Novice School Principals' Sense of Ultimate Responsibility: Problems of Practice in Transitioning to the Principal's Office

James P. Spillane[1] and Linda C. Lee[2]

Abstract

Purpose: To investigate the problems of practice experienced by novice school principals as they transition into their new occupation, focusing in particular on the first 3 months on the job—a critical transition period according to the literature. **Research Methods/Approach**: This theory-building, mixed-methods, longitudinal study examines a random sample of novice principals from one cohort of new Chicago Public School principals. Using interviews at two time points, we systematically examine the "reality shocks" novices encounter as they experience their new occupation firsthand. **Findings**: A major "reality shock" for novice principals as they transitioned into their new occupation was a sense of ultimate responsibility. This sense of ultimate responsibility contributed to three core problems of practice—task volume, diversity, and unpredictability. While almost all novices experienced the responsibility shock as well as one or more of the practice problems, the conditions of novices' transitions to the principalship either eased or exacerbated the level of practice problems they encountered. **Implications for Research and Practice**: Our account shows how the volume, diversity, and unpredictability of tasks emerge early

[1]Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA
[2]University of Texas, Austin, TX, USA

Corresponding Author:
James P. Spillane, Northwestern University, 2120 Campus Drive, Annenberg 208, Evanston, IL 60208, USA.
Email: j-spillane@northwestern.edu

and intensify over new principals' first 3 months on the job, largely due to new principals' sense of ultimate responsibility. In our conclusion, we discuss the implications of our work for research and practice by considering ways that problems of practice can be eased for novices as they transition into their new position.

Keywords
occupational and organizational socialization, novice school principals, principal practice, the principalship

Introduction

Philanthropic, professional, and government agencies are turning their attention increasingly to school principals, investing considerable effort and resources in their recruitment, eligibility screening, preparation, and professional learning. There is good reason for this; empirical evidence amassed over several decades across various lines of inquiry suggests that principals make a difference in the school improvement process, whether improvement efforts are orchestrated from within or outside the school organization (Augustine et al., 2009; Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Coburn, 2005; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Purkey & Smith, 1985; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Syntheses and meta-analysis of these literatures suggest that school principals have a significant, if indirect, effect on student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2007; Robinson, 2008).

A literature spanning several decades offers insights into the work of the school principal, identifying key challenges or problems of practice that principals face. Principals' roles are diverse: They span activities across managerial, instructional, and political realms (Cuban, 1988), and these varied realms all compete for the principals' time and attention (Copland, 2001; Cuban, 2011; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). Principal work also tends to be fragmented, fast-paced, and varied; it involves long hours and a relentless workload, along with demands from multiple, diverse stakeholders (Duke, 1988; Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Lortie, 2009; MacBeath et al., 2009; Martin & Willower, 1981; Peterson, 1977, 1982; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998; Williams & Portin, 1996; Wolcott, 1973). Together, these conditions contribute to high levels of stress (Allison, 1997; Gmelch, 1983; Lindle, 2004; Savery & Detiuk, 1986; Thomson, 2009) and burnout (Friedman, 2002; Whitaker, 1996) among principals.

Existing work across several countries has shown that novice principals in a variety of settings experience similar key challenges (see Hobson et al., 2003, for a review of the literature). New principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making powers. Oftentimes, beginning principals also have difficulty dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous principal (Duke, 1987; Hart, 1993). Members of the school community not only compare the new principal to the previous one but also often resist changes to the routines and culture to which they have become accustomed. And resonant with the literature on principal practice, new principals frequently have difficulty managing and prioritizing the multiple tasks expected of them. Ineffective and resistant staff members also pose significant challenges for beginning principals. The new principal often finds that supporting, reprimanding, and counseling out these individuals is difficult and stressful. Other, more technical challenges—such as managing the budget and maintaining the school building—also loom large for novice principals, as well as difficulties related to implementing new government initiatives.

Still, most research on novice principals in the United States predates the institutionalization of standards and test-based high-stakes accountability—policy changes that target low-performing urban school systems in particular. Several scholars argue that, with the emergence of a high-stakes accountability policy environment in the United States and elsewhere, the demands on school principals have changed, altering the expectations that newcomers bring to the role and encounter from others (Crow, 2006; Lortie, 2009; Stevenson, 2006; Thomson, 2009; Tucker & Codding, 2002; Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). In particular, those who become principals in large, urban districts in this era of accountability likely face an especially daunting transition. Poverty and racial dynamics, along with expectations for instructional leadership and accountability for school performance, greatly complexify the experience of the novice urban school principal (Anyon, 1997; Chou & Tozer, 2008; Cuban, 2001; Noguera, 1996). With such large numbers of low-performing students and the high turnover in leadership in these environments, understanding the novice principals' experience in these contexts is especially critical for retaining and better supporting them.

In this article, we investigate the experiences of novice school principals as they transition into their new occupation in particular schools, focusing in particular on the first 3 months—a critical period of "entry and encounter" for them (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Using data from a mixed-methods, longitudinal study of one cohort of novice principals in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), we systematically examine the

"reality shocks" novices encounter as they experience their new occupation firsthand. Specifically, we focus on the problems of practice that novices experience, the sources of these problems, and the social conditions of novices' transition to their new occupation that exacerbate or mitigate them.

We begin by anchoring our theory-building study in the literature on novice principals and sketching the analytical framework that guides our work. Specifically, in this article we focus on the organizational socialization of new principals—that is, how novice principals become socialized into their new occupation in a particular school organization. This is distinct from their professional socialization that refers to how one becomes socialized into and identifies with a particular profession over time (Greenfield, 1985; Hart, 1991; Heck, 1995; Merton, 1968; Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Nevertheless, the two types of socialization are related. We use the term "occupational socialization" to refer to our investigation of novice principals' socialization into their new position in particular school organizations. Next, we describe our mixed-methods, longitudinal study. We then turn to our findings arguing, based on our analysis of data, that ultimate responsibility features prominently in novice principals' experiences, even prior to the start of their first academic year on the job. Novices' senses of responsibility, a major "reality shock" as they transition into their new occupation, contribute to three problems of practice—high levels of task volume, task diversity, and task unpredictability. We conclude by discussing our findings.

Anchoring the Work

Most principals enter the occupation from the teaching profession, transitioning from the classroom to the principal's office typically by spending time in another school administrative position (Gates et al., 2004; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Ringel, Gates, Ghosh-Dastidar, Brown, & Chung, 2004). Thus, most new principals come to the occupation having up-close exposure to it, to re-appropriate Dan Lortie's term, having had an "apprenticeship of observation" to the principal's job (Cuban, 1976; Duke, 1987; Lortie, 1975). Still, crossing over into the principal's office represents a sizable shift for most newcomers, a distinct and often abrupt change in perspective, expectations, and work tasks for novices (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Lortie, 1975; Thomson, 2009; Wolcott, 1973). Given colleagues' tendencies to no longer view principals as teachers, moving into the principal's office also brings about shifts in existing social relationships (Loder & Spillane, 2005; Lortie, Crow, & Prolman, 1983; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003).

Empirical Research: Transition Challenges

Our literature review of the empirical literature on novice school principals identifies several insights into how principals transition into their new occupation and the challenges they experience. Role change is central in organizational socialization in general and school principal socialization in particular. Newcomers to the occupation, who are informed by the expectations of diverse school stakeholders as well as their own expectations for their new position, are socialized into a new role identity in particular schools (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Hart, 1991; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Whereas teachers primarily teach students, principals assume a multifaceted job that includes overlapping instructional, managerial, and political roles (Cuban, 1988). School principals struggle to manage these competing roles (Cuban, 2011), and for newcomers, this role conflict potentially creates identity dilemmas as they transition into the principal position.[1]

New principals experience a sense of professional isolation and loneliness, a major contrast with their previous administrative positions (Bolam, Dunning, & Karstanje, 2000; Daresh & Male, 2000; Draper & McMichael, 2000; Earley et al., 2011; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Beginning principals are often struck by how taking on the official title immediately results in staff members being more cautious and distant with them. One large-scale study of beginning secondary school principals in the United Kingdom links this sense of professional isolation and loneliness to the ultimate responsibility of the role (Weindling & Earley, 1987). As one principal in their study explained, "It is the loneliness of being the final arbiter upon whose word all sinks or swims. It is this power that isolates and daunts" (pp. 122-123). Some research also investigates efforts to mitigate this sense of loneliness among novices through meetings and support groups with principals from other schools (Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley et al., 2011; Parkay & Currie, 1992; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Nevertheless, the fact that principals must ultimately go back to their own schools where their situations are unique means that some degree of isolation and loneliness remains inherent to the job.

