TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY AND SHARED LEADERSHIP:

PORTRAITS OF TEACHERS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study is a portraiture that examines the impact of shared leadership and school partnering in two high-poverty schools. It discusses teachers' views of school culture and their own self-efficacy. Additionally, each teacher shares his or her view of educating children in poverty and the impact of shared leadership. The study includes five participants with a single portrait written about each. Each participant is a teacher who serves on a school leadership team in a high-poverty school. The two schools involved in this study are part of a unique shared leadership model designed around a school partnership.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the loving memory of Dr. Harold Bishop, my teacher, mentor and friend.

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First and foremost, to God be the Glory! I would like to thank my daughter Briahna for her patience as I completed this process. I love you sweetie! I also thank my study participants for their candor and courage to share a piece of their life experiences with me. What a gifted group of professionals. You all are truly a credit to our profession. I thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Daisy Arredondo-Rucinski and committee members, Drs. Jane Newman, Richard Rice, John Dantzler, and Nirmala Erevelles, for their guidance. Finally, I thank my many friends and family members who encouraged and supported me through this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Preface

Mid-City Elementary School was located in a high-poverty community and surrounded by numerous unkempt and vacant homes. This was a predominantly black neighborhood where the sidewalks were dirty and laced with weeds and litter. With un-manicured lawns, many houses had old cars and what appeared to be junk strewn about. The scene was depressing. As I looked at the faces of the adults in this community, I saw lines that indicated hard lives filled with disappointment, missed opportunities and little hope. Many grew up in this community and had little opportunity to travel or be exposed to a different or more up-lifting lifestyle. Then the scene suddenly evolved. The bright faces and energetic bodies of the elementary-aged children flooded the sidewalks. With expectant smiles on their faces, book bags on their backs and much bounce in their steps, they were headed to a place that for many was the brightest spot of their day. They were going to school.

As the children walked through the doors of the aging building, they were greeted by their caretakers for the next seven hours: teachers, principal, office staff, lunchroom ladies, and custodian. I elected to focus my attention on six teachers for this study.

As principal of a high-poverty elementary school, I recognized that so many factors may determine the success of a school, of a leadership team and of an individual teacher. As I listened to voices of teachers who taught these children living in poverty, it became apparent to me that

how a teacher felt about herself and her abilities (self-efficacy) were powerful forces. Additionally, I believed these same teachers needed to feel a sense of empowerment and to know that they were part of the decision-making process of events that affected their lives.

Shared Leadership and School Partnering

Nearly three years ago as a first year principal, I felt overwhelmed and a sense of helplessness that I had never before experienced. Prior to assuming this position, I served as an assistant principal in a middle school in a relatively affluent school district. Although that position had its stresses, there was a buffer; I knew that the principal had the ultimate responsibility.

The primary source of my stress as a first-year principal was the apparent lack of leadership that existed in my school during previous administrations. There was an acting principal in place for a year and a half and due to the fact that she served as a teacher in the school for more than ten years, she was welcomed by some of her former colleagues and scorned by others. Prior to her, the beloved principal for whom we later named our playground, had been very ill for a number of years and this certainly limited his effectiveness.

Within the first two months of being appointed principal, I met many school and district leaders who said, "If you need anything let me know." There was one principal in particular with whom I shared similar ideologies. She and I worked together to hire a guidance counselor shared by our schools. We immediately began sharing ideas and became each others sounding boards for problem solving. Prior to the end of that school year we decided to collaborate further by providing professional development to our leadership teams together. The partnership grew from that point.

We paired a member of each school leadership team with one from the other school. We planned and structured our team meetings in a way that resembled corporate teams (Lencioni, 2004). With off-site training meetings and leadership retreats, our teams quickly bonded and the partnership spread to many of the rest of the faculty of each school.

In addition to receiving extensive leadership training together, our model included empowering our teacher leaders to be decision makers and change agents within their respective schools. During this period the other principal and I worked to train other school and district leaders using our model which we called "Meeting of the Minds: Partnering for Success".

I believed it was important for school leaders to be humble enough to share their leadership and to practice servant leadership (Blanchard, 2003). In my view, humility was one of the most important leadership traits that effective leaders possessed and that effective leaders thought of others and the good of the organization and worried little about getting credit or accolades.

I believed that the job of principal was too big to be done alone. Principals needed others. Shared leadership in a school setting was one key to creating a collaborative culture where members feel valued. Individualistic and balkanized cultures were detrimental to the success of a school, especially a high poverty school (Blankstein, 2004). According to Blankstein (2004), a healthy school culture was one where the predominant culture is collaborative in nature. I believed that school partnering was an effective strategy of extending a collaborative culture beyond the four walls of a school and that it lead to greater school and district success. I believed that leadership could be found at all levels of any organization and that the primary role of a leader was to build the leadership capacity in those she served. Leadership was described by Barnard (1963) as the ability of a superior to influence the behavior of a subordinate or group

and persuade them to follow a particular course of action. It would have been foolish of me, even as a principal, to believe that I was the only person in my building with that type of influence or that my influence was the most substantial in all scenarios or with all individuals.

Statement of the Problem

Although educating children in poverty can be a rewarding and fulfilling task, it was also a task that was wrought with challenges and often disappointments and stress. Poverty was defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov) as being based on a set of money thresholds that vary depending upon family size and composition. This number, established in the 1960s, was called the poverty threshold. If a family's total income was less than the family's threshold, then that family and everyone in it were considered to be in poverty. Ninety-eight percent of the students at Mid-City Elementary lived in poverty.

Children in Poverty

According to Klein and Knitzer (2007) of the National Center for Children in Poverty, before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children living in poverty was 40 percent below their higher socio-economic counterparts. At age four, children who lived in poverty were 18 months below what was normal for their age group. By age ten, the gap was even larger in the poorest families. Third graders from middle-income families typically had a vocabulary of 12,000 words, whereas children in poverty at the same age had a vocabulary of only about 4,000 words (Klein and Knitzer, 2007). Hart and Risley (1995) found that 36-month old children from welfare families had about 70 percent of the vocabulary of children from

working-class families and only about 45 percent of the vocabulary of children from professional families.

