Newly appointed principals' challenges in learning and adjusting to school culture

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of two new principals of secondary schools. It focused on the principals' experiences of learning the school culture through interactions with the staff and attempting changes which they felt were necessary for improving the teaching and learning process. The study aims to contribute to the literature on newly appointed principals' experiences by highlighting the way newly appointed principals learn about school culture and the setbacks they are likely to face during the learning process. These findings have implications for principal preparation programmes and hiring policies. Participants were selected from two secondary schools located in one of the eleven Education Districts in Guyana. Findings indicate that newly appointed principals experienced challenges that impacted their ability to manage the school culture and institute the changes that were needed for ensuring improvements in teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

New principals encounter numerous challenges during their early stages of headship (Bayar, 2016; Hicks, 2016; Lee-Piggott, 2016; Northfield, 2013; Spillane et al., 2015). These challenges come about as the new principals attempt to reform the school to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. The range of challenges faced by the new principals include their inability to make decisions about the kind of changes that should be made at the school, their experiences of professional isolation and loneliness, having to deal with a heavy workload, an ineffective staff, and the expectations of parents, staff and students (Earley et al., 2011; Fullan, 2001; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Woodley, 2018). Although these challenges were reported by researchers who focussed on new principals in North American and European countries, the experiences of new principals in Latin America and the Caribbean are not dissimilar (Borden, 2002; Lee-Piggott, 2016). Principals are expected to perform as change agents at their school but their preparation for this role and their ability to function, come into question when they have to come to terms with the prevailing culture that exists at the school.

There is the common practice in the context of Guyana’s education system where there is no direct training or certification for the position of a principal; experience in senior administrative positions is their only teacher. There is a gradual upward mobility as teachers grow in seniority and become eligible for promotion (Sepuru and Mohlakwana, 2020). This practice allows them to gain much needed experience in school leadership and administrative practices while serving as a classroom teacher within Latin America and the Caribbean (Borden, 2002). Whereas opportunities exist in parts of North America and Europe for aspiring principals to attend formal training and preparatory programs for principalship. Even though these provisions are made for ease of transition to headship, newly appointed principals still appear to be unprepared for the challenges of the position (Sepuru and Mohlakwana, 2020), particularly in areas associated with teachers’ pedagogical improvement.

Novice principals face challenges ranging from violence at school to teachers and parents' negative attitudes (Bayar, 2016; Lee-Piggott, 2016). Korumaz (2016) said that one of the greatest challenges is simply to keep up with and manage the continuous changes within the school because principals are expected to act as leaders of staff and students. Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) added that school principals are expected to demonstrate proficiency when performing leadership and management roles in schools. Hicks (2016) said that new principals continue to rise to these complex challenges of leadership. One of the reasons why principals are able to meet these challenges is because they make sense of their calling to become a principal. New principals are sometimes forced to walk in the shadow of the departed principal and dealing with conflicting expectations from stakeholders, as well as having to deal with...
demotivated staff members (Crow, 2006; Hicks, 2016; Shoho and Barnett, 2010). Swen (2020) posits that principals made sense of their purpose and motivation, despite the great challenges that they encountered on a daily basis. Making sense, comes by way of clear directives as to their role and function as an educational leader. Spillane et al. (2015) support the view of making sense when they said that novice principals struggle with their changing role and status while simultaneously trying to make sense of their new school environment. Kolzow (2014) and Aas et al. (2020) articulated that educational leaders must not only have a clear vision of their purpose but must be in a position to communicate this vision to all staff member in such a way that they will embrace it. This communication must include aspects of the teaching and learning processes and areas for improvement. Northfield (2013) shared that the teaching and learning processes should be student-centred while the leadership is participatory, action-based, and distributed.

In addressing the important role that the principal must play in ensuring improvement in conditions that support teaching and learning, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) suggest that each principal must assume the role of a cultural leader. By extension, student learning and the development of trust between teachers and administrators, and among teachers themselves will be possible. Brody et al. (2010) opined that those principals who are interested in school improvement will guide their schools in teaching and learning practices that will prepare students for the social and economic demands of the 21st century. This view lends support to the principal’s school improvement efforts that focus on relationship building and staff development as essential aspects of school improvement.

Professional development can be defined as any activity that is intentionally designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators who will then, improve the students’ academic achievement (Guskey, 2000; Louch-Horsley et al., 2010). Day and Sachs (2004) used the term continuous professional development to describe all the activities in which teachers are engaged in during a career which are designed to enhance their work. Normore (2003) highlighted the need for school improvement by focussing on staff development and building strong relationships. Jayapragas (2016) opined that in Singapore, staff development sessions play a pivotal and critical role in the lives of principals. Brown (2019, 2021) posited that these staff development sessions must be meaningful, organized, and tailored to address the academic needs of both teachers and their students. The policy of the Ministry of Education in Guyana is that new principals should adapt the role of a cultural leader. By extension, student learning and the development of trust between teachers and administrators, and among teachers themselves will be possible. Brody et al. (2010) opined that those principals who are interested in school improvement will guide their schools in teaching and learning practices that will prepare students for the social and economic demands of the 21st century. This view lends support to the principal’s school improvement efforts that focus on relationship building and staff development as essential aspects of school improvement.

In Guyana, there has been little attention on the challenges faced by newly appointed principals within the public school culture. These challenges appear never to be addressed by the Ministry of Education and many newly appointed principals suffer in silence. This is an area in the Ministry of Education agenda that needs urgent attention. Newly appointed principals need a seamless transition to headship, which would enable them to focus on issues that matter most. A more formal, incumbent and newly appointed principal, meeting should precede the assumption of duty. Should this be done, the newly appointed principal can learn before taking up this position, about the culture of the school and meeting with staff. Too much time is spent trying to understand these phenomena when building a robust school culture or preparation for accreditation might be priority. There should be a mentor/mentee program that would benefit all newly appointed principals, at least prior to them assuming headship responsibilities. Newly appointed principals should not be left only to their personal experiences garnered during their pre-principalship assumption responsibilities. The questions remain, why there is a reluctance to smooth the path for a newly appointed principal and how can one understand the lived experiences of newly appointed principals.

1.2. Empirical review of literature

Earley et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study involving five new principals from London and from the Midlands inner-city, UK to explore their experiences of headship during their first year on the job. The authors compared the experiences of these new principals with those of other principals who had been on the job for two to four years. The finding of their study revealed that new principals experienced challenges in reading the culture of the new school and the school’s capacity for change.

Beam et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-method study involving 159 secondary school leaders from Virginia USA, who were enrolled in a graduate-level school leadership program. The study compared the experiences and challenges faced by novice school leaders, who were on the job for one to three years (one-third of the study sample) with those on the job for more than three years (two-thirds of the study sample). Among the recurring themes for the principals with more than three years' experience was that of adjusting to the culture of a new school, a theme which the authors did not see occurring among the principals with less than three years on the job.

