have developed organically, it would be interesting to see if there is a different level of shared ownership of the CoP when it is established by the participants rather than by a researcher.

A final recommendation for future research is around the culture of vulnerability and professional growth within school districts, specifically among high level district officials. Current research and publications claim that vulnerability in leadership leads to increased effectiveness and trust (Brown, 2018; Kaplan & Manchester, 2018). However, there is an absence of research that identifies the root cause for resistance to vulnerability by district leaders. This may speak to a culture of distrust in the educational community. Several participants communicated that one of the most valuable aspects of the CoP was that they could speak freely without concern of ramifications compared to how they would be more careful with their speaking if they were in a professional learning environment associated or organized by their district. Possible research questions are why is this a common thread among principal supervisors from different districts, and how does the perceived inability to engage fully in professional learning impact the professional learning experiences of principal supervisors across the country?

Personal Growth and Reflection

The CoP experience was incredibly beneficial to me from a personal wellbeing perspective. I was hopeful that participants would connect with each other in the

experience, but the speed and depth at which participants opened up and formed genuine relationships far exceeded any expectations that I had. The CoP became a place where I did not have to explain the weight of my day or my reason for working as hard as I do. The balance of laughter, learning, and connecting was uplifting, and I left every convening smiling and excited about the next time we would meet.

From a professional perspective, I learned much about how to ensure that collaborative learning is valuable by setting a clear purpose, outlining roles, and being open to going off script. In my work as a principal supervisor, I have seen already how the presence of these three things can strengthen a professional collaboration or learning experience and how the absence of any of those three things can lead to a professional experience that is not valued by participants or does not provide participants with meaningful learning that is applicable to their work. This has a direct impact on how I will frame principal professional learning in the coming year and how I will engage with colleagues in professional learning. I also have a better understanding of how my principal supervisor colleagues might be entering professional learning spaces in our district because these spaces do not allow for anonymity or the opportunity to share and discuss without a layered context of district politics. Therefore, I learned that I need to prioritize an out-of-district community of practice as part of my professional learning.

As a researcher, I learned that I can balance researcher and participant successfully even if it is not the most comfortable way of engaging. In fact, I suspect that I was a better listener and colleague while performing dual parts because I was more attentive to the inclusion of all participants and the airtime that I was taking. This is a perspective that will impact my future professional role as I remind myself that other

people may be feeling the same way that I am and that I do not have to prove myself in professional settings. When I can set myself aside, more good things will come from the group for the shared purpose of supporting our schools, our principals, and our students. This also speaks to the power of vulnerability. When I allowed myself to be vulnerable with a group of colleagues, I felt closer to them, affirmed by them, and, ultimately, more able to fulfill my role because of my vulnerability.

Conclusion

This practitioner participatory action research study was designed to explore a possible role-specific professional learning option for a category of professionals who have not historically had access to role-specific professional learning opportunities. The goal of the CoP was to provide improvement for the principal supervisors who participated, including myself as a practitioner/participant/researcher (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2012; Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). The results of this study overwhelmingly demonstrated that this CoP experience was beneficial to all participants and that each participant could identify ways in which their personal or professional lives were improved through their participation in the CoP.

In my study findings and conclusions, I was intentional about preserving the voices of the participants and honoring their quoted words. Among all the benefits of this experience from my multi-dimensional seat, the greatest was getting to know each participant and having the privilege of spending time with them every other week for a couple of months. Even in the analysis of the convening transcripts and coding of themes, I often found myself smiling or even laughing out loud as I remembered special moments during the CoP as all the participants connected with each other in ways that we

never would have at a conference or at a formal district-directed professional learning session. While each participant is incredible and unique in their own ways, I do not believe that it was just because each of these people are great that the experience was so positive. I believe that the structure of the CoP, the shared role experiences, the intentionality of focus topics, and the willingness of participants to speak made this CoP a positive experience for everyone involved and, therefore, could be replicated in any number of other principal supervisor CoPs.

