

**School Leadership Review**

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#### Call for Papers

The next issue of *School Leadership Review* will be published in Spring 2009. The theme is open. The Fall 2009 issue will be on the theme of online teaching.

#### Submission Guidelines

- Submissions should be 2000 – 3000 words in length (@ 20 pages).
- Manuscripts must use APA 5<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Limit the use of tables, figures, and appendices.
- Manuscripts must include cover page with contact information.
- Manuscripts may be submitted at any time.
- Submit manuscripts electronically in Word to [pgill@uttyler.edu](mailto:pgill@uttyler.edu) and [whickey@uttyler.edu](mailto:whickey@uttyler.edu).



## Preparation Issues in Educational Leadership

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Educational leaders have chosen to belong to one of the most important and influential professions. Not only do educators have an important impact on others, but there is a need to have a practical understanding of instruction, curriculum, and psychology. Leaders in all disciplines often relate to previous educational relationships in discussions about important moments in their lives. These relationships matter, and they provide foundational experiences for each of us.

Professors of educational leadership must be generalists in many areas to help prepare future school administrators for overall success. The ability to understand eclectic subjects becomes apparent in the variety of topics that occur in open-themed journals. For example, this journal edition has topics as varied as mentoring, accountability, culture, leadership, and minority issues. However, there is an underlying thread that ties together these issues: student achievement.

What is the best way to develop the leaders who are responsible for student achievement? There are multiple views related to the best way to train administrative professionals, and new technology creates new questions. There are currently several options for instructional delivery of educational administration classes, including traditional face-to-face, hybrid (both traditional and internet use in a class), and totally online courses.

The courses that are 100% online are controversial among many professors. The reason is simple – how does a teacher of a  
mainly people-

oriented discipline address these skills without modeling. In addition, research suggests the importance of teacher-student relationships to overall student achievement. Can a course designed to impact the next generation of educational leaders be taught completely online?

Competition for educational administration students is fierce. Most regions in the state will have several universities hire adjunct professors to teach a cohort away from the brick and mortar of home. Colleges market their programs in order to address the needs of educators, and this process begins to erode the traditional bases of many programs. Few programs have created the concern of Lamar University's Online Educational Administration Program. Lamar agreed to provide the higher education legitimacy for entrepreneur Randy Best, who not only created a marketing plan for educational leadership program delivery, but also contacted districts in order to solicit their support through regular payroll deductions for the program cost. In addition, Higher Education Holding, the business that is owned by Best, provides this for \$5000, a cost significantly less than many schools. Lamar benefits through state funding increases based on enrollment (Smith, 2008).

There was a strong reaction to this program. Throughout the state over 2800 students enrolled in the program, and this enrollment adversely impacted a number of educational administration departments in the state. Many professors believed the program was an issue not only in decreased student numbers, but in instructional philosophy. The Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration (TCPEA), in a meeting during the spring of 2008, expressed concern and developed a statement addressing online instruction. This TCPEA statement represents a concern for the instructional validity of mass production degrees that represent little value in the professor/student interaction and relationship.

There are other problems, once again related to relationships, that programs of this type create. Educational administration programs should be more than producers of degrees and certifications. The networking and contacts that are created provide foundational resources for future administrators. Our departments exist in part to serve local school districts. The decision by the Higher Education Coordinating Board to allow the Lamar program to exist has the affect of decreasing the impact of regional departments of educational administration. The students that are produced have gaps in their education that simple knowledge based correspondence-like courses cannot reproduce, and the funds that help provide continued support for education go into the pockets of a businessman. Randy Best may be a good person, but he is not likely to be available for a struggling first-year principal.

The entrepreneur mind-set is the other side of this issue. Perhaps the departments of educational administration must adjust or perish. Departments that do not adjust to the market, even if the characteristics of the market provide a lesser education, may deserve to become extinct. The entrepreneurial focus is happening more often as other universities are beginning to offer online degrees.

Future educational administration programs will likely have online degrees, although allowing businessmen to siphon off funds from the state while using a university front is questionable. Departments that do not address the needs of their students will find class sizes getting smaller. Technology has often been viewed as a paradigm changer in education, although for it to be beneficial, teaching excellence must accompany it. Relationships are important in education, and without the human touch instruction often feels empty.

*School Leadership Review* invites articles related to contemporary issues in online instruction for the Fall 2009 issue. Are the online programs an academically less effective option driven by the market, or can this instruction be as worthwhile as traditional methods? Can a program have 2800 students throughout the state and be legitimate? Are there really benefits to local Departments of

Educational Administration? These are important questions that need to be addressed as we prepare the next generation of educational leaders.

#### References

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## Expectations of Mentoring: Novice Teachers' Voices

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Mentoring, as an avenue to support and retain new teachers, has received a renewed interest. As Trubowitz suggests, “School systems are finding that beginning teachers who have access to intensive mentoring are less likely to leave teaching” (2004, p. 59). While several factors may cause teachers to leave, alienation has been identified as one of the major forces. According to previous research, teachers experience “a combination of feelings of isolation, normlessness, powerlessness, and meaninglessness” (Benham & O’Brien, 2002, p. 20). Such feelings of isolation are compounded by the current accountability demands and the professional pressure teachers’ experience. Thus, it is imperative to consider alternative strategies aimed at providing the kind of support congruent with beginning teacher’s needs in order to be successful (Breux & Wong, 2003, p. iii). A goal of such strategies should be the effective socialization of teachers, and providing on-going support for growth, through different approaches including mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999). Although mentoring can be an effective means to enhance teacher efficacy and help beginning teachers (Breux & Wong, 2003; Delgado, 1999; Yost, 2002), limited research focuses on teachers’ perspectives associated with their own expectations of mentoring, particularly in diverse school settings (Wang & Odell, 2002). Further, researchers suggest, “There has been limited evidence that points to the expectations of new teachers relative to mentoring” (Tillman, 2005, p. 616). Thus, it is essential that teachers’ voices be illuminated to better understand their needs so that school leaders may “consider the benefits of consulting with novice teachers about their expectations in the mentoring arrangement” (Tillman, 2005, p. 626). Much of the current literature on teacher mentoring is based on experiences of mentors (Ganser, 1996; Trubowitz, 2004), and mentoring internship program descriptions (Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999) however, novice teachers’ voices tend to be absent from the discourse. While few studies have focused on teachers’ perceptions (Rowley, 1999; Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, 1999), additional research is needed so that beginning teachers’ voices contribute to a better understanding of mentoring as a vehicle to reduce isolation, successfully socialize new teachers into the demands of the profession, provide culturally responsive support to novice teachers, and reduce teacher turnover. Such inquiry could also be useful to avoid the common pitfalls that might have a detrimental effect on teachers and students. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present the results of a study conducted to examine teachers’ expectations of mentoring.

### Theoretical Background

Each year thousands of eager individuals are certified to begin the daunting task of planning, delivering, and assessing instruction, with varying degrees of competence. Therefore, “Providing support to beginning teachers is essential for beginning teachers to become effective practitioners as soon as possible” (Andrews & Quinn, 2005, p. 110). As teachers enter the educational arena, they are expected to possess the knowledge and skills that will help them influence student achievement within certain school cultures, but it is also acknowledged that novice teachers should have access to someone to facilitate their own growth and professional development

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). In an effort to facilitate teacher development, novice educators are teamed up with a mentor who is expected to provide guidance and support throughout the first year. “Even when circumstances are more conducive to developing these partnerships, mentors are frequently given little more direction than to ‘help out’ the new teacher, and many experienced teachers have been at the craft for so long that they have forgotten what they did not know at the beginning” (Millinger, 2004, p. 67).

While an effective mentoring relationship provides an opportunity for the experienced and the novice teacher to form a cooperative bond, this collegial activity is a way to support new teachers, to facilitate their professional development, and foster self-confidence (Shulman, 1988). According to previous research (Huling-Austin, 1992) many mentoring relationships lack quality and questions regarding the “why, how, and what of mentoring continue to be raised” (Trubowitz, 2004, p.1). Furthermore, others affirm that “providing support to beginning teachers is essential for two reasons: the need to retain qualified beginning teachers and the need for beginning teachers to become effective practitioners as soon as possible” (Andrews & Quinn, 2005, p. 110). The multiplicity of mental, physical, emotional, financial, and new demands on beginning teachers (Cohen, 1999) dictates the need to provide a more constructive experience for the beginning educator. Mentoring beginning teacher is one of the most important novice teacher development endeavors a school district must improve.

Mentoring programs are recognized as a way to socialize beginning teachers, but more importantly, to provide the necessary support to survive and succeed in the classroom. Despite the obstacles faced by many beginning teachers for a successful mentoring experience to occur, research clearly delineates the characteristics and structures needed to influence a beginning teacher’s initial experiences in the classroom in a positive manner (Anzul, 2000; Odell & Huling, 2000; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Schwille & Dynak, 2000). These practices include: identifying the needs of novice teachers, refining teacher performance, understanding the dynamics of mentoring to better support and assist beginning teachers, and enhancing beginning teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and skills. However, teachers’ expectations are seldom highlighted, and therefore, clarifying novice teachers’ expectations should be an integral part of a mentoring process (Tillman, 2005).

Previous researchers (Bey & Holmes, 1992; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986) have identified a framework with characteristics describing effective mentoring practices. A component of the framework outlines the process for mentor selection and matching of novice teachers with experienced educators. Criteria for mentors may include: a desire to continuously learn and promote self-improvement, an ability to work with a diverse group of individuals, a readiness to seek to understand first and not make judgments about the novice teacher, an ability to demonstrate effective practices in the classroom and serve as a model for a beginning teacher, an enthusiasm to serve in a support role rather than in an evaluator role, and a readiness to accept the time commitment involved in mentoring a beginning teacher. Others have also highlighted how mentors set guidelines to achieve success (Trubowitz & Robins, 2003), but these criteria and guidelines address only the role of the mentor.

Mentoring, as a viable medium to enhance teacher learning and development, continues to be an area of interest. According to previous research, policymakers at the state level have led the movement to implement beginning teacher programs to provide assistance and support. School districts, regional service centers, state departments of education, and institutions of higher education have been chiefly responsible for implementing support programs for beginning educators entering the profession (Furtwengler, 1995, p. 2).

Furthermore, states across the country have required the creation of mentoring programs to assist new teachers (Portner, 1998). However, most recently it has been concluded that “with the growing acceptance of the need to mentor novice teachers comes the danger that schools will attempt to implement mentor programs without paying adequate attention to the factors that create mentor/mentee relationships that provide growth and satisfaction for both participants” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 59).

Existing mentoring programs usually operate under institutional prescribed assumptions of how to best help beginning teachers. Consequently, mentor assignments can render negative outcomes. For example, “if administrators pressure an experienced teacher into working with a novice, the likelihood that resentment will taint the relationship is high” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 59). Taking into account that novice teachers’ expectations are shaped by their ideology and their experiences frame their identity as educators, ignoring their voices may also exacerbate a negative situation. By illuminating their voices, novice teachers’ expectations can be identified and possibly contribute to the development of a culturally responsive mentoring program.

Others have focused on effective mentoring practices (Rowley, 1999), fostering teacher leadership through mentoring (Moir & Bloom, 2003), and mentor responsibilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) however, teachers’ own voices have been absent from the discourse, and often times mentoring programs render fruitless results with teachers becoming more frustrated about the current job demands. Further, as Benham and O’Brien (2002) assert, “It is impossible to overestimate the degree of job intensification that has taken place in teaching within the past decade, as society asks its schools to do more and more” (p. 28). Thus, additional inquiry related to teachers’ expectations of mentoring might enhance existing knowledge on how to better assist novice teachers as they attempt to respond to the ever increasing demands for quality teaching and student learning success.

Given the current state of teacher turnover and the shortage of teachers, it is imperative to hear teachers’ voices concerning their perspectives of mentoring. Previous research has focused on novice teachers’ views, however, Wang and Odell (2002) stated,

research on the novice teachers’ perceptions of mentoring has generally been approached with surveys and questionnaires. In spite of the large number of studies on preservice teachers and beginning teachers, we found that the questionnaires, especially those with fixed questions, were often difficult to explore. It was difficult to determine the origin and nature of expectations held by novice teachers (p. 510).

Thus, understanding teachers’ views related to mentoring and how they may contribute to mentoring might also help school leaders to respond effectively to the socialization and support needs of novice teachers. As Tillman (2005) suggested, “It is important that new teachers be socialized to the school culture in ways that would counter negative perceptions and expectations of students” (p. 621). Moreover, novice teachers’ capacity may vary depending on the type of preparation program they come from. As a result, their needs and expectations may also be varied. Not only may such variability be a challenge for school districts, but mentoring programs designed only from an institutional perspective may also not be the best approach to socialize beginning teachers. As Wang and Odell (2002) suggested, “The expectations that novices and mentors bring to their work together have the potential to shape the process as well as the consequences of mentoring novice’s learning to teach” (p. 513). Therefore, novice teachers’ perceptions associated with the mentoring relationship need to be illuminated.

Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this study was to identify novice teachers' expectations of the mentoring relationship. Specifically, four main questions were addressed:

1. What do novice teachers expect from the teacher/mentor relationship?
2. What do novice teachers perceive as the most important attributes of the mentor?
3. What do novice teachers contribute to the teacher/mentor relationship?
4. What kind of training do novice teachers recommend for mentors?

This study was conducted following a qualitative research paradigm with a grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2003) explained "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (pp. 250-251). Qualitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.6) was used to "explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day situations." The intent was to let the data drive the development of theoretical explanations related to the phenomenon of study.

Study participants were selected using convenience and purposive sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The 25 teachers selected to participate in the study represented two groups of novice teachers with a mentor assigned according to the district's mentoring model. One group included those teachers who had begun their teaching career with district, and the other group included experienced teachers who were new to their teaching assignment. These teachers represented different schools and grade levels in a school district located in the southern part of a central state. The sample included teachers who graduated from a traditional four year college program as well as those who completed their preparation through an alternative certification program.

The school district's mentoring program requires a mentor-teacher application/contract that describes a mentor as follows:

A mentor teacher is a person who is willing to provide on-going support and assistance to the first year teacher to which he/she has been assigned. The mentor teacher should demonstrate excellence in teaching. A mentor is a person who has the ability to work well with adults and can build a relationship or trust with the first year teacher. The mentor teacher must be sensitive to the viewpoint of others, be an active, open learner and display competent social and public relations skills. (LISD, 2005, p. 1)

The school district mentoring model also contains information about mentoring activities, sessions between the mentor and the teacher and other related matters (LISD, 2005). However, novice teachers' expectations or professional needs are not noted.