Lee-Piggott (2014) conducted a case study based on critical incidents reported by a new principal at a primary school in one Caribbean Island. This study investigated the nature of the interplay between the new principal’s leadership and the school culture. Among the aims of the study was that of developing an understanding of the practices and strategies of the new principal in reshaping and enhancing the school culture. Although this study centered on the experiences of a new school principal at the primary school level, there are lessons to be learnt from the principal’s experiences of the school culture that would be of value to new principals operating at the secondary school level. An important aspect of the study is the emphasis on the relational aspects of school leadership that is, the relationship between the new principal and the teachers at the school with the actions of one influencing the other. Lee-Piggott found that the task of reshaping and enhancing the school culture is perhaps the greatest single professional challenge faced by new principals.

1.3. Background of the study

Webster-Powell and Bourne (2016) cautioned that for a school to be effective it requires an instructional leader who understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness. School-based instructional supervision is the current practice of Jamaica’s education system.
as alluded to by Webster-Powell and Bourne. Instructional supervision has been renegaded by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica to school principals and their local faculties, according to Wilberforce and Dilworth (1959), to assume responsibility for instructional leadership and supervision within their schools. This operational mode is ratified by Ministry Paper 47 (2016) where the Ministry of Education has called on schools to become more accountable for improving educational outcomes.

The authors researchers have observed that newly appointed principals have a tough time, especially in the initial stage of their leadership. They are also challenged with having to deal with teachers of diverse background and beliefs. These diversities often create conflict among staff. However, the researchers are not confident that this is the case. As a result, this study was conducted to understand the lived experiences of two newly appointed principals.

1.4. Statement of the problem

Newly appointed principals may have different lived experiences in the processes of improving instruction in their schools. McCormack et al. (2019) identified some of these experiences as supervisors’ workload, time expenditure, institutional and instructional support. Allida et al. (2018) stated that teachers do not immediately accept correction. As a result, many newly appointed principals are unprepared as educational leaders due to teachers’ resistance to new ideas couples with the challenging school culture.

1.5. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of newly appointed principals at the secondary school level in the Guyana context for two newly appointed principals at Brighton and Arundel secondary schools in greater Georgetown, region 4. At this stage in the research, the description of the lived experiences of newly appointed principals will be generally defined as an in-depth understanding of Head Teachers who have been newly appointed and have at most served 18 months.

1.6. Social constructivism: an interpretive framework

Organizational socialization theorists have long held fast to the view popularized by Schein (2004) that culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin, in the sense that the culture of an organization determines the criteria for leadership. Similarly, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) argued that through a process of organizational socialization an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role. These writers also noted that organizational socialization is concerned with the way one develops the attitudes, behaviours and perspective needed to work satisfactorily within organizational settings. In essence, organizational socialization leads to awareness of the organization’s culture and facilitates adjustment on the part of the newcomer (Wanenburg, 2012). One of the benefits of Van Maanen and Schein’s theory is its ability to accommodate an examination of the social and professional experiences of the newcomers to the position and their preparation prior to taking up the job (Shohot and Barnett, 2010). This is considered useful for an understanding of how the new principal is likely to perform on the job (Wanenburg, 2012). The theory also points to a set of six corresponding tactics involved in the process by which newcomers learn the culture and become integrated in the organization. Included among these is the formal and informal socialization tactics. Formal tactics involve separating the newcomers from others in the organization and exposing them to activities such as training and orientation classes as opposed to exposing them to informal tactics such as leaving the newcomer to his or her own to explore the culture. The socialization of an individual is likely to involve a combination of all or some of the tactics identified (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Since this study focussed on the new principals’ awareness of the culture, in the context of the Guyana education system which is devoid of the formal socialization tactics put forward by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), attention was directed to the informal interactive processes involving teachers and the new principal by which the new principal acquired knowledge and experiences about the culture of the school. Attention was also directed to the manner in which the knowledge and experiences gained by the new principal influenced his or her efforts to introduce new measures that are aimed at improving teaching and learning for overall school improvement.

The theoretical framework based on Van Maanen and Schein (1979) theory of organizational socialization as well as the literature review illustrate that the new principal comes to the organization with a set of beliefs, values, and expectations which may or may not be aligned with those of the teachers (Bengtson et al., 2013). However, as the interaction with teachers continue during the initial two years on the job, the new principal must demonstrate the ability to influence the teachers to adopt new behaviours and practices that would lead to the beginning of a new culture, one that ultimately leads to overall school improvement. This theoretical basis along with the literature was used for determining the questions that guided the interviews used in this study as seen in Table 1 below.

1.7. Ontology: a philosophical assumption

There is a connection between social constructivism and ontology as a philosophical assumption to the description of the lived experiences of newly appointed principals to secondary schools. Almeida (2013) said that the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of reality is known as metaphysics and a fundamental component of metaphysics is Ontology. This suggests that ontological beliefs play a major role in understanding the nature of reality which is the lived experiences of newly appointed principals. Creswell (2013) said that when researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing multiple realities because each respondent can provide a different reality. This research showed how each newly appointed principal shared their own reality about the nature of their lived experiences. Teachers who are attached to the same school also shared their lived experiences of having to work with a novice principal. One general ontological question within this research is, what is the reality of the lived experiences of newly appointed principals to secondary schools in region 4, Guyana?

1.8. Research questions

This research has one central research question with two sub-research questions. These research questions guided this research, and the researchers were able to provide answers based on the data that were collected from the respondents. The central research question is: How is the meaning of newly appointed principals explored by two principals at Brighton and Arundel secondary schools in region 4? The two sub-research questions are:

Table 1. Interview questions based on the Socialization theory (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

| Socialization Theory | Principals’ Questions | Teachers’ question |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Social and professional experiences of the new principals, and teacher’s length of service | Question No 1 and 2 | Questions 1 and 2 |
| 2. Expectations | Questions 3 and 4 | Question 3 |
| 3. Culture Learning tactics, challenges, and coping strategies | Questions 5, 6 and 7 | Question 4 |
| 4. School Improvement strategies | Questions 8 and 9 | Questions 5 and 6 |
1. What are the Lived Experiences of newly appointed principals with regards to the culture of a selected secondary school in region 4, Guyana?  
2. What is it like for a newly appointed principal to be placed at a secondary school level without any formal interaction with the incumbent principals and staff prior to taking up the headship?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative designs demonstrate a different approach to scholarly inquiry since it relies on non-numeric data. Jennings (2005) articulated that a qualitative design generates multiple realities which relate to the local setting which may be generalized to other similar settings and contexts as seen fit by the user. Merriam (2009) purported that the most common generalization in qualitative research is a reader or user generalizability. This is where the person who reads the study decides whether the findings can be applied to their particular situation. Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2013) established that to cater for transfer to another situation, the researcher must ensure a rich, thick, description of the research and its processes. The researchers provided comprehensive details in describing the phenomenon of interest.