The CoP, however, was not just about having a positive experience for a group of professionals. The bigger intention was to support a vitally important role group in our K-12 American school districts. Principal supervisors have an indirect but significant impact on our K-12 students (Grissom et al., 2021; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Any research that potentially leads to more effective principal supervisors to benefit students is worth conducting. When principal supervisors feel more connected to their colleagues and feel better about their work, they are better able to support principals who are then better able to support students. That is why studies like this are essential to the field of education.

In reflecting on the full experience, I identified five specific recommendations, two for communities of practice and three for principal supervisor professional learning. These recommendations in tandem with each other would change the landscape of principal supervisor professional development and would redefine the professional nature of the principal supervisor community. If principal supervisors engaged with each other as a larger network throughout the country, our work would no longer be in isolation. In just a short period of time, six principal supervisors indicated that they gained a sense of

professional well-being by participating in a community of practice. The potential of this type of professional learning could be revolutionary for principal supervisors, their understanding of their role, and their ability to effectively serve as a coach and evaluator to principals, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes for K-12 students across the country.

In these five chapters, I have attempted to tell the story of a principal supervisor CoP in a way that serves as a springboard for others to engage in action research, to consider being both a participant and a researcher, to support principal supervisors, and to rethink professional learning, specifically for principal supervisors. There are many innovative ways to encourage professional growth and engagement among principal supervisors, but principal supervisor professional learning cannot and should not be ignored as a critical element of K-12 district administration. From this study, my hope is that principal supervisors who are looking for opportunities to grow professionally see that not only does professional learning not need to be initiated by your school district, it is likely to be more beneficial to you if it is not. Individual principal supervisors can be change agents for themselves and for their colleagues by taking a leap of faith and inviting each other to learn and grow together in communities of practice just as the participants and I did in this practitioner participatory action research study.

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Appendix A

PSEL 2015 Prioritizations of Equity and Diversity

- Standard 1c: Articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement (p. 9).
- Standard 2d: Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity (p. 10).
- Standard 2e: Lead with interpersonal and communication skill, social-emotional insight, and understanding of all students' and staff members' backgrounds and cultures (p. 10).
- Standard 3: Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 11).
- Standard 3a: Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context (p. 11).
- Standard 3b: Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning (p. 11).
- Standard 3c: Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success (p. 11).

- Standard 3e: Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status (p. 11).
- Standard 3f: Promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society (p. 11).
- Standard 3g: Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice (p. 11).
- Standard 3h: Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership (p. 11).
- Standard 4a: Implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promote the mission, vision, and core values of the school, embody high expectations for student learning, align with academic standards, and are culturally responsive (p. 12).
- Standard 5: Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student (p. 13).
- Standard 5f: Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community (p. 13).
- Standard 7c: Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable

practice; trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement (p. 15).

- Standard 8f: Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement (p. 16).
- Standard 9k: Develop and administer systems for fair and equitable management of conflict among students, faculty and staff, leaders, families, and community (p. 17).

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015).

Appendix B

Email to Participants for Convening #1

Dear Community of Practice:

The highlight of my week was meeting each of you and kicking off our work together in this CoP. I am looking forward to our next convening on February 28 at 4PM EST as I hope it is the same for you, especially now that you have met at least a couple of participants.

Based on the topics that we generated in our brainstorming, the second group selected **personal positionality** as our topic for the next convening. I am including a draft agenda for you to review and edit as you see fit. To assist in our conversation, I included a social identity wheel that I have used in my doctoral work, and I did a quick search and linked a few short articles related to positionality in education. If you have other ideas or resources that you would like to share, lead, or work through in our CoP as it relates to positionality and the role of principal supervisor, please add them to the agenda or share them with me to add. **I am being very mindful of your identity and how Google docs show your identity if you are in the docs or editing the docs, so a PDF of the draft agenda is attached to this email.**