The primary data collection protocol was a questionnaire containing open ended questions mailed to the teachers at the beginning of the school year. This instrument, a letter inviting them to participate, a document explaining the purpose of the study, and an addressed envelope were sent to the teachers with instructions to return the items through mail. Teachers' written responses to open-ended questions have the potential to capture the respondents' perspectives without predetermining those perspectives through a previous selection of questionnaire categories of responses (Patton, 1990). Participating teachers were able to share "information, perspectives and experiences related to the topic of research" (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The main interest was to allow teachers' voices describe their thinking associated with mentoring so that the analytical, conceptual and theoretical explanations could be developed from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The researchers carefully examined the participants' written responses. Such examination was completed to analyze, compare, and synthesize emerging themes. As Straus and Corbin (1990, p. 71) state "It is through careful scrutiny of data, line by line, that researchers are able to uncover new concepts and novel relationships and to systematically develop categories in term of their properties and dimensions" Thus, the researchers coded and organized teachers' responses according to emerging themes and clustered together congruent to the research questions (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

### Findings

The findings of the study generated four dominant themes: (a) teachers' expectations of the teacher/mentor relationship; (b) perceived attributes of the mentor; (c) teachers' own contributions to the mentoring process; and (d) development of mentor's capacity to perform the role.

#### Novice teachers' expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship

The data revealed that novice teachers have specific expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship. These included the development of a close professional working bond, teaching-centered instructional leadership, guidance to navigate the administrative bureaucracy, and clear communication between both parties. Providing such supportive leadership and assistance may be accomplished when mentors embrace the role of helper and provide novice teachers with support and suggestions learned from experience (Sawyer, 2004).

*Development of a close professional working bond.* The need to form a close working relationship with mentors emerged as one of the teachers' expectations. This kind of relationship requires that mentors spend time getting to know their mentee and together determine areas of importance for the teacher. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) suggested, "The mentoring relationship is special because

of its entrusting nature. Those being mentored depend upon their mentors to help them, protect them, show them the way, and develop their skills and insights more fully” (p. 264). Others also recognize the value of a positive working relationship between the mentor and the teachers. For instance, Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2005) asserted that a “trusting, helping relationship can make the difference between a successful and failed entrance to the profession” (p. 252). The participating teachers expressed the need have access to their mentor collegial support throughout their first year of teaching. One participant expressed

I expected to build a relationship with my mentor that would allow me to be better prepared and with a little insight into the profession that was new to me. Also, I expected my mentor to be a viable source of educational information and able to guide me to the resources that would help my students achieve academic success.

*Teaching-centered instructional leadership.* The data revealed that novice teachers expect their mentors to be instructional leaders. They expect mentors to be knowledgeable and informed about teaching matters both in general and particularly related to their own school, including classroom management techniques, and ways of incorporating those into their teaching repertoire. Glickman et al. (2005) suggested, “Mentoring typically is direct assistance provided by an experienced teacher to a beginning teacher. The mentor may provide any of the forms of direct assistance” (p. 252). Thus, mentors who are instructional leaders usually tend “to help new teachers improve their effectiveness in demonstrating the schools’ standards for teaching” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006, p. 264). As teachers said

I expected my mentor to provide me with tips and instructions on how to carry out some of the activities (instructional) and paperwork that teachers have to do. My mentor always answered my questions and guided me through things that I wasn’t sure how to do.

I expected to acquire valuable experiences and information from my mentor. For example, discipline advice, time management, and other useful classroom information.

I expected to learn more on how discipline was handled and teach at the same time. Even though one might have experience, but he or she might want to learn more on that. This year, I did have what I wanted to learn with the mentor and help of the district.

*Guidance on how to navigate through the bureaucracy* The data revealed that novice teachers expect to have assistance to navigate the educational bureaucracies. Novice teachers usually face challenges associated with bureaucratic paperwork, so they need guidance from their mentors to better understand the different processes and mechanisms related to school operations. Novice teachers may have a “number of interrelated needs” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthal, 2000, p.13) and these must be addressed through “orientation to the school system, school curriculum and community” (p. 12). Functioning within a school bureaucracy requires help to interpret and to meet state laws and specific policy requirements. As a teacher observed

I expected my mentor to provide me with tips and instructions on how to carry out some of the activities (instructional) and paperwork that teachers have to do. My mentor always answered my questions and guided me through things that I wasn’t sure how to do.

### *Clear communication*

Data also revealed that novice teachers expect clear communication from their mentors.

This communication should be two-way and on-going. Teachers, as professionals, need to be able to share their concerns as well as exchange ideas with the mentor so that their immediate needs may be addressed in a positive environment. The need for professional communication was also identified as an attribute of successful schools where teachers in successful schools have on-going conversations about teaching (Glickman et al., 2005). Teachers in this study conveyed

I expected to have an open teacher/mentor communication this year. The open communication between the teacher/mentor was always present. I believe that my expectations for my mentor were achieved. This year, I was always in communication with my mentor. We kept each other informed in reference to datelines, meetings, etc.

The communication level that I was able to share with my mentor was great. He was always willing to give a helping hand and gave me many valuable lessons.

Clear communication, based on a common language between mentor and protégé, may lead to a joint exploration of better teaching practices (Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, 1999). This common journey may be further enhanced when “the good mentor communicates hope and optimism” (Rowley, 1999, p. 22), in that way that validates the mentee’s efforts.

### Mentor attributes

Novice teachers in this study expect their respective teacher mentor to possess several attributes for a successful mentoring experience. According to the novice teachers mentors should be willing, caring, and ethical.

*Willing.* Data revealed that teachers expect their mentors to demonstrate a willingness and genuine interest to help new teachers with their complex tasks, be available throughout the year at all times, and make teachers’ first year of teaching a positive professional experience. Such a willingness is an important dimension of the selection of mentors (Bey & Holmes, 1992; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986). An important characteristic in identifying mentors to support beginning teachers includes “a willingness to spend time helping beginning teachers” (Glickman et al., 2005, p. 282). As participants observed

I believe that a mentor should be someone with experience, willing to help and provide for the new teacher, and present resources upon availability. My mentor was friendly, not only with me but also with the rest of the faculty and staff, and I believe I’ve learned to be that way and improve the work environment.

I believe a mentor should display a willingness to help out new teachers and ease their (novice teachers) transition into the school system

*Caring.* Data suggested that teachers expect their mentors to practice a caring philosophy and exhibit a high level of collegiality, one that is inspirational as well as a professional virtue (Sergiovanni, 1992). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) affirm this notion, “Collegiality speaks not only to the degree of trust, openness, and good feelings that exist among a faculty, but also the kind of

norm system that bonds teachers as a collective unit” (p. 353). A caring mentor, therefore, should strive to achieve a type of collegiality that is “characterized by mutual respect, shared work, values, cooperation and specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006, p. 353). One mentee expressed

I believe that a mentor should be someone who is caring, helpful, who is an excellent colleague with determination, and who is understanding and overall inspiring.

*Ethical.* Data also revealed that novice teachers expect their mentors to be ethical in their interaction with teachers. They expect their mentors to adhere to a professional code of ethics as they work with teachers who are valuable professionals, possess dignity and deserve respect. While a specific code of ethics for mentors is not available, researchers (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthal, 2000) suggest that “as practitioners, mentors and supervisors need to be aware of the ethical issues that they will face” (p. 321) because “ethical supervisory leadership requires a knowledge of social justice issues and related contemporary professional issues, and a commitment to be a model and change agent when confronted with institutional injustice or individual racism or sexism” (p. 317). As a teacher noted

I feel that a true mentor should follow the Code of Ethics that he or she is expected to follow. A good mentor should take time needed for answering questions that a mentee asks.

Novice teacher contributions to the mentoring process

The data revealed that these teachers did not realize they had anything to contribute to the mentoring process. Even though these teachers’ perceptions were one dimensional, the mentoring process can be a reciprocal exchange (Millinger, 2004). Novice teachers reported feeling surprised when they became aware of how much they actually contributed to the mentoring process. Beginning teachers’ contributions included the sharing of ideas, and asking relevant teaching-focused questions.

*Sharing of ideas.* According to the data, one way to contribute to the mentor-teacher relationship was offering ideas. In addition, teachers also played a part in the development of specific teaching plans, contributing to the mentor’s learning, regardless of their extensive teaching experience. Thus, “the relationship becomes more of a partnership when it comes to figuring out how to deal with new issues facing teachers and schools” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 62). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) concur

While the emphasis in mentoring is on helping new teachers, mentors typically report that the experience of mentoring is expansive for them as well. By helping a colleague, they are forced to come to grips with their own teaching, to see their problems more clearly, and to learn ways to overcome them” (p. 267).

By sharing ideas and information, novice teachers contribute to the process and make their experience more meaningful and rewarding. “Co-developing and collaborating on the learning process are far more helpful to the mentee and make wiser use of the mentor’s time” (Millinger, 2004, p. 67) As mentees noted

My contributions to the relationship were more than simply being an apprentice. I believe that I was easy to talk to, eager to learn and at the same time very willing to share some of my ideas, specifically when it comes to technology.

Yes, I feel that I contributed to the teacher/mentor relationship to some extent. I was open to suggestions and contributed as well as in developing a comprehensive teaching plan, including strategies for teaching TEKS to children, developing and

implementing discipline strategies for children with discipline problems, and effectively communicating through meetings on a weekly basis, including developing agendas.

I learned many things from my mentor but I did share many things with my mentor that he did not experience throughout his teaching.

*Asking focused questions.* According to the data, mentees also contributed to the mentoring process by asking focused questions. In doing so, their professional needs are directly addressed as they emerge. Teacher-initiated questions may lead to joint decision making in different aspects of specific interest to the teacher. Moreover, by asking pertinent questions, novice teachers expect to get direct assistance in matters of professional concern. Mentoring is a form of providing direct assistance to teachers, and as such it may be offered through co-teaching arrangements in which “the expert peer and teacher seeking assistance together can plan, teach, and evaluate a lesson. Co-teaching establishes trust and rapport, and fosters the collegiality, dialogue, and mutual reflection that foster teacher growth” (Glickman, et al., 2005, p. 252). As a mentee conveyed

I believe that I contributed to the teacher/mentor relationship by asking my mentor questions about school district policy procedures and by asking my mentor for help as situations arose.

#### Recommendations to develop mentor capacity

According to the data the experience mentors possess may not be enough to successfully perform their role. Therefore, as Evertson and Smither (2000) express, “If mentors can be taught to work with their protégés in more learning-centered ways perhaps the changes in mentors would result in changes in the teaching of their protégés” (p. 294). Two areas for mentor development emerged from the data, preparation to work with novice teachers and capacity to communicate.

*Preparation to work with novice teachers.* Novice teachers’ conceptions conveyed that experienced teachers who perform the role of a mentor should have the training to be able to guide new teachers through the complex legal issues and responsibilities in the educational setting. If mentors are to be successful, they must identify the strengths and needs of the mentee, thus helping to develop internal capacity for improving student learning (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; Anzul, 2000). Mentor preparation, according to Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998), could include concerns for the novice teacher, active listening, and teacher’s cognitive developmental stages. Mentors should also possess skills at providing instructional support in different interpersonal contexts and model continuous learning (Rowley, 1999, pp. 20-22). As mentees noted

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training to teach us first time teachers what the process for the computer is to fill out an ARD form if we are in Special Education or even a regular teacher on how to look for better ways to help Special Education students with modifications.

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on how to work on the same timeline. I would also recommend for mentor teachers to also receive training on how to go over rules and guidelines for their department and campus. Also, I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on writing and developing timelines.

I would recommend for the mentors to attend a series of workshops to help them target the areas that new teachers experience.

*Capacity to clearly communicate.* The findings also indicated that mentors are expected to clearly communicate campus and district policies, to support new teachers who may come with different professional and preparation backgrounds, and who may teach in a variety of formats. An extremely important aspect in working with novice teachers is clear communication to tailor support to the mentee's individual needs. Ultimately, this interactive effort of using learned communications skills and knowledge can effectively improve interactions between mentor and mentee (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). As teachers commented,

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on mentoring strategies to be able to study and identify the strength and weaknesses of the novice teacher and how to work on and build on these strategies. And, I would also recommend for mentor teachers to receive training that stresses the importance of communication.

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on up-to-date procedures, how to use effective communication, and how to teach novice teachers effective first year teacher training procedures.

I believe that mentor teachers should receive training in which they would learn to be able to communicate and make time to share with the new teacher what it's corresponding school expects of the new teacher.

*Timeline for a meaningful mentoring process.* Finally, the data revealed that the mentees expected to be mentored between six months to two years. According to the participants, this time frame would not weaken the mentoring process. It would also be sufficient time for novice teachers to learn what they needed to know in order to have a successful initial experience in the teaching and learning process. The following novice teachers' comments describe what novice teachers perceived to be an effective timeline:

In my opinion, a one-year minimum is necessary. The teacher/mentor relationship should be intense the first three months of the school year as the new teacher becomes acquainted with the school, the procedures, and the discipline problems. After that, a constant follow up is needed, meeting once a week and communicating ideas and concerns. Also, the end of the school year is very important, and it would be great for the mentor to be there to answer any questions of all the paperwork chaos that comes with the end of each school year.

I believe that the appropriate time length for the mentoring process should be a minimum time of one month of classroom observations and training before the new teacher starts teaching would be extraordinary.

I believe that the appropriate time length of the mentoring process should take place for about a year and a half. The first year (of mentoring) should be for any type of help and the half year to see if the teacher is ready to be on their own.

I believe that the appropriate time length of the mentoring process should be two years.

It's hard to say what the appropriate time length would be. I suppose it may vary from grade level to grade level. However, perhaps documentation of the time spent or hours logged would be one way to measure the appropriate time required for the mentoring process.

#### Conclusion

Despite the robust scope of studies that includes the benefits of mentoring (Kram, 1985; Murphy & Ensher, 2006), fostering teacher leadership (Moir & Bloom, 2003) describing mentoring characteristics and effective practices (Anzul, 2000; Arnold, 2006; Bey & Holmes, 1992; Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Hon & Shorr, 1998; Hope, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Poulter, 2005; Rowley, 1999; Schwille & Dynak, 2000), most of the previous research related to mentoring

teachers has focused on reports of mentoring programs (Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999) and mentors' reports of their experiences (Trubowitz, 2004). Thus, this study aimed at identifying novice teachers' expectations of the mentoring process, in an effort to add teachers' voices to the discourse of a phenomenon that may affect their level of success during their first year of teaching.

This study suggests that novice teachers perceive the mentoring experience during the first year of teaching as critical to their success including the mentor's knowledge and skills (Evertson & Smithey, 2000, p. 301). This is also congruent with the notion that "experienced teachers will serve as mentors and models, helping novices learn new pedagogies and socializing them to new professional norms" (Feiman-Nemser, 1996, p. 1). Additionally, a positive mentor- protégé relationship "prevents potential problems later in the school year" (Sargent, 2003, p. 47).

This study's findings suggest that teachers have specific expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship. The most significant expectations relate to the development of a professional working bond, teaching centered instructional leadership, guidance to navigate the bureaucracy and clear communication. Wang and Odell (2002) have also indicated that such expectations have the potential to affect and influence a mentoring relationship. Thus, it is imperative that school leaders make a concerted effort to initially clarify teachers' expectations.