In addition to the cognitive disadvantages, according to Public Life Foundation of Owensboro (2005), there were also health-related concerns that impacted the process of educating children in poverty. The same study also found that mothers in poverty were not as likely to have received quality prenatal care during pregnancy. Without proper prenatal care, babies were more likely to be born preterm, putting them at high-risk for health problems and learning disabilities. The pregnant women who were most vulnerable were poor, single mothers and immigrants. Medicaid and uninsured patients also tended to miss appointments more often and were at high risk for complications. Poor women were more likely to smoke, not follow directions during pregnancy, and have substance abuse problems (Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, 2005).

Educators experienced both the academic and health related effects of teaching children who lived in poverty. According to local school data, many children at Mid-City Elementary do not attend a quality early education pre-school program and they had the cognitive ability of three or four year olds upon entering kindergarten. This despite the fact that Head Start was housed on our campus and our families would have clearly qualified for the program. During my tenure at Mid-City, I personally witnessed mothers smoking while pregnant. When asked about prenatal care and their own health, they often shrugged and seemed oblivious to its importance.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (2006), in Alabama 47% (177,555) of young children lived in low-income families. This was slightly higher than the national average of 43%. Additionally, 33% (76,684) of young white children and 75% (82,044) of young black children lived in low-income families. The NCCP defined low-income as being

less than twice the federal poverty threshold. Sixteen percent of white and 43% of black young children in Alabama lived in poor families, below the federal poverty threshold.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

In a Title I school with such a large number of children living in poverty, teacher self-efficacy played a vital role in whether or not student achievement goals were met. According to Bandura (1997), beliefs of personal self-efficacy constituted the key factor of human agency. If people believed they had no power to produce results, they would not attempt to make things happen. This study explored how teacher self-efficacy in a high-poverty school might make a difference in how teachers treated children and what their expected outcomes may be for their students.

Self-efficacy influenced the choices made and the amount of effort that one exerted. Efficacy also played a role in how a person reacted when faced with obstacles. It affected whether we gave up with little fight or pursued solutions and gained a greater sense of urgency (Bandura, 1997).

According to Pajares (1999), people who had a strong sense of personal competence in a domain approached difficult tasks in that domain as challenges to be mastered rather than as dangers to be avoided, had greater intrinsic interest in activities, set challenging goals and maintained a strong commitment to them, heightened their efforts in the face of failure, more easily recovered their confidence after failures or setbacks, and attributed failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which they believe they were capable of acquiring. Moreover, high self-efficacy helped create feelings of serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities. Conversely, people with low self-efficacy may have believed that things were tougher

than they really were. This belief may have fostered stress, depression, and a narrow vision of how best to solve a problem. As a result of these influences, self-efficacy beliefs were strong determinants and predictors of the level of accomplishment that individuals finally attained (Pajares, 1996).

School Culture

The issues of poverty and teacher self-efficacy come together and help form the school culture. Deal and Peterson (1999) stated, "The culture of an enterprise plays the dominant role in exemplary performance. Highly respected organizations have evolved a shared system of informal folkways and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose." (p. 1)

During my tenure as principal, I came to respect the importance and value of understanding school culture. I viewed school culture as complex and often having many layers, none of which should be overlooked. I believed that understanding the culture in a high-poverty school may well have been the key to the school's success. Teachers, parents, principals, students and the greater community all had views and a sense of what made their school special. Mid-City was no different. With a number of teachers teaching the second generation from some families, there was an undeniable sense of family. The school was the heartbeat of this community.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Each of these problems, poverty, effects of teacher self-efficacy and understanding school culture contributed to my desire to conduct this study. The purpose of this study was to tell the story and capture the origin of the experience of being on two school leadership teams in

high-poverty, typically low performing elementary schools experimenting with shared leadership. The study was framed within an organizational context of small elementary schools in a mid-sized, inner-city setting. The fundamental questions which guided this study were:

1. How does the experience of being a member of a school leadership team in a high-poverty school affect a teacher's self efficacy?
2. How does a shared leadership model within a school partnership affect a teacher's perception of the culture of a high poverty elementary school? and
3. How do teacher leaders in high-poverty schools view the students and parents of their school community?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The framework for this study included the idea that both teachers and administrators can provide leadership and shared leadership may give teachers a sense of empowerment, ownership, and self-efficacy and increase their level of commitment. This concept rejected the idea that "leadership is typically something that is done to followers" but rather leadership was "stretched over leaders and followers" (Spillane, 2006 p. 4). Furthermore, school partnerships may have contributed to the development of teacher responsibility, self-efficacy and commitment, which may in turn affect teachers' beliefs about their students' learning abilities.

Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

As a leader and a believer in the importance of developing relationships, I understood the power of stories. Blunt (2001) stated:

> "Learning organizations, knowledge organizations, and the other contemporary forms of organized human activity, including government bureaucracies, are using stories as

> powerful leadership learning "technologies." What is being rediscovered is what cultures have known for millennia - stories are a powerful, indeed irreplaceable method used by vibrant organizations and superior leaders" (GovLeaders.org, p. 1).

Stories connected people. My hope was that my stories would provide hope and inspiration to the readers. I intended to describe the impact of shared leadership and created stories about what means to teach children living in poverty.

Research Design and Methodology

In considering my research questions and the nature of the stories that I wanted to tell, portraiture appeared to fit as the appropriate research design. This method of inquiry was used to document social sciences and was intended to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor. This research design was framed through dialogue between me, the researcher and portraitist, and the participants of my study. What appealed to me about this method was that it began by searching for what was "good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997 p. 9).

In creating a portrait, I was challenged not to impose my own definition of what was good but rather to address my study participants knowing and believing that there were a number of ways in which goodness can be expressed. My role was to document my participants' perspectives. Traditional academic reporting was intended to inform. My hope was that my portrait would not only inform but also inspire.

According to Featherstone (1989), the power of portraiture was in its explicitly humanistic impulse. Portraiture embraced both analytic rigor (a perspective that was distant, discerning, and skeptical) and community building (acts of intimacy and connection). He used

the term “a people’s scholarship” – a scholarship in which “scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people’s experience.” (p. 367)

An additional challenge of writing using the portraiture method was that as the portraitist, my voice would emerge as an instrument of inquiry yet I needed to maintain balance. My primary role as a portraitist was to ensure that I balance my personal disposition with disciplined skepticism and critique. By doing so, I hoped to successfully explore the meanings attached to behaviors of the teachers who work with children in poverty.