Qualitative research may take the form of a case study, a narrative biography, a phenomenology, a grounded theory study, or an ethnography study. The researchers conducted descriptive phenomenological research. Lewis-Hickman (2015) stated that phenomenological research is a design in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015) contended that the main purposes of phenomenological research are to seek reality from individuals’ narratives of their experiences and feelings, and to produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon.

Guest et al. (2013) defined phenomenology as a philosophical approach to the study of experience that shares a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things that matter to us, and which constitute our lived experiences. Frechette et al. (2020) and Reiners (2012) distinguished between descriptive and interpretive phenomenological designs. Descriptive phenomenology is used when the researcher wants to describe the phenomenon under study and brackets his or her biases. Interpretive phenomenology is used when the research questions ask for the meaning of the phenomenon and the researcher does not bracket their biases and prior engagement with the question in study. In this study the researchers incorporated the descriptive phenomenological design to describe the central phenomenon under study.

2.2. Population

Asiamah et al. (2017) defined population as a group of individuals who share similar characteristics of interest and who have certain qualities and academic attainment in common. The identification of a population from which a sample is derived is an important means of providing a link to respondents. The researcher focused on the lived experiences of newly appointed principals to secondary schools in region 4 of Guyana. The population for this research captured the principals who were appointed to a particular school, regardless of grade, within a two-year margin. There is a total of fifty-seven principals who fit this description. Their age, range from 45 to 54 years. Guyana houses a confluence of six races and the principals within this population represent these races. Region 4 is predominantly Afro-Guyanese. All of the principals in this region attained a minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Guyana.

2.3. Sample

The researchers were interested in describing the lived experiences of newly appointed principals at selected schools in region 4. In addition to the two newly appointed principals, other participants of the study included 18 teachers, nine from each of the participating schools. The characteristics of the sample bore the resemblance of the population, except that the respondents were of either the African or East Indian heritage. The respondents are from a Grade B school in region 4. The grade of the school is assigned by the Ministry of Education after considering a number of criteria, which includes the school population and national results. Some characteristics of the population and sample are shown in Table 2 below.

2.4. Sampling procedure

The two newly appointed principals were identified through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to select each of the research sites and respondents. This was primarily based on the respondents’ ability to meaningfully contribute to the description of the principals’ lived experiences. The intention was to have two newly appointed principals of schools with similar school population and academic performance proficiencies within the same Education District. Research sites could have also been selected based on their differences (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2011). The schools were identified through accessing the Ministry of Education database of schools in one Education District.

2.5. Research setting

The database search pointed to two schools in Education District 4 of similar ranking where new principals were appointed in the last 18 months. Both schools ranked very low in the national ranking of schools based on students’ performance level at national examinations. The schools situated approximately twelve miles apart from each other in rural communities and they both have experienced rapid turnover of principals who, on average, spent less than five years in the principal position. The decision was taken to use both schools although there were some observed differences between the principals. These differences are, one was older in chronological years and had more than twenty years of classroom teaching experience, as well as longer service as a deputy principal and was a few months away from retirement. The other had fewer years of classroom and leadership experiences and had many more years before achieving retirement age. Further, one principal was familiar with the existing school culture, having served at the school as a teacher before moving to another school to take up the job as a Deputy Principal while the other principal had no prior knowledge of the school and its culture. The researchers felt that these differences, though significant, contributed to an understanding of how new principals’ characteristics played a role in their efforts to adjust to the school culture.

The nine teachers selected from each of the participating schools were selected based on: a) length of service at the school (persons who served for 1–5 years and persons who served for 5 year or more). Attempts were made at both schools to have more than half of the number of teachers making up the sample fit into the category of those serving for 5 years or more. It was felt that the differences in the years of service would allow

| Table 2. Characteristics of the research sites and participants. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | Principal (time on the Job) | Student Population | Teacher Population | Sample Size |
| Arundel Secondary | 6 months | 534 | 32 | 9 |
| Brighton Secondary | 18 months | 447 | 25 | 9 |
the researchers to have a clearer insight of the teachers’ perceptions of the
new principals’ efforts to adjust to the school culture and introduce the
changes based on the teachers’ years of being associated with the school
culture and what they perceive to be the important things that should be
dealt with by the principal as deemed necessary for school improvement.

2.6. Data collection sources

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the two
newly appointed principals and their 18 teachers. These interview pro-
tocols were vetted by two University lecturers who supervise under-
graduate students pursuing their degree. The whole purpose of this
vetting process was to ensure that the information intended to be
collected is the information that was collected (Merriam, 2009). These
interviews allowed for an in-depth understanding of the lived experi-
ences of these newly appointed principals. Even though this research was
not about the teachers, their voices helped the researchers to have a
clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the newly appointed
principals. The researchers were able to derive a clearer understanding of
the lived experiences of newly appointed principals. Three separate in-
terviews, lasting approximately 30 min, were conducted with each of the
principals. Interviews were conducted during school time at the conven-
ience of the participants. All interviews were conducted by the re-
searchers who also engaged in non-participant observation and reviewed
school documents. The interviews with the teachers were conducted
mainly during their lunch break and non-teaching sessions. These pro-
vided a clearer insight of the challenges that the principals experienced
daily, on the job. Interviews were conducted within a five-month period,
lasting from December 2019 to April 2020.

2.7. Data analysis

Joyner et al. (2013) posited that qualitative data analysis is more
challenging to analyze as the data are not numerical, but textual. Mer-
riam (2009) suggested, “All qualitative research data analysis is primarily
inductive and comparative” (p. 175). Gay et al. (2009) concurred that the
collection and analysis of qualitative data could occur simultaneously.
This current study engaged in an iterative data collection and analysis
procedure (Creswell, 2013; Gay et al., 2009; Merriam, 2009).

The researchers made detailed transcriptions of all interviews. These
transcribed notes from the recorded interviews were saved on an 8 GB flash
drive, according to date, time, data source, data collection strategy, and
research site. When the researchers were satisfied through member checks
that the information received was what the participants wanted to convey,
the analysis drew to a smooth close. This analysis was done manually.

Creswell (2013, 2015) outlined a simplified version of phenomenol-
yogy data analysis that was previously discussed by Moustakas. Creswell
stated that even though the general analysis of narrative data focus on
coding and arriving at themes, the phenomenology data analysis must be
treated differently. Creswell outlined five steps that must be followed: 1.
description of the authors’ personal experience, 2. development of a list
of significant statements, 3. collapsing the significant statement to arrive
at themes, 4. write a textural description of the respondents’ experience, 5.
write a structural description of the respondents’ experience, and 6. write
a composed description that conveys the essence of the respondents’
experience with the phenomenon of the study. The authors of this
research, followed these steps.