The results also support the notion that mentors should possess several attributes that are most important for a successful mentoring process. These attributes include a willingness to help new teachers with their complex tasks,

acting as a caring colleague and being ethical. Moreover, mentors must genuinely desire to help new teachers, are available throughout the year, demonstrate care and compassion, and provide the support to make the mentee's first year of teaching successful (Holden, 1995; Odell et. al., 2000; Rowley, 1995; Schulz, 1995).

Findings suggest that these attributes are more important than the formal credentialing of experienced teachers. Others have also found additional mentor characteristics that in a way echo the ones reported here. For instance, Rowley (1999) suggested that the following are also important qualities of a mentor: "commitment to the role of mentoring; acceptance of the beginning teacher; skill at providing instructional support; effectiveness in different interpersonal contexts; model continuous learning; and communicate hope and optimism" (pp. 20-22).

The findings also indicate that novice teachers perceive themselves as making significant contributions to the mentoring process. These include sharing ideas and asking focused questions. This aspect supports the notion that a reciprocal relationship is a critical aspect of effective mentoring (Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990). Zeldin (1995) affirms, "Reciprocity and mutual respect are the hallmarks of the mentoring relationship" (p. 20). Consequently, the mentees were not reluctant to share current teaching strategies, ideas, and research with mentors. As a result, mentors' learning was also enhanced. This is congruent with Moir and Bloom's (2003) report in that "mentoring offers veteran teachers professional replenishment, contributes to the retention of the region's best teachers and produces teacher leaders" (p. 59). Other novice teachers'

contributions included reminding mentors of deadlines, and developing a positive working relationship that, in turn, made the mentor's job easier and their experience more meaningful and rewarding. This echoes Zeldin's (1995) assertion that the

“protégé receives tutelage and wisdom from the mentor, and in turn gives the mentor new perspectives, helping the mentor see her old life through new eyes. The protégé asks questions about things that the mentor takes for granted, and shares ideas that the mentor may not have thought of for years, if ever” (p. 20).

Novice teachers' questions usually relate to the most pressing teaching needs experienced in their first year of teaching. Thus, by respecting and taking teachers' questions and contributions into account, schools may be in a position to actually address teachers' most pressing professional needs (Mandel, 2006). Furthermore, as novice teachers share concerns and ideas, they contribute a willingness to expose their own weaknesses. “The mentor is ready and willing to pass on the gift of self as philosopher, and the protégé is willing to share questions and vulnerabilities” (Zeldin, 1995, p. 21).

Additionally, findings propose that there are two main concerns regarding the preparation of mentors. First, novice teachers expect experienced teachers to have the necessary training to be able to guide new teachers through the complex legal educational issues and responsibilities required by law of all teachers. Some mentors may be excellent teachers but may not be able to communicate the nuances of teaching with developmentally appropriate terminology to the mentee (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Moir and Bloom (2003) add

“Our mentors come to us as excellent teachers, but they need training to develop new skills for fostering the talents and teaching styles of other teachers” (p. 59). Second, it is also extremely important for mentors to engage in training to build their communication capacity and become familiar with effective techniques and technology to have on-going conversations with novice teachers. Moir and Bloom (2003) also agree, “Effective mentors must be able to observe and communicate, track a new teacher’s immediate needs and broader concerns; and know when to elicit a new teacher’s thoughts and when to provide concrete advice” (p. 59). On-going communication also conveys feelings of compassion and care for new teachers. Thus, mentor preparation becomes a critical aspect of a successful mentoring process and researchers (Glickman et al., 2005) offer specific suggestions related to the content, design and implementation of mentor preparation programs.

Next, novice teachers expect the mentoring process to extend over a prescribed period of time. This time frame seems to be perceived as sufficient to provide the necessary information for a successful initial experience in the teaching and learning process and for an effective mentoring relationship. This view supports the idea that mentoring should be an ongoing process, must go beyond the first year of teaching if it is going to have a sustained impact, and be aimed at facilitating successful teaching experiences for novice teachers (Eberhard, Reindhardt-Mondragon & Stottlemyer, 2000).

In light of the findings, the following propositions are advanced and may need to be further tested: (a) clarification of teachers’ expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship is an imperative initial step to a successful mentoring

program, (b) failure to consult novice teachers regarding the mentoring process may limit the desired effect on teachers' initial teaching experience and may ignore the most pressing needs of these teachers, (c) knowledge on how to assess the mentee's immediate needs may facilitate culturally responsive mentoring to avoid prescribing a "one size fits all" agenda, and (d) ongoing support for an extended period of time, beyond the first year of teaching, may maximize the benefits of a mentoring program.

Finally, the promise of mentoring may depend, to a certain extent, on the novice teachers' contributions which may lead to a richer and more focused mentoring relationship. Clarification of expectations and clear communication between mentor and mentee may also reduce the challenges associated with meeting the various needs of novice teachers. Successfully socializing novice teachers into the educational area during their initial year requires a conscious commitment from all stakeholders, whether designing and implementing induction and mentoring programs, or actively participating in the mentoring process. Mentoring with a teacher-centered focus may influence the quality of guidance and mentor leadership that novice educators require. Whether guidance includes effective classroom management techniques, interpretation and implementation of state laws and policy requirements, or helping a protégé to problem solve, listening to teacher voices may provide alternative strategies that ultimately will benefit teachers and students.

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Within the field of education, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of context in understanding various aspects of education (Phillips & Burbules, 2000), and systems approaches to understanding change have become increasingly common. Yet, the simple linear algorithm implicit in current policy such as the Adequate Yearly Progress provision of *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) fails to take into account the complex and dynamic nature of education and represents an inappropriate oversimplification of educational outcomes and their measurement. This article postulates that the ecological systems model of Urie Bronfenbrenner represents a useful theoretical framework for understanding the processes and interactions involved in student achievement, and that the dynamic, non-linear changes within these systems can be effectively understood by applying the mathematical models of complexity theory.

#### Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner developed his ecological systems theory in an attempt to define and understand human development within the context of the system of relationships that form the person's environment. His definition (1986) of the theory itself is as follows:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the

immediate settings in which the developing person lives. [This] process is affected by the relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 188).

The environment, according to the theory, is comprised of four layers of systems which interact in complex ways and can both affect and be affected by the person's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This theory can be extended to model the development of an organization as well, and is particularly appropriate for describing the complex systems of a school district or even of an individual school. Each of the four system layers are described below, and an example of a working model of the ecological context of an individual school is depicted in Figure 1.

*Microsystem.* The microsystem is defined as the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by a developing person in a particular setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief (p. 227). In other words, this layer forms a set of structures with which a person has direct contact, and the influences between the developing person and these structures are bi-directional. The person influences and is influenced by the microsystem. If this theory is extended from human development to organizational development, and an individual school is the unit of interest, the microsystem of the school would include students, parents and family members, administration, teachers, and the surrounding community.

#### *Mesosystem*

The mesosystem, simply stated, comprises the linkages between microsystems (p. 227). Just as the direction of influence between the school and each structure within the microsystem is bi-directional, the mesosystem involves bi-directional influences between these various structures. An example of the mesosystem of an individual school can be seen in the interactions and dynamics between two its microsystems, students and parents. Parental expectations regarding the academic and extra-curricular success of their children can often create a dynamic that directly and indirectly impacts the atmosphere and climate of the school. Unreasonably high expectations and low tolerance for failure can create a dynamic between parent and child that is characterized by tension and fear. This dynamic impacts the school in various direct and indirect ways, including student behavior in the classroom resulting from such expectations, pressures to ensure their child's success placed on school personnel by the parent, an attempt by school personnel to shield students from such parental pressures by restricting the amount of information that is communicated regarding student achievement, etc.

*Exosystem.* The exosystem represents the larger social system, and encompasses events, contingencies, decisions, and policies over which the developing person has no influence. The exosystem thus exerts a unidirectional influence that directly or indirectly impacts the developing person. The exosystem of an individual school might be comprised of such structures as district policy, state regulations, local economics, federal mandates, local disasters, etc.

*Macrosystem.* The macrosystem can be thought of as the "social blueprint" of a given culture, subculture, or broad social context and consists of the overarching pattern of values, belief systems, lifestyles, opportunities, customs, and resources embedded therein. This system is generally considered to exert a unidirectional influence upon not only the person but the micro-, meso-, and exosystems as well. The macrosystem of an individual school is embodied not only in the cultural, political, social, and economic climate of the local community, but that of the nation as a whole.

*Chronosystem.* Although not one of the four system layers per se, the chronosystem represents a time-based dimension that influences the operation of all levels of the ecological systems. The chronosystem can refer to both short- and long-term time dimensions of the individual over the course of a lifespan, as well as the socio-historical time dimension of the macrosystem in which the individual lives. The chronosystem of an individual school, therefore, may be represented by both the day-to-day and year-to-year developmental changes that occur in its student body, teaching staff, curricular choices, etc., as well as the overall number of years in operation (i.e., a newer school faces challenges and opportunities that differ from those of a school that has been in operation for a length of time).

*Development in Context.* In addition to defining the ecological systems in which development takes place, Bronfenbrenner also emphasized the importance of context in human development. In order to model development or change within an individual, Bronfenbrenner built upon the work of Kurt Lewin (1935), who is credited as one of the first theorists to recognize the importance of interaction between the person and environment in describing human behavior. Development can be formulated as follows:  $D_t = f(t-p)$  (PE) (t-p).

Whereas the initial reformulation of Lewin's work resulted in the relatively simple equation,  $D = f(PE)$  in which development (D) was considered to be a joint function (f) of the interaction between the person and the environment (PE), this later revision introduces the element of time at which developmental outcomes are observed (t) and the period(s) during which joint forces, emanating from the person and environment, operate to produce the outcome existing at the time of observation (t-p). Thus, the characteristics of a person at a given time in his or her life are a joint function of the characteristics of the person and of the environment over the course of the person's life up to the time of observation (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 191). Similarly, the characteristics of a school, including the level of academic proficiency of its students, at any given point in time may be appropriately considered a joint function of the characteristics of the organization itself *and* of the environment, or ecological systems, over the entire course of the school's lifetime up to the up to the time of observation. The basic idea contained in this formula is particularly important because its nonlinear property extends understanding of human- and organizational- development beyond mere additive functions to interaction effects and elements of both short- and long-term time observations and demonstrates the essence, if in a simplified form, of complexity theory.

*Theoretical Models.* Bronfenbrenner (1989) distinguishes between class-theoretical and field theoretical models of research. Class-theoretical models include what he terms social address models, personal attributes models (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983), and person-context models; these are limited in that they provide little insight into *processes* that lead to particular outcomes. For example, social address models focus solely on the environment, placing developmental outcomes as a function of social characteristics such as family size, socio-economic status, etc. Similarly, personal attribute models focus only on the individual, placing developmental outcomes as primarily a function of characteristics of the person at an earlier age (e.g., reading ability at age 16 as a function of early experiences with phonological awareness at age 6). And although more informative than the previous models, the person-context model is still limited in focus. This model focuses on particular environmental characteristics that are seen as either risk or favorable factors for the development of particular outcomes in individuals with particular characteristics, but there is still in an absence of investigation into the processes within the environment as well as the individual that lead to the outcome in question. For example, it may be useful to know that retention in any grade significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out of school among adolescent boys (National

Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2003). However, it would be far more informative to investigate the system-level processes associated with retention in grade as well as the interpersonal processes that lead to and result from retention in grade, and how these interact to create a propensity to drop out of school.

Instead, Bronfenbrenner advocated that research investigating human development should involve a field-theoretical approach in which the interaction of processes, person, and context are taken into consideration. Such research would focus on how developmental processes and outcomes vary as a joint function of the characteristics of the person as well as the environment, and their interactions over the course of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 200). The underlying rationale for a process-person-context research model is applicable to organizational development as well, and is a useful model for understanding how developmental processes (e.g., teaching and learning) and outcomes (e.g., student achievement) vary as a joint function of the characteristics of not only the school itself but also those of the ecological systems or environment surrounding the school.

Currently, many methods of investigating the educational outcomes of individual schools fit the class-theoretical model and are based on linear algorithms that simplify and break down systems into isolated, component parts. The premise of such linear models is that inputs into the system will result in predictable outcomes. While appropriately predictive of some static, closed systems, these models fail to adequately predict the behavior of or capture the essence and emergent properties of complex systems involving three or more interacting components. Instead, methods of investigating developmental processes and outcomes for humans as well as organizations should be based on field theoretical models, and complexity theory offers an appropriate paradigm for understanding how changes in complex systems such as schools are often discontinuous and non-linear, and can lead abruptly to unexpected forms or states (Marshall & Zohar, 1997).

### Complexity Theory

Simply stated, the term ‘complexity’ has been defined as “order at the edge of chaos,” a phrase attributed to Chris Langton (Lewin, 1992; Waldorp, 1992), a computer scientist who studied artificial intelligence among other things. It is important, however, to distinguish between the colloquial definition of the word that implies randomness, confusion, or complete disorder from chaos in the modern scientific sense, which represents a specific kind of process from which a level of organization and order emerges that is difficult to discern and impossible to measure accurately for long-term prediction. Complex systems, i.e., systems that fit Bronfenbrenner’s field theoretical model, balance precariously between stasis and entropy, and are constantly evolving and developing around this critical state. Examples include the stability of ecosystems, the rise and fall of civilizations, dips and subsequent recoveries of the stock market, heart rhythms, weather patterns, and even human consciousness (Lewin, 1992; Marshall & Zohar, 1997). Individual schools, embedded with the interactions and linkages of the four system layers, similarly balance precariously between a state of stasis and entropy, and seemingly minor changes in one element of a system layer can have a profound impact on the developmental processes and outcomes that are observed over time.

### Implications of Complexity Theory for Educational Research and Policy

While there is still debate regarding the efficacy of complexity theory as a research paradigm, others see it as a useful and even necessary means for understanding change within complex social systems. Blackerby (1993) points out that

Nonlinear dynamics can be shown to model nonlinear phenomena better than linear models. While linear models may be considered acceptable approximations of some human [and organizational] behavior, they have no capacity to model transitions. Nonlinear models representing non-equilibrium dynamics are essential to illustrate system transitions such as from one stage of system development to another, from one paradigm to another, from one evaluation criteria to another (p. 88).

As far back as 1989, Crowell asserted that the challenge of the future in education is not the effective utilization of technology or even of accountability but, rather, the imperative need to recognize new conceptual models that are compatible with educational practices. In fact, the application of complexity theory to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems as a conceptual model for school accountability and student learning outcomes may represent a best-fit model for developmental outcomes at the organizational level- in this case, the school. In 2003, Reilly noted that educational reform policy and modes of understanding cause-effect relationships within education are based on the untenable assumptions of linear proportionality, which has led to public perceptions of failure in education given the unparalleled investment of resources in recent years. Instead, Reilly pointed out that the same action in two apparently comparable systems can have quite different results due to differential sensitivity to initial conditions within various regions of each system (p. 428). In other words, the interactions among multiple layers of the complex system that comprises the ecological context of a school could result in any number of unforeseen outcomes, and seemingly small changes or fluctuations in one system layer can potentially have far-reaching consequences resulting in larger impacts in other systems layers. Thus, seemingly minor changes or fluctuations in, say, the economic condition of the community surrounding a school (exosystem) may have far-reaching long-term consequences for the achievement level of the school that may not be predictable or even evident in the absence of a dimension of time.