Since the purpose of the study was to examine how shared leadership affects teaching children in poverty, the selected participants were be members of two school leadership teams. Five team members comprised the final participants and were selected from two high- poverty schools. I conducted a preliminary interview to assure that the teacher leaders selected were able and willing to commit to sharing their stories in an open and honest fashion. Two back up candidates were held in reserve. Once selected, the participants were informed in more depth about the design and methodology of the study. Once the potential participants had the opportunity to consider the design and methodology of the study and make a definitive decision to participate, I asked them to sign a consent form. A series of 2-3 interviews were then be conducted individually with each participant.

Throughout the selection and interview process it was important that the teachers understand the entire process. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davies (1997) stated that reciprocity between the portraitist and the actor (teacher) was more likely to occur when the structure, boundaries, and commitments of the relationship were made explicit from the beginning. The actor (teacher) needed to know what the portraitist intended, needed, and wanted. Whether it was one hour-long session, a few meetings over a week’s time, or several months of frequent

encounters, the teachers needed to be aware. These issues were addressed by the study design and concerns were resolved before beginning the interviews.

Interviews were being tape recorded and then transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. I also used a tool called an “Impressionistic Record” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 188) to make additional observations and reflections. Other items such as written notes and photographs were used as appropriate in the creation of the written portrait of each participant. I offered to provide copies of the transcripted interviews to participants so they could check them for accuracy.

After collecting necessary data, I drew out and constructed emergent themes using five modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997, p. 193):

> "First, we listen for repetitive refrains that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently, forming a collective expression of commonly held views. Second, we listen for resonant metaphors; poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors illuminate and experience their realities. Third, we listen for themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals that seem to be important to organizational continuity and coherence. Fourth, we use triangulation to weave together the threads of data converging from a variety of sources. And finally, we construct themes and reveal patterns among perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors."

Using this process, the portraits began to take shape. I analyzed the extent to which the stories had content related to shared leadership, teacher self-efficacy and perceptions of cultures of the two schools.

Limitations of the Study

The study included portraits of five teachers from two high-poverty schools. I served as principal of one of the schools which may be seen as a limiting factor. My position of principal and my role as researcher were clearly defined so as to separate them to the greatest degree

possible and mitigate any harm to the participants. One example of addressing this limitation was including information about how the participants felt during the study as it related to my role as researcher. This information was derived by a formal audit (post-interview) conducted by an unbiased party who was in no way affiliated with either school. Additionally, kept a reflective journal during the data collection process to dictate how I felt and what I observed. The findings and conclusions for the study were based upon the analyses of the portraits of the participants.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One began with an Introduction to the Study including a Preface and my beliefs about shared leadership and school partnering. I described how my experiences as a new principal helped shape my beliefs. The next section, the statement of the problem, described the statement of the problem in terms of the effects of poverty on children, teacher self-efficacy and the value of understanding school culture. The next sections described the purpose of the study, stated the research questions and described the conceptual underpinnings of the study. Finally, the last section on research design and study methodology provided a brief overview of the methodology of portraiture.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction to the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine how the experience of participating as a member of a school leadership team (and thus sharing leadership) in a high poverty school may affect a teacher's self-efficacy and perceptions of school culture. Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature on children in poverty, teacher self-efficacy, school culture and shared leadership.

Children in Poverty

What is Poverty?

Although the reasons for poverty were quite complex, the concept or definition of poverty itself was not. Generally speaking, a child living in poverty lacked goods and services considered essential to human well-being (Betson and Michael, 1997). Measuring poverty in such a way that it accurately reflected a child's well-being in terms of economic resources is a different matter. The United States determined the official poverty rate using poverty thresholds that were issued each year by the Census Bureau. This method for calculating the poverty rate was established in the mid 1960s and has not changed in subsequent years. The poverty threshold was updated annually to account for inflation (National Poverty Center, 2005).

According to the Census Bureau (www.census.gov) the poverty definition was:

Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less that the family's threshold then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid and food stamps).

U.S. Census Bureau News

This section of the review of literature pertained to national statistical data that related to poverty. The information contained in this section was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's website (www.census.gov).

On Tuesday August 28, 2007 the U.S. Census Bureau reported that for the first time in a decade, the nation's official poverty rate had declined. Unfortunately the decline was not a statistically significant difference (from 12.6% in 2005 to 12.3% in 2006). In numbers, there were 36.5 million people in poverty in 2006 with a disproportionate number being children.

In 2006, about 9.8 percent (7.7 million) of the nation's families were in poverty. Married-couple families had a poverty rate of 4.9 percent (2.9 million), compared with 28.3 percent (4.1 million) for female-householder, no-husband present families and 13.2 percent (671,000) for those with a male householder and no wife present. The poverty rate for these types of families in poverty showed no statistically significant change between 2005 and 2006.

For people 65 and older, the poverty rate was lower (9.4 percent) in 2006 than in 2005 (10.1 percent). For children younger than 18 (17.4 percent) and people 18 to 64 (10.8 percent) the poverty rate remained statistically unchanged.

In 2006, the South continued to have the highest poverty rate at 13.8 percent. The other three regions of the U.S. had poverty rates that were not statistically different from one another: 11.5 percent in the Northeast, 11.2 percent in the Midwest and 11.6 percent in the West. The West was the only region to show a statistically significant change in the number and percentage in poverty: 8 million and 11.6 percent in 2006, down from 8.6 million and 12.6 percent in 2005.

The Census Bureau (www.census.gov) also reports on real median household income. Median income is the amount which divides the income distribution into two equal groups, half having incomes above the median, half having incomes below the median. The medians for households are based on people 15 years old or over with income. Between 2005 and 2006 the real median household income for white households rose 1.1 percent from $50,100 to $50,700. This was the first household income increase for white families since 1999. Asian households had the highest median income at $64,200, followed by non-Hispanic white at $52,400. Hispanic and black household income levels were $37,800 and $32,000 respectively. Income levels remained consistent with no notable change for each of these groups. The Northeast ($52,100) and West ($52,200) had the highest household incomes followed by the Midwest ($47,800) and the South ($43,900).