A second challenge identified in previous work concerns managing the legacy, practice, and style of the principal that they are replacing (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993; Bush, 2011; Cheung & Walker, 2006; Draper & McMichael, 2000; Dunning, 2000; Parkay & Hall, 1992; Webster, 1989; Weindling & Earley, 1987). In particular, novices often find themselves compared to the previous principal. Whether the previous principal was "a hero to be lived up to" or a "bad act to follow" presents different challenges for the incoming principal—with those in the former case having

big shoes to fill (the "Rebecca Myth") and those in the latter case being expected to save the school (the "Messiah Myth"; Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Gouldner, 1954; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Weindling & Earley, 1987).[2] More difficult for beginning principals is coming into a place where the staff, students, and community members have become accustomed to the existing culture and routines developed under the previous administration. Changes brought in by the new principal are thus often resisted because school members feel that their way of life is being challenged.

A third challenge documented in the literature concerns the difficulties novices experience with regard to the multifaceted nature of the tasks they are expected to perform (Bolam et al., 2000; Cuban, 1988; Daresh & Male, 2000; Draper & McMichael, 1998; Dunning, 1996; Earley et al., 2011, Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008; Parkay & Hall, 1992; Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003; Stevenson, 2006; Webster, 1989). With the large number of disconnected tasks that accompany the role, novice principals struggle to manage their time and priorities. In particular, beginning principals are often frustrated by the large volume of administrative tasks, which limits their ability to get inside classrooms and perform the duties that are expected of them as "instructional leaders."

A fourth prominent challenge involves dealing with ineffective and resistant staff (Alvy & Coladarci, 1985; Bolam et al., 2000; Cheung & Walker, 2006; Dunning, 1996; Earley et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2008; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Novice principals often find that when personnel issues arise, they take up an inordinate amount of both time and emotional energy. Interacting with "difficult" personalities can not only be stressful but remediating, and/or removing them is often a drawn-out process that requires significant time and paperwork. Furthermore, novice principals often do not feel well-prepared or well-supported in managing these personnel issues.

A few other challenges also feature in the early experiences of novice principals. Managing the school budget is a challenge for many, as novice principals are often not exposed to this task in their previous roles as teachers and assistant principals (Bolam et al., 2000; Dunning, 1996; Male, 2001; Nelson et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2003). Furthermore, principals are often frustrated by issues related to building maintenance, as they not only take time away from what they consider to be their primary tasks but are also often time-consuming, urgent, and require knowledge that principals do not usually possess (e.g., fixing the furnace; Daresh & Male, 2000; Walker et al., 2003). Both managing the budget and facility issues are particularly prominent in areas where site-based management exists. Last, being expected to implement new government initiatives—particularly

those related to curricular changes—often presents a challenge to novice principals (Bolam et al., 2000; Cheung & Walker, 2006; Dunning, 1996; Male, 2001; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). These mandates may require new knowledge or, due to their external source, can limit principal's autonomy and place them in a more "middle-manager" role. Taken together, this literature suggests that new principals, despite their extended apprenticeship of observation to the occupation, are not immunized to the tensions that accompany a shift to a new occupation and the process of on-the-job socialization (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Hughes, 1958).

Analytical Framing: A Sense-Making Perspective on Occupational Socialization

We use a sense-making framework to examine school principals' on-the-job socialization as they work to make sense of their new environments and the changes, contrasts, and surprises therein (Louis, 1980). Sense-making is fundamentally about meaning making, not just interpreting cues in our environment but also noticing and bracketing them. Thus, "sense-making is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery" (Weick, 1995, p. 8). Sense-making is triggered when ongoing flows of experience are interrupted and/or automatic processing fails because existing scripts or schemas no longer work (Louis, 1980; Louis & Sutton, 1991; Mandler, 1984). Situations of change, contrast, surprise, discrepancy, ambiguity, and uncertainty prompt people to extract puzzling clues from their environment in an effort to reconstruct their understanding of their situation.

Sense-making is triggered and influenced in part by individual's habits, past experiences, predispositions and purposes, and beliefs about what is and what ought to be in a particular situation—such as in an occupation and/or particular organization (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). New principals bring skills, knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and values from their experiences as administrators and classroom teachers that shape their expectations for their new position. At the same time, sense-making is also influenced by situations—not only the cues extracted from these situations but also the *sense that others give* via their expectations and local interpretations (Louis, 1980). New principals might have their job expectations dashed, fall short of their own expectations for themselves in their new position, encounter for the first time unanticipated aspects of the job, or find that their assumptions from prior experience do not match their new occupational and/or organizational experience. Furthermore, others in the new work situation have particular expectations for the school principal that may or may not align with the new principal's expectations for the role.

Research Approach

Overview

Data for this study come from the Principal Policy and Practice Study (P[3] Study), a project based at Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy and funded by the Spencer Foundation. The primary goal of the P[3] Study is to examine the transition and on-the-job socialization of new principals. Using a longitudinal, mixed-methods design, we followed two cohorts of new principals in the CPS for the first 2 years of their principalship. Cohort 1 began their principalships in the fall of 2009, and Cohort 2 began in the fall of 2010. Extensive data were gathered through a combination of principal questionnaires, semistructured interviews with a subsample of each cohort at several time points, case studies of three schools, CPS data on the principal eligibility process, and data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research's biennial surveys.

Data Collection

This particular study uses the data from our interviews of 17 elementary school principals from Cohort 2 (see Table 1). These principals were randomly selected (using a table of random numbers) from the population of all novice elementary school principals in the district for that year (36% of the 47 new principals). Findings from our study, therefore, are generalizable to the population of novice CPS elementary principals for the 2010-2011 school year. During their first year, these principals were interviewed in-depth immediately before starting the school year (Time 1), 3 months into the school year (Time 2), and at the end of the school year (Time 3). Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. We developed interview protocols to ensure comparable data were collected across school principals in our study. Time 1 interview protocols were organized around the following seven topics—views on what a good principal is, the transition into the principalship, goals for the first year, expected challenges, role in developing others, the expectations of different stakeholders, and the interviewee's path into education and administration. Time 2 protocols were organized around seven topics: how things are going, what has gone as expected, what has been surprising, challenges, goals, role in developing others, and staff's response to interviewee's leadership. To focus on the new principals' transition into their principalships, this article uses data from the first two rounds of interviews (Time 1 and Time 2) covering their first 3 months on the job (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; Weindling & Earley, 1987).

Table 1. Sample of Novice School Principals for the 2010-2011 School Year.

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Years as Teacher	Years in Administration	School Size	CPS Performance Policy Level[a]
Alejandro	Male	Hispanic	10	6	Medium	High
Carol	Female	White	20	8	Large	Middle
Charles	Male	Black	5	2	Medium	Low
Damien	Male	Black	10	3	Small	Low
George	Male	White	3	1	Small	Low
Janice	Female	White	6	10	Small	Middle
Jennifer	Female	Black	14	0	Medium	Middle
Joanne	Female	White	20	4	Medium	N/A (new school)
Joyce	Female	Black	6	5	Small	Low
Kara	Female	Biracial/Multiethnic	12	4	Small	Low
Kathy	Female	White	17	9	Medium	High
Laura	Female	White	17	1	Large	Low
Lori	Female	White	12	6	Large	High
Manuel	Male	Hispanic	7	2	Large	Middle
Peter	Male	Hispanic	10	7	Medium	Low
Rich	Male	White	5	1	Small	Low
Sally	Female	Black	8	4	Small	Low

Note. CPS = Chicago Public Schools.
a. The CPS performance level is based on Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) scores, ISAT trends, attendance rates, attendance trends, and value-added scores.

Data Analysis

All interviews were first transcribed and then coded using NVivo 8. For the purpose of this article, data analysis involved five stages. In the first stage, for data reduction purposes we identified all excerpts in which the principal described experiencing challenges, conflicts, tensions, and difficulties and coded these under "challenges" using NVivo (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We focused on these challenges because, as Becker et al. (1961) note in their seminal sociological study of occupational socialization, "If it is true that conflict and tension arise when the expectations governing social relationships are violated or frustrated then it is clear that study of such instances will reveal just what those expectations are" (p. 21). In the second stage, we generated reports of all the data coded under challenges for all principals and then "open coded" these data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Both authors read and reread these reports independently, noting salient themes and paying particular attention to work or practice challenges. Our primary analytical strategy here was inductive while informed by our reading of the literature, as reviewed above. After our first reading of these data, we compared notes with one another by discussing and writing "analytical memos" on salient themes. We discussed our different interpretations of the data and adjudicated disagreements, sometimes with input from other project researchers (see below). Based on this work, we grouped similar themes together to create three codes that focused on prominent problems of practice: task volume, task diversity, and task unpredictability. During these deliberations, we also identified the "responsibility" theme. We then reread the data to verify the "goodness" or "fit" of our four codes and used analytical memos to develop and sharpen the responsibility code.