2.7.1. An Author’s personal experience

My experience as an educational leader includes serving as Head of
Department (HOD) and a newly appointed principal. Collectively these
roles, performed at two Secondary Schools, spanned a period of 13 years.
My appointment to the Headship was based on my years of service a
HOD. I became a newly appointed principal with no previous knowledge
of my new school culture. When I was transferred, I was conscious of the
differences in culture at the two schools. I served at this new school, as a
novice Principal, for almost five years. During my initial months, I
learned that many teachers were young and inexperienced, having joined
the staff immediately following High school. Based on this fact, I
perceived my new role as one that required me to become a mentor to my
young and inexperienced teachers. As a mentor, I consistently encour-
aged my teachers to become professionally trained as an educator. I also
adjusted my actions to suit what I considered to be my expected role as a
principal. My adjustments were made easy, by the teachers’ willingness
to support me, by explaining to me what the common practices were and
how they felt about what they had been doing. I pointed out to them the
areas where I felt changes could be made and asked that they try out
these suggested changes and they agreed to do so. Within a period of less
than one year, we were able to establish new approaches to our teaching
and administrative practices in the school. I tried not to give the
impression that I had all the answers, but convinced them that together
we can develop ideas for improvement and help each other to overcome
our respective areas of weakness.

Our team effort worked well and our team-teaching strategy
contributed to increased pass rates. Teachers were confident about their
abilities to deliver the content and connect with their students. As a
school, we were recognized for these new initiatives as a result of stu-
dents becoming more engaged in their learning and academic achieve-
ment. In retrospect, I was not intimidated to promote these changes for
the good of the school. I was able to get the cooperation of the teachers as
I set out to adjust the school culture and make significant changes for the
overall improvement of the school. I have held one other leadership post
since leaving the Headship of the High school – Coordinator of a
department at a Premier University. The experiences gained in these
leadership roles helped me to understand the importance of establishing
connections with people in an organization.

In addition to the content analysis used for analyzing qualitative data,
Creswell’s (2012) five-step model for coding was used for the analysis of
the data. These five steps involved: a) reading through the text data, b)
dividing the texts into segments of information, c) labelling the segments
with codes, d) reducing overlap and redundancy of the codes, and e)
collapsing the codes into themes. Two major themes (Disappointments &
Pleasurable Surprises and Needing Support) emerged from research ques-
tion #1, while three major themes (Resolving teaching and learning chal-
genges; Teachers’ Professional Development; and Impact of attempted Change)
emerged from research question #2. Table 3 below shows the initial
categories and the frequency counts.

**Table 4** below shows the link between the research questions and the
emerging themes.

| Chang | Frequency Counts | % Frequency |
|-------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Communication | 3 | 2.9 |
| 2. Expectation | 5 | 4.9 |
| 3. Working together | 5 | 4.9 |
| 4. Staff support | 10 | 9.8 |
| 5. School improvement | 7 | 6.9 |
| 6. Cooperation | 3 | 2.9 |
| 7. Feedback | 1 | 0.9 |
| 8. Need change | 8 | 7.8 |
| 9. Student discipline | 15 | 14.3 |
| 10. Community | 16 | 15.7 |
| 11. What I learned | 15 | 14.3 |
| 12. Experience | 7 | 6.9 |
| 13. Staff division | 3 | 2.9 |
| 14. Observation | 4 | 3.9 |
| Total count | 102 | Approx. 100% |

Note. This spreadsheet reveals 14 initial categories and 102 counts. Some of the
categories and codes were collapsed for a clearer understanding of the analysis.
3. Results

There was one central qualitative research question and two qualitative sub-research questions that guided this research. Each sub-research question was explored which contributed to the current body of knowledge. Two themes emerged from the analysis of the information received from the first sub-research question and three themes emerged from the analysis of the information received from the second sub-research question.

3.1. The first sub-research question is: What are the lived experiences of newly appointed principals with regards to the culture of a selected secondary school in region 4, Guyana? The two themes that emerged as a result of this research question are: disappointments and pleasurable surprises & Needing support

3.1.1. Disappointments & Pleasurable Surprises

Kenrick (pseudonym), the newly appointed principal at Arundel Secondary school, is in his mid-40s. He had completed only two months on the job when he was first interviewed for this study. He had no prior knowledge of the school other than the fact that it is in an area that is close to where he resides. Kenrick reported having a surprising encounter with the school’s culture. He explained, “during my first days on the job, I tried to connect with my staff by meeting them individually and engaging in informal conversations in the school’s corridors.” This led him to discover many attributes about the school which he did not expect to hear.

He described his experience as “perplexing” due to his discovery of teacher relationships. Some of these factors are related to teachers who are not on speaking terms with their colleagues, teacher unprofessionalism, and numerous instances of indiscipline among students. He said, “These factors did not coincide with the perceptions that I had established about the school, perceptions which were based on my own experiences of growing up and attending a school in a rural community.” Kenrick’s description of the interactions he had with the teachers and the students at the school reflected his disappointment at what he regarded as elements of the school culture. His thoughts are summed up in the following statement, “I was not expecting to hear these things happening here. This school is in a rural area, but I feel as though I am still at the urban school.”

Carmen, a native of the village where the school is located, and she is familiar with the history and culture of the community and that of the school. Carmen said, “My knowledge about the history and culture of the community as well as the school were critical factors in making my decision to apply for the principalship position. I perceived that this knowledge would make me an excellent candidate for the principalship position, but would also serve as the basis upon which I would be able to bring about improvement in the school’s poor academic performance level and its public image.”

Carmen felt confident that she could remedy the three major issues affecting the school: meeting the learning needs of the students, dispelling the negative image of the school, and reducing the attrition rate of students. She explained:

Everything at the school seemed just as they were when I last taught here. The morning assembly was the same, students were still repeating the same Morning Prayer that was said since the school was established, and many other procedures remained in place.

Carmen felt that the reception she received from the teachers at the commencement of her headship was “not surprising and cordial”, and as a result she anticipated no difficulties in working with them to return the school to its former glory. She felt that her expectations concerning the staff were partially realized because of “the warm and inviting reception” that she received from the staff, many of whom she had previously worked with while teaching at the school. Carmen describes herself as a person with “strong Christian values… who believes in the power of prayers”. She believes that her prayers are key to success throughout her teaching career and her new role as principal.

Teacher Shamika has been a secondary school teacher at Arundel for almost seven years and has taught Mathematics and Chemistry. She is...
currently an untrained teacher of Mathematics at the Grade 8 level. Her greatest joy is the teaching of Mathematics which began approximately five years ago, and this interest continued to grow. She holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree with a concentration in Mathematics and a minor in Chemistry. She said:

“Teaching at this school has always been filled with mixed feelings; they are some good days and some not so good days. But we have to make the best of it. This is our job and regardless of the many disappointments we must be here.”