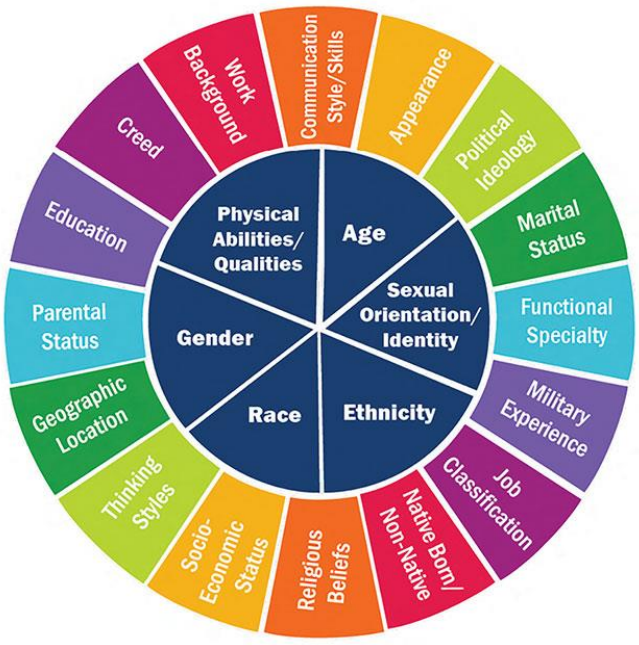
As we move through this work, my goal is that we share the role of facilitator and organizer. If anyone would like to volunteer to be the facilitator for the next convening, please let me know. If not, I am happy to do the first one and then pass the torch moving forward.

Wishing you all a wonderful weekend that gives you the rest and energy that you need for a great week ahead!

Appendix C

Community of Practice Convening #1 Agenda

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Check-In		
Learning Together ● Social Identity Wheel Handout.pdf		
Discussion ● Positionality Statement | Centre for Teaching and Learning ● Reflect on Your Positionality to Ensure Student Success		● Personal Operating Manual handout template - Future Forum ● Courageous Principal Training ● Marie's User Manual
Reflection		
Agenda for Next Time (Google Doc)		**Topic: Balancing Transactional vs. Transformational**



Consider the following questions while looking at the wheel:

- Which identities do you think about most often?
- Which identities do you think about least often?
- About which of your identities would you like to learn more?
- Which identities have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself?
- Which identities have the greatest effect on how others perceive you?

https://www.mgma.com/resources/human-resources/how-medical-practices-can-continue-the-journey-tow

Appendix D

Email to Participants for Convening #2

Good afternoon,

I hope everyone has enjoyed a nice weekend. Last week, my area had a significant wind event, and our power was out for almost 3 full days with 2 missed days of school. I'm looking forward to the first full week of school that we will have had since mid-February.

Here is the agenda for our convening on Tuesday (PDF is also attached to the email). Last time, we decided to spend some time learning about and discussing **how to balance transactional and transformational leadership**. I found some resources and linked them at the bottom of the agenda. If you have something that you would like to add, please do, or send it to me, and I will add it.

If you are feeling moved to facilitate our meeting on Tuesday, please let me know before or at the meeting. I am willing and ready to hand over the reins.

Zoom link is in the invite and at the top of the agenda. Looking forward to seeing you on Tuesday!

Appendix E

Community of Practice Convening #2 Agenda

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Check-In: Scale of 1-10		
Learning Together: **Balancing Transactional vs. Transformational Leadership** **https://youtu.be/C6tNK3t7Q9k**		
Discussion		
Reflection ● **Actionable steps** ● **Sharing of resources**		
Agenda for Next Time		

Resources:

Image Citation: **Transactional vs Transformational Leadership - Florida Tech Online**