In the third stage, we engaged in "closed coding" using our four codes—volume, unpredictability, diversity, and responsibility—for all the principals at Time 1 and Time 2. Both authors read and reread the NVivo reports for each of these four codes, and we used "analytical memos" to develop our assertions around each theme. Our analysis of the data coded under responsibility prompted another round of data coding—Stage 4—where we recoded the data originally coded under "responsibility" into three subcodes: more responsibility, sole responsibility, and ultimate responsibility. Furthermore, concerned that data relevant to the responsibility theme might not have been coded as a challenge, we went back to the original transcripts for each principal, at both time points, and coded additional excerpts for our three responsibility subcodes. We read and reread the NVivo reports from this coding work to develop analytical memos that became the basis for our assertion about ultimate responsibility.

In Stage 5, to evaluate the differences in the level of task volume, diversity, and unpredictability between principals and between time points, we created rubrics for rating the principals on these items. Based on the excerpts coded, each principal was given a score of between 0 and 3 for each item at each time point—with 0 indicating no mention of that particular problem of practice and 3 indicating prevalent and intense mentions. We used a similar process to score each principal's sense of responsibility. In Stage 5, we also categorized principals into insider or outsider depending on whether they became principal of a school they were already working in or not and also rated them on the extent to which their transition was planned. Our rubric for rating the transition's degree of planned-ness ranged from −2 to +2, with −2 indicating that the succession occurred quickly and with little planning and +2 indicating that the new principal was specifically groomed to succeed the previous principal. After completing our closed coding, we used the NVivo query function to compare and contrast principals on our challenge and responsibility codes and on various dimensions such as over time (e.g., Time 1 vs. Time 2 interviews), school type, and transition situation. In this way, we were able to systematically examine patterns in our data.

While embracing the interpretive nature of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006), we worked in several ways to check on the validity of our analysis—that is, "the trustworthiness of inferences drawn" (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992, p. 644). With respect to data collection, we used standardized semistructured interview protocols for all interviews with multiple researchers using the same interview protocols. To ensure comparable data were collected across subjects, all researchers were trained to use the protocols and trained to adapt the probes depending on the interviewee's response. We checked for variation in findings based on the *interviewer* who conducted the interview but found no cause for concern. We also used two *triangulation* methods—investigator triangulation and theory triangulation (Denzin, 1984; Stake, 1995)—at various points in the data analysis process. For instance, we presented our ongoing analysis to other project researchers who were not involved in the analysis for this article—an interdisciplinary team of postdoctoral fellows and graduate students drawn from human development, teacher education, school administration, and learning sciences. We also discussed our ongoing analysis with two colleagues outside the project, a sociologist and an organizational theorist. Including researchers from different theoretical backgrounds in these deliberations enabled us to engage in theory triangulation (Denzin, 1984). These deliberations pressed us to refine and justify our codes and emerging assertions as well as encouraged us to entertain alternative interpretations of our data.

Findings

We argue, based on our analysis of the data, that a major "reality shock" for novice principals as they transitioned into their new occupation was a sense of ultimate responsibility. Furthermore, we argue that this sense of ultimate responsibility contributed to three core problems of practice—task volume, diversity, and unpredictability. Whereas all novices experienced the responsibility shock as well as one or more of the practice problems, all novices did not experience them the same way or with the same intensity. Specifically, we explore how the social conditions of novices' transitions either eased or exacerbated their problems of practice.

The Ultimate Responsibility Shock

A consistent theme in new principals' accounts, even prior to the start of their first academic year on the job, was the shock of responsibility that came with entering the principal occupation. Indeed, all but two of our novice principals mentioned this jump in responsibility. Their accounts not only stressed the shock of more or greater responsibility that accompanied their transition into the principal's office but also a sense of being *ultimately* responsible for their school.

The Responsibility Shock. Contrasting his new occupation with the sense of responsibility he felt as a classroom teacher, George, a young White principal of a low-performing school, noted that responsibility is "magnified and compounded" in his new job. He explained, "I'm responsible for the whole building of students and I'm ultimately—for most purposes—the end all, be all accountability person. Everything falls on me . . . no matter what" (George, Time 1). George underscores the increased responsibility that he has assumed by virtue of becoming a principal. Still, it is not simply that he has more responsibility and responsibility for the whole building but also that he is "the end all, be all accountability person"; the buck now stops with him. He elaborated, noting,

> One thing that really was smacking me in the gut Sunday night was the responsibility part. It's like the ultimate responsibility . . . all the people who work in this building—their employment and welfare or their well-being as far as financially and in other ways is dependent upon my successful leadership of this organization . . . there's a lot of responsibility there. (George, Time 1)

For George, the shock that came with the transition into his new occupation was not just more responsibility; it was also the sense of ultimate responsibility for the welfare of other people.

While we might expect this responsibility shock for individuals moving from the classroom to the principal's office, it was also a prominent theme for novice principals who had held other school administrative positions before becoming principal. Charles, a young African American principal who was formerly an assistant principal (AP), captured the responsibility shock when he noted, "It's more responsibility and it's a bigger commitment. I think as an AP, I knew at the end of the day if something went wrong, I wasn't gonna be the one getting the phone call (laughs)" (Charles, Time 1). For Charles, a major difference between being an AP and principal is the greater responsibility and the greater commitment that came with that responsibility. But in Charles's account, as in George's account, there is also the shock of being ultimately responsible for all that happens in his school. Contrasting her work as an AP, Janice, a young White principal at a predominantly Hispanic school remarked,

> Even though I was doing the technical things of principals and I knew how to do the budget, I knew how to do positions . . . there was always somebody else who was ultimately responsible for it. So it wasn't me. I might have done it, but I wasn't responsible for the outcome (laughs). . . . Yeah I had to think about [becoming principal] because like, 'Oh my God! What if I like totally run this school into the ground?! (Janice, Time 1)

Janice points out that while she was "doing the technical" work of a principal in her previous position as an AP, she was not "ultimately responsible" and that was one of the big surprises in transitioning into her new occupation.

Manuel, a Hispanic principal of a racially diverse school, underscores this sense of ultimate responsibility while also capturing its solo nature when he noted, "The biggest transition I think is just sitting in this chair and realizing that now it's all up to me. . . . One of the biggest misconceptions about principals is that people think that we have all the answers and we don't" (Manuel, Time 1). Manuel also locates this sense of ultimate responsibility in the expectations that others have for the principal—having "all the answers." It is not simply that multiple stakeholders place demands on principals, but they also expect principals to know everything.

Alejandro, a Hispanic principal of a middle-performing school, also spoke about the increased and ultimate responsibility that came with his transition to the principalship. Contrasting his prior position as an AP with his new occupation, he noted,

> As an assistant principal, I was always providing suggestions and I always wanted to do more and be assertive. But the principal would always just kinda like, "Hold on a minute. It's not that simple." Because I didn't think about the personal relationships and that ultimate, "Ok well you're the one that has to tell that person

> we're gonna change your grade." Whereas the AP you could just make that suggestion . . . but, when you're actually sitting in front of a person and you have to tell someone that, and that person doesn't wanna change grade and they're like sad face . . . that's probably been the hardest part in terms of . . . the transition. That's the hardest part. And it's just something that you don't learn or they can't teach you in a workshop. (Alejandro, Time 1)

In Alejandro's view, the "hardest part" of his transition from being an AP to principal was taking on responsibility for all aspects of the school, personal and professional. While as an AP he could come up with suggestions, he now had to consider the entailments and implications of these ideas for the people in the organization. Joyce, a young African American principal of a "turn-around" school, makes a similar comparison noting that "I feel like I have to know and understand what's going on because ultimately if something goes wrong, I'm the one who has to answer to or explain why something isn't right" (Joyce, Time 1).[3]

Overall, the responsibility theme was more prominent in new principals' accounts prior to the start of the school year than 3 months in, suggesting that this shock may have to do with the surprises that come with occupational transitions. For most of the principals (59%), the intensity with which they described responsibility diminished after 3 months on the job, with six of those not mentioning responsibility at all in their second interview. For three principals (18%), the intensity of responsibility increased after 3 months on the job. And two of the principals (12%) seemed to experience a similar level of intensity at both time points. It appears, therefore, that most of the principals in our study internalized the sense of ultimate responsibility after their first 3 months on the job.