How Did We Get Here? Trends in Childhood Poverty

During the first 25 years after World War II, our nation experienced a robust economic growth and decline in poverty (beginning in the 1940s through the early 1970s) (Corcoran and

Chaudry, 1997). According to official measures of poverty, both the child and adult poverty rates declined significantly from the late 1950s through the 1960s (Betson and Michael, 1997). The mid 1970s marked the end of a long trend of rising living standards and the end of falling poverty rates. According to Corcoran and Chaudry (1997), the proportion of Americans with poverty-level living standards stopped declining and then rose. From 1973 to 1979, economic growth came to a halt, average family income stagnated, and poverty levels went through modest cyclical changes. Corcoran and Chaudry (1997, p. 42) reported:

> From 1979 to the present, poverty has grown, rising strongly during economic recessions and declining modestly during periods of economic growth. In the new turbulent economy no large group has fared worse than families with children, with more of them becoming poor. From 1979 to 1983, the child poverty rate climbed from 16 percent to 22 percent and the rate for children under 6 rose from 18 percent to 25 percent.

According to the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan, in the late 1950s the poverty rate for all Americans was 22.4 percent or 39.5 million people. These numbers declined steadily throughout the 1960s (reaching a low of 11.1 percent) and began to rise again in 1980. By 1983 the number living in poverty had risen to 35.3 million or 15.2 percent. Into the 1990s, the poverty rate remained above 12.8 percent and was 15.1 percent or 39.3 million individuals by 1993. There was a decline for the remainder of the decade, 11.3 percent in 2000. Since then, poverty rates rose each year to 12.7 percent in 2004 and as previously stated the decline seen since this time was not statistically significant (National Poverty Center, 2005).

Children living in poverty represented a disproportionate share of the poor in the United States (National Poverty Center, 2005). (A child was defined as an individual under the age of 18. Children living independently, living with a spouse, living in group quarters, and children ages 14 and under living with only unrelated adults were excluded from the definition.) Children were 25 percent of the population but represented 35 percent of the poor population. In 2004, 13

million children, or 17.8 percent, were poor. The poverty rate for children varied substantially depending upon race and ethnic origin. Black and Hispanic children represented an overwhelmingly high percentage of poor children at 33.2 and 28.9 percent respectively. White only (non-Hispanic) represented 10.5 percent, while Asian children were at 9.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Report, 2004).

Low-Income versus Poor

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, for 2007, the federal poverty level (poverty threshold) was $20,650 for a family of four. Children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level were referred to as poor. But research suggested that, on average, families needed an income of twice the federal poverty level to meet basic needs. Families and children were defined as low-income if the family income was less than twice the federal poverty threshold.

In 2006 in Alabama, 23 percent of children lived in poor families while an additional 20 percent were in low-income families. Additionally, 75 percent of children in single-parent families in Alabama were poor. Of the children in poor families, 42 percent were black and 12 percent were white (nccp.org, 2007).

Poverty, Taxes and Welfare in Alabama

The extent and severity of poverty in Alabama had defined much of the state's history (Flynt, 2004). As a largely rural state in the early 20th Century, physical isolation caused the rural poor to remain invisible. Flynt (2004) compared the phenomenon to that of fickle lovers as

middle-class, upwardly mobile citizens lived their lives the poor remained out of sight and therefore out of mind.

According to Flynt (2004), in 1960 38 percent of white Americans who were over the age of 14 earned less that $2,000. During the same era, children under age 18 along with adults 64 and older were the Alabamians most likely to be poor. In 2000, Alabama had the nation's second lowest family welfare payments and a state income tax that started taxing earnings of a family of four at $4,600 a year, approximately a third of the federal poverty level. In comparison, Mississippi had a tax threshold for a family of four set at $15,000. Sales taxes on food, clothing, electricity and prescription drugs deepened the affect of the regressive Alabama tax system for the poor as a higher proportion of their income was spent on these items than non-poor.

Modern welfare in Alabama began in 1883 (Flynt, 2004). When established, the Alabama legislature required counties to establish a separate fund to assist the poor. Many poor people rejected welfare related aid and saw it as insulting and condescending. Poor whites tended to resent the gesture more than poor blacks. Many believed that welfare was too identified with blacks, derelicts and moral misfits. The result was half or more of Alabama's poor were white throughout the 20th century. Still, middle-and upper-class Alabamians routinely described poverty and the welfare system as predominantly an African American predicament.

In Alabama, poverty did operate most oppressively on blacks (Flynt, 2004). Unlike children of poor whites, a poor black child could work hard and earn a college degree and other necessary attributes needed to obtain a professional position but still faced discrimination based on skin color. In contrast, a poor white child could travel a similar path and ultimately hide their origin by learning to play golf, joining the country club and moving to the suburbs. Flynt (2004) ascertained that "whether welfare primarily helped poor people, sought to control them, or

manipulated them into middle-class values, religion, and work ethic remains unresolved (p. 192)."

Effect of Poverty on Children's Educational Outcomes

Children living in poverty were considered at-risk by many and simple comparisons of poor children to their non-poor counterparts shed light on why. Fauth, et al (2002, answers.com) stated:

National data sets indicated that poor children were more likely to do worse on indices of school achievement than non-poor children. Poor children were twice as likely as non-poor children to have repeated a grade, to have been expelled or suspended from school, or to have dropped out of high school. They were also 1.4 times as likely to be identified as having a learning disability in elementary or high school than their non-poor counterparts.

A major cause for concern was the fact that children living in poverty were often rated "low" academically upon entering kindergarten. Smith and colleagues (1997) found that family poverty was significantly associated with lower scores on several measures of child cognitive and school readiness outcomes for children age three to four years.

The average cognitive test scores of pre-school children in the highest socioeconomic group were 60 percent above the average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group before entering kindergarten. At age 4, children who lived below the poverty line are 18 months below what was normal for their age group; by age 10 the gap remained and for children from the poorest families, the gap was even larger. The average third grader from middle-income families with well-educated parents knew about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents who did not talk as much to them had vocabularies

of around 4,000 words (Klein and Knitzer, 2007). Thus the gap between low-income children and their middle-class peers was both real and significant.

During middle childhood, the effects of poverty were similarly striking. Among children age 5 to 12, the effect of family poverty on child achievement paralleled the findings for young children. Family poverty was significantly associated with lower reading and mathematics achievement scores.