4 I's of Transformational Leadership

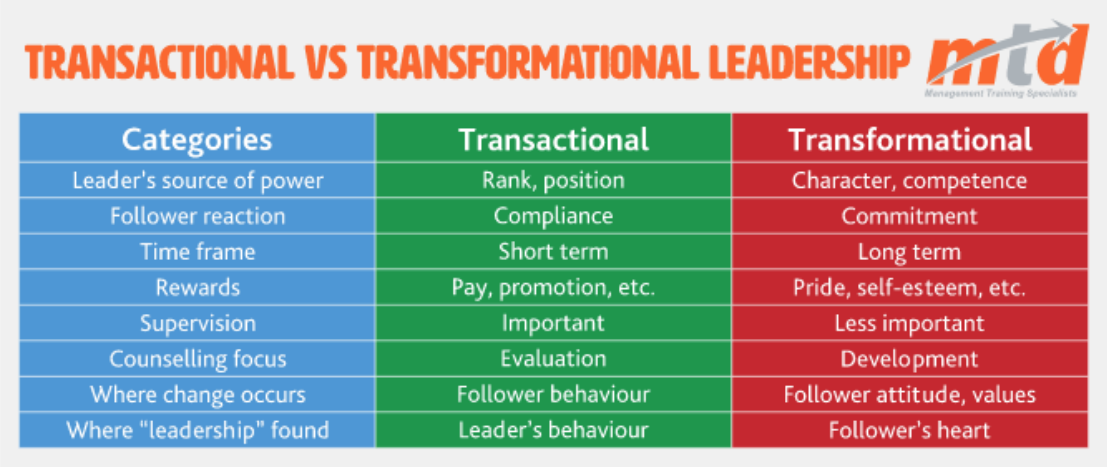
- **Intellectual Stimulation**
- **Individual Consideration**
- **Inspirational Motivation**
- **Idealized Influence**

Transactional vs. Transformational Leadership: What's the Difference?: This resource from Michigan State University provides definitions for transactional and transformational leadership along with comparisons and examples.

Leadership Styles that Create Excellence - Dynamic and Responsive | MSU Online: A companion resource that lists types of leaders

Daily Leadership Development | Dr. Ronald E. Riggio: A few resources from Dr. Ronald Riggio

Hyseni Duraku Z and Hoxha L (2021).pdf: Recent study on the transformational and transactional attributes of school principals



Categories	Transactional	Transformational
Leader's source of power	Rank, position	Character, competence
Follower reaction	Compliance	Commitment
Time frame	Short term	Long term
Rewards	Pay, promotion, etc.	Pride, self-esteem, etc.
Supervision	Important	Less important
Counselling focus	Evaluation	Development
Where change occurs	Follower behaviour	Follower attitude, values
Where "leadership" found	Leader's behaviour	Follower's heart

Image Citation: What Is The Difference Between Transactional and Transformational Leadership? - MTD Training (June 16, 2020)

THE BASIS FOR COMPARISON	TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP	TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP
MEANING	Leadership style where the leader uses rewards and punishments to motivate followers	Leadership style where the leader uses charisma and enthusiasm to inspire followers
CONCEPT	The leader emphasizes his relationship with the followers	The leader emphasizes the followers' values, ideals, morals, and needs.
NATURE	Responsive	Active
BEST FOR	Busy environment	Turbulent environment
WORK FOR	Development of an existing organizational culture	Changing the current corporate culture
STYLE	Bureaucratic	Charismatic
HOW MANY LEADERS CAN THERE BE?	One	Several
FOCUSED ON	Planning and execution	Innovation
MOTIVATIONAL TOOL	Attract supporters by putting their interests first	Attract supporters by focusing on the interests of the company

Jelvix jelvix.com

Image Citation: [Transactional Vs. Transformational leadership - different paths to resultsJelvix]

Three forms of transactional leadership

- **Passive**
- **Active**
- **Constructive**

[Transactional Vs. Transformational leadership - different paths to resultsJelvix]

Appendix F

Email to Participants for Convening #3

Good evening!

I hope everyone had a great weekend. We had lovely weather today which allowed for lots of outdoor time. Our spring break starts at the end of the week, so my family is looking forward to a short week with a trip to NYC/Connecticut starting on Friday.