Ultimate Responsibility: Stress, Solitariness, and Loneliness. According to the principals in our study, with their sense of ultimate responsibility came increased stress, a constant alertness to what might go wrong, and an inability to leave the job behind even on weekends. This stress was manifest in novices' reports of things such as sleep loss, physical exhaustion, frustration, nervousness, and constant worrying. Indeed, all 17 principals in our study mentioned the stress that came with their new occupation. After talking about more and ultimate responsibility, for instance, Charles goes on to note:

> But now as a principal . . . it's pressure. . . . You're always thinking about what can go wrong. And I seem to be in that frame of mind now—still focusing on the positives and still praising my staff for the good things that I've seen thus far, but in the back of my mind. . . . I'm still wondering what can go wrong, because if something goes wrong, it's all under me. (Charles, Time 1)

In this excerpt, Charles underscores the mental pressure that came with crossing over to the principal's office, noting that he is always thinking about, anticipating, what might go wrong. In his view, his new occupation came with "a frame of mind" where he is constantly scanning the environment in an effort to anticipate problems.

Principals talked about waking up worrying about decisions they have to make or trying to figure out how to solve perplexing issues. Damien, a former high school AP and new principal at a low-performing school remarked,

> I knew it was going to be a lot of pressure. . . . You find yourself waking up in the middle of the night on like a Sunday, waking up and thinking about something. You know it's just like, it really gets into you. (Damien, Time 2)

Damien captures how he internalized this sense of ultimate responsibility and how this pressure manifests itself in affecting basic functions such as sleep. Similarly, Sally, an African American principal of a low-performing school, describes how her sleep is constantly interrupted by thoughts and tasks involving her school. When asked what being a principal is like, she says,

> [There's] no time and you don't sleep, and even when you sleep you're thinking of stuff (laughter). You wake up while you're sleeping, go write in your book . . . truthfully I go to sleep, my laptop is on my side and this book is on my side because I'm reviewing whatever I did that day before I go to bed, and then I'm checking my email because we get things on email all night. (Sally, Time 1)

Like Damien, thoughts about Sally's school weigh on her mind even when she sleeps. For her, being a principal is a 24/7 job; even at night, she is either doing work-related tasks or thinking about them.

Our account also suggests that, despite the high demand for their time and the constant interaction with others, some novice principals (47%) experienced early on the solitary and lonely nature of their new occupation. This solitariness and loneliness came not from the absence of others in their daily work. Indeed, almost all the new principals in our study had APs and other formally designated leaders who assisted them. And many of our novice principals talked explicitly about distributing or delegating responsibility to other administrators or to teachers. Rather, the solitariness and loneliness stemmed from novice principals' sense that they were ultimately and solely responsible for critical school decisions. Lori, a White principal of a large high-performing school, describes this solitariness when making a difficult decision about a teacher:

> It is a very lonely job . . . and nobody can understand that unless they've sat in this chair. And so I can't explain to my AP. I mean I can say it over and over and she

can listen. But at the end of the day, she gets to sleep. I didn't get to sleep for weeks. (Lori, Time 2)

Despite being able to discuss the matter with her AP, the fact that the livelihoods of the teacher and the students were ultimately in her hands meant that the burden was hers, and hers alone, to bear.

Furthermore, because principals are responsible for their schools, they sometimes have to make decisions that they feel are best for their organization overall but that might not make individual teachers, students, and parents happy. As a result, these principals make some people unhappy or displeased with them. To use Alejandro's words, principals create "sad faces" that contribute to being isolated socially. As Kara, a principal at a small low-performing school explained, "This is a very isolating job and you have to be comfortable with making decisions that you're not gonna make everyone happy all of the time. Maybe a little bit of the time (laughs)" (Kara, Time 1). For Kara, who is attempting change among a veteran staff that is set in their ways, a defining characteristic of being principal entails making decisions that are necessary for moving her school forward but that might upset some teachers and result in her isolation.

Indeed, some principals purposefully isolate themselves socially, so that the decisions they make will be more readily accepted. For instance, Lori describes how distancing herself is necessary so that her decisions will be perceived as fair:

It's just a very lonely job (laughs). . . . I mean you can be friendly and supportive of your teachers, but they're not people that you can hang out with on the weekends. . . . You can't be perceived as being someone's best friend . . . because then there's always that doubt in other people's mind about, well did they get this because they are friends? . . . Since I came here, I always said I wasn't here to make friends with people; I'm here to do a job. . . . I can be friendly and cordial. . . . But I don't fraternize with employees outside of work. (Lori, Time 2)

Lori reports intentionally keeping her distance socially from employees and avoids fraternizing with them outside of work because she does not want suspicions of favoritism to affect the legitimacy of her decisions. During his first 3 months, Damien also reported intentionally distancing himself from his staff to convey that he is serious about turning around the school. He compares his approach to a strategy he used as a new teacher:

And it's almost like teaching. . . . They used to tell us when we were beginning teachers, "Don't smile until Christmas." . . . That's the approach I took when I was a beginning teacher. . . . I came in, you know, "I'm not playing." . . . And then later

in the year, you can come down a little bit, but you can't start off "Hi, hi," and then take it up. Once you lose it, then you can't ratchet it up. . . . Because I mean you don't have enough time in this accountability era to wait for things to happen. (Damien, Time 2)

Damien intentionally chooses not to "smile until Christmas" so that his staff members will respect his authority as principal and take him seriously; he hopes that, as a result, he'll be able to quickly turn around the school. In both cases, a strategy of social isolation was chosen in an effort to facilitate the acceptance of decisions the principal must make on behalf of the school.

Problems of Practice: Volume, Diversity, and Unpredictability

Novice principals' sense of more and ultimate responsibility contributed to three problems of practice—high levels of task volume, diversity, and unpredictability. Ninety-four percent (16) of our principals described at least one of these problems of practice in one of their interviews, with a large majority of those (81%, 13 principals) describing more than one problem of practice (see Figure 1). Moreover, volume, diversity, and unpredictability interacted with one another, magnifying the difficulties for novices.

Work Volume: "Can I Have Two Minutes?" The *volume* of demands was a salient theme for 41% (7) of our principals before the start of the school year and 59% (10) at the end of their first semester on the job. Moreover, the challenge of volume intensified over the first 3 months for eight of our principals (47%), and seven of those eight principals indicated that the workload had become almost overwhelming. Additionally, two principals (12%) expressed high levels of task volume at both time points. (Task volume seemed to be less pronounced after 3 months for only one principal [6%], and six principals [35%] did not express that task volume was a challenge at either time point.)

Kara captured the volume of demands on her when she noted, "Well it seemed like once that official title took place, the doors opened (laughs) and everything came pouring down . . . not in a bad way but just like ok, here, here and here" (Kara, Time 2). For Kara, once she got the position as principal, the demands on her "came pouring down." Other principals identified the sources of these demands. Kathy, a White principal at a high-performing school, remarked after 3 months on the job:

> The other thing that continues to shock me is the amount of people that want my attention. . . . I never thought I'd close my door and sometimes I have to close my door. . . . Parents, teachers, students, my AP . . . everybody [wants my attention]. (Kathy, Time 2)
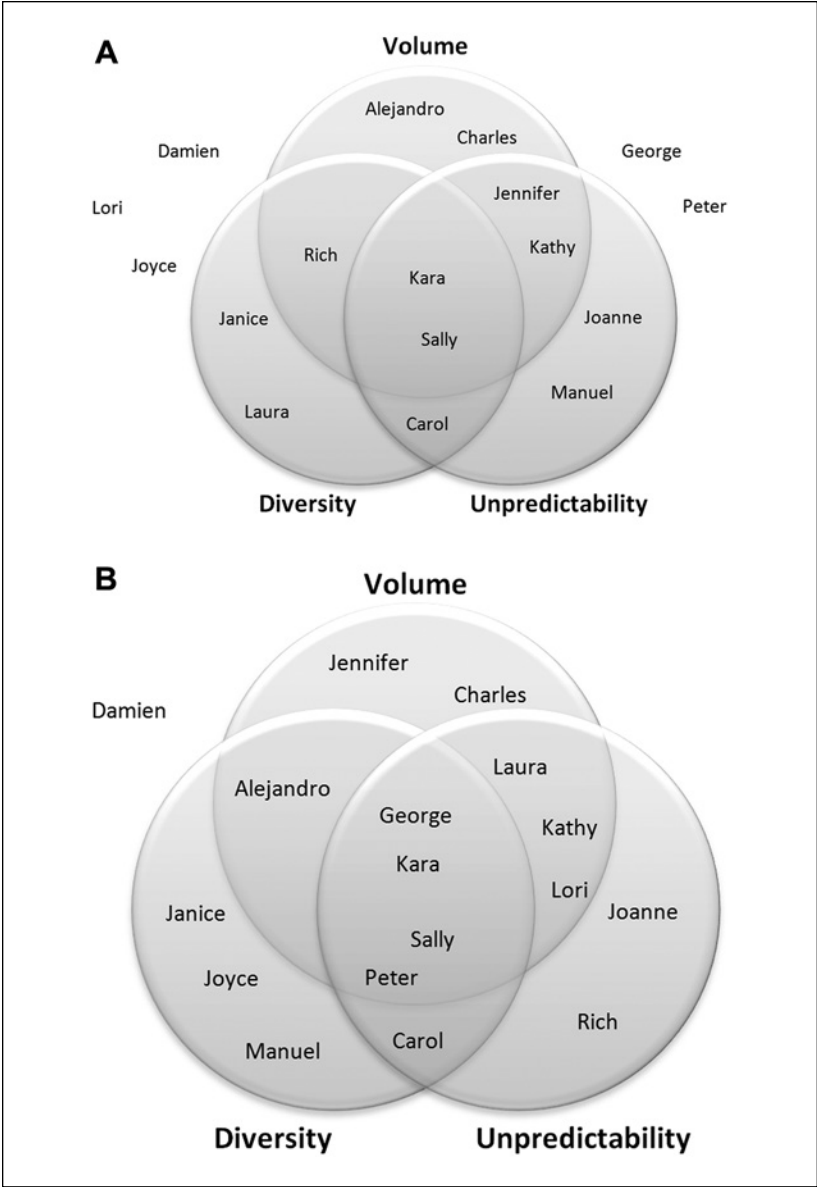
Figure 1. (A) The problems of practice experienced by novice principals at the beginning of the school year (August 2010). (B) The problems of practice experienced by novice principals 3 months into the school year (November-December 2010).

Kathy reports "shock" at the demands on her time from multiple stakeholders and having to abandon her open door policy in an effort to protect her time from different stakeholders seeking her attention. As evident in Kathy's remarks, the volume of demand experienced by new principals is in great part a function of internal and external stakeholders' expectations for the principal.

Jennifer, an African American principal of a predominately Hispanic school, also captures the volume of demands when she says:

> Every teacher wanted to come and one teacher asked, "Well can I move my room assignment? I want you to know about me. I want you to know about the history [of this school]. I want you to do something about these parents who are harassing all the time. Will you stand up for us?" So everybody put their bid in as to what they expected from me. And I was very nervous because I was thinking to myself, "What do you think I'm going to do?" And the clerk, I will never forget, she said "You know, we've all been really waiting for someone like you, and we hope that you will give us the change that we so desperately need." And I'm thinking, I'm not Obama! (Jennifer, Time 1)

Jennifer's account captures how what others (teachers and the school clerk) "expected from" her contributed to the volume of demands. In this way, the expectations of others play an important role in socialization into a new occupation, a prevalent theme in the occupational socialization literature (Duke, Isaacson, Sagor, & Schmuck, 1984; Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Hughes, 1958; Louis, 1980).

Similarly, Lori describes how surprised she is by the sharp jump in demands she is confronted with when she transitions from being the AP at her school to becoming the principal:

> I am surprised by the amount of, just the sheer volume of email and phone calls and two minutes, "Can I have two minutes, can I get two minutes of your time? Do you have a second?" And it's all day long. . . . What has surprised me is how much I need to manage my time better because I can't plan for anything. . . . I'm surprised by how much I'm in demand . . . and how little time I have to get tasks done. . . . It consumes you. . . . You can delegate some of that to your AP, which I do and she picks it up and takes it, and then some of it you have to do yourself. (Lori, Time 2)

Lori's account captures her surprise on becoming a principal and the sheer volume of demand on her time, even though she had considerable experience as an AP. While she can delegate some of the work to her AP, "some of it" she has to do herself—linking work volume to her sense of ultimate responsibility. Furthermore, Lori underscores how the volume of demand undermines her ability to get work done.

Work Diversity: "I Wear Too Many Hats". It is not simply the sheer number of demands that principals found taxing but that these demands involve diverse and sometimes contrary pulls on their time and attention. Task diversity was a salient theme for 35% (6) of our principals before the start of the school year and for 53% (9) at the end of their first semester. Moreover, for seven of the principals (41%), work diversity intensified over the first 3 months of the school year. (Three principals [18%] experienced less task diversity after 3 months, whereas six [35%] did not express that task diversity was a challenge at either time point.)

Peter, a Latino and the new principal at a middle-performing school, highlights this task diversity when he remarks, "I didn't know how many different directions you could be pulled into. I knew there was gonna be a lot of work" (Peter, Time 2). For Peter and other principals in our study, being pulled in so many different directions was a shock that added tremendously to the challenge of work volume. Rich, a young White principal of a turnaround school, remarked that "being a principal is like being pulled in about 100 very important but not always complementary directions" (Rich, Time 1). Rich underscores how numerous demands create tension not just because of their volume but also because these demands pull him in different "very important" directions that are not always "complementary."

Janice expands on the diversity problem noting, "You're everything: instructional leader, engineer, counselor, you got to listen to people's parents—they come to you with all sorts of problems that have nothing to do with school—let's see, a lunch room manager" (Janice, Time 1). For Janice, and other novices, the diversity of demands comes from the multiple roles they have to play as principal—from lunchroom manager to engineer to instructional leader. Indeed, 3 months into her first academic year on the job, Janice compared being a principal to the following:

> Being a jack of all trades . . . I feel more like [that] this time because . . . you are the instructional leader and that's the main thing but also a social worker when someone needs some shoulder to cry on or some help. . . . I am an engineer . . . If parents come in with issues that they have going on at home and they want to know if they should call the police, and so now I'm a lawyer. . . . You're expected to be everything to everybody. (Janice, Time 2)

For Janice, a core problem of practice in her new occupation comes from the expectations of diverse stakeholders who place different demands on her; as a result, she is under pressure to be "everything to everybody." Similarly, Sally noted,

> It's like a lot of different things. It's like being the president. It's like being the go-to. It's like being the fall guy (laughs). You know, it's like being everything to

a lot of different people. You're a task manager, you are a businessperson, you're a counselor, you're a doctor, you're a nurse. You're all these different things but at the end of the day, it's a public servant . . . with a stipend (laughs). (Sally, Time 2)

In Sally's view, the diversity of demands is a function of the very different roles that "different" stakeholders expect her to perform as principal—"it's like being everything," and you have to do this for "different" people.

Work diversity, furthermore, appears to be tied to novices' sense of ultimate responsibility. As Manuel explained,

It's tough to put it in one word. You wear too many hats when you're a principal. . . . A good example of this . . . we had a technology coordinator who is amazing with what she does. . . . I asked her to please build, to recreate the [school] website. . . . And she told me "Sure, I'll take care of it." November came around, nothing happened. I asked her again and "Sure, I'll do it during the winter break." Then I started thinking, if I let this to continue, the summer will come around. . . . So one day I started looking and I said, you know what, I should learn how to do the website. . . . I did the website myself. So being a principal is, is taking that next step and if people don't do it, you have to do it; it's still your responsibility. (Manuel, Time 2)

Manuel's account captures the diversity of the principals' work—"too many hats"—and he connects this diversity to having ultimate responsibility—"if people don't do it . . . it's still your responsibility." Principals have to pick up the slack when others don't deliver.

Unpredictability: "One Minute You're On the [Surf] Board and the Next Minute . . . ". A third problem of practice in principals' accounts was the *unpredictability* of the work. Unpredictability was a salient theme for 41% (7) of our principals before the start of the school year and for 59% (10) at the end of their first semester. Moreover, 47% (8) of our principals expressed an increase in the intensity of this unpredictability over the first 3 months. One principal (6%) expressed high levels of unpredictability at both time points. (Only three principals [18%] indicated less unpredictability after 3 months, whereas five principals [29%] did not describe unpredictability at either time point.)

Lori captures the unpredictability aspect of the job when she notes,

It's like surfing without a surfboard on any given day. I mean one minute you're on the board and the next minute you're drowning . . . I mean it's something you like to do and on any given day you just absolutely love it and then the next thing you know, a wave comes and smacks you and you're like, "What happened? How do I get back above water?" I mean things can just come out of nowhere. (Lori, Time 2)

Acknowledging her love of the job, Lori points out how things "come out of nowhere" and throw her off the "surfboard."