Many states currently consider the rate of change in achievement status among students to be partially indicative of adequate yearly progress. This change is often conceptualized using a relatively simple linear equation that calculates the target slope needed for a given school to achieve proficiency among 100% of its students by the year 2014 as required by NCLB. For example, if at the end of the 2003 school year, 80% of students in a given school scored in the proficient range on a state-mandated achievement test in a given area, then the target slope that would determine the necessary rate of increase in proficiency would be 1.82. If 81% of the school's students reach the proficiency range in the following year, AYP as determined by this component will not have been met. Note, however, that there are several assumptions inherent within this formula. Not only is the school treated as a completely closed system – impervious to outside influences – which is an untenable assumption, this linear formula rests on assumptions of proportionality and additive functions. Instead, nonlinear equations can be used more effectively to map expected change values since factors such as time, development, interaction effects, energy input and loss, and measurement error can be accounted for, and upper- and lower-limit boundaries can theoretically be removed (Blackerby, 1993). For example, there are developmental periods at which achievement levels can be expected to fluctuate more than at others. Achievement among middle school students should vary more so than among students in lower grades due to the increased range of skills for which a student must demonstrate proficiency, increased variability in academic experiences, and countless differences in development and environment that tend to increase the variability among individuals during the early adolescent years.

The idea of a school as a complex system in which developmental processes and outcomes emerge from a complex interaction among systemic layers is consistent with what seems to be intuitively known by many educators- that the rate of academic achievement is not a simple monotonic function that increases toward absolute proficiency. Instead, any mathematical model for expected rate of change in academic achievement of a particular school must build the ecological systems of the school into the equation as parameters. The processes that link the layers or regions within the system can then be defined in terms of functions and feedback. For example, in the following equation,  $\dot{e}_t$  is the parameter difference between achievement at a previous and current time (t) for all values of t. The community parameter, kappa ( $\kappa$ ), acts as a scaling parameter (resources available, for example) while a family parameter, phi ( $\phi$ ), similarly acts as a scaling parameter (education level of the parents, for example), and gamma ( $\gamma$ ) is each individual student whose value is then added to a particular school's composite progress. In this way, the time element and assumptions of nonlinear development as well as positive and negative inputs from other layers within the system such as community and family are taken into consideration.

$$\frac{-\kappa\phi^2 e_{t-1}}{\Sigma (\dot{e}_t = \gamma e_{t-1} - \phi e_{t-1}^e \kappa^2)}$$

Furthermore, educational policy must move beyond class-theoretical models in which environmental or interpersonal factors are considered solely responsible for developmental outcome. Many state formulas for adequate yearly progress include a provision that requires specific subgroups (defined in terms of ethnicity, racial background, special needs, limited English proficiency, etc.) within a given school to achieve at the level indicated by the target slope in order for a school to be considered successful. However, this requirement relies on a class-theoretical model that fails to take into account specific processes or interactions involved in differential learning outcomes. Instead, a field-theoretical model may provide educators with insight into the interactions among layers within the complex system that have resulted in differential levels of achievement.

#### Conclusion

Educational systems are complex, dynamic systems with multidirectional linkages and processes that interconnect the different layers within the system. As such, developmental processes and outcomes in the form of student achievement may be best understood using the constructs and methods of new sciences. There must be recognition as to the limitations of and faulty assumptions implicit in linear models that render them inappropriate at best, and potentially harmful as the basis for education policy, reform, and accountability efforts. While linear approximations of nonlinear phenomena are at times, the only viable option (Blackerby, 1993, p. 53), the challenge is to communicate understanding that continued reliance upon inappropriate linear models propagates misperceptions about student achievement and educational outcomes. Such misperceptions will continue perpetuate accusations of misuse of resources, wasted tax dollars, and incompetence of public schools to educate students.

Future research efforts aimed at informing educational policy might focus on clarifying the multiple layers within the complex educational system using an ecological systems approach and drawing upon the concepts of complexity. Seeking a deeper understanding of changes in academic achievement within a given school, for example, might begin with a model of the sources of energy loss, points of bifurcation, and levels of initial sensitivity within the layers of the system. While the mathematical models and the complex equations

of chaos theory are difficult to understand, given the limitations of traditional approaches, educational researchers must forge ahead and move beyond metaphorical application of complexity theory in order to better understand outcomes and to discern that which can be controlled from that which can not.

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## Caring Culture and Leadership Revealed: Narrative Non-Fiction Story Method and the Crystallization Process

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Narrative non-fiction story is a qualitative research method that attempts to capture the voice of human experience (Barone, 1992). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) suggested that a story begins and ends with everyday life; the very expressions through speech as people tell stories about themselves (p.xvi). It is our stories that give light to the most insignificant experiences in our lives (Bakan, 1996).

Basic human qualities framed in terms of human desire call our attention to the need to tell stories of personal experience, the need for reciprocity in storytelling, and the need for reflection throughout telling and retelling stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). It is storytelling and the relationship between storyteller and audience (singular or plural) that give rise to professional knowledge and offer educational leaders the opportunity for creation and re-creation of the professional culture. Stories are a source of knowledge, efficacious for research, and serve as a catalyst for change.

Cooper (1991) reminded us that “listening to stories is an ancient form of nurturance...a long standing tribal ritual” (p.104). Telling and listening to our own stories encourages us and allows us to frame and reframe our thinking about our professional practice and the context in which it is realized. It allows us to examine ourselves and to clarify our thinking about our personal and professional experiences. Our own stories can serve as intense self-reflection as we seek to

reconstruct the past, integrate it with the present, and envision a desired future (Cooper).

The authors of *Stories Lives Tell: Narratives and Dialogue in Education* reminded the reader that “adults, like children, are natural storytellers, though they have often learned to suppress their urge to tell stories as a way of knowing” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.3). Storytelling serves as a form of self-research, a way to clarify and encourage, and to move thought into language and action. Stories contribute to the understanding of self and of self in relation to others, giving voice to the innermost feeling and thinking. As one’s story is combined with stories from other members of the same context, it adds to the collective voice of that culture (Cooper, 1991). MacIntyre (1997) asserted that we can only understand a community or culture if we know their stories as they have told them.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 2000) are known foremost in the field of educational research for their use of narrative story method. They declare that it is a method that illuminates the “continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experiences” (2000, p.17). As storytellers, we recreate our journeys through life, examining who we are and who we have been. Our stories serve to deepen our awareness of who we are within the context of our practice as well as enhance our understanding of the context and culture to which we belong.

#### Introduction to the Research

Although substantial data for the research could have provided a quantitative description of certain elements of the school, the researcher knew that the culture could be more clearly defined if stories of the people within that setting were told. It would not be a truth that was sought, but rather that unique perspective of care evidenced in the school and through the leadership there. The principal’s story would give insight into the guiding principles, organizational policies, and operational procedures of the school, as well as reveal the principal’s distinct leadership behaviors that create and sustain an ethic of care. As the study progressed, the principal of the school offered an exceptional story told in a common everyday language to enlighten the researcher with a perspective as unique as the principal himself. Not only the principal’s story, but those told by others gave evidence of the very essence of caring power as care and power intersect (Sernak, 1998) to create a dynamic that molds the school culture by its provisions for equity and inclusiveness.

As answers to the research questions were sought and obtained purposefully or vicariously through the stories told, there was no single answer or definitive response for which the research begged. This study, situated within a specific context, tells the story of the individual and collective lives of the people in that setting. As this story is told, an understanding of the caring culture of this school is revealed. The story, examined critically through a lens focused on care (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999, 2001), allowed the researcher to identify specific leadership practices, driven by an ethic of care, that promote personal and organizational excellence. Thus it was revealed that through such leadership practices, each member of the school, in pursuit of excellence, has equitable access to the organization’s most powerful opportunities and resources.

This study contributes to the literature in at least three specific ways. First, it provides practitioners evidence of a caring culture in a highly successful school and insight into the quality and characteristics of the heart and mind of caring leadership. The contextually rich detail of the individual stories enhances the understanding of structures, procedures, and patterns of relationships and interactions in this school where care is practiced. Secondly, since few previous studies specifically highlighted the relationship of care and power in schools, this study is significant in that it examined the leadership practices in regard to the use of power situated in contexts that

exemplify an ethic of care. The current base of literature has little to offer about care and power exercised in the school to provide equity and inclusiveness and used to enhance the growth and improvement of each individual and the school as a whole. Revealing evidence of community and commitment among members as fostered by caring leadership, these stories provide a description of a school in which care and power drive the decision-making processes that determine the policies and practices. Lastly, the study contributes to the belief that stories from the field offer not only valid data, but more intimate data, which educators may utilize to inform their practice. For that reason, this research aided in the confirmation that narrative non-fiction story method research can and should be an integral part of scholarly practice.

### The Research Design

Narrative non-fiction story method will likely rely on several forms of data including current and historical artifacts, field notes, and observations. Data recorded most frequently however, are derived from interviews with primary members of the context under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). For this study, the stories were collected through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with the principal and other members of the school with the intent to allow participants' stories to be told in their most natural voice.

*Participant Selection.* For this study, one school site was selected where its principal and five teachers were interviewed. The principal had served on the campus for twenty-five years, seventeen of those as principal and the first eight years as fifth grade teacher. He was the only full time male staff member at the school; therefore all of the teachers who were interviewed were female. Two of the teachers were African-American; three were White/Other than Hispanic. Their years of service at this school ranged from four to twenty-six. Four of the teachers were serving as regular education teachers in grades one, three, four, and five, and one was the gym teacher. There was no design in excluding grade two from the interview process; rather neither teacher at that level volunteered or was designated for interview. All participation was voluntary, and pseudonyms were assigned for the district, the school, and each of the interviewees as well as any person they referenced in their conversations.

The school selected for the research met the criteria as an academically successful public school situated in East Texas. Three criteria governed school selection: the school had to have been rated as "Exemplary" or "Recognized" by the Texas Education Agency within the two previous years, have a student minority population of at least 35%, and have an economically disadvantaged student population of at least 50%. The school selected had been assigned those ratings as well as having been given other academic awards. The student population of the school was recorded as 75% African-American, 18% Hispanic, and 7% White/Other than Hispanic origin. The number of students receiving free or reduced meals constituted 78% of the school enrollment.

Two additional criteria related to the school leader: 1) the principal must have been in the position at the school a minimum of five years and 2) the principal must have evidenced in his/her practice an ethic care according to the literature base. The literature examined as the foundation of this research indicated that principals practicing an ethic of care place students at the center of their practice, desiring that every student reach full potential. These educational leaders value strong relational bonds among the many members of the school community, and implement organizational policies and procedures that provide for inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making and various school improvement processes. The only criterion for teacher selection was to have been in the school at

least three of the past five years. The researcher had determined the need for a minimum of five teacher participants to constitute a representative sample.

A purposive sampling technique was used to identify the principal and school. To assist in the sampling process, educational consultants on the School Support Staff at the Education Service Center were contacted to assist in identifying possible sites for study. These consultants worked closely with districts and individual campuses and consequently, they knew the schools and their principals well. They also had an understanding of the schools' organizational structures as well as in-depth and unique perspectives on the various schools' cultures. A list of criteria relative to care and caring cultures, as well as an abstract of the study, were given to the consultants to aid them in understanding the elements of care and caring leadership revealed in the literature and sought in the school community. Any of the region's schools in which both principal and school met the criteria outlined were to be included in their list. Service Center consultants provided the researcher a list of the names of schools and their principals meeting the criteria.

The design stated that an attempt would be made to secure for the research the first principal on the list. If that principal was unable or unwilling to participate in the study, the researcher would move on to the second principal on the list, and so on until a principal from the list was secured for the study. The principal of this study was contacted by telephone and generally informed about the research. He was the first principal contacted and indicated a desire to participate in the research, therefore no other principals were contacted.

To secure secondary participants for the study, the principal was asked to offer the names of two teachers who had been in the school at least three of the past five years who might agree to participate. A snowball sampling technique was to be used with these two initial participants to suggest at least three more teachers who might agree to participate. The staff at this school was small, thus, the principal was reluctant to offer specific teachers, but rather suggested that the researcher interview any of the members who would volunteer. When asked if he knew of two teachers who might have a particularly unique story, the principal suggested the teacher who had been at the school longer than his twenty-five years and another teacher who was the only one on staff who had attended the school as a student. After this introduction to the study in a scheduled faculty meeting, these two teachers agreed to participate and recommended a third. Two additional teachers volunteered to participate.

*Establishing Protocol.* The teachers were given an overview of the study, informed that any participation would be voluntary, and told that any participant would be allowed to withdraw from the research project at any time should there be a need or desire to do so. They were advised that anyone deciding to participate would be asked to sign a consent form granting the researcher permission to interview, to audio-tape record the interview, and to use the interview for reporting the research. It was explained as well, that the school and each of the participants would be assigned pseudonyms. All names representing persons, the school, and the district that appear throughout the research reports are pseudonyms.

*Data Collection.* As the instrument for qualitative research, the researcher served as interviewer and personally collected the stories of the principal as the primary source and teachers in the school as the secondary sources. Once the participants were secured for the study, a time for each interview was scheduled. They were advised that note-taking might be used in addition to audio-recording. As stated in interview protocol, the participants were asked to sign informed participant consent forms for interviewing and audio-taping.

Guided by a set of interview questions, each participant was asked to tell his/her own story or personal experiences relative to care, caring relationships, and the evidence of care in the school. As the participants were asked to tell stories of care in their school, the interview questions were used as a tool for maintaining focus on the research questions concerning the characteristics of a caring school culture, caring leadership, and the evidence of caring power.

As the participants and interviewer engaged in the research process, the dialogue became an on-going shared exploration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The researcher responded to their conversations to encourage extension or further exploration of the experiences and memories being shared. The participants occasionally asked questions of the researcher or prompted input as well, resulting in a strong rapport.

To maintain confidentiality and for the purpose of clarity, the researcher personally transcribed the interviews. The transcriptions were written in narrative text, just as events and experiences were told by the individual teachers. The text included the interactions between interviewee and interviewer. Copies of the transcriptions were returned to the respective participants as a form of member check, with an opportunity for additions, deletions, or clarifying comments. Participants noted any revisions they desired on their individual transcripts and returned them to the researcher. Following a period of one week for reflections on the transcriptions, further dialogue between participants and researcher was offered.

#### Data Analysis

The researcher was responsible for data analysis and reporting. The individual stories, as they were analyzed, combined to develop a composite profile of the school and the school leadership in relation to a practiced ethic of care. The story of each participant was worthy in its uniqueness. The researcher noted in reflections at the close of each story those elements which were believed to contribute to its uniqueness as well as how that particular story related to the foundational literature of this research.