Teacher Ronaldo has been a secondary school teacher at Brighton for almost ten years. He has taught in secondary schools in at least two different regions. Ronaldo is currently an untrained teacher but earned a Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree with a concentration in Physics. He also finds it a joy to share his expertise with other teachers within the department and is referred to as a disciplinarian by many of his colleagues. He appeared to be very frank with his choice of words. He said,

“I am used to disappointments in all form and fashion. As teachers, we need to take our disappointments and turn them into opportunities. Could I be honest with you? I wish I could stay at home and still be paid. It is getting from bad to worse. I have a responsibility to me students and I will fulfill that responsibility at all cost. I have a conscience”

Teacher Butterfly is a veteran Arundel school teacher. She has been teaching for approximately 19 years with 18 of these at the level of grades 10 and 11. She is an alternatively trained teacher known for her outstanding performance in teaching Mathematics and received awards for her exceptional performance in the Mathematics department. In many of her classes, she encourages students to focus on and strive for excellence. This stalwart has earned a Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree in Mathematics. She shared, “At this school, you cannot focus on the negatives. If you look for the negatives, you will see it. Instead of looking for the negatives, look for the opportunities among the disappointments.”

Each school has a unique culture that shapes their identity. The type of reception a newly appointed principal receives is dependent on the culture that was created before they got there.

3.1.2. Needing Support

Both Carmen and Kenrick felt that they needed advice and direction on how to deal with the administrative and disciplinary issues they encountered at each of their school. Kenrick explained his situation thus:

I feel I need to bounce off my ideas with someone not only familiar with these situations but also who has been a new principal at a school. I wanted to know if what I am thinking about makes sense. I have never had to manage a school on my own, so this is new to me, and I need the support of the teachers and parents.

Kenrick admitted:

I made some blunders in an effort to reach out and build a trusting relationship with my teachers at his school. There were teachers on my staff who were known to me since my early days of teacher training, and I decided that they would be the best persons to whom I can reach out for advice about school practices.

This decision proved calamitous as he realized that other teachers were unhappy with his close association with these teachers, and he felt that this contributed to further division among the teaching staff.

Kenrick eventually came up with the idea of organizing a day of fun and relaxation for teachers at a recreation park. He was able to get the teachers to agree with this idea and the event was held as professional development activity for the staff. Kenrick was surprised at the response he got from the teachers as they were involved in organizing and participating in the event. He posits:

I am pleasantly surprised at the high level of cordial interaction among staff at play. I was able to observe the teachers interacting and having a good time with each other in a non-formal and relaxing setting, as well as being able to see other aspects of their personality that would not be noticeable in the formal school setting.

Another strategy adopted by Kenrick to build relationship with his teachers was to establish an open-door policy that allowed teachers to come into his office and discuss situations that they felt were affecting their performance at the school. However, he quickly realized that this strategy was not working well for him. He said,

I am really overwhelmed with the magnitude of issues that confront me at the school. On many occasions, I have an extremely busy schedule that keeps me in my office for most of the day. Too many complaints are brought to my attention by teachers and students, and I feel that some of these issues are minor ones and can be dealt with by the senior staff.

Apart from seeking the support of the teachers, Kenrick relied heavily on the Senior Management Team (SMT) at his school. This team was charged with ensuring implementation and monitoring of school improvement plans. Kenrick’s dependence on this team was noted by the other teachers who felt that their views and ideas were sometimes overlooked by the administration as they believe the principal listens only to members of the SMT.

Additionally, Kenrick came to learn about the influence of a past principal of the school, one who served in this position for 15 years and who was admired by many of the senior members of the teaching staff.

Kenrick:

There has been a practice among the acting heads and those older members of staff who regularly consulted with the past principal. What I plan to do is also connect with the past principal and seek his support on some of the issues he had for improving the school.

He further mentioned: In other education districts, Principals received educational support. These principals meet at regularly convened district meetings which offer them the opportunity to interact and learn from each other through sharing of ideas and experiences.

These experiences were not very different for Carmen who, although she felt accepted by many of the teachers at her school, she eventually became aware of the fact that there were divisions among the staff. She postulates:

Some teachers did not take kindly to me assuming the principalship role as there was a senior teacher who had acted as the principal and had some amount of influence over teachers, particularly those newly appointed teachers. This led to some amount of uneasiness for me but with time I was able to make inroads with the dissenting teachers due to my efforts to reach out to all in a friendly, unbiased, and compassionate manner. I knew that I had to have the support of all the teachers if I were to succeed in changing the image of the school and improving the performance level of the students.

Carmen decided that her main strategy would be to pay attention to the well-being of the teachers at her school and she did this by daily enquiring about their well-being and making time to listen to them throughout the day.

Carmen relied heavily on her network with other principals in the district for support in relation to her effort to improve the school. She reported,

I received help from one of the principals in this district to realize a goal of improving students’ performance in particular subject areas. This arrangement involved teachers from both schools taking turns to pair teach and observe each other and teach each other’s class.
One significant factor that supported Carmen’s transition to the headship is that she commenced the job at the same time as the newly appointed Deputy Principal, a woman who was appointed from another school. This meant that they were both new to their respective positions. Working together as Principal and Deputy Principal meant that they supported each other in learning and adjusting to the requirements of their new roles within the context of the school culture. Carmen was particularly happy to have this new deputy with whom she shared some common features and she reported that they worked well together.

Teacher Smith is bilingual. She has been in full-time teaching for approximately seven years. She is currently untrained and has been teaching Mathematics at the Grades 10 and 11 at Arundel for the past five years. All of her teaching experience is at the secondary school level. She recalled her early childhood Mathematics experience as one having a solid foundation. She has a Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree in Statistics with a minor in Economics. Teacher Smith contributed:

“We all need support at some point in our lives. Not only as a teacher or a principal, but also as parents and students. However, in this case, newly appointed principals need all the support that they can get. You need to be very observant, because some principals, even though they need the support, they do not ask. Some of them have too much pride. Even though they do not ask, you need to be observant, keeping your ears to the ground, and share when you believe the time is most appropriate.”

Teacher Elaine is a traditionally trained teacher with an unbreakable service record of 25 years as a secondary school teacher at three different schools including Brighton. She currently serves as the Mathematics Head of Department as well as a Grade 12 teacher. She enjoys her work especially teaching Grades 10 and 11. She takes pride in spending most of her working day at school planning for her Mathematics department. She strives to improve the effectiveness of her Mathematics teachers and continues to develop an appreciation of Mathematics in her students. Teacher Elaine proposes:

“Support is needed at every level within the education system. Our time may come when we are promoted to the principalship position. Then we may know how critical it is for teachers to give their newly appointed principals all the support that they need. Being a principal is a very important position and therefore, the responsibilities are huge.”

Teacher Christie is a dedicated worker and is committed to the success of her students. She is an alternatively trained teacher and has more than 10 years of teaching experience with approximately nine of those at Grade 11 at Brighton. Teaching for her has been rewarding, especially when her students are successful at the Mathematics examination. She earned a Bachelor of Science (BSc.) in Management Studies with a minor in Mathematics. She enjoys teaching Mathematics.