Kathy also highlights the unpredictability of the job when she remarks, "I'm usually arriving at 7:30 . . . and you never know what's gonna be in front of you. . . . So I can have my day planned out perfectly and it's all shot (laughs)" (Kathy, Time 1). Even in August before the start of the school year, Kathy was aware of the unpredictability and anticipated it would be a challenge. Three months on, Kathy reported that what she had anticipated with respect to unpredictability had materialized, comparing being a principal to being a "captain of a ship" and noting how "things sometimes are smooth sailing and then in a moment, the winds can turn, and you're not sure you're gonna stay afloat. . . . I'm the last one out" (Kathy, Time 2). Kathy not only underscores the unpredictability of the work but also connects this to the sense of ultimate responsibility—"I'm the last one out"—that comes with being a principal.

Similar to Kathy, George connects task unpredictability to his sense of ultimate responsibility, noting,

> The work is harder than I expected, day-to-day. Like I am a very systematic thinker, think programmatically . . . have a good plan and the execution is the easy part. It's so hard not to get caught up in the day-to-day putting out fires. That you got the best plan for the week or the best plan at 7:30 in the morning and by 8:30, it's out the window. Or by Monday morning, it's out the window for the whole week. . . . That's the biggest [challenge]. And that was different than when you're like a teacher leader or even like before [when] I was a resident principal. You know, the things didn't end at your door, so you did not have to be responsible for those and [could] stay focused on the planning and the implementation of whatever you owned. But ultimately, I own everything here and so if it doesn't get taken care of somewhere else . . . it ends at me. (George, Time 2)

George finds his work as principal more difficult than he expected because of its unpredictability or, as he puts it, the "day-to-day putting out fires," something that does not fit easily with his systematic planning style. He links this unpredictability directly to the sense of ultimate responsibility—"I own everything here"—that he experiences on becoming a principal. As a result, he feels he cannot afford to ignore the surprises that bubble up in his workday and that distract him from his "good plan."

The novice principals experienced different combinations of the volume, diversity, and unpredictability problems of practice. Before the start of the school year, six novices (35%) reported two or more of these practice problems, whereas 3 months into the school year, nine novices (53%) reported two or more of them (see Figure 1). Moreover, these problems of practice interacted with one another, exacerbating the difficulties experienced by

novice principals as they transitioned into their new occupation. Sally captures the interactions when she remarks:

> The paperwork, the time that things are due, being out of the building for meetings when you really want to be in the building; those things are challenging. Time management, trying to get everything in . . . because you sit down and you're getting ready to do something and something happens—you know, the fire department shows up . . . a fight breaks out. . . . When you come back to your office, you can't remember what you were doing and somebody brings you something else. So whatever you were doing goes on the side. (Sally, Time 2)

Pointing to work volume, diversity, and unpredictability, Sally notes how the unpredictability and diversity of the work constantly and unexpectedly takes her away from the task-at-hand, thereby making it difficult to keep up with the large volume of demands.

Overall, 88% (15) of our novice principals experienced an increase in one or more of the practice problems over the first 3 months on the job. Fifty-three percent (8) of these 15 principals experienced an increase in task volume, 47% (7) experienced an increase in task diversity, and 53% (8) experienced an increase in task unpredictability.

The Conditions of Novice Principals' Transitions

Our account to this point captures the "responsibility shock" experienced by all but two novice principals in our study as they transitioned into their new occupation. It also details three problems of practice that accompanied this responsibility shock—volume, diversity, and unpredictability. With one exception, all principals reported experiencing one or more of these three practice problems either prior to the start of the school year or at the end of their first semester on the job, and the intensity of these practice problems tended to increase over that time period.

Still, principals in our study did not experience these problems of practice with the same intensity. Problems of practice were experienced differently, in part, because the social conditions of novices' transitions to the principalship differed (Author, Bush, 2011; Cheung & Walker, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). As much of our preceding analysis illuminates, principaling is a social practice: Novice principals figure out practice while on the job through their interactions with various internal and external stakeholders. Different transition situations meant that principals faced different social conditions when they assumed the principal position, and these varied conditions either eased or exacerbated the practice problems they encountered.

Some principals, for example, were APs in their school and were groomed to succeed their principals. Already familiar with their school and largely continuing the trajectory set forth by their predecessor usually meant that these principals had the advantages of information and staff cooperation, which tended to ease their problems of practice. Janice, for instance, explained how being promoted internally from AP to principal made her first few months on the job easier:

> I knew the climate and the culture of the school. . . . I knew the people, I knew what the school's vision was, what we were working toward, what people were dedicated to accomplishing. So I think that went a long way because I was already part of that, so I didn't have to learn it and take the time to kind of figure out the culture of the school. (Janice, Time 1)

The extensive knowledge that Janice had about her staff and school facilitated her work as a new principal. Already knowing the contours of her school and the capabilities of her staff was a resource that allowed her to bypass the lengthy process of familiarizing herself to a new environment and to focus instead on developing an effective strategy for improving instruction.

On the other extreme, some principals found themselves thrown last minute into the principalship at a new school, usually because the former principal was removed due to poor performance. As outsiders with little information about the school and no support from the previous administration, these principals faced conditions that tended to exacerbate the problems of practice they experienced during their first few months on the job. For example, limited information not only hampered Laura's ability to complete critical technical tasks (e.g., assigning teachers to positions and establishing the payroll system) but also meant she was ignorant of the social-political dynamics of her staff. She told us,

> Just a lot of politics I don't know about yet. I really don't know who has an agenda, who's really just here to be a thoughtful teacher, and who's here to sabotage others. . . . So that's gonna be a challenge, knowing what to believe, how it's gonna affect student learning, and does it need to be dealt with now." (Laura, Time 1)

Unlike Janice, Laura does not have the advantages of information and staff buy-in. As a result, she does not have those resources to draw on as she transitions into the principalship and, instead, expends significant time and energy trying to discover the contours of her school and staff. Indeed, due to this lack of information, Laura ends up unwittingly igniting staff conflicts rather than uniting them during her first year on the job.

Overall, novices who took over the principalship in schools where they had previously worked (Janice, Lori, Kathy, Joyce) tended to express lower levels of practice problems before the start of the school year compared with those novices who hastily assumed the principalship in a school with which they were unfamiliar (Sally, Laura, Kara, Carol). Whereas the former group expressed low to medium levels (0 to 2) of practice problems before the start of the school year, the latter group expressed medium to high levels (2 to 3). While the intensity of these problems of practice increased for both groups by the end of their first 3 months, it remained higher for those novices who started their careers in an unplanned manner at a new school.

Discussion and Conclusion

We might expect that as novices transition into the principal occupation, they will experience an increase in their volume of work and their amount of responsibility, especially when compared with their prior administrative positions. As our analysis shows, however, the problems of practice experienced by novice principals are not simply about volume but also about the diversity and unpredictability of the work and a sense of ultimate responsibility. Our account extends prior work by relating novices' sense of ultimate responsibility to practice problems and also by showing how the conditions of new principals' transition can ease or exacerbate these practice problems.

With respect to practice, one issue concerns easing the problems of practice we identify for novices as they transition into the principal position. The literature on succession planning is helpful here by suggesting strategies for consideration and pointing out that these strategies may be more easily deployed in centralized rather than decentralized systems (Bush, 2011; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Thomson, 2009). The CPS system involves a hybrid of centralized and decentralized decision-making that changes from time to time, an arrangement not uncommon in the United States: Local School Councils for the most part hire principals to 4-year contracts, while the school district through a highly selective eligibility process and the state through licensure decides who is eligible to be a principal. Various universities and other providers (e.g., New Leaders for New Schools) provide preservice and in-service principal development. Such hybrid and unsettled educational governance arrangements complicate efforts to create strategic and systemic approaches to support newcomers' transition into the principal position.

Our analysis suggests that when novices take up the principal position in schools that they know a considerable amount about because they are insiders,

the problems of practice tend to be eased for novices. Already familiar with their school usually means that these principals have the advantages of information and potentially staff cooperation, which tends to ease their problems of practice. Whereas when novices enter the principal occupation in schools that they know relatively little about, the problems of practice tend to be exacerbated. There is something of a "Catch-22" here in that central policymakers may not want to continue business as usual in chronically low-performing schools, so the impetus for them is to bring in an outsider to shake things up. Therefore, especially for individuals from outside the school, the problems of practice associated with transitioning into the principal occupation might be eased by providing adequate time and access to information about the school.