*Analysis of Narrative.* It was, however, the interrelatedness of the several stories that became the object of the analysis of narrative. Mindful of the topic of the research, the researcher gave credence to the common elements and/or evidence of care, the leadership practices found common throughout the many stories, and any discussion of policies and procedures that gave evidence of caring power. This analysis of the data collected, because of its coherence, allowed the researcher to interpret and integrate the individual stories into an emplotted story (Polkinghorne, 1995) that profiles the reality of caring culture.

An analysis of narrative is accomplished as the researcher explores such a collection of several stories and any accompanying data collected, searching for common themes and connections (Polkinghorne, 1995; Richardson, 1994). Patterns of consistency in each story, across stories, and through several stories gave witness of a strong coherent message. In this sense, the data were examined in their totality so that patterns or themes of the whole emerged. The coherence of meaning, which is hoped for in an analysis of narrative, emerged from the connections and consistencies of the stories shared by the principal and teachers.

*Crystallization.* Paramount in understanding the creation of narrative from multiple stories collected, and in providing a degree of trustworthiness, is recognition of the phenomenal process of crystallization (Richardson, 1994, 1997). The many experiences relative to care as told in the stories of various members of the school present myriad perspectives. When examining the stories, rather than

searching for one truth or a “fixed point” of understanding (Richardson, 1997, p. 92), the researcher knew that there were multiple facets to be explored.

In offering an explanation of crystallization, Richardson pointed to the crystal as it “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionality, and angles of approach” (1997, p. 92). Disposing of the notion that one should attempt to “triangulate” qualitative research, Richardson suggested that we submit to what we know about crystals. Crystals “grow, change, alter but are not amorphous” (p. 92). They “reflect externalities and refract within themselves ...” offering a “...deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” (p. 92). As the stories are told and retold, and the narrative is created, we can understand that new thinking is stimulated, alternate theories are developed, and different ways of knowing are created (Richardson, 1997). Such was the case for this researcher and the storytellers represented in the study.

*Trustworthiness.* Narrative non-fiction story method research is frequently questioned for its trustworthiness and truthfulness (Richardson, 1997). Audio-taping the dialogic engagements along with note-taking allowed for greater accuracy in recording the story, however, the researcher provided for trustworthiness through collaborative examination of the transcribed stories and reflection of the interpretations. Common themes and connections were sought, also as a means of offering coherence and validity to the greater story (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Knowing that truth in the story lies in the perception of the one offering the story, the researcher trusted that the interviewees were offering true experiences remembered and told with accuracy.

Accuracy in recording and reporting the story then fell into the hands of the researcher. The intent from the onset of the study was to collect data using the most accurate methods and to record and report that data with precision so that trustworthiness was further ensured.

According to Horn (2000), trustworthiness is also established when the participant agrees to the accuracy of the story and the researcher’s interpretation of it. Each of the participants took the opportunity to examine the transcription of the interview in which he or she participated. Each one gave feedback, and appropriate changes were made as requested. One must understand again that the researcher was not seeking a truth through the stories, but rather the real life experiences of those within this context and the recurring themes represented in their stories.

Passages from *The Narrative of Care at Frances Burtyn Elementary*

[Italics indicate exact words of the participants. Pseudonyms are used for the school and each participant. Passages are not necessarily sequenced as in the original research.]

It was a beautiful clear winter afternoon, cool, but not too cool; warm but not too warm. Just the week or two previous, we had been blessed with spring-like showers followed by several unseasonably warm days. As I entered the driveway, I noticed that little patches of green had already sprung up on the grounds of Frances Burtyn Elementary. Children were moving about, some without jackets or sweaters. They were ready for sunny days and dry playgrounds. They were anxious to be outside, just like the grass waiting to spring forth from its winter hideaway (p. 137).

I was anxious to “spring forth” into my newness as well, and with only the restraints of no prior relationship, I began the work of field research. Lunch was over, and only a few students and adults were still transitioning. Everyone appeared to be settling back in for

the routine afternoon activities. I wanted to go visit classrooms and watch some of what happens here at Burtyn Elementary, but that was not my mission for today. As one of the more widely used methods of creating field notes is that of personal interview (Mishler, 1986), I was here to interview the principal, Mr. Steve Barron. I was here to listen to the first story of care and power at this very successful school.

Mr. Barron's story would be one of six that I would be told through personal interview over the next two weeks. As all stories are, these would be molded by both internal and external conditions, internal being the feelings, dispositions, and beliefs of the person involved, and the external being the surrounding environment (Polkinghorne, 1995). My search for understanding of narrative non-fiction story method research had indicated that I would be able to create a narrative from the accumulation of stories told by those most intimate with the subject, the persons at Burtyn Elementary who had experienced care in the school. Once completed, this analysis of narrative would offer the reader insight and understanding (Polkinghorne, 1995) into these issues of care and power at Burtyn.

As my inquiry began to categorize and qualify and "put little things where they fit," I found that each story was all about loving and caring for children. They told of the decisions educators have to make to ensure that what is done is that which is good and right for children. Each story was about how they have found meaning in the vicarious twists and turns of their personal and professional lives and all that they have experienced.

As the six individuals shared their stories of care, my inquiry intensified and a larger story that is now called "A Narrative of Care at Frances Burtyn Elementary" began to come into focus. This narrative is expressed through a common language of care that the participants used to describe their way of being in relation to one another, to describe the leadership at the school, and to elaborate on the various ways that they have chosen to provide the best education and environment for their children.

As an outsider, if I wanted to understand the culture at Burtyn Elementary, I knew that it was crucial for me to understand the common language spoken there. In each of the interviews, I asked the participant to begin with an introduction to Burtyn or just to give me a list of words they might use to describe their school. I wanted a "word wall", a thesaurus of what could be said about this place and these people. Although we occasionally discussed particulars of the physical being of the school to offer some contextual reference, the intended focus was on the human element, both adults and children, their relationships and interactions, their ways of being with and for one another.

Although each story had its uniqueness due to the varied experiences of the people there and the particular details of life at the school they chose to highlight, the common language was quite evident. These first responses would allow me a glimpse of the language that this group of people shares and would help me start my word wall.

As the questions were posed and the answers thoughtfully given, words typically associated with care surfaced, and a picture of care began to emerge. The words that were repeated throughout the interviews were *caring*, *nurturing*, *loving*, *family*, *community*, *warm*, *safe*, and *supportive*. These words were used in a variety of contexts, sometimes when describing the school staff and teachers, sometimes when describing the parents and the students, and always when describing the principal and his leadership. These words were used not only as referents for the present, but the past as well. Because of the contextual variations-time, place, people-the picture of care became

holographic in nature. When “positioned” one way, care had a certain appearance, but when re-examined at another angle, the picture of care took on a different appearance. I found the same to be true of other terms in their common vocabulary.

Beyond the vocabulary expressing their common language, another way of understanding the culture of this school was to examine their belief system (Polkinghorne, 1988). This was easy to accomplish since, while telling their stories, they each spoke so readily and consistently of their beliefs and gave evidence through their actions. As the stories were told, Polkinghorne’s (1988) claim came to mind: our individual stories reveal who we are; our collective story exposes our belief system, our values, and who we are as a community or culture.

*First of all I feel that Burtyn is one of the most caring schools I’ve ever worked (with).* Ellen smiled as she offered her first thoughts, but it was in her eyes that I saw truth was being told. *This place has a warm, nurturing environment. The students are aware of the care we give them...they feel safe, loved, important, successful* (Kozol, 2000; Mitchell, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Pellicer, 1999; Scheurich, 1998; Sernak, 1998). *It’s a perfect place for a child to learn...it’s my favorite place to be.*

Carrie never hesitated when offering the words *compassion* and *respect*. *There is a great deal of respect here. We look out for the children and their families. We look out for each other and our families.* Her understanding of compassion is that it always reaches out to others and takes on some form of action. *If we know someone’s having a really hard time, (we do) little things to help make things better.*

As I pulled these comments from their stories, I began to put some of their terminology into context or frames of reference. This added meaning to the words on the wall. The story began to develop that essence of time as well, as Mr. Barron and Lauraleigh added their experiences with principal leadership previously at Burtyn.

Mr. Barron gave witness that *the caring has always been a part of Burtyn...the principal who was here before me...that was the absolute expectation she had. She was loving, kind...when I became principal, all I had to do was keep that ball rolling.*

Lauraleigh agreed with Mr. Barron about previous principals who set in place a strong ethic of care before she complimented the current one. *When I first came to Burtyn, the principal was very helpful and compassionate. He always had that helpful attitude. And then, she (the next principal) carried on that tradition...very caring, very thoughtful. When they passed the mantle (to Mr. Barron), someone somewhere must have said, ‘When you send a leader to Burtyn, you better send someone who loves children.’ I have been fortunate to work for principals who care...I have never entertained the thought of leaving.*

Alexandria has been at Burtyn just six years, a short time compared to Lauraleigh, but she recognizes the scope of Mr. Barron’s caring leadership. *He really does make this school...the climate, and what it is* (Beck, 1994; Bjorum, 1999; Pellicer, 1999). *He has made it where the kids want to come to school...they feel safe. He has such a personal relationship* (Barth, 1990; Bulach, Brown, & Potter, 1994)...*he knows every child here, knows them by name, knows what they’ve been doing. He comes in (the classrooms) every morning. They know he’s here and that he cares about them.*

It is important to see Mr. Barron’s leadership is not just a model of caring behaviors...his ways of caring beyond that to establishing this vision of excellence that drives their work there (Barth, 1990; Bennis, 1984; Pellicer, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1987, 1992, 1996). He told of the blurring and refocusing of the vision of the school. People in the community and on the staff had long thought of too

little of these children's academic abilities. It was as if they thought only the smiling and the hugging and the positive environment was enough. *As far as academic achievement, we were falling short. The caring part had always been a part of Burtyn. What we had to add was the academic part....we're going to prepare them to be winners.*

The change in focus did not come without birth pains, Mr. Barron remembered (Beck, 1994; Brown & Moffett, 1999; Pellicer, 1999). *The first realization we had to come to ...was that our children are capable. It was an almost in-your-face thing for some teachers. Yes, he may be from a single-parent home, he may be African-American, he may be poor...but there's no reason he can't learn. Our conversations are not about weaknesses now; they're about strengths...about what they can do.*

The community that serves Burtyn has always been an important consideration the staff at this school. Mr. Barron has sought to serve the community well by involving them at school in the decision-making process and the many activities that are a regular part of the school schedule (Boyer, 1995; Kelts, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sernak, 1998). *My base of support is in this community. I work for this community, he stressed to me. In order to provide for parent discussion and input of this greater academic focus...he and the teachers presented to small groups of parents the idea of a very demanding and rigorous academic emphasis at Burtyn. The bottom line of this new way of thinking...was...do you want to be ...just passing kids through the grades? That's the worst kind of discrimination you can have. You know...if we just pass them through...they're not going to graduate from high school.*

Many of the community members and parents know what not graduating from high school means. Not giving these children the best education possible, not demanding of them their best effort, and simply providing social promotion would eventually doom them to a life diminished (Kozol, 1991, 2000; Mitchell, 1990; Scheurich, 1998; Voss, 1993). Although not every parent believed in the new plan, the large majority of the parents have supported the school in this endeavor (Sergiovanni, 1992). Since many of the parents and grandparents of children at Burtyn were students there during their elementary years, selling the new way of thinking to this community was not difficult. Continuity of people had resulted in a strong trust factor... (and as Noddings argues) "...the school cannot achieve its academic goals without providing caring and continuity for students." (1992, p. 14). The building and sustaining of relationships for the span of two and three generations has had profound effect on all the stakeholder groups of Burtyn.

#### Conclusion

Similar to journal writing, story telling serves as a form of self-reflection and self-analysis (Cooper, 1991). In like manner, the stories of others give voice to the listener's own experiences as well. The process of telling, discussing, and retelling the stories afforded an opportunity for the members of Burtyn to deepen their understanding of their roles in developing and sustaining a culture of care. This new meaning and heightened awareness of caring and its relation to power may inform future actions in the shared decision-making efforts of the school as a whole.

As the school opened its doors to the study, the principal and teachers opened their hearts and minds to give voice about the work they do to care for children. The climate and environment at Frances Burtyn Elementary School is warm and nurturing, loving and caring, safe and trustworthy. The caring culture is evident through the coherence of the spoken word, the physical touch, the academic challenges, and the relational bonds of this school and community. The language at Burtyn is a caring language. It teaches children that they are cared for, as well as teaching them to care. The language is not superficial, but has the depth of a consistent practice of care.

The leadership has been established as a caring leadership, as the principal is seen as the primary care-giver and role model in caring for the children and in protecting the community's interests in the welfare of the children. The community and staff participate in sharing the vision that the principal has established, as well as in the decision-making processes of the school.

The principal's leadership has promoted the core beliefs of the school in regard to the children's right to a safe and nurturing environment, pursuing the talents and gifts of all children, the professional growth of all adults to improve instruction, and the commitment to high standards of academic achievement. His leadership has realized power through these shared core beliefs and through ongoing accomplishment of their goals.

The power of this principal is shared as it is used to re-energize and revitalize the plans for their immediate work and ways of being with one another. It is *caring power* as it used to create hope in all children and to assist them in preparing for a brighter and more accomplished future. Though not actually spoken, I believe I could safely say that their greatest hope for these children would be that in the midst of accomplishing their life's goals and dreams, through their vocation and avocation, they in turn become great care-givers.

Polkinghorne (1988) explained, that as individuals we story our existence to confirm personal essence, whereas "at the cultural level, narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values" (p. 14). This analysis of narrative must serve to accomplish both perspectives. As an analysis of narrative is conducted, it becomes apparent that narrative non-fiction story method allows the individual voices to remain as they contextualize the unique events and details of each story and become embedded in the greater narrative of a shared existence (Chase, 1996). Once examined, the accumulation of stories told through the voices of those closest to the events offers that more holistic narrative. Recursively examining the stories and the relevant data, focused on time, personal experience and knowledge, and reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991), the narrative emerges. The real life experiences of those within the context and the researcher's ability to identify recurring themes represented in the stories meet to provide depth of understanding concerning the individuals and the greater community or culture.

Closely aligned with the thinking of Richardson (1994), I attempted to disallow fragmentation or isolation of the stories by examining them in totality so that themes and patterns of the whole could emerge. Employing this technique associated with the theory of crystallization (Richardson), I could allow the individual stories and expressions of care to remain intact while observing the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional themes of care come forth, similar to observing the natural development of crystals as they "reflect externalities and refract within themselves" (p. 92).

This narrative of care, revealed through the several stories told by Burtyn's principal and teachers, however, is but one story. It is bound by time and people and other contextual elements. There are surely other stories "out there" waiting to be told and heard. Regardless of the topic of consideration, hearing the stories of personal experience of others in a given context may cause the listeners to reflect and find themselves and their own experiences in those stories. Narrative inquiry as a personal experience method (Barone, 1992; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1995; Richardson, 1994) is an opportunity for educational leaders to more closely examine and inform their own practice as well as the practice of others. Through contextually rich details, narrative non-fiction story method offers powerful voice to daily practice in schools and provides greater understanding of the culture of the school. The careful analysis employed in this

methodology, combined with the knowledge of the crystallization process, can produce a powerful catalyst for individual and school improvement.