Teacher Christie said, “No man is an island and as teachers we are morally obligated to give our support, whether a person requests it or not. We need to understand one thing and that is, when a principal fails, the entire school fails. No one in the community would say that the principal failed, they would more say that the school failed.”

Creativity and collaboration among Principals and their teaching staff can reduce blunders, assist in accomplishing goals, and improve the perception of others. Building strong and lasting relationships at the school level can make a big difference in the school culture. The reception that a newly appointed Principal receives from her staff is contingent on the culture that is dominant in a secondary school environment. Creativity, collaboration, and a spirit of collegiality among Principals in an Education district can lead to teachers and students' success.

Successful school leaders collaborate for the greater good of others. Trying to accomplish success by an individual effort results in a stifled education system. Newly appointed Principals are not strangers, but team players geared towards achieving success through creativity and collaboration.

3.2. The second sub-research question is: what is it like for a newly appointed principal to be placed at a secondary school level without any formal interaction with the incumbent principals and staff prior to taking up the headship?

Within the confines of this research question, the respondents spoke in detail about: Resolving teaching and learning challenges, teachers’ Professional Development, and impact of attempted change.

3.2.1. Resolving teaching and learning challenges

Both Principals expressed dismay at the students' unacceptable academic performance status and the poor public image of their respective school. They believed that these challenges are contingent on the lack of parental support, community involvement, and uncoordinated teacher efforts. While Carmen was able to mention that the school’s status and performance is a result of the school culture and declining social conditions within the external community, Kenrick believed that the teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards school were major contributors. He summed up his observation in the following manner:

“I see a problem here with teachers’ lateness for class or absence from school, and teachers failing to use appropriate teaching techniques and motivational strategies to get students to learn. Another thing about this school that I cannot come to grips with is the noise level that emanates from classrooms during instruction. I have observed that the students are very noisy, and they become engaged in acts of indiscipline when they are unsupervised. This happens because teachers are either late for class or they are absent from school and the class is left unsupervised. I believe that students engage in acts of indiscipline when they are left unsupervised. The teachers are also setting a bad example for the students by being late for school and late in starting their classes.

Both principals felt that the teachers need to use appropriate teaching techniques and motivational strategies to get students to learn. Carmen said,

“I will implement a strategy which I believe would lead to improvement in students’ academic performance. This would involve an agreement between parents and teachers for extra hours of tuition to be provided to students who need to upgrade their performance in comprehension and mathematics. This is in addition to an earlier arrangement with another secondary school in the district that allowed teachers of Grades 10 and 11 from both schools to take turns in visiting each other's classroom to observe and teach for a day. After each session, both teachers will discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

These measures came out of decisions reached at staff meetings held during the first twelve months of her tenure, but they were only introduced at the start of her second year on the job. Teachers at Carmen’s school expressed dissatisfaction at the non-implementation of some ideas that were discussed and agreed upon at staff meetings. The teachers felt that the principal was not sufficiently pro-active in getting things done at the school.

Anton has been a Science teacher of the secondary division at Brighton school for the past four years. He claims to be proficient in Music. He has always been willing and ready to share new ideas with his Department and school whenever that opportunity presents itself. His career interest is to become a medical doctor. Anton said:

“Challenges are never classified as stumbling blocks, they are always steppingstones. In life there will always be challenges. That is not the problem, but rather how we deal with them. At my school, we have many challenges that range from not having a variety of learning resources to students' indiscipline. If you stay here long enough, all of my claims would be confirmed.”
Bond has been a teacher at Arundel school for the past 17 years. He has a love for the languages having lives in a foreign country for 10 years. He is a teacher of Grade 8. He shares the same view as Anton. He posits, “Resources are very important in the execution of a teacher’s responsibility. Sometimes we wait on the school and the Ministry of Education to place these things in out laps. If teachers have the responsibility to teach the nation’s children, they can purchase within a reasonable budget. For the greater part, I personally purchase my leaning materials.”

David is an independent Mathematics teacher who is a teacher at Brighton’s School for approximately four years. He feels more accomplished whenever he is given the opportunity to share ideas with the administration. He is able to complete his work on time with little or no supervision. He loves the teaching of languages and always wants to impart his knowledge to all of his students.

Kenrick adopted a one-on-one approach to help teachers at his school. He believed that by this means he would be able to develop a relationship with the teachers while helping them to improve their practice. When he observed that some teachers at his school were doing lesson plans that led to uninspiring lessons, he called each teacher in and showed them the steps to producing appealing lesson plans. He noted, “This approach added to my already burdensome daily tasks, but I felt that this had to be done. Improvement in students’ behavior and learning outcomes are my key priority areas. Student learning at my school can be improved if teachers adopted more learner-centered and student-friendly approaches."

He also felt that the teachers were too quick to dismiss the students as being “incapable of learning”. Kenrick reflected, In my personal experiences as a secondary school student who lagged behind other students in my class was encouraged by teachers at my school who showed great concern and care for me. I would like to see the teachers at Arundel Secondary show similar care and concern for their students, but I am unsure how to get the teachers to show more care for their students, I may have to get the members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) involved and embrace this idea and work along with me, to achieve this goal.

Teacher Christopher supports her colleagues: Even though I enjoy teaching Mathematics, I too experience some challenges in my Mathematics classroom. I care for my students and this has helped me to rise above the challenges that I face on a daily basis. My passion for my students rises above my challenges.

Teachers’ absence from school, lateness for classes, and choice of appropriate teaching strategies can create an atmosphere of indiscipline. Teachers and principals must collaborate to improve the teaching and learning process at the school. Principals must be proactive.

3.2.2. Teachers’ professional development

Carmen and Kenrick spoke of their challenges in trying to manage teachers’ behavior and practices. These challenges relate to issues such as teachers arriving late for school and the beginning of classes, teachers departing the school’s premises before the end of the school day without permission and, teachers’ failure to accurately complete lesson plans. The principals adopted various measures by which they hope to get teachers to change their behavior and practice. These measures include convening regularly planned staff meetings to deal specifically with these issues, having discussions with individual teachers on an informal basis, and resorting to the use of gentle persuasion.

Carmen noted, “While some teachers made the effort to comply after being spoken to, others showed open resentment which further encouraged division among the staff.” Similarly, Kenrick had much more to say when he reported:

Such indifference among the teachers is caused because they believe that some ideas are useless and not worthy of consideration. The behavior and practices of the teachers constitute an aspect of the school’s culture that principals can view as having the greatest negative impact on their leadership.

Both principals acknowledged their failure in getting teachers to engage in collaborative work. Carmen shares the view: I had not taken the lead in ensuring that all my teachers at the school are up to date in their content knowledge and use of current teaching methods and techniques. I do not want to blame it on my extremely busy schedule, but I have no current alternative.