At our last convening, we decided to spend some time on safety and security for the upcoming convening. Rather than linking a bunch of resources, I think it would be helpful for us to share where things are in our respective districts/schools to see if there are trends and then shift the conversation to actionable next steps as principal supervisors. What are the ways that we can impact safety and security or best support our principals as they do the work?

Any other suggestions for structuring our time are welcome! A very skeleton agenda is linked and attached. As always, the zoom link is in your invite and at the top of the agenda.

Appendix G

Community of Practice Convening #3 Agenda

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Check-In		
Learning Together: Safety and Security		
Discussion		
Reflection		
Agenda for Next Time		**Topic: Developing Future Leaders**

Appendix H

Email to Participants Following Convening #3

I just wanted to reach out and tell each of you how grateful I am for you! I know that your schedules are crazy and making time to come to these is challenging. What I love is that you are kind enough to reach out if you aren't going to make it and even if you are being pulled in a ton of directions, you try to log on anyway.

Today, we talked about safety and security. If you weren't able to come but want to share some thoughts on the topic, send me an email. I will compile them and share the info back out with the group using your pseudonyms.

In the meantime, here is the latest quick reflection. Even if you weren't able to join us, please take a minute to share your thoughts.

Next time (April 11), we will be discussing Developing Future Leaders. I'm looking forward to learning with and from you!

Appendix I

Email to Participants for Convening #4

Hello, CoP Friends!

It feels like it has been an extra long time since I have seen each of you, so I am glad that we are scheduled to meet this Tuesday at 4PM EST to discuss **Developing Future Leaders.** We will spend some time sharing what we are doing in our districts along with any specific needs that other members of the group might be able to support.

Here is the link to the agenda: Agenda. The agenda is also attached as a PDF.

After this week, we will meet just one more time as a closing session. I will be looking for your reflection on the experience and seeking your input on the themes that emerged during our months together.

As always, I am so appreciative of each one of you and the effort that you have made to carve out time to meet. Fingers crossed that the stars align for our next two times and that we are all able to attend!

See you Tuesday!

Appendix J

Community of Practice Convening #4 Agenda

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Check-In		
Learning Together: Developing Future Leaders What does this look like in your district? Do you have any specific needs for the group to support?		
Discussion		
Reflection		
Agenda for Next Time		**Reflection on the Experience**

Appendix K

Email to Participants for Post Convening

Good afternoon! We are scheduled to meet one last time tomorrow afternoon at 4PM EST. I am including the agenda as a PDF attachment and a google doc. Embedded in the agenda, each of you has a private google doc that includes some questions that I will give time for you to answer tomorrow, but feel free to look ahead if that better suits you.

See you soon!

Appendix L

Post Convening Agenda

ITEM	PERSON/TIME	NOTES
Check-In **Shared Resources**		
Individual Reflection (Written) ● **Carolyn** ● **Tracy** ● **Ben** ● **Lauren** ● **Marie** ● **Katherine**		
Share-Out on Reflection Questions		
Additional Discussion on Possible Questions		
Review Descriptions (On Google Doc)		
Reflection on Professional Role		Areas of greatest effectiveness Areas of least effectiveness
Closing ● **Where do we go from here?** ● **Final Google Form**		

Appendix M

Individual Participant Responses to Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do principal supervisors characterize their community of practice experience?

Marie. It was wonderful. It went really well and the group members added value to me and my life as a leader and principal coach. Good for the work and soul. It was therapeutic, just being in a space with people that are dealing with it. I can talk to my colleagues all day long, but at the end of the day, there's a competition level of what is your [team] doing versus mine, and it's real political. I like non-political learning and leading in a space where you can hear other people's ideas and learn from them all.

Carolyn. I enjoyed meeting similar roles from outside the district. I have not had this opportunity before. I would have enjoyed some deliberate community building time**.** Community building icebreakers, all that stuff is not my forte, and I do enjoy hopping right into the work, but everyone on here is just so cool, and you see these glimpses of personality, and maybe part of it would have been difficult. It was like the first couple of meetings, it felt like it was a different selection of us all the time. We never really talked about participation or norms, honestly…I want more from everybody on the screen right now. You're all amazing.