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Strengthening the Campus Leadership Team through Effective  
Principal and Counselor Relationships: Implications for Training

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Campuses with successful leadership teams have a better opportunity to meet the ever-increasing and complex needs of the students they serve (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). These successful campuses are strengthened when they include strong principals and counseling teams with shared mutual trust and understanding that permeates the school climate (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006). A review of the literature revealed a paucity of studies examining the nature of successful principal-counselor relations and the impact of this relationship on student success, effective campus leadership teams, and an effective school climate that promotes learning. Meaningful dialogue and discussion of this critical professional relationship also were found lacking in the major counseling and educational leadership professional journals.

#### Conceptual Framework

Trust between individuals is paramount to successful team building and leadership sustainability in schools today (Fullan, 2005). There is much support from the literature to indicate that an atmosphere of mutual trust permeating a school's climate leads to student success (Brock & Ponec, 1998; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Vaught, 1995). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) defined trust in their meta-analysis on trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open" (p.556). The working relationship

between the campus principal and the school counselor is largely dependent upon open collegial communication, mutual respect and trust.

As the principal and counselor work together to meet the needs of their students, staff and parents, barriers to this needed trust component arise from a lack of understanding of roles, misconceptions regarding confidentiality issues, and the absence of collegial sharing (Beale, 1995; Vaught, 1995). How pervasive is this lack of mutual understanding? Are there differences in the perceptions held by elementary and secondary counselors and principals regarding these issues? Are counselors and school administrators receiving adequate training in these areas? If not, what are the critical components that should be included in preparation programs for pre-service principals and counselors to foster highly effective ways of professional collaboration and teaming?

#### Purpose

This national study of school counselors and campus principals was designed around the following three purposes: to describe the nature of the principal-counselor relationship in today's public schools; to describe the nature of a successful principal-counselor partnership and how to achieve this working team approach; and to identify the critical components of a graduate school preparation program in Counseling and Educational Leadership necessary to foster this important relationship. What are the significant factors in a successful professional relationship between the campus principal and the counseling team that support an atmosphere of mutual trust, a positive school climate, and student and staff success? Identifying these critical components is basic to developing appropriate learning experiences and materials for pre-service preparation programs.

Three key factors have been identified in supporting exemplary guidance and counseling programs: (a) the principal's support of the counselor is critical (Beale, 1995; Vaught, 1995); (b) an understanding of the role of the counselor is important (Cormany & Brantley, 1996; Ponc & Brock, 2000); and (c) trust and communication between the principal and counselor must be present (Brock & Ponc, 1998; Ponc & Brock, 2000; Vaught, 1995). The major purpose of the study was to examine the level of trust between counselors and principals, to describe the nature of the principal-counselor relationship in public schools, to describe successful principal-counselor partnerships, and to identify the key elements of effective principal and counselor preparation programs with regards to this relationship.

#### Rationale

Seifert and Vornberg (2002) concluded that school principals, who understood the role of the counselor and devoted time to develop open communication and collaboration with their counseling team, were more likely to iron out differences in perceptions in areas of mutual concern. These areas include confidentiality, student advocacy, situational cause and effect, and school climate. Counselors can make a real difference in student learning and achievement by working with the whole school and being focused on the whole student (Baker, 1996; Schmidt, 1996; Kaplan & Evans, 1999).

Because of their different professional preparation, principals and school counselors have varied approaches to address student issues and concerns (Kaplan, 1995; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Even though the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 1990) has clearly defined the role of the school counselor, research has shown that the principals and school counselors view the role of the counselor differently (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Cole, 1991; Fitch, Newby, & Ballestero, 2001; Stalling, 1991).

Frequently, the principal determines the role of the counselor in the local school and often needs to be educated about that role (Neukrug, Barr, Hoffman, & Kaplan, 1993; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994). Ponc and Block (2000) contend, “Principals' definitions of the role of the counselor may range from that of administrative assistant to helper/ advocate of children” (p. 208). School counselors are many times utilized to perform routine clerical tasks, handle discipline problems, and react to situations rather than establish a balanced program that supports developmental and prevention efforts (Baker, 1996; Burhans, 1999; Hogan, 1998; Seifert & Vornberg, 2002). Nichter and Nelson (2006) conclude, “the principal’s perception of the school counselor’s role is the most likely the single strongest influence on how school counselors really spend their time” (p.16).

As noted, there is a scarcity of research examining the collegial relationship between school principals and counselors. Professional development programs in counseling and educational leadership do not address in depth this vital part of the preparation process (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). This national study attempted to identify the practitioner perspective on the key elements of a successful preparation program that addresses this relationship.

#### *Limitations of Study*

Studies that use self-report questionnaires to gather data are limited by the response rate and the honesty of the respondents. Even though the number of participants in this national study was adequate, the response rate in this study is a limitation. Many of the principals surveyed in western states reported that their counseling programs had been cut or completely eliminated due to budget constraints.

#### Method

Two survey instruments were developed to assess elementary and secondary school counselors’ and school principals’ perceptions of factors related to the principal-counselor relationship. The items included in the survey instruments were based on patterns and themes that emerged from the review of the literature. Input on items was gathered from practicing elementary and secondary campus principals as well counseling and educational leadership educators. The content validity of both questionnaires was established through formal feedback from counselor educators and professors of educational administration.

Each survey included demographic items, multiple statements with a Likert summative rating scale with response choices (1-5), and open-ended questions. The principals’ survey included 44 Likert items and the counselors’ survey included 45 Likert items. The survey questions focused on the role of the school counselor, the existing level of communication, trust and cooperation between the counselor and principal, and the adequacy of their professional preparation programs with regards to understanding counselors’ roles, responsibilities, confidentiality, and productive professional collaboration. With the exception of the open-ended questions, the survey questionnaires were similar with parallel questions designed for comparison.

A pilot study (n=39) was conducted in a southwestern state with urban, suburban and rural participants. Based on feedback from principal and counselor participants in the pilot study and the university-based educators who reviewed the instruments, some items were revised and deleted.

## Population and Sample

The target population for the study was the national population of elementary and secondary school counselors and campus principals. To survey a cross-section of counselors and principals in the United States, the mailing lists of three national professional organizations - American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) were used. The study was divided into five phases: the pilot study and four subsets with a target of 500 participants at each mailing for a total of 2,000 potential participants. Random samples of the population of elementary school counselors ( $n = 500$ ), elementary school principals ( $n = 500$ ), secondary school counselors ( $n = 500$ ), and secondary school principals ( $n = 500$ ) were drawn from the professional organizations' mailing lists.

After the pilot study was completed, survey packets were mailed to elementary and secondary school counselors and elementary and secondary campus principals nationwide. After the initial mailings, a follow-up mailing was completed in an effort to increase the response rate (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

## Data Analysis and Results

### School Principal Survey

As noted, 1000 surveys were mailed to elementary and secondary school principals. As a result of wrong addresses and other issues, the total number of surveys actually received by the sample was 964. Of the 285 surveys returned (30%), 253 were usable. Many elementary school principals returned surveys but indicated that they did not have a counselor in their building; a fact that lowered the usable response rate somewhat among this group. The demographics of the principal respondents were as follows: gender- 54% male and 46% female; level- 43% elementary school principals and 57% secondary school principals; setting- 47% rural, 39% suburban and 14% urban; median number of years serving as principal- 7; median number of years serving on current campus- 5; median number of years with current counselor- 3; median number of students on campus- 560; and formal training as counselor prior to serving as principal- 25% had training and 75% had no training.

An exploratory factor analysis ( $n = 253$ ) revealed a six-factor solution based on visual inspection of a scree plot. The scree plot tends to be more accurate than the standard eigen value greater than one method, which often overestimates the number of salient factors (Zwick & Velicer, 1986). The six resulting factors were named as follows with coefficient alphas in parentheses: relationship quality (.966), shared leadership (.856), training (.909), role definition (.800), role communication (.675), and confidentiality (.624), which are above the typical average (Henson & Roberts, 2006). The reliability of the obtained scores was stronger in the first four factors. These six factors explained 67% of the variance in the scores.

*Relationship quality.* One part of the relationship explored was trust. An overwhelming majority of principals (93%) indicated that they trusted their counselors. Over 87% of principals indicated that their counselors had similar views on how to handle crises. Over 90% of principals agreed that they could predict how counselors would respond to delicate situations. Given the number of statistical significance tests that were conducted in this study, a conservative alpha of .01 was used to reduce experiment-wise error. Model assumptions were examined and met. A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in relationship quality between

elementary and secondary school principals,  $F(1, 251) = .03, p = .855$ . In other words, both elementary and secondary principals expressed similar views regarding the quality of their relationships with their school counselors. Trust was not an issue.

*Shared Leadership.* Over 90% of principals indicated that they considered their counselors to be an integral part of the campus planning team. Similarly, over 88% of principals agreed that their counselors were involved in the campus site-based decision-making process. A smaller percentage of principals (66%) sought their counselors' opinions regarding curriculum and instruction. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in shared leadership between elementary and secondary school principals,  $F(1, 251) = .509, p = .476$ . From the principals' point of view at both the elementary and secondary settings, counselors are important members of the campus leadership team and whose contributions are sought.

*Training.* Three one-way ANOVA's were conducted to examine principal's training. Model assumptions were examined and met. There was not a statistically significant difference in training between elementary and secondary school principals,  $F(1, 252) = 1.861, p = .174$ . However, there was a statistically significant difference in training between principals who had formal training as counselors and those who did not,  $F(1, 252) = 19.76, p = .0001$ , with a medium effect size of  $\eta^2 = .07$ . The principals with counseling backgrounds or training, expressed different levels of understanding of the role of the school counselor and how to support and involve counselors than their colleagues with no counseling backgrounds.

More than 31% of the principal respondents did not agree that their training prepared them to work collaboratively with counselors. Similarly, 36% of principals did not agree that their training prepared them to know how to support counselors. In addition, 33% of principals indicated that they did not agree that their training prepared them to understand the role of counselors. A larger number of principals (40%) indicated that their training did not prepare them to understand how much to expect counselors to disclose regarding student confidences.

Over 40% of principals *without* coursework in counseling said they were not prepared to know how to support counselors, whereas 23% of principals *with* this coursework stated that their training did not prepare them in this area. Over 39% of principals *without* coursework in counseling said their training did not prepare them to understand the role of the counselor, compared to 14% of those *with* coursework in counseling. The largest discrepancy between those with and without coursework in counseling was found in the area of confidentiality. Over 46% of principals *without* counseling coursework said their training did not prepare them to understand how much to expect counselors to disclose regarding student confidences, compared to 13% of principals *with* counseling coursework.

*Role Definition and Role Communication.* Over 44% of principals indicated that their school districts had not clarified the types of activities in which counselors should be involved. About one-third (31%) stated that their school districts had not clearly defined the role of the counselor and the majority of principals (56%) indicated that their school districts had not explained to them what a comprehensive school counseling program was. Over 96% of principals indicated that their counselors had a voice in defining their roles. Over 91% of principals said that they discussed the counselor role with their counselors and over 90% of principals stated that they meet regularly with their counselors. Regarding vital and important parent and student communiqués, 96% of principals indicated that they shared this information with counselors.

*Confidentiality.* Principals' views on confidentiality contrasted sharply with counselors' views. Principals were divided when it came to understanding why a counselor would keep something confidential if the school could be adversely affected. Almost half (40%) of the principals indicated that they understood why counselors would keep these issues confidential, whereas slightly more principals (43%) could not understand why counselors would keep such issues confidential.

#### School Counselor Survey

As a result of wrong addresses and other issues, the total number of surveys actually received by the school counselors was 960 of 1000. Of the 370 surveys returned (39%), 362 were usable. The demographics of the counselor respondents were as follows: gender- 12% male and 88% female; level- 54% elementary and 46% secondary; setting - 19% urban, 48% suburban, and 33% rural; median number of years serving as counselor- 9; median number of years with current principal- 3; and median number of students for whom they are responsible- 400.

An exploratory factor analysis ( $n = 362$ ) revealed a six-factor solution based on visual inspection of a scree plot. These six factors explained 60% of the variance in the scores. The six factors identified were labeled as follows (coefficient alphas in parentheses): relationship quality (.954), shared leadership (.917), training (.848), role definition (.694), role advocacy (.662), and confidentiality (.602).

*Relationship quality.* The vast majority of school counselors (77%) indicated that they trusted their principals. An even higher percentage of counselors (86%) indicated that their principals support them. When asked if they met regularly with their principal, 66% indicated that they met regularly, but a larger percentage of elementary counselors (74%) than secondary counselors (58%) said that they met regularly with their principals. Thus, counselors indicated that they trusted their principals, but elementary and secondary school counselors differed in their perceptions of how much regular access they had to their principal.

*Shared leadership.* Whereas 80% of the counselors indicated that their principal wanted them to be a part of campus planning, only 48% (elementary 43%, secondary 53%) indicated that their principal sought their input in issues related to curriculum and instruction. Over 71% of the counselors (elementary 74%, secondary 67%) stated that their principal involved them in campus decision-making. When asked if their principal shared new ideas with them, 73% of elementary school counselors and 61% of secondary school counselors agreed.

*Training.* An ANOVA examining the difference in training between elementary and secondary school counselors was statistically significant  $F(1, 360) = 8.572, p = .004, \eta^2 = .023$ . In other words, elementary counselors differed from their secondary counterparts with regards to their perceptions of the adequacy of their pre-service training programs in the area of campus leadership. A majority of counselors (51%) said their training did not prepare them to work collaboratively with principals. Similarly, over 56% of respondents stated that their training did not prepare them to understand how to support principals. Over 43% of counselors indicated their training did not prepare them to be proactive with principals if asked to assume duties outside of the counselor role. Finally, 32% of counselors said their training did not help them understand how much to disclose to principals regarding student confidences.

*Role definition.* When counselors were asked if their school districts clearly defined their role, 39% of the counselors stated that their districts had not clearly defined their role. When asked if they had implemented a comprehensive school counseling program on

their campus, most counselors (73%) indicated that they had. Elementary school counselors (84%) were much more likely to implement a comprehensive program than secondary school counselors (61%). There was a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary school counselors in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program,  $F(1, 361) = 36.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ . School counselors were not in agreement regarding the level of implementation of comprehensive counseling programs on elementary and secondary campuses.

*Role Advocacy.* Given that principals determine the role of counselors on local campuses, counselors are in a position of needing to be proactive about their roles if they are going to be able to establish a role that approximates ASCA (American School Counselor Association, 1990) standards. Over 95% of respondents indicated that they understand their role as a school counselor. Over 88% of elementary school counselors said that they have discussed their role with their principals, but only 73% of secondary counselors reported doing so. There was a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary school counselors in discussing their roles with their principals,  $F(1, 361) = 22.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ . Both secondary and elementary school counselors appeared to struggle when it came to asserting themselves about having to assume duties outside of their role. When asked if they initiated discussions with their principals when principals want them to assume duties outside of their role, only 55% of the counselors indicated that they have had these discussions.