There are more than transition arrangements at play here: As Pat Thomson (2009) points out, "the actual everyday work" of principals "also requires policy attention" (p. 131). District and state high-stakes accountability policies that hold the school principal accountable for school performance as measured by student achievement on standardized tests most likely contribute to novices' sense of ultimate responsibility. While we want new principals to take responsibility for their schools and student learning, at the same time, we want them to cultivate a sense of this responsibility as being shared with other administrators (district and school) and school staff more broadly. Policies that hold school leadership teams responsible—rather than just the school principal—might help ease novices' sense of ultimate and sole responsibility and, in the process, reduce the problems of practice that can overwhelm novice principals.

Leadership development programs, both preservice and in-service, might directly help principals manage the stress associated with the job, and local education systems might encourage and reward work environments that reduce rather than increase stress (Thomson, 2009). For novices in our study, their sense of ultimate responsibility came with increased stress and an inability to leave the job behind at the end of the workday or even on weekends. Rather than focusing exclusively or even mostly on the technical aspects of being a principal, leadership preparation and development programs might directly work on the emotional dimensions of the work, including helping novices manage stress and create healthy work environments. Simply making novices aware of the ultimate responsibility "reality shock" of their new job and the stress that accompanies this shock would be a small but potentially important first step. Awareness, however, only goes so far; serious attention to stress management in the work life and work place is essential.

To alleviate the work volume and work diversity experienced by novices, "new models of leadership" (e.g., federations, co-headships, and executive leadership) might also help with the transition challenges (Bush 2011; Thomson, 2009). While novices in our study talked about distributing and

delegating leadership, we did not systematically analyze these strategies for this article. A related strategy, common in some schools in our study, involved the appointment of "business managers" with responsibility for building operations. These arrangements may ease the volume and diversity of the work confronting novices. In our study, tasks involving the physical plant, school budget, and administrative paperwork often accounted for a substantial amount of the volume and diversity of principals' work yet were considered the most frustrating because principals viewed these tasks as taking time away from what they viewed as their central responsibility—instructional leadership. If implemented well, new leadership arrangements have the potential to ease principals' practice problems and potentially do so in a manner that promotes principals' focus on teaching and learning. Still, these new leadership arrangements need to be considered with a healthy and skeptical disposition, as they may not have the intended outcomes (Bush, 2011).

With respect to research, our work suggests some future directions for investigations of novices' transitions into the principal position. One line of work might examine the transitions of novices into the principal position under different leadership arrangements such as co-principal and distributed leadership arrangements. Another line of work might examine how novices' sense of ultimate responsibility differs depending on the norms of the schools in which they assume the principal position, such as norms of "collective responsibility." Prior research, for example, shows a positive relationship between teachers' sense of collective responsibility and valued school outcomes (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Lee & Smith, 1996). Examining relations between a school staff's sense of "collective responsibility" and new principals' sense of "ultimate responsibility" would shed light on how school norms might moderate novices' emerging sense of ultimate responsibility.

Authors' Note

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Principal Policy and Practice Study (http://www.principalpolicyresearch.org), funded by research grants from the Spencer Foundation (200900092). Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy and Institute for Policy Research supported this work. All opinions and conclusions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any funding agency.

Notes

1. There are several other conceptual frameworks one might use to frame a study of principals. For a discussion of these frameworks, see Bush (2011) and Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2009).

2. The Rebecca Myth is in reference to a book by Daphne DuMaurier. In the book, a woman marries a widower but finds it difficult to live up to the memory of his first wife, Rebecca. Rebecca's virtues are widely extolled, more so than when she was alive.

3. In a turnaround situation, the district attempts to "turn around" an academically underperforming school by replacing all or most of the school staff. Students, however, are allowed to remain in the school.

References

Allison, D. J. (1997). Coping with stress in the principalship. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *35*(1), 39-55.

Alvy, H. B., & Coladarci, T. (1985). Problems of the novice principal. *Research in Rural Education*, *3*(1), 39-47.

Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban education reform*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Augustine, C. H., Gonzalez, G., Ikemoto, G. S., Russell, J., Zellman, G. L., Constant, L., . . .Dembosky, J. W. (2009). *Improving school leadership: The promise of cohesive leadership systems*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Education.

Becker, H. S., Geer, B., Hughes, E. C., & Strauss, A. L. (1961). *Boys in white: Student culture in medical school*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Berman, P., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1977). *Federal programs supporting educational change: Factors affecting implementation and continuation*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Bolam, R., Dunning, G., & Karstanje, P. (Eds.). (2000). *New heads in the new Europe*. Munster, Germany: Waxmann.

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Pocklington, K., & Weindling, D. (1993). *National evaluation of the headteacher mentoring pilot schemes*. London, England: Department for Education.

Bossert, S. T., Dwyer, D. C., Rowan, B., & Lee, G. V. (1982). The instructional management role of the principal. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *18*(3), 34-64.

Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2003). Becoming a principal: Role conception, initial social-ization, role-identity transformation, purposeful engagement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *39*, 468-503.

Bryk, A. S., & Driscoll, M. E. (1988). *The school as community: Theoretical foun-dations, contextual influences, and consequences for students and teachers*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, National Center on Effective Secondary Schools.

Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bush, T. (2011). Succession planning in England: New leaders and new forms of leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, *31*, 181-198.

Cheung, R. M.-B., & Walker, A. (2006). Inner worlds and outer limits: The for-mation of beginning school principals in Hong Kong. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*, 389-407.

Chou, V., & Tozer, S. (2008). What's urban got to do with it? The meanings of urban in urban teacher preparation and development. In F. P. Peterman (Ed.), *Partnering to prepare urban teachers: A call to activism* (pp. 1-20). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enact-ment of reading policy. *Educational Policy*, *19*, 476-509.

Copland, M. A. (2001). The myth of the superprincipal. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *82*, 528-533.

Crow, G. M. (2006). Complexity and the beginning principal in the United States: Perspectives on socialization. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*, 310-325.

Crow, G. M., & Glascock, C. (1995). Socialization to a new conception of the princi-palship. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *33*(1), 22-43.

Cuban, L. (1976). *Urban school chiefs under fire*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Cuban, L. (1988). *The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Cuban, L. (2001). *Leadership for student learning: Urban school leadership— Different in kind and degree*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Cuban, L. (2011). *The DNA of the principalship: Conflict and guilt in the genetic code*. Retrieved from http://larrycuban.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/the-dna-of-the-principalship-conflict-and-guilt-in-the-genetic-code/

Daresh, J., & Male, T. (2000). Crossing the border into leadership: Experiences of newly appointed British headteachers and American principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *28*(1), 89-101.

Denzin, N. K. (1984). *On understanding emotion*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DiPaola, M., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The principalship at a crossroads: A study of the conditions and concerns of principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, *87*(634), 43-65.

Draper, J., & McMichael, P. (1998). Making sense of primary headship: The surprises awaiting new heads. *School Leadership & Management*, *18*, 197-211.

Draper, J., & McMichael, P. (2000). Contextualising new headship. *School Leadership & Management*, *20*, 459-473.

Duke, D. L. (1987). *School leadership and instructional improvement*. New York, NY: Random House.

Duke, D. L. (1988). Why principals consider quitting. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *70*, 308-312.

Duke, D. L., Isaacson, N. S., Sagor, R., & Schmuck, P. A. (1984). *Transition to leadership: An investigation of the first year of the principalship*. Portland, OR: Lewis and Clark College Educational Administration Program.

Dunning, G. (1996). Management problems of new primary headteachers. *School Organisation*, *16*, 111-128.

Dunning, G. (2000). New heads in Wales. In R. Bolam, G. Dunning, & P. Karstanje (Eds.), *New heads in the new Europe* (pp. 129-152). Munster, Germany: Waxmann.

Earley, P., Nelson, R., Higham, R., Bubb, S., Porritt, V., & Coates, M. (2011). *Experiences of new headteachers in cities*. London, England: London Center for Leadership in Learning.

Earley, P., & Weindling, D. (2004). *Understanding school leadership*. London, England: Sage.

Eisenhart, M., & Howe, K. R. (1992). Validity in educational research. In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 643-680). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Friedman, I. A. (2002). Burnout in school principals. *School Psychology of Education*, *5*, 229-251.

Gates, S. M., Guarino, C., Santibanez, L., Brown, A., Ghosh-Dastidar, B., & Chung, C. (2004). *Career paths of school administrators in North Carolina: Insights from an anaysis of state data*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Gmelch, W. H. (1983). Stress, health, and coping strategies of public school administrators. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *64*, 512-514.