Children living in families with incomes less than half the poverty threshold (deep poverty) scored nine to ten points lower on cognitive ability than children in near-poor families (150 percent to 200 percent of the poverty threshold) at age three to four. Persistently poor children, those who spend all of their childhood years in poverty, experienced more negative cognitive and educational outcomes than their peers who experienced only short-term or transient poverty (Smith, et al., 1997). The effects of poverty seemed to be greatest when poverty occurs early in the child's life, when it was persistent, and when children live well below the poverty threshold (Fauth, et al., 2002).

Why does family income have such a profound impact on child development? Dahl and Lochner of the National Bureau of Economic Research (2005) provided several explanations for the causes. First, poverty was associated with increased levels of parental stress, depression and poor health. These conditions tended to adversely affect a parents' ability to nurture their children. A 2004 report from Child Trends and Center for Child Health Research found that in 1998, 27 percent of kindergarteners living in poverty had a parent at-risk for depression compared to 14 percent of other kindergartners.

Additionally, low income parents report a higher level of frustration and aggravation with their children, and these children were more likely to have poor verbal development and exhibit

higher levels of distractibility and hostility in the classroom (Parker et. al, 1999). Parents with extra family income might have also used that money for child-centered items such as books, quality daycare or preschool programs, better health care or to move to a better neighborhood (Dahl and Lochner, 2005). Children living in poor families may have had a worse home environment or other characteristics that the researcher did not observe. These omitted variables may have been part of the reason for substandard achievement and may have continued to affect children's development even if family income were to rise (Mayer, 1997).

Ruby Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty

Author, Ruby Payne (2005), ascertained that poverty was relative. If everyone in a community has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth was vague. Much of her writings revolved around the idea of hidden rules that existed among poverty, middle class and wealthy classes of people. She described hidden rules as "the unspoken cues and habits of a group (p.37)." These rules varied for each socio-economic class. According to Payne, education was "valued and revered as abstract but not as reality (p.42)" for people in poverty. Her writing supported the belief that people in poverty tended to believe in fate and the idea that one could do little to mitigate chance.

Payne defined poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources (p.8)." By her definition, resources included financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models and knowledge of hidden rules. Although there was merit in her writings, she gave a number of scenarios that clearly do not typify southern poverty and some that are out of touch (at best) as to how African-Americans related to one another

(whether in poverty or not). Despite this, she was “the leading U.S. expert on the mindsets of poverty, middle class and wealth” according to the cover of her book.

Teacher Quality in High-Poverty Schools

In consideration of the aforementioned data, what were teachers and school administrators to do in effort to successfully educate children who live in poverty? Quality teachers were the key. According to Murnane (2007 p. 162):

Equality of educational opportunities had been part of the rhetoric of American political life for many years. Reality, however, did not match the rhetoric. Children living in poverty, disproportionately children of color, tended to be concentrated in schools with inadequate resources and poorly skilled teachers. Many of these children were likely to leave school before earning a high school diploma. Even if they graduate, many left school without the skills needed to earn a decent living.

Schools where the needs were greatest do tend to have ineffective teachers in place. Teacher pay and working conditions were two of the commonly cited reasons (Murnane and Steele, 2007). It was no surprise that teaching in a high-poverty school was not an easy task.

Murnane and Steele (2007) argued that while money may not be a primary factor in deciding whether or not to teach, it may have played a role in teacher decisions about where to teach. Working conditions were also a consideration. Working conditions include class size and contract hours, as well as more difficult to measure concepts such as facilities quality, parent support, school leadership quality, collegiality within the school, and curricular autonomy (Murnane and Steele, 2007). Dilapidated facilities, frequent turnover among struggling school leaders and weak parental support also contributed to a school having a difficult time attracting

effective teachers. Urban school districts serving large concentrations of low-income students had trouble attracting and retaining effective teachers (Murnane and Steele, 2007)

Health Insurance and Prenatal Care

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), both the percentage and the number of people without health insurance increased in 2006. The percentage without health insurance increased from 15.3 percent in 2005 to 15.8 percent in 2006, and the number of uninsured increased from 44.8 million to 47 million. The percentage of people covered by government health programs decreased to 27 percent in 2006 from 27.3 percent in 2005. With an uninsured rate in 2006 at 19.3 percent for children under the age of 18, children in poverty were more likely to be uninsured than all children.

The health of low-income Americans suffered because health insurance was not universally available and people without health care tended to not practice preventive health care. Of the more than 46 million non-elderly Americans without health insurance, 65 percent had family income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. An additional 16 percent of the uninsured had income between 200 and 300 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Even when lower income families had insurance, they may have found themselves "underinsured". Sixteen million people or 9 percent, among those aged nineteen to sixty-four, have health insurance but were considered underinsured because they have inadequate financial protection against high health costs (Weil, 2007).

According to the online source www.opportunityagenda.org (2007), without health insurance coverage, adequate prenatal care was not likely. Prenatal care was vital and there are

documented risks of late or no prenatal care. Early prenatal care had numerous benefits. Studies showed that adequate care:

1. Improved birth outcomes by diagnosing treatable conditions and encouraging better maternal health habits.
4. Reduced maternal smoking.
5. Served as an introduction to the health-care system for some women, allowing physicians to evaluate nonobstetric conditions.
6. Offered a valuable opportunity for impoverished women to connect with other needed social services.
7. Presented an occasion for providers to educate mothers regarding numerous health issues affecting their pregnancy, including diet and nutrition, immunizations, weight gain, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, benefits of breast-feeding, and injury and illness prevention.
8. Decreased rates of pregnancy complications in comparison to women who initiate late or no prenatal care.
9. Provided a cost-effective way of potentially decreasing the incidence of preterm birth and low birth weight, problems that are among the leading causes of infant mortality in the United States (www.opportunityagenda.org, 2007).

Improper prenatal care and lack of health insurance caused to health related ailments that would otherwise be prevented. Children in poor and low-income families suffered as a result.

As indicated in this review, children in poverty faced a myriad of obstacles (both academic and health-related) as did the teachers who cared for them daily (such as poor working

conditions). Childhood poverty was not a new concept, yet understanding the entirety of its effects on education and student achievement continued to be a complex, multi-layered issue.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) first introduced the construct of self-efficacy in 1977. Since that time, self-efficacy beliefs have received increasing attention in educational research, particularly in studies of academic motivation and of self-regulation (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996).