*Confidentiality Concerns.* Issues related to confidentiality have been problematic in counselor-principal relationships. Over 37% of counselors said that they experienced tension between maintaining confidentiality with their student clients and keeping principals informed. Counselors also were concerned about how this sharing would impact their effectiveness with students. Over 57% of the counselors expressed concern about losing students' trust if they shared information with principals.

#### Implications

One of the clearest and most consistent findings of this study was in the area of professional training. Both counselor and principal participants indicated that additional pre-service training would better prepare them for more effective communication and team building interactions. More understanding of confidentiality would be helpful to principals and might help alleviate the tension experienced by counselors regarding keeping principals informed. Both counselors and principals indicated that their training did not prepare them to understand and work effectively with each other. It appears that preparation programs should give more emphasis on the principal-counselor relationship. As this study indicates, those principals who had taken counseling courses better understood the role of the counselor. This suggests that information in pre-service course work regarding counselor role and other important issues could better prepare principals to understand counselors' roles, ethical dilemmas, and needs.

One issue that emerged among counselors was communication. Two of the notable differences between the relationship of elementary and secondary school counselors and their principals involved communication. Secondary school counselors in particular indicated that they did not have the type of exchange with their principals that their elementary school counterparts did. Secondary school counselors were not as likely to meet regularly with their principals and they were not as likely to discuss their role with their principals. Obviously, this lack of communication is understandable given the larger size and complexity of the secondary school environment, but

considering the concern that counselors already have about their role, increased communication among secondary counselors and principals seems to be an issue that needs more attention.

Ethical issues such as confidentiality become very critical at the secondary level due to the age and nature of secondary student populations (Seifert & Vornberg, 2002). The potential for administrative misuse of the counselor's time and expertise increases in secondary school settings. Elementary and secondary counselors reported that much of their time was spent in tasks not directly related to their guidance and counseling responsibilities. Elementary principals shared their frustrations, as they wanted students to benefit from direct counseling activities. In the open-ended questions, secondary principals were conflicted as to the roles they wanted their counselors to play, thus adding to confusion and miscommunication regarding performance expectations for counselors and counseling teams. Counselors expressed frustration regarding role responsibilities when asked to participate in campus leadership activities or contribute to overall campus instructional programs. Many counselors expressed frustration regarding their inappropriate role as campus test coordinators as well as being assigned the responsibility for special education or at-risk programming.

#### Recommendations

Recommendations for professional preparation programs included the following: *proactive collaboration* between graduate school departments, *leadership and assertiveness training* for counselors, and the development and sponsorship of field based *professional development programs* for practicing campus principals and their campus counseling team that center on "best practices".

Recommendation 1: *Proactive collaboration* between graduate departments of educational leadership and counseling in recognizing and emphasizing the importance of the school principal-counselor relationship. This includes offering jointly a graduate course, pre-service seminars, and field-based activities for pre-service principals and counselors. Study results indicated that it is important to integrate the following into the curricula of both disciplines' pre-service programs:

- (1) A foundation in counseling approaches, techniques and school based programs;
- (2) The components of comprehensive school counseling programs;
- (3) The role and responsibilities of the school counselor and principal;
- (4) Confidentiality issues, legalities, and ethics; and
- (5) Collaborative team building strategies to build and nurture shared leadership teams involving the school counselor as a key contributor.

Recommendation 2: *An increased emphasis on leadership training programs and assertiveness skills* in counselor education programs could prove helpful in fostering and developing leadership skills and characteristics in future counselors. Many counselor respondents indicated that they spend considerable time involved in non-counselor duties, but almost half of the counselors surveyed said that they do not discuss this issue with their principals. Many counselors do not see themselves as educational leaders and express frustration on how to be effective advocates for students on their campuses. School campuses would benefit from the impact of counselors who viewed themselves as contributing educational leaders who have much to offer the educational setting with regards to promoting and achieving student success.

Recommendation 3: *Proactive development of professional programs and activities for campus principals and school counselors* should be developed collaboratively between the two disciplines. Meaningful professional development opportunities can be designed with the cooperation of the university-based faculty, professional organizations, and the practicing school principal and counselor. Seminars, workshops, and presentations at professional meetings and in-service opportunities can increase the dialogue and discussion of “best practices” for increasing the leadership potential of school counselors as well as increasing the support and understanding of the counselor by the campus principal.

#### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which trust was present or lacking between school counselors and principals, to identify the important elements of a successful teaming relationship between these two professionals, and identify the critical components of pre-service preparation programs. Surprisingly, trust was not the major issue. Effective communication practices, clear role definitions and mutual understanding, as well as pre-service preparation practices emerged as real concerns.

The bottom line remains - how does this potentially powerful relationship between school principal and school counselor affect student growth and achievement? Current preparation programs in counseling and school administration do not consistently address this vital part of the professional preparation process (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Professional preparation programs need to address mutual understanding and trust, role and responsibilities, confidentiality and ethics, and shared leadership. Programs should provide the appropriate learning experiences for graduate students in both counseling and educational administration programs. Both preparation programs must include the development and nurturing of the campus leadership team as well as the integral role and critical contributions the school counselor can make as an educational leader.

DeVoss and Andrews (2006) conclude that leadership-training programs for school counselor trainees are a vehicle that fosters development of leadership skills and characteristics. The principal-counselor relationship is critical and complex. Principals are responsible for the school as a whole. Whereas principals are responsible *for* students, counselors are responsible *to* students. Counselors are ethically obligated to keep student disclosures confidential unless a notable risk to safety exists.

School counselors do not see themselves as educational leaders on their campuses. Developing leadership capacity on a campus to meet the ever-increasing needs of students is a high priority for campus principals. It appears that additional training is needed so that principals and counselors can be more supportive and collaborative as well as develop a better understanding of each other’s responsibilities, professional obligations, and needs. These two campus professionals can form the basis of the critical campus leadership team that is necessary today to meet the complex and diverse needs of the students and school communities they serve.

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## A Struggle to Bridge the Gap: Promoting African American Males in Teacher Education

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After serving 22 years in public education as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent, I am in awe over the small number of African American males as public school teachers. My classroom teacher experience was ephemeral as I was promoted to educational administration after five and one-half years. As the only African American male teacher in a high school with over 3,600 students, hundreds of whom were African American male, I was an anomaly in that environment. African American male role models were drastically needed and sought after mainly because campus data reported African American males ranked first in number of discipline referrals, number of suspensions, expulsions and academic failures. Few African American males are classroom teachers in this country. One can find those who are teaching in urban school districts (Lynn, 2002). Sports and entertainment fans inspect the performance of many of the “brothers” on the college and professional levels. But, in the context of classroom teaching, “brothers” are difficult to locate. Unfortunately, some African American men, although they are certified, are choosing not to teach in public schools.

### African American Males and Education

Research notes African American males do not select teaching because of the lack of academic encouragement (even from their parents), racelessness (achiever-isolation or the fear of being labeled by others as “acting white”), absence of role models, the low status of teaching, and too much education for

the return. Teaching is viewed by African American males as “work” where teachers have to “put up with,” “go through a lot,” and take “crap” from students.

Murrell (1994) found that African American males have been categorically underserved by public schools, and part of the reason this has occurred stems from an insufficient and incomplete knowledge base about these students. Murrell suggested that some non-minority teachers have a difficult, if not impossible time, dealing with African American males. Specifically, he analyzed the discourse patterns and speech events that evoked qualitatively different learning experiences for African American male students in urban middle schools. In his study, he found that the way these non-minority teachers in the study responded to and dealt with African American male students was unacceptable to the students. Because these non-minority teachers did not understand how African American males were reared, their communities, their dilemmas, or their concerns, they had a difficult time relating to these students.

Although the diversity of students has dramatically increased, the cultural capital needed for success continues to be dominated by the White society. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1999a) described the inequalities that lie below the visible surface of a covertly oppressive educational system when they stated, “Knowledge of White middle-class language, concern for academic success, and the ability to deport oneself in a “courteous” manner all contribute to one’s advantage at school” (p. 299). African American males who refuse to engage in achiever-isolation (isolating oneself from the cultural group to avoid ridicule when achieving academically), but strongly grasp their cultural identity may consider teaching a Euro-American profession.

Gordon (1994) suggested that we imagine a gifted African American male going from kindergarten to twelfth grade without ever having an African American male teacher as a role model or even seeing an African American male teacher in the classroom. This experience, undoubtedly, would have a negative impact on the African American’s male’s decision to teach school. African American male teachers can serve as role models for African American students and serve as a source of support.

The research literature concerning African American males and education is primarily based on how to educate the African American male (Tatum, 2006), the dilemmas of the African American male (Power, 1988), African American males in urban teaching positions (Lynn, 1999; 2002), and why minorities, and African American males in particular are not entering teacher education programs (Graham, 1987; Haberman, 1998). Research studies have been conducted on the need for minority teachers in public schools (Su, 1997). Lacking though, is literature on why African American males who are certified to teach are not teaching.

#### Method

This study was a qualitative narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry was the primary design of this study in order to illuminate the voices of African American males who are certified to teach, but who are employed in other professions. The participants for this study were twelve African American males in the State of Texas who had been certified as teachers by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) but had chosen not to teach. From their voices, others may understand the factors that influenced them to earn teaching credentials but to enter occupations other than teaching.

Four of the participants had never taught before, and eight participants had taught and left the profession. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with these men. The interviews were scripted, taped, and the tapes were subsequently transcribed

for an accurate story of why they earned teaching credentials but chose not to teach. Several questions were asked of the participants in order to begin discussion and conversation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested asking questions backward, forward, inward, and outward for a more thorough overview of the participants' experiences. In keeping with this recommendation, the participant narratives were guided by—but not limited to, and the data was filtered through the lens of the following two questions:

1. Why did you choose to obtain teacher certification?
2. Why did you choose to leave the teaching profession, or never enter?

Data collected were critical life experiences that provided reasons why the twelve African American males earned teaching certifications and why they are choosing not to use them. Data were analyzed continuously (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). From this qualitative narrative inquiry, commonalities, themes and patterns were discovered.

#### *African American Males Speaking Out*

After just one year of instructing, assigning and collecting homework, averaging grades, and administering consequences for inappropriate student behavior, one participant considered teaching, “*too stressful*”, especially when his wife and daughter were “*much more important*” than a teaching job. He needed more money to support them. Eventually, he exited the teaching profession in route to making more money. This participant explains why he left teaching.

*I left the teaching profession so that I could make some money to take care of my wife and baby daughter. I was never the type that depended on someone else to do things for me. I wanted and needed to take care of my family, and I could not do that with the money I was bringing home each month. The job was not paying enough. I could not survive on the money I was bringing home to take care of us. It was not enough. I started working part-time while I was teaching, but teaching took up so much time with grading papers, preparing lessons for class, dealing with discipline problems that I was too stressed out and tired of the job. I became discouraged because we were still suffering financially at home. If the pay was ok, I could have dealt with the work and stress.*

One participant taught for nine years before he finally decided he “*had enough*.” He was “*tired of struggling financially*” and decided he would find other ways to make a living. He stated...

*Schools do not pay money. Money is the reason I left. If I were making a decent, comfortable, and respectable salary, I would still be teaching today. I was making no money. I could barely make if from paycheck to paycheck and from month to month. We got paid once a month, and I could not pay my bills, I needed more money than what I was making. The money that I could make was predetermined each year. I was financially locked in, and my wife wanted some of the nicer things in life, and I could not do it with the teaching salary that I was making.*

Upon completion of his engineering degree, one participant worked as an engineer and eventually retired so that he could teach school. He had a passionate desire to teach. However, when he accepted a teaching job, the pay was low so he began working as a pastor and managing a radio station. When the three jobs became too difficult for him to handle, he terminated the one that was the most stressful and the most underpaid. He offered the following:

*I left the teaching profession because I was teaching, pasturing a church and managing a radio station all at the same time. I had to let something go, and teaching was doing the least for me so I decided to quit teaching. I choose not to teach because of the money. In a capitalistic society, money is important. The money was a major issue in deciding to teach or venture into another profession. If you do not have the money to do things, you cannot live a comfortable life. When I finished college, there were friends of mine who went into teaching. When I started my engineering job, I was making approximately \$10,000 more than they did. It made economic sense to me to go into engineering as opposed to teaching.*

Money was important to one participant when he completed college. He knew he had to support himself financially, and he knew that his salary as a police officer in a large city was more than what he would make as a beginning teacher. When asked if the teaching salary had been \$40,000 a year when he earned his teaching certificate, would he have entered the teaching profession, his reply was, "Yes." His frustration was obvious as he continued...

*When I first got out of college, I took a job with the City of Dallas as a police officer. When I took the job as police officer, I was making more money than a teacher who had been teaching school for five or six years. Finances were important to me at that time because I was beginning to live on my own and acquire the things that were necessary to live a comfortable life in Dallas. A career as a teacher would not have provided me with the things I needed and wanted. As I have grown in my current profession and gained experience with the department, my salary has increased. Now, it becomes a matter of finances. My lifestyle, my needs, wants, my family, and my financial obligations will not allow me to accept a job as a teacher because the pay is so low so, even now, it is still a matter of finances.*

Watching his mother struggle financially for over thirty years and wondering how she would make ends meet when she retired caused one participant to seriously ponder leaving the teaching profession in search of a financial opportunity elsewhere. He did not want his salary to be "frozen." He wanted to be able to work overtime so that he had an opportunity to increase his salary. Very emotionally, he explained...

*Watching my mother teach for almost thirty years and still struggling has been difficult for me. I ask myself, "How can a profession as important as teaching pay so little?" My mother is almost at retirement, and she is scared to death about how she is going to live. I do not want to be that way. It is ridiculous. I left because of the pay. I left because of the money that is involved. The job was not paying enough. Teaching has too many limitations and not enough money. It is difficult to move up in the rankings. The salaries are too low. When my salary was announced at the beginning of the school year, I knew that that was what I was going to make for a year. I could not work outside that box. I could not get any overtime. My low salary was frozen. I wanted and needed something better. I wanted to be able to improve my salary each month, and the standards made me feel not respected. The conditions that teachers work under made me feel like I was nothing, and people were not satisfied with what I was attempting to do.*

Some of these men really wanted to teach school. They had a passion for teaching. When asked why he left the teaching profession, one participant sadly responded:

*I chose not to teach because of financial reasons. I could make more money in industry, and at the time, I really needed the money. I left the teaching profession because I had the opportunity to go into industry and increase my salary substantially. The industry paid my health and life insurance, and they provided me with incentives and benefits that the schools did not and could not provide. At the time, my oldest daughter was entering college, and my son was going to college the next year. We needed the money so I left the teaching field and entered industry. I wanted to teach badly, but we needed the money. The opportunity was there so I took it. It was a great move for me, and my income rose eighty percent. If I was making that kind of money in teaching, I never would have given it a thought to leave, but I could not pass up the opportunity.*

Another participant never mentioned money and/or finances as being the reason why he left the teaching profession. However, he was aware of the low salaries of teachers, and he did not enter college with the intent to teach school. He accepted a teaching position because he could not find a job anywhere else. Moreover, when asked what experiences he faced in the educational setting that might have guided his attitude toward not teaching, his reply was:

*When I was growing up, teaching was not on my mind. I did not want to teach. The black students that I knew and hung around with in college either knew teachers or had relatives who taught school, and they would tell me the horror stories about the discipline that teachers had to deal with, and I believe this sort of turned me away from wanting to teach at that time, and money was an issue. I knew teachers made little money, and I did not want to have to deal with all those problems associated with teaching for the small amount of money teaching pays.*

According to another participant, he never used his teaching credentials. He loves his current job working with a major industry, and what was more important to him was he loves the money he makes. He offered the following:

*I never left the teaching profession. I never entered. I have a relative who lives in Fort Worth who works for General Motors. This relative has worked for General Motors for a long time. He was able to get me a job there. When I started working for General Motors, my salary was a lot higher than what I would have been making as a teacher. I could not turn down that opportunity. I wanted the money and starting out young and wanting things, money was probably the greatest influence in why I took that job. If I did take a teaching job, my salary would be lowered tremendously.*

As interesting as one participant's story was, the final analysis was that there was not enough money in the teaching profession for him to want to teach. I asked this participant why he left the teaching profession. He replied...