Goldring, E., Huff, J., May, H., & Camburn, E. (2008). School context and individual characteristics: What influences principal practice? *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 332-352.

Gordon, G. E., & Rosen, N. (1981). Critical factors in leadership succession. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, *27*, 227-254.

Gouldner, A. W. (1954). The pattern of succession in bureaucracy. In R. K. Merton (Ed.), *Reader in bureaucracy* (pp. 339-351). Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Greenfield, W. D. (1985). *Being and becoming a principal: Responses to work contexts and socialization processes*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Grissom, J. A., & Loeb, S. (2011). Triangulating principal effectiveness: How perspectives of parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial skills. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*, 1091-1123.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigns in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980-1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *32*(1), 5-44.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2011). Exploring the journey of school improvement: Classifying and analyzing patterns of change in school improvement processes and learning outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *22*(1), 1-27.

Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. *Elementary School Journal*, *86*, 217-247.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley.

Hart, A. W. (1991). Leader succession and socialization: A synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, *61*, 451-474.

Hart, A. W. (1993). *Principal succession: Establishing leadership in schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Heck, R. H. (1995). Organizational and professional socialization: Its impact on the performance of new administrators. *Urban Review*, *27*(1), 31-49.

Hobson, A., Brown, E., Ashby, P., Keys, W., Sharp, C., & Benefield, P. (2003). *Issues for early headship: Problems and support strategies*. Nottingham, England: National College for School Leadership.

Horng, E. L., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2010). Principal's time use and school effectiveness. *American Journal of Education*, *116*, 491-523.

Hughes, E. C. (1958). *Men and their work*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Kelly, A., & Saunders, N. (2010). New heads on the block: Three case studies of transition to primary school headship. *School Leadership & Management*, *30*, 127-142.

Kmetz, J. T., & Willower, D. J. (1982). Elementary school principals' work behavior. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *18*(4), 62-78.

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1996). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement for early secondary school students. *American Journal of Education*, *104*, 103-147.

Leithwood, K. A., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Leithwood, K. A., Mascall, B., Strauss, T., Sacks, R., Memon, N., & Yashkina, A. (2007). Distributing leadership to make schools smarter: Taking the ego out of the system. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *6*(1), 37-67.

Leithwood, K. A., & Montgomery, D. J. (1982). The role of the elementary school principal in program improvement. *Review of Educational Research*, *52*, 309-339.

Lindle, J. C. (2004). Trauma and stress in the principal's office: Systemic inquiry as coping. *Journal of School Leadership*, *14*, 378-410.

Loder, Tondra L., & Spillane, James P. (2005). Is a principal still a teacher? US women administrators' accounts of role conflict and role discontinuity. *School Leadership and Management, 25*(3), 263-279.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lortie, D. C. (2009). *School principal: Managing in public*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lortie, D. C., Crow, G., & Prolman, S. (1983). *The elementary school principal in suburbia: An occupational and organizational study*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, US Department of Education.

Louis, K. S., & Kruse, S. D. (1995). *Professionalism and community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *25*, 226-251.

Louis, M. R., & Sutton, R. I. (1991). Switching cognitive gears: From habits of mind to active thinking. *Human Relations*, *44*, 55-76.

MacBeath, J., Gronn, P., Opfer, D., Lowden, K., Ford, C., Cowie, M., & O'brien, J. (2009). *The recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Government.

Male, T. (2001, April). *The professional induction of headteachers in England: Findings from the IBPS project*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Mandler, G. (1984). *Mind and body: Psychology of emotion and stress*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Martin, W. J., & Willower, D. J. (1981). The managerial behavior of high school principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *17*(1), 69-90.

Matthews, J. L., & Crow, G. M. (2003). *Being and becoming a principal: Role conceptions for contemporary principals and assistant principals*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon/Longman.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). *Building school-based teacher learning communities: Professional strategies to improve student achievement*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Miles, Matthew B., & Huberman, A. Michael. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nelson, S. W., de la Colina, M. G., & Boone, M. D. (2008). Lifeworld or systems-world: What guides novice principals. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 690-701.

Noguera, P. A. (1996). Confronting the urban in urban school reform. *Urban Review*, *28*(1), 1-19.

Papa, F. C., Lankford, H., & Wyckoff, J. (2002). *The attributes and career paths of principals: Implications for improving policy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Parkay, F. W., & Currie, G. D. (1992). Sources of support for the beginning principal. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hall (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership* (pp. 70-84). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Parkay, F. W., Currie, G. D., & Rhodes, J. W. (1992). Professional socialization: A longitudinal study of first-time high school principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *28*(1), 43-75.

Parkay, F. W., & Hall, G. E. (1992). *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Peterson, K. D. (1977). The principal's tasks. *Administrator's Notebook*, *26*(8), 1-4.

Peterson, K. D. (1982). Making sense of principals' work. *Australian Administrator*, *3*(3), 1-4.

Portin, B., Shen, J., & Williams, R. C. (1998). The changing principalship and its impact: Voices from principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, *82*(602), 1-8.

Purkey, S. C., & Smith, M. S. (1985). School reform: The district policy implications of the effective schools literature. *Elementary School Journal*, *85*, 353-389.

Ringel, J. S., Gates, S. M., Ghosh-Dastidar, B., Brown, A., & Chung, C. (2004). *Career paths of school administrators in Illinois: Insights from an analysis of state data*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Robinson, V. M. J. (2008). Forging the links between distributed leadership and educational outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 241-256.

Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). Workplace conditions that affect teacher quality and commitment: Implications for teacher induction programs. *Elementary School Journal*, *89*, 421-439.

Savery, L. K., & Detiuk, M. (1986). The perceived stress levels of primary and secondary principals. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *24*, 272-281.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Starbuck, W. H., & Milliken, F. J. (1988). Executives' perceptual filters: What they notice and how they make sense. In D. C. Hambrick (Ed.), *The executive effect: Concepts and methods for studying top managers* (pp. 38-64). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Stevenson, H. (2006). Moving towards, into and through principalship: Developing a framework for researching the career trajectories of school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*, 408-420.

Strong, M., Barrett, A., & Bloom, G. (2003, April). *Supporting the new principal: Managerial and instructional leadership in a principal induction program*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Thomson, P. (2009). *School leadership: Heads on the block?* London, England: Routledge.

Tucker, M. S., & Codding, J. B. (Eds.). (2002). *The principal challenge: Leading and managing schools in an era of accountability*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Usdan, M., McCloud, B., & Podmostko, M. (2000). *Leadership for student learning: Reinventing the principalship*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Van Maanen, J. E., & Schein, E. H. (1979). Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In B. M. Staw (Ed.), *Annual review of research in organizational behavior* (pp. 209-266). New York, NY: JIP Press.

Walker, K., Anderson, K., Sackney, L., & Woolf, J. (2003). Unexpected learning by neophyte principals: Factors related to success of first year principals in schools. *Managing Global Transitions*, *1*, 195-213.

Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement* (A Working Paper). Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Webster, L. (1989). *The real world of administration: Reflections of first and second year principals* (pp. 1-11). Eric Number ED 314857.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weindling, D., & Dimmock, C. (2006). Sitting in the "hot seat": New headteachers in the UK. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*, 326-340.

Weindling, D., & Earley, P. (1987). *Secondary headership: The first years*. Windsor, England: NFER-Nelson.

Whitaker, K. S. (1996). Exploring causes of principal burnout. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *34*(1), 60-71.

Williams, R. C., & Portin, B. S. (1996). *Challenges of school leadership: The changing role of the principal*. Olympia, WA: Association of Washington School Principals.

Wolcott, H. F. (1973). *The man in the principal's office: An ethnography*. Eugene: University of Oregon.

Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (2006). *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. New York, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Author Biographies

James P. Spillane is the Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Professor in Learning and Organizational Change at the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. He is also professor of Human Development and Social Policy, professor of Learning Sciences, professor of Management and Organizations, and faculty associate at Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research. Spillane has published extensively on issues of education policy, policy implementation, school reform, and school leadership. He has authored several books including *Standards Deviation: How Local Schools Misunderstand Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2004), *Distributed Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2006), *Distributed Leadership in Practice* (Teachers College Press, 2011), *Diagnosis and Design for School Improvement* (Teachers College Press, 2011), and numerous journal articles and book chapters.

Linda C. Lee recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy and is now a researcher in The University of Texas at Austin's Educational Administration Department. Her work centers on schools as organizations, educational reform, and new principals. Specifically, she is interested in scaling up and sustaining education reform by understanding different organizational contexts and then tailoring reforms to those contexts.