Kenrick pointed to his reliance on the SMT for support and to implement the ideas for change. He realized that “some old practices had to be addressed but I feel that it would take some time for my ideas to be implemented since I could not make the changes by myself”. He further explained the situation at his school:

There are some good teachers here, those who utilize appropriate teaching methods and techniques that encourage learning. These teachers are the popular ones among the staff, but they keep the knowledge and experience to themselves. To me, it was as if teachers were competing among themselves instead of working together for betterment of all the students.

Kenrick states that he does not subscribe to this practice and would wish to see all teachers being committed to helping all students achieve academic success. He intends to reformulate the professional development sessions to ensure that they serve as a means whereby teachers acquire the knowledge and expertise that they need to improve their teaching techniques and achieve greater results for the benefit of the school.

Teacher James has been a teacher at Arundel secondary school for almost ten years. He has taught in secondary schools in both Jamaica and Trinidad. Mr. James is currently a trained teacher in Mathematics. He also finds it a joy to share his expertise with other teachers within the department and is well respected by students and colleagues.

Teacher James said: “Professional development sessions should be specific to a particular need. Most of these sessions I have attended have been based on general day-to-day information. I am not interested in facilitators telling me to set up all night planning a ten-page lesson to meet diverse abilities in my classroom. All facilitators need to come and show us what they expect us to do. Since I am here at (school mentioned), no one has ever come and shown us how we can effectively meet such a diverse range of abilities inside our classrooms.”

Teachers have much to say with regards to this burning issue of Professional Development. Teacher William of Brighton Secondary has been a trained teacher for almost seven years and teaches Integrated Science to Grades 9 and 10 students. He is passionate about teachers’ professional development especially in the Sciences. He said, “At this school, we need more meaningful professional development. Meaningful in the sense that what is planned must be able to develop practice in our classrooms. For too long, these sessions are way too generally. Personally for me, it does not make sense. When professional development sessions are general, they are not meeting the needs of the teachers and by extension, the students.” Ms. Clarke of Arundel shares this same view. She said, “As a staff, we have voiced our concerns on many occasions. However, our words do not have weight. The principals continue to ignore our concerns. What can we do? We just have to move with the flow.” One strong concern has to do with the effectiveness of these sessions that are very lengthy for most parts. Teacher Tim of Brighton secondary school for the least five years has a passion for teaching his students. He has attended at least three professional
development sessions annually. He made an extremely strong statement when he said, “The Professional Development sessions are effective if the teacher goes there with an open mind and willing to learn and ready to share the information learned.”

Managing teachers’ behaviors and beliefs are major skills for success that a principal must acquire at the secondary school level. However, the responsibility must be levied at the teachers who have direct contact with their students. Principals can give their teachers the support through organized and well-structured teachers’ professional development sessions.

The presence or absence of a teacher at school and classroom, speak to their level of commitment to student-success. Principals are required to ensure that their teachers and students are successful. However, teachers who have direct contact with their students have a greater impact which leads to school success through professional development.

Success at the secondary school level is a joint venture. Each individual is important to the process of improving students’ and teachers’ performance as well as school image. Principals must learn to work together with all staff to bring about positive changes in the school environment.

### 3.2.3. Impact of attempted change

There were some amount of synergy between the interview content of the newly appointed principals and the teachers at the school they manage. The closeness of interview content was observed after a careful analysis of all interview protocols. The researchers felt that this was unique to this research and thought that it should be shared. The data obtained from the teacher interviews indicated a level of dissatisfaction among teachers at both schools.

Teacher David from Brighton’s Secondary, Carmen’s school, was able to reflect on his expectations of the principal’s school improvement efforts. He acknowledged:

> Although there was a greater level of cooperation and camaraderie among Principal and teachers, all teachers were not in agreement with the new measures implemented to ensure student learning. Teacher Sighs. You know what? Many teachers also felt that conditions have remained very much the same.

Teacher Pratt of the same school sanctioned, that teachers generally felt that the principal was a good person, but she did not have the gut and the determination to deal with the kind of problems that existed at the school. Contributing to this discussion was Teacher Jennifer said,

> I have been teaching here for almost ten years and I have worked with four Principals including the current one. I think student behavior continues to be a major problem here. Students fight and behave badly and have little regard for teachers. It is something that bothers me a lot, but the principal has done nothing to address this problem.

These comments were supported by teacher Miranda who has been at the school for less than five years:

> On the matter of student learning, we have lots of plans based on discussions at staff meetings, but they are still to come to fruition. In my opinion, the new principal will leave without making any significant impact on student learning. I also do not see teachers making any significant effort to help the students to do better.”

Teacher John who has completed seven years at the school stated, “I believe conditions would have been better if the principal was a male. I think he would have used more effective measures to address indiscipline at the school.”

Teacher Cheryl who has spent less than two years at the school stated, “I think teachers here can get away with much (their misdeemeanors are treated lightly). This is because there is not a strong leadership coming from the top.”

The teachers at Arundel Secondary, Kenrick’s school, expressed awareness of the principal’s vision for the school and felt that he is determined in his efforts to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. However, they believed that participatory leadership was absent due to Kenrick’s unreserved reliance on the Senior Management Team in the major decision-making process while failing to meaningfully engage the rest of the staff, in consultation. It was also felt that the senior teachers, most of whom taught at the school eight years or more, showed a reluctance in accepting the views of the younger teachers, those who were there for five years or less. Concerning this claim, teacher Peter made the following statement:

> Young teachers here are not encouraged to be creative. For example, when I attempt to do things differently my HOD tells me I should stick to the procedures and ideas outlined in the course guide. I think the principal is aware of what is going on, but you see, there are teachers here with a lot more influence and they get to decide what must happen.

The consensus of teachers from both schools is that they would like to see an emphasis on teachers’ professional development because they think this will benefit the school. They are not satisfied with what is currently offered as professional development at the school because they believe that too much emphasis is placed on teachers’ compliance with the Ministry of Education policies. Not enough is being done to help teachers improve their practice so that they can better contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning at the school.

The principal’s gender and teachers’ level of inclusivity in the management of the school can be significant factors in maintaining discipline in a secondary school setting. All teachers, regardless of their number of years of teaching experience, can make meaningful suggestions that can elevate the academic performance of students.

Every member of staff is important to the smooth functioning of a school. Some Principals only rely on the advice of their ‘friends’ and experience teachers. This should never be the practice of leaders in any organization and definitely not within a learning institution. The molding, of minds and character, is the responsibility of every school and therefore, all resources should be employed for the good of the learning institution.