There were three major areas of emphasis. Researchers have explored the link between efficacy beliefs and college major and career choices, particularly in science and mathematics; and have suggested that efficacy beliefs of teachers were related to their instructional practices and to various student outcomes (Ashton and Webb, 1986); and researchers have reported that students' self-efficacy beliefs were correlated with other motivation constructs and with students' academic performances and achievement (Pajares, 1996). According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, individuals possessed a self system that enabled them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, motivation, feelings and actions. This self system provided reference mechanisms and a set of subfunctions for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behavior, which resulted from the interplay between the system and environmental sources of influence. The results of this self system were a self-regulatory function that provided individuals with the capability to influence their own cognitive processes and actions and thus altered their environments (Pajares, 1996).

Teachers' Perceived Efficacy

What effect does a teachers' self-efficacy have on her ability to perform effectively in the classroom? According to Bandura (1997):

The task of creating learning environments conducive to development of cognitive competencies rested heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers. Evidence indicated that teachers' beliefs in their instructional efficacy partly determined how they structure academic activities in their classrooms and shape students' evaluations of their intellectual capabilities (p. 240).

Teacher efficacy had significant implications. It not only affected a teacher's behavior in the classroom, but also the effort that they exerted in teaching, the goals they set and their levels of aspiration (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001). Teachers with a high sense of instructional efficacy operated on the belief that difficult students were teachable through extra effort and appropriate teaching techniques. They believed that they can enlist family support and overcome negating community influences through effective teaching (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tended to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994). These teachers were also more receptive to new ideas and were more willing to experiment with new techniques to better meet the needs of their students (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly and Zellman, 1977; Guskey, 1988; Stein and Wang, 1988). When things did not go smoothly or when there were setbacks, efficacy beliefs influence the level of persistence and resilience. Greater efficacy enabled teachers to be less critical of students when they made mistakes (Ashton and Webb, 1986), to work longer with a student who was struggling (Gibson and Dembo, 1984), and to be less inclined to refer a difficult student for special education (Meijer and Foster, 1988; Poddell and Soodak, 1993).

On the other hand, teachers who have a low sense of instructional efficacy believe there was little they can do if students were not motivated and that the influence teachers exert on students' cognitive development was extremely limited by unsupportive or oppositional influences from the home and neighborhood environment (Bandura, 1997). Jackson, et al (1986), reported that some teachers find themselves beleaguered day in and day out by disruptive and nonachieving students. Eventually, their sense of inefficacy to fulfill academic demands took a stressful toll. Burnout was not at all uncommon in academia. It encompassed a syndrome of reactions to prolonged occupational stressors that included physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of the people being served, and a lack of any sense of personal accomplishment (Jackson, Schwab, and Shuler, 1986; Kyriacou, 1987; Maslach, 1982).

Early Measure of Teacher Efficacy

Researchers reported a variety of problems with existing measures of teacher efficacy. The validity and reliability of the existing measures were questioned which created confusion and debate. According to Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy (2001), one cause for the confusion was that many measures reveal a two-factor structure (external and internal) when subjected to factor analysis and researchers have continued to debate the meaning of these two factors (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001).

The idea of measuring a teacher's perception of her own capabilities began with a simple measure consisting of two items. The two items were buried within an extensive questionnaire but proved to be the most powerful factors examined by Rand researchers in their study of teacher characteristics and student learning (Armor et al., 1976). The Rand researchers conceived teacher efficacy as the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the

reinforcement of their actions, that was whether control of reinforcement lay within them or in the environment. Teachers who believed that the influence of the environment overwhelmed their own ability to have an impact on a student's learning exhibited a belief that reinforcement of their teaching efforts was outside their control or *external* to them. Teachers who demonstrated confidence in their ability to teach difficult or unmotivated students displayed a belief that reinforcement of teaching activities was within the teachers' control or was *internal* (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001).

The Rand measure asked teachers to indicate their level of agreement with two statements. The sum of the two items was called teacher efficacy (TE), a construct that purported to reveal the extent to which a teacher believed that the consequences of teaching – student motivation and learning—were in their own hands or internally controlled (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001). Tschennen-Moran and A. Hoy (2001) reported on the Rand measure:

> Rand item 1 stated: "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment." (p. 784).

Teachers who expressed a strong agreement with this statement believed that environmental factors overwhelmed any power that they can exert in schools. They believed that factors such as parents' education, conditions of home life, social and economic class, race and gender had a very real impact on a student's motivation and performance in school. Teachers' beliefs about the power of these external factors compared to the influence of teachers and schools had been labeled general teacher efficacy (GTE) (Ashton, Olejnik, Crocker, and McAuliffe, 1982). Rand Item 2 stated:

> "If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students" (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001, p. 785).

Teachers who agreed with this statement indicated confidence in their abilities as teachers to overcome factors that could make learning difficult for a student. These teachers often had experienced past success in boosting students' achievement. This aspect of efficacy had been labeled personal teaching efficacy (PTE) because it was more specific and individual than a belief about what teachers in general can accomplish (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001).

Other Efficacy Measures

Not long after the first Rand study was published, Guskey (1981) developed a 30-item instrument measuring responsibility for student achievement. For each item, participants were asked to distribute 100 percentage points between two alternatives, one stating that the event was caused by the teacher and the other stating that the event occurred because of factors outside the teacher's immediate control. Scores on the *responsibility for student achievement* (RSA) yielded a measure of how much the teacher assumed responsibility for student outcomes in general. The 100-point scale was eventually scaled down to a 10-point measure for the teachers to divide between the alternative explanations. Guskey found a significant positive correlation between teacher efficacy (TE) and responsibility for student achievement (RSA).

At the same time that Guskey developed the RSA, Rose and Medway (1981) proposed the teacher locus of control (TLC), a 28-item measure in which teachers were asked to assign responsibility for student successes or failures by choosing between two competing explanations for the situations described. Half the items on this measure described situations of student success and half described student failure. For each success situation, one explanation attributed the positive outcome internally to the teacher and the other assigned responsibility outside the teacher, usually to the students. Likewise, for each failure situation, one explanation gave an

internal teacher attribution and the other blamed external factors. Rose and Medway (1981) found that the TLC was a better predictor of teacher behaviors than Rotter's internal-external (I-E) scale, probably because it was more specific to a teaching context. Early measures of teacher efficacy were grounded in Rotter's social learning theory (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001).