*I did not leave the teaching profession; I never entered the teaching profession. Two months after I graduated from Texas College in Tyler, Texas, I was drafted to fight in the Korean War. I spent two and one-half years in the service, and when I returned, I really did not think about teaching. I never wanted to teach, but I went to Texas Southern University on a GI program and earned a master's degree. I decided to try to get a job teaching, but no one would hire me because I had no experience in teaching. With a master's degree, and no experience, it was tough to get a teaching job because of the problem with salaries. The schools would settle with someone with a bachelor's degree because they could pay them less. I got married and needed to work. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law were teachers, and they wanted me to teach. I looked for a short time, and I even substituted for a while. I was never promised a job after that. I took a job at the post office and never looked back. I*

*never applied for many jobs as a teacher. I never really wanted to teach school. I got the teaching certificate because at the time it was understood that students who graduated from Texas College got a teaching certificate. You have to want to teach and love to teach. You have to be patient. I did not have the desire or the patience. Teaching is a tough profession, but it is the least respected, least supported, and most underpaid. Principals are afraid of superintendents, teachers are afraid of principals, parents are afraid of teachers, and students are not afraid of anybody. If I had been a teacher, I would have been a keeper instead of a teacher. I did not want to be a keeper, so I did not pursue teaching.*

I asked this participant what a “keeper” was, and his reply was, *“A keeper is one who works for the money, and not because of the love for children and learning.*

### Implications of the Findings

The implications of the findings of this study are important and can be of assistance to educators in attempting to diversify the teaching profession. There are four implications from analysis of the data. First, consideration to increasing teachers’ salaries is needed in order to retain African American males in the teaching profession. African American men who are certified to teach school are leaving the teaching profession because they are not paid enough money for them to take care of their families and pay bills in the manner they prefer. Therefore, when the African American males do become certified, for whatever reason, they do not enter the profession, or they leave the profession because of the low pay. This trend indicates that the underrepresentation of African American males in teacher education will continue unless the teachers are paid salaries that are competitive with other professions.

Second, unless the issue of recruiting and retaining African American males is addressed, students will continue to lack needed role models in K-12 education. As long as African American males are dropping out of the teaching profession, they will not be seen in the classrooms as role models. African American students prefer having African American males as role models because they viewed these African American teachers as their supporters and people in whom they could relate. African American students are also known to be more relaxed and comfortable around African American teachers (Gordon, 1994). Needed African American role models will not be provided unless ways are found to recruit and retain African American males for the teaching profession.

Third, the perception of teaching as a second-class profession needs to change. These participants viewed the teaching profession as a second-class profession at this time. Although, historically, the teaching profession was seen as a very important and highly respected job or career, some of these participants earned teaching certificates only in the event they could not find a higher paying job.

Fourth, the negative aspects of teaching need to be addressed in order to attract and retain African American male teachers. The teaching profession, as perceived by these participants, carries with it a negative image. Participants in this study view the teaching profession as plagued with discipline problems, low pay, and extensive work. Some of these participants can tolerate the discipline problems and the excessive workload; however, none of the participants would tolerate the low salaries.

### What Does The Future Holds for African American Males?

The question remains, Do schools want African American males as teachers and role models for its students? If that answer is yes, their actions must line up with their words. Demographics are changing in the United States, African American male role models are

needed, and the ratio of African American male teachers to African American students is not proportional (Wilder, 2000). African American males are seriously underrepresented in teacher education programs (Gordon, 1994). During the 2000-2001 school year in Texas, there were 275,103 teachers in the public school classrooms, and of this number, 62,414 were men. In general, men are not entering the teaching profession as often as females. In particular, African American men are not entering the teaching profession as often as any other group. Only 5,590 of Texas teachers were African American males (B. Webster, personal communication, September 12, 2001).

According to Myers (1994) only a small number of African American males are entering colleges and universities, and many African American males who are entering colleges and universities are choosing fields other than teaching in which to earn degrees (Kirby et al., 1999; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000).

As we approach the end of another decade, many states are standing at a crossroads. In one direction lies a future that follows the path of the current courses of action. In the other direction lies a future that follows a new path. Some states are following a new path by supporting their people by providing opportunities for educational advancement through high quality programs. "Closing the Gaps by 2015" is one of the programs that Texas is implementing to improve the educational system in the state (The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000).

Part of closing the gap will require greater numbers of faculty—including African American males—as there is a major teacher shortage that exists in the United States today, and no state is exempt from this ubiquitous experience inflicted upon school superintendents, principals, personnel directors, and classroom teachers. Also, closing the gap will require creativity in utilizing resources and recognition of the need to reach every student. When these students graduate and become successful in the workplace, they will serve as role models for younger students to follow. This will promote the value of education for future students. There is a need for younger students to have role models and the need to promote the value of education. Who will be the faculty and, especially, the minority faculty in the year 2015 standing in front of the classrooms in our country as role models promoting the value of education? African American males need to be part of that faculty.

#### Things to Consider

Based on the findings, the emergent themes, and analysis of the data, schools that wish to attract and/or retain African American males in the teaching profession must address the issues of financial compensation and knowledge and benefits of the teaching profession. Schools must consider increasing teachers' salaries, communicate the need for African American males, counteract the negative stereotype, and communicate the benefits that are available. African American males need to be the target audience.

*Consideration to Increase Teachers' Salaries.* From a little red, one-room school house that was occupied by one race of children to a metropolis of major urban, major suburban, central city, independent town, non-metro fast growing, non-metro stable, rural, and charter schools, the educational system has grown. The demand for equality and capable teachers has also grown. TEA (2001) publicized the fact that most teachers in Texas are female, white, hold a bachelor's degree and have 11.9 years of experience. The average salary for Texas teachers in 2001-2002 was \$39,122. This statement, alone, explains why African American males leave the teaching profession for other employment opportunities. The low beginning salary of \$26,240.00, which is the legally mandated

minimum salary set by the 79<sup>th</sup> Third Special Legislative Session for Texas would be of particular concern for these twelve African American males when comparing these salaries to other professions they could enter as college graduates. The data suggested that if nothing is done about the current teaching salaries, African American males may continue to leave, or never enter the teaching profession. If they continue to leave or never enter the teaching profession, under representation of African American males in teacher education will continue. According to this study, eleven of these participants see their financial needs as more important than the need for African American males as teachers in the classrooms. This implies that attracting African American men to the classroom as teachers is not enough. Teacher salaries have to be raised to a level that would make the teaching profession much more attractive to these men, and hopefully, cause them to remain in the profession. In closely examining the priorities of these African American male participants, this study supports the need to seriously consider the hope of financial reward in education. Concomitantly, this study reinforces the need to increase personal satisfaction that educators feel and communicate about the teaching profession. In addition, this study supports that the prestige of the educational profession must be improved in order to sustain African American male teachers.

With increased accountability and standards, the need for increased salaries may be intensified. Accountability and standards are major topics and major concerns as a result of the No Child Left Behind Law of 2001. Although these accountability and standards issues are not driving these twelve participants away from teacher education, these participants expressed a concern that increased standards and accountability are causing highly capable high school graduates to not consider the teaching profession as a choice for them. Innovations and recruitment programs without raising teacher salaries are not the key to retaining African American male teachers. In addition, if we are ever to retain African American males in the classrooms, the push to raise test scores, to institute competency tests, and to increase teacher standards without addressing the root cause of the reason these African American males are leaving the teaching profession may not yield long-term benefits in achieving retention. In short, with increased emphasis on accountability and standards, increased attention to salary increases is needed.

Districts that can afford to pay high salaries might attract African American male teachers leaving rural districts with fewer African American male teachers unless increases in salaries for all districts occur. When African American males do enter the teaching profession, they may be attracted to the higher salaries offered in the larger cities or to the wealthier suburban school districts. When this occurs, the smaller and rural school districts are left with no or few African American males as teachers. Local school districts can choose to pay salaries above the state minimum salary scale. They may also offer more attractive incentives which might attract African American males to their districts. This competition among local districts causes those districts that cannot compete because of their financial weakness to go without quality teachers and African American male teachers, in particular. This misdistribution of teachers is caused by salary discrepancies. Therefore, it is important to raise salaries for all districts so that African American males will be represented in both rural and urban areas.

#### Knowledge and Benefits

Benefits of the teaching profession need to be more widely communicated. Although teaching is not necessarily a lucrative field financially, good fringe benefits are usually provided, and the rewards derived from helping young people grow and develop into productive citizens are enormous. The benefits of teaching in Texas include a 10-month contract (187 days) paid over twelve months,

with personal and sick leave days, retirement and healthcare packages, holiday and summer vacation time accrued as well as the provision of professional development and family and medical leave. When African American males begin to make career choices, they should consider the rewards of the entire package of teaching and not just the annual salary. Teaching is a valuable profession for African American males to contemplate as we enter the new millennium. These benefits should be communicated.

The need for African American male role models in K-12 education should be clearly communicated and addressed. Wilder (2000) asserted that because African American male students do not see African American male teachers in the profession, many times from PK through graduation, they do not see the teaching profession as a viable career option for them. In other words, they need to see African American men as role models in classrooms and not in prisons. If teaching salaries are not increased, the African American men who are currently in the teaching profession might decide to exit the profession in search of higher paying jobs.

*Ways need to be identified to portray teaching as a first-class profession and counteract the negative image of the teaching profession.* This study supports Gordon (1994) that there are still African American men who view the teaching profession as a “second-class” profession. Six of the twelve participants in this study entered the teaching field as a “second option.” They did not want to teach, initially. They chose teaching as a second career to “fall back on.” This implies that these participants view teaching as something they can do if their first choice of profession falters. One way for policymakers to counteract the image of teaching as a second-class profession is to pay teachers as professionals.

#### Recommendations for Practice

Parents of African American males could help their sons understand that although the teaching profession does not pay salaries that are competitive to other professional occupations, the intrinsic rewards of the teaching profession are well worth the time and energy spent earning credentials to teach. Parents could illuminate to their sons that teaching requires having a love for and a desire to help them learn. They could help their sons understand that the job of teaching and caring for children means more than a paycheck. Teaching and caring for children are worth the discipline problems and hard work associated with the teaching profession.

From the data collected in this study, high school counselors might counsel African American males into the teaching profession by sharing with them that although salaries are not competitive with other professions, African American males are needed in the teaching profession as role models, not only for African American males, but also for other children. High school counselors have the opportunity to guide African American male students into the teaching profession by sharing with them the importance of becoming a teacher. They could tell the African American male student that although the salaries will not be competitive, and financial and material gain will not be substantial, their contributions to the profession and to other students will certainly benefit the school district in which they teach.

Public school administrators should approach their school boards with the idea that attention should be given to providing financial rewards and incentives to retain teachers in their school districts and in the teaching profession. These administrators should stress to their school boards the importance of salaries for the retention of African American males as teachers.

Colleges and universities faculty and administration should stress, through their recruitment programs, the extra benefits that are associated with the teaching profession. In their catalogs, they should highlight the time teachers have in the summer to return to

school, vacation holidays that are associated with the school year, weekend time when teachers are not usually required to teach, and job security in that when the economy is suffering the teachers continue to teach. The teaching profession brings with it an array of extra benefits that other professions lack. These extra benefits should be highlighted in colleges and universities catalogs. Colleges and universities should stress the importance of African American male retention in teacher education because of the lack of role models and the need for African American teachers by offering tuition reduction for those who are interested in entering teacher education programs.

Finally, data from this study supports the need for legislators to consider financial rewards, through policy, for those in the teaching profession. For example, legislators should create policy to increase the teacher pay scale, provide signing bonuses for first year teachers, provide Christmas bonuses for those in the profession, offer longevity pay for those who remain in the profession, develop higher salary scales for masters and doctoral degrees, establish incentives for teachers who remain in the teaching profession, and/or provide attractive retirement benefits for teachers who retire from the profession. In addition, legislators through policy should consider continuing an increase in salary for each year teachers teach rather than terminating the salary schedule after twenty years of teaching.

African American male teachers, who once were predominant in classrooms filled with mostly young black males have become such a rarity that school districts fight over the few who graduate each year from colleges and universities. One participant stated that he went to the school district “*to be employed as a custodian*”, but was hired to “*re-enter a teacher education program to become certified to teach.*” He already owned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics. The reason he cited for this phenomenon was to “*fill quotas.*”

In our society—a society plagued by capitalism, materialism, socialism and the politics of difference, these societal concerns, coupled with single-parent homes, alcoholism and drugs, drive-by-shootings, substandard housing, and welfare, education for African American males is increasingly more important and necessary than ever before. A good solid education will prepare our African American male students to compete in society and to make a viable contribution to our world, which in turn, benefits the whole society. African American male teachers are needed who can motivate and educate minority students to meet the challenges of competing for fair housing, fair education, and fair job opportunities that exist in America.

Unless African American male students choose teaching, our African American youth could complete a PK-12 academic program and never encounter an African American male teacher. Before desegregation, there were many African American male teachers in Black schools. These teachers had a tremendous impact on the lives of many black children, and any teacher holds power that can positively or negatively affect children. The twelve African American males in this research study chose not to teach. Our nation’s schools seek to prepare African American male students for the challenges of adulthood and to enable them to become productive, capable, and respectable men. If schools do not recruit and retain African American males to meet the challenges of a career in teaching and to take advantage of the vast opportunities and rewards of the teaching profession, then many African American males will not serve as role models for African American students to become a leading force in the coming decades. In short, the gap will not be closed, but widened.

The missing link in education is the African American male teacher. There are programs and initiatives on the national, state, and local levels that promote the recruitment and retention of African American males to the teaching profession. This present study

supports that the issue of increasing salaries is important in initial recruitment and retention efforts while ongoing attention to improved working conditions is vital in retention. The choice to address these issues is ours.

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