### 4. Discussion of findings

The first sub-research question is: What are the Lived Experiences of newly appointed principals with regards to the culture of a selected secondary school in region 4, Guyana? In response to this research question it was found that the findings coincided with Earley et al. (2011) who conducted a qualitative study. It is generally felt that new Principals’ experience cultural challenges whenever they are appointed as new principals. Among these challenges that have been identified, are gross disappointments (Sepuru and Mohlakwana, 2020). The lived experiences of both Principals in this study support the need for a rich socialization process to be evident. This is because their statements reveal that they did not feel confident about making decisions on their own. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) noted the distinction between formal and informal socialization tactics. They postulate that newly appointed principals who experience formal socialization is exposed to a set of training experiences that are specifically designed by the organization. On the other hand, individuals who experience informal socialization is left on his/her own to learn the process of the organization by trial and error. This is the case of the principals reported in this study. The time spent on trial-and-error processes could have been used to institute concrete measures that would lead to substantive change in the school conditions. Further, the Principals in this study spoke of having a heavy workload that consisted mainly of record-keeping, report writing, and attendance at district meetings. These activities required long hours of office work and little time is left to concentrate on school improvement projects (Brody et al., 2010; Spillane and Lee, 2014). In Kenrick’s case, he delegated the school improvement tasks to the Senior Management Team. This allowed him to concentrate on completing the office work.
which kept him confined to his office for most of the day. Spillane and Lee (2014) saw the heavy workload of new Principals as an aspect of the ‘reality shock’ of having ultimate responsibility for all that happens at the school. This experience of ultimate responsibility, in the case of this study, led to a reduction in the time available to the new Principals to deal with the more pertinent issues such as the professional development of staff. This helps the researchers to have a richer appreciation of the findings of sub-research question 2. The second sub-research question is: What is it like for a newly appointed principal to be placed at a secondary school level without any formal interaction with the incumbent principals and staff prior to taking up the headship? One significant aspect of the study’s finding in relation to resolving teaching and learning challenges indicates that having prior background knowledge and experience of the school culture is not necessarily an advantage when it comes to performing the role as a principal of the school. This was the case for Carmen who had prior knowledge of the school culture (Barth, 2002; Deal and Peterson, 1999; Harvey, 1991; Woodley, 2018). Carmen recognized that there were no significant changes in the school culture over the years between when she first taught at the school and when she returned to serve, yet she felt that during her term as principal she would be able to make a difference. However, the views of the teachers who were interviewed suggest that she was unable to take control of the situation at the school and effect meaningful changes during her period as a newly appointed principal (Crow, 2006; Hargreaves, 1999; Lee–Piggott, 2016).

The findings support the view that although one needs to be aware of the culture and possess knowledge of its distinctiveness in the school setting, the ability to manage the culture and the courage to do so are equally important (Louis and Wahlstrom, 2011; Schein, 2004). At Kenrick’s school, Arundel secondary, the teachers felt that he was uninformed about the realities or conditions at the school, and Kenrick himself reported that he reached out to the previous principal and to senior teachers on the staff because he felt the need for their advice and support. This finding corresponds with the literature dealing with new principals’ transition to headship and their experiences of expectations of staff (Crow, 2006; Hicks 2016; Shoho and Barnett, 2010).

The principals in this study, being fully cognizant of the many issues about the staff, have attempted to address the issues through various measures. The essence of the principals’ reported experiences is that they believed they were doing the best they could to encourage the staff within the given circumstances which they saw as one in which “old practices” dominated. However, it appears that the efforts of the principals fell far short in addressing the problems of students’ underperformance and teachers’ attitudes by not giving enough attention to the professional development of the staff. A focus on the improvement of the people in the organization, as a necessary step towards overall improvement, is in keeping with the arguments put forward by (DuFour and Berkey, 1995; Valentine, 2006).

While the principals in this study reported the difficulties they faced as new principals they believed they were making progress by simply adopting the strategies that they thought were necessary to have the school function in an orderly manner. However, from the perspective of the teachers, the principals were perceived as unsuccessful because the expected results were not forthcoming. At both schools, the teachers felt that they were omitted from consultation and planning and that the efforts to improve the school were inadequate. This finding reflects the need for formal socialization program for new principals to orient them to the culture of the school as expressed in the behaviours of both the staff and the students, thereby allowing for the interests of stakeholders to be taken into consideration (Harvey, 1991).

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide answers to the two sub-research questions. They have helped in achieving the researchers’ purpose which was to explore the lived experiences of two newly appointed principals at the secondary school level. These findings coincided with those highlighted in the review of the literature. This study highlighted that newly appointed principals experience severe challenges associated with learning the school culture and adjusting to it (Alton, 1994; Bayar, 2016; Lee–Piggott, 2016). Principals desire the support of other staff members to guide them through at least the initial stages of headship (Louis and Wahlstrom, 2011; Negis-Isik and Gursel, 2013). The experiences gained while learning and adjusting to the culture are regarded as a necessary part of the process of being a new principal at a secondary school. Out of these experiences, the principal must emerge as more confident and competent in managing the culture and determining the kinds of changes that need to be made to enhance teaching and learning at their school (Brody et al., 2010; Louis and Wahlstrom, 2011). Having the right kind of support during the initial stages of headship would help the new principal to maximize the benefits to be gained from their experiences.

5.1. Implications for practice and future research

➢ This study should be seen as the beginning of further studies into the lived experiences of newly appointed principals in the context of the Guyanese education system.
➢ There is a general absence of coaching and mentorship facilities for aspiring Principals.
➢ Since this study is limited in its ability to generalize, a quantitative approach to the study of new principals would help in providing a scientific explanation of the influence of Principals on the academic performance of students, in a secondary school setting.
➢ The findings of such a study would help in formulating the appropriate policies at the Ministry of Education for ensuring that the placement of new principals takes into consideration the fit between school culture and the new principals’ background, ability, and commitment.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Jill Medford: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Troy Brown: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.
Appendix A

Principal Interview Schedule.

1. Please describe your educational background and prior teaching experiences.
2. Please tell me about your experiences in school leadership role positions prior to becoming a principal.
3. What knowledge did you have about this school prior to taking up your appointment?
4. What were your reasons for choosing this school?
5. How have you tried to learn about the culture of this school after taking up the appointment?
6. What things about this school surprise you most?
7. What are some of the challenges you faced during the early months of being at the school, and how have you been dealing with these challenges?
8. Do you encourage teachers to plan lessons together, observe each other's teaching, experiment with new teaching techniques and share ideas for improvement of classroom practices? (other ways of ensuring professional development of staff)
9. What changes have you implemented in your attempts to improve the teaching and learning process at your school?

Appendix B

Teachers' Interview schedule.

1. How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. How many principals have you had the privilege of working with at this school?
3. What do you think are some of the expectations that teachers had for the new principal?
4. What do you perceive to be some of the major problems at this school? Do you think the principal is aware of these problems? How do you think the principal is doing in relation to remedying these problems?
5. What school improvements projects have been undertaken I the last year (or four months)? Are teachers willingly participating I these projects?
6. Does the principal encourage teachers to plan lessons together, observe each other’s teaching, experiment with new teaching techniques, and share ideas for improvement of classroom practices?

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