Lauren. This was a great opportunity to connect with others in similar roles. It was so valuable to hear about their experiences, to share ideas, and to gain the perspectives and insights of others across the country. It is like a professional learning community about systems work in districts. It just amazed me as to how many similarities in our situations and the things that we deal with even though our contexts are

so vastly different. It was just so nice to be able to connect…I really work in a silo, and so to be able to have these kinds of conversations with like-minded individuals, I just found it so fascinating. I feel like we are all very invested in our roles, and I feel like we are all very solution-minded. For the randomness of the group coming together, just that really struck me.

Ben. I have immensely enjoyed my experience in the Community of Practice. It has been refreshing to candidly touch base with peers who are in similar positions and situations, as we are in incredibly unique, busy, and demanding jobs. A safe space for colleagues to collaborate and share ideas, struggles, and areas for professional growth. I did appreciate the candor and the transparency, but as administrators, I also just think in the back of your mind, "Oh, this is being recorded." Truthfully, there's always that in our positions. I just naively assume that everything we say has the potential to be recorded and used in a different capacity.

It was just very pleasant being able to speak to like minded colleagues across the country, and, just frankly, knowing that the seasons of life that we go through in this position are actually very similar, regardless of where you are.

Tracy. I am grateful to have been included in the CoP. This coalition of leaders provided a safe space to be vulnerable to share challenges and to discover the commonalities amongst strangers. The CoP was a coalition of district leaders in similar positions sharing common topics and experiences. This time allowed each leader a space to be vulnerable and realize the challenges and barriers were common regardless of geographic location. It was a great space to be in. It was great because our backgrounds, our experiences are seemingly so different, but yet we share these common challenges. I

think it was good and cathartic to be able to just say it out loud, whatever it was that we were dealing with and know that somebody on the other end could relate to that. But I am that person [that asks], "What is something I can take that, whether I use it or not, what's one thing that I could take back and do differently?" So, that's just me, and if we don't ever get to that point, I'm good with it. Just to be able to have some commonness was great for me, so I appreciate the opportunity to do that.

Katherine. My experience was great. I love meeting new people and talking about our common work. I took a few good ideas from the group, but I think the biggest benefit for me is knowing that I have this group of people to lean on professionally in the future now that we have built this foundation for collaboration and trust. This CoP is a group of people in similar roles from different districts who gather together and discuss broad issues that are shared among participants in a judgment-free candid conversation space.

Research Question 2: What role-specific themes of professional development and interest emerge from a community of practice of principal supervisors?

Marie. We're all going through similar experiences and we're navigating through the crazy. We're not alone. We are open and willing to learn/grow from each other.

Carolyn. Gender dynamics are real and commonly experienced. Most of our issues seemed common, I'm guessing because they are related to common societal problems.

Lauren. No matter where we work, we face the same challenges. There are some strong common threads. I think the main one for me was the investment we each

had in our roles. This was evident in the participation rate of the group and that members participated while they were in their car because they didn't want to miss. A second theme was that we all seemed to be solution minded. We may have posed wonderings but always shared some things we had tried and offered additional ideas to each other.

Ben. Trust in colleagues; the power of authentic collegiality; and the importance of meaningful, continuous growth.

Tracy. Unsure confidence amongst the women in the group: while all leaders in the group were well qualified, many of the participants expressed some level of imposter syndrome and how their positionality affects the work. Common themes also included concerns of safety, evaluating/supporting/coaching other leaders.

Katherine. We are from different places but have similar needs and concerns. From the women, there was a definite sense of gender dynamics at play in our work. Each of our districts has strengths in different areas–we can learn from each other.

Research Question 3: How do principal supervisors perceive the effects of role-specific professional development on their work as principal supervisors?

Marie. I am not alone in this work. This has been almost therapeutic. I just know a lot of this is so isolating.