At some point during the confusion about how best to measure teacher efficacy, an unpublished measure used by Bandura (undated) in his work on teacher efficacy had circulated among researchers. Bandura (1997) pointed out that teachers' sense of efficacy was not necessarily uniform across the many different types of tasks teachers are asked to perform, or across the different subject areas. As a result, he constructed a 30-item instrument with seven subscales: efficacy to influence decision making, efficacy to influence school resources, instructional efficacy, disciplinary efficacy, efficacy to enlist parental involvement, efficacy to enlist community involvement and efficacy to create a positive school climate (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001). This measure attempted to provide a multifaceted picture of teachers' efficacy beliefs without becoming too narrow or specific.

The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale

Participants in a seminar at Ohio State University on *self-efficacy in teaching and learning* worked on a new measure. The seminar included two researchers and eight graduate students. All eight had teaching experience ranged from 5 to 28 years, with a mean of 11.9. The group explored several possible formats for a new efficacy measure. They decided on a measure based on Bandura's scale, but with an expanded list of teacher capabilities (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001). After pooling the items, the group discussed them and attempted to gain consensus on each item. From Bandura's 30-item scale, 7 items were eliminated and 23 were

retained. Nineteen remaining items generated by the group described relevant tasks of teaching that the Bandura scale did not address. Some of the areas addressed included assessment, adjusting the lesson to individual student needs and dealing with learning difficulties. Each item was measured by a 9-point scale ranging from 1-Nothing to 9-A Great Deal. An example of items were:

1. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?
2. How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school
3. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?
4. To what extent are you able to tailor your lessons to the academic level of your students?

The new measure was named the *Ohio State teacher efficacy scale* (OSTES) and it was examined in three separate studies. This process reduced the original instrument from 52 to 32 items. The second study further reduced it to 18 items consisting of 4 subscales. In the third study, 18 more items were developed and tested and 2 forms were created as a result (a long form with 24 items and a short form with 12 items). These instruments were then examined for factor structure, reliability, and validity. The analysis indicated that the OSTES could be considered reasonably valid and reliable and that the long and short versions should prove to be useful tools for researchers (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001).

Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement

Early studies (Coleman et al., 1966) reported that the characteristics of a school had little effect on student achievement, but rather differences in family background caused the most variation. Edmonds (1979) refuted these findings by identifying a list of effective schools

characteristics such as strong leadership from the principal, high expectations and a systematic means for evaluating students. Essentially, good schools were a direct result of good leaders. This claim that there was a direct relationship between the quality of the administrator and student achievement had been indefinable (Hoy, Hoy, and Tarter, 2006).

In a recent study (Hoy, Hoy, and Tarter, 2006), researchers found that academic optimism (academic emphasis, collective efficacy and faculty trust combined) was a greater indicator of student performance than socioeconomic factors or school leadership. Academic emphasis consisted of setting high academic goals and expectations while maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment. In other studies (Hoy and Hannum, 1997; Hoy and Sabo, 1998; Hoy, Tarter and Bliss, 1990) where socioeconomic factors were controlled, academic emphasis and achievement were positively related.

According to Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004), perceived collective efficacy was the judgment of teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the actions required to have positive effects on students. Bandura (1993) found that there was a relationship between academic achievement and perceived collective efficacy. Schools where collective efficacy was lacking showed academic decline or showed little academic progress.

Like collective efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students was a collective school property (Hoy, Hoy, and Tarter, 2006). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) concluded that trust consists of five facets: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Few studies have examined the role of trust and student achievement. One study (Goddard et al., 2001), demonstrated a significant direct relationship between faculty trust in students and parents and higher student achievement, even when socioeconomic status was controlled. Faculty trust in parents and students encouraged a sense of collective efficacy which caused teachers to insist on

higher academic expectations (Hoy, Hoy, and Tarter, 2006). The study of self-efficacy was on-going and the research was plentiful. It seemed clear that this often elusive concept can be instrumental in determining the success of a teacher in a high-poverty school.

School Culture

School Culture Defined

According to Stolp (1994), school culture was set of historically transmitted patterns of meaning to include norms, values, beliefs, traditions, ceremonies, rituals and myths understood, albeit in varying degrees, by members of the school community. There was no shortage of definitions for school culture or culture in general yet none was universally accepted as the one best definition (Deal and Peterson, 1999). Geertz (1973) defined culture as the web of significance in which we are all suspended. Bower (1966) simply suggested that culture was the way we do things around here. The shared values and beliefs that closely knit a community together was how Deal and Kennedy (1982) defined it. According to Schein (1985), culture was:

> "a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems…that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems" (p. 9).

Elements of School Culture

Symbols and rituals represent an important part of school culture (Roberts and Pruitt, 2003). They served to reinforce the values that bond the members together (Deal and Peterson, 1998). The graduation ceremony was seen as the ultimate ritual and was full of symbolism. Symbols and rituals that took place throughout the years tended to reinforce shared values, motivate the members and keep the vision in mind (Roberts and Pruitt, 2003).

Celebrations shaped and maintained the culture of the school and encouraged progress toward the community objectives and toward the shared vision (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Honoring and celebrating positive action sent an effective message of what was valued to old and new members of the school community. Public celebrations honored and recognized behaviors that supported the school vision and served as a powerful motivator that helps to maintain a positive school culture (Roberts and Pruitt, 2003).

Roberts and Pruitt (2003) stated:

> "Culture binds people together. The culture in a learning community school is student-focused and collaborative. Members share the belief that everyone is a learner. Teachers engage in research and problem solving, examining their practice with the ultimate aim of improving student performance. In this culture, collaboration and collegiality are highly valued. Staff members work together, help one another, and share ideas" (p. 172).

According to Roberts and Pruitt (2003), Williams and De Gaetano (1985) explained:

> "There are three major layers of culture. In the deepest layer reside the values, shared beliefs of the community members. This layer is often so taken for granted that it is difficult for an outsider to see it readily and, indeed, it may be hard for some members to articulate at this level. This level represents the "why": *Why do we do things the way we do them?* In the middle layer are the activities, the day-to-day practices that make up the ongoing life of the school. This is the "how" layer: H*ow do we do things around here? How are staff meetings conducted? How are parents received into the building?* On the surface layer are objects, the things that we are evident even in the absence of any community members. This is the "what" layer: *What do we see and hear when we walk around the school after hours?* The hall displays, the amount of student work exhibited, the way furniture is arranged, and the slogans that are posted are some of the things that give us clues about the culture of the school" (pp. 173-174).