Carolyn. I'm more aware of the interplay of state and fed rules with district policy and procedures.

Lauren. It was affirming because I was not alone in my thinking or the things that I have to deal with in my role. It was supportive in terms of giving me new perspectives from which to come at my work. It also pushed my thinking when members approached things in different ways. New ideas always help the day-to-day. Any time I

can build my toolkit, there is a positive effect on my work. I think all of that has an impact on how I respond to things.

Ben. I appreciated being able to bounce ideas off of colleagues in similar positions as mine. It was also affirming and reassuring to know that the "stations of life" that our roles go through are the same everywhere, regardless of your state, community, situation, or circumstance. I wouldn't say it impacted my day-to-day work; however, it was reassuring to know that I had an outlet to candidly talk to peers who shared similar experiences as I did.

An impact for us in our roles has a very different connotation in our day to day lives, especially when it comes to student achievement and effectiveness. So it was hard for me to separate that from this, but in a great way. It felt very rewarding just to be able to talk to like minded people who share similar struggles and successes, and I truly did not see that as a benefit of joining in the beginning. I thought it was just going to simply be talking about structured practices, so I actually ended up enjoying it a lot more because of [that].

Tracy. The CoP did not impact my leadership actions; however, it provided support for my personal reflection as a leader. That self-reflection led to self awareness of my reaction to experiences in this position.

Katherine. Throughout the week, I was thinking about the group members and what they had shared. I am hoping to engage with some of the ideas more this summer– especially the user manual. I didn't notice a change in my day-to-day work. Perhaps if I utilized the resources shared then I might. One of the biggest benefits that I don't think I expected was just to be able to speak candidly, without concern, that everything you say

might go to someone else or be interpreted in a way that gets told to someone. Just being able to speak candidly and knowing that it's staying in this group, both because of the agreements that we've made, but also because of our roles and we're not in the same districts. I think if people looked at my work, they wouldn't be like, "Oh, wow! She's a different principal supervisor than I was when we started." I think it's more about how I felt than what I did.

Appendix N

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT
TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Principal Supervisor Professional Learning in a Community of Practice

Introduction and Background Information
You are invited to take part in a research study because you are a current principal supervisor. The study is being conducted under the direction of Mary Brydon-Miller, PhD of The College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville**.**

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate. Take your time to decide.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to explore communities of practice as a professional learning format for principal supervisors and to contribute to the limited research on principal supervisors as a contributing role to the field of education.

What will happen if I take part in the study?
If you consent to participate, you will participate in a virtual community of practice with 4-10 principal supervisors for a minimum of 60 minutes twice a month for three or four months (six meetings including the pre and post convening with the possibility of four additional convenings for a total not to exceed 10). All meetings will be recorded using the recording feature available through the virtual platform. The researcher will also be taking written notes during the meetings and will ask participants for written reflections at the end of each meeting; these reflections will be data sources for the study. In addition, any resources shared during the community of practice or produced by the community of practice will be data sources for the study, as will any communication among participants during the convenings and outside of the convenings in the days between the pre-convening and post-convening. A follow-up conversation to the community of practice may occur via phone, email, or virtual platform of no more than 30 minutes to allow the researcher to check for the accuracy and clarification of her notes after the conclusion of the community of practice. Email or phone may also be used to contact participants throughout the study. Any virtual meeting, individual or group, will be recorded. Any phone call will be recorded with an audio recorder. The researcher is also a participant in this participatory practitioner action research study.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be given the option to have your name, district, and/or position identified or kept confidential with pseudonyms. At the first convening, all participants will be instructed to maintain the confidentiality of group members' identities and contributions with the understanding that due to the nature of participation in the study. By participating in this study, you are acknowledging that the co-investigator cannot assure that all participants will adhere to this instruction. All transcripts will be kept in a password-protected digital file.

Your research test results will be shared with you. Results of the overall research study will be shared with you.

What are the possible risks or discomforts from being in this research study?
There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in interacting with others and engaging in personal reflection. By participating in this study, you are acknowledging that the co-investigator cannot assure that all participants will adhere to the instruction to maintain confidentiality of group members' identities and contributions..

There may be unforeseen risks.

What are the benefits of taking part in the study?
The possible benefits of this study for participants include learning and developing professionally and developing new professional relationships. You may or may not benefit personally by participating in this study. The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in the study?
Instead of taking part in this study, you could choose to not participate in the study.

Will I be paid?
You will not be paid for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

How will my information be protected?
The data collected about you will be kept private and secure by a password-protected digital file.

Who will see, use or share the information?
The people who may request, receive, or use your private information include the researchers and the study team. We may also share your information with other people, for example, if needed for your clinical care, for the research study activities, or for regulatory/compliance functions.

Additionally, by signing this form, you give permission to the research team to share your information with others outside of the University of Louisville. This may include the sponsor of the study and its agents or contractors, those who provide funding to the study, outside providers, study safety monitors, government agencies, other sites in the study, data managers, and other agents and contractors used by the study team. If applicable, your information may also be shared as required by law (for example, to collect or receive information for reporting child abuse or neglect, preventing or controlling disease, injury, or disability, and conducting public health surveillance, investigations or interventions.)

We try to make sure that everyone who sees your information keeps it confidential, but we cannot guarantee this. Those who receive your information may not be required by federal or state privacy laws to protect it and may share your information with others without your permission.

Will my information be used for future research?

Your data will be stored and shared for future research without additional informed consent if identifiable private information, such as your name are removed. If identifying information is removed from your data, the data may be used for future research studies or given to another investigator for future research studies without additional consent from you.

Can I stop participating in the study at any time?
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may change your mind and stop taking part at any time. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify. You will be told about any new information learned during the study that could affect your decision to continue in the study.

Who can I contact for questions, concerns and complaints?
If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller (502-852-6887, mlbryd01@louisville.edu.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call this toll free number: 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Acknowledgment and Signatures
This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature and date indicate that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date Signed

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)	Signature of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)	Date Signed

Phone number for participants to call for questions: 502-439-0850
Investigator name, degree, phone number, University Department, & address:
Principal Investigator: Mary Brydon-Miller, PhD, 502-852-6887, University of Louisville Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development, Room 314 College of Education, mlbryd01@louisville.edu
Co-Investigator: Jessica Rosenthal, Master of Education, 502-439-0850, University of Louisville Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development, 3222 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40218, jessica.rosenthal@louisville.edu
Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Virtual Platform

CURRICULUM VITAE

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B.S. Secondary Education and English
Vanderbilt University
2003

M.Ed, School Leadership
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Ed.D Educational Leadership
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2023

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools
Jefferson County Public Schools
2023-

Executive Administrator of Middle Schools
Jefferson County Public Schools
2018-2023

Elementary School Principal
Jefferson County Public Schools
2009-2023

Elementary/Middle School Principal Intern
Jefferson County Public Schools
2008-2009

Middle School/High School Teacher
Metro Nashville Public Schools
2003-2007

HONORS

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society
2022-

Leadership Institute for School Principals

2018

Tennessee Council of Teachers of English Leadership Development Award
2006

PRESENTATIONS

JCPS Middle Schools: Action for Change
Racial Equity Institute, July 2022

The Other Issues Around Rolling Out an Innovation
Strategic Data Project Convening, May 2022

Critical Pedagogy: A Theory Symposium
Spring Research Conference, March 2021

The PLC Framework: An Overview and Updates
JCPS Digital Learning Channel, August 2020

Collaborative Calibration Visits
AMLE Institute for Middle Level Leadership, June 2019

Making Miracles Happen Through Leveled Support
JCPS Deeper Learning Symposium, June 2019

PUBLICATIONS

Chaney Gilmore, S. & Slater, J (2007). Imitation to innovation: A true tale of a poet and a vertical team from Nashville NCTE. *Tennessee English Journal* (October 2007).