Attaining a positive school culture was viewed as ideal but according to Peterson (2004), there was no one perfect school culture, but there were some features of positive cultures that tended to lead to success. First, there needed to be a widely shared sense of purpose and values that was consistent and shared across staff members. In an absence of this, the culture demonstrated fragmentation and often times, a conflict. Secondly, there were group norms of

continuous learning and school improvement that whereby the group reinforced the importance of staff learning and a focus on continuous improvement in the school. The third was a sense of responsibility for a student's learning. Peterson (2004) explained that, as adults we may assume that the staff really believed and felt responsible for student learning but, in some schools they blamed the students for not being successful. In a positive school culture, however, the staff really felt a sense of responsibility for the learning of all students.

Black Culture in High Poverty Schools

"School environments with high concentrations of poverty are thought to have adverse effects on educational and social outcomes above and beyond the effects of individual poverty itself (Peterson, 2006 p. 118)." According to Peterson (2006), school segregation could worsen black student achievement by minimizing contact with white students due to a notion known as "concentrations of poverty". He further ascertained that:

> Rather than emphasizing the positive effects of a majority white school environment, authors such as McHorter and Ogbu have emphasized the negative effects of "black culture" particularly in secondary schools, whereby a black (school) culture discourages high achievement on various grounds (e.g., it is tantamount to "acting white"). Thus, even in desegregated schools the potential benefit of having a majority white environment may be negated by adverse effects of black peers. School administration and faculty can create a school culture that challenges the conventional black culture by setting very high academic standards and demanding high performance (p. 118).

School Culture Triage

The school culture triage was a common means of measuring school culture (Center for Improving School Culture). Measuring the degree to which the following three behaviors were present in a school or school district was most helpful in assessing the school culture according to Phillips (1993). These behaviors included:

1. Professional Collaboration: Do teachers and staff meet and work together to solve professional issues e.g. instructional, organizational or curricular issues?
2. Affiliative/Collegial Relationships: Do people enjoy working together, support one another and feel valued and included?
3. Efficacy or self-determination: Are people in this school here because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as true professionals or, do they simply see themselves as helpless victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy (www.schoolculture.net/triage.html)?

School culture was an important aspect of educating all children, whether in poverty or not. In an interview, Peterson (http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/ali/exhibits /1000488/) emphasized just how powerful culture was to the learning of students and the productivity of the school. In this age of intense accountability, and the use of data, and a focus on building structures for school, the importance of school culture must not be misjudged. Schools must have the kind of heart, soul, and spirit that our kids deserve; we are not going to have the kind of productivity that we hope to achieve without this. It was critically important to be able to understand the school culture and shape it in everything we do.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership allowed teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members to play a significant role in the decision making that affected all aspects of the school. In the shared leadership structure, members of the school community worked collaboratively in groups and made decisions by consensus. Shared leadership means many more people than the administrators have the information and the power to make decisions and enact changes. Instead

of one or two people making decisions alone, teams made decisions by consensus after all participants had voiced their opinions and support for the change. Shared leadership required an operational structure that allowed more people to lead the thinking of the school and to participate in making decisions at all levels (www.turningpts.org).

School Leadership Team

Leadership teams were a common structure in schools using a shared leadership model. According to the National Turning Points Center, Center for Collaborative Education, the leadership team organized and coordinated the school's effort as its members gathered information, guided the vision-making process, and communicated the school's progress to members of the school community. To undergo major change, an organization needed people that understood the change process, was committed to it, and were willing to take responsibility for its success. Whole-school change needed extensive coordination, communication, and management. The leadership team accepted the vital role of leading the change process that a school underwent while ensuring that the faculty and staff were a fundamental part of all change (www.turningpts.org).

Shared leadership, also known as shared decision-making (SDM) was seen as time-intensive in nature especially when teams were not properly trained (Smith and Piele, 1996). Team members may have received training in decision-making, critical thinking and conflict resolution. Professional consultants or experienced facilitators provided training and/or support in implementing this structure (Smith and Piele, 1996).

According to the National School Boards Association (www.nsba.org), well functioning leadership teams had the following features:

1. Purpose: Members proudly share a sense of why the team exists and were invested in accomplishing its mission and goals.
2. Priorities: Members knew what needed to be done next, by whom, and by when to achieve team goals.
3. Roles: Members knew their roles in getting tasks done and when to allow a more skillful member to do a certain task.
4. Decisions: Authority and decision-making lines were clearly understood.
5. Conflict: Conflict was dealt with openly and was considered important to decision-making and personal growth.
6. Personal traits: members felt their unique personalities were appreciated and well utilized.
7. Norms: Group norms for working together were set and seen as standards for every one in the groups.
8. Effectiveness: Members found team meetings efficient and productive and looked forward to this time together.
9. Success: Members knew clearly when the team had met with success and shared in this equally and proudly.
10. Training: Opportunities for feedback and updating skills were provided and taken advantage of by team members.

Administrator and Teacher Concerns

Smith and Piele (1996) found that some administrators viewed decision-making as a territorial issue and were more concerned with protecting their own turf than "seeing the big

picture" (p. 230). Teacher reluctance was also noted in schools attempting to initiate SDM. Smith and Piele (1996) stated:

> Some teachers opted out because of lack of time to devote to the process. Others were only interested in making class-room level decisions or were subject to pressure by colleagues to resist – perhaps because SDM was seen as just another fad. If principals decide to initiate (this model) they should be prepared to work with teachers over a long period, and seek to determine teachers' understanding of the meaning of the change (pp. 230-231).

Smith and Piele (1996) stated, "As promised, SDM does seem to result in greater teacher satisfaction. Many studies have found that teachers are pleased that their views can influence school decisions." (p. 237). They further ascertained:

> The principal must create a noncompetitive, win-win school climate by promoting trust through modeling and teaching group skills. Principals also need to model values and behaviors such as collaboration, equity, and professional development. These set the direction and tone of the school in order for change to occur (p. 233).

School Partnering

Schools have often partnered with businesses, churches and universities but there was limited research on one school partnering with another. Cradleboard Partners facilitates a school partnering model where a Native American class was partnered with a non-Native American classroom. Teachers were given materials and online resources to communicate with the partner class. According to www.cradleboard.org, the purpose of the Cradleboard Teaching Project was provided educators more enriching, accurate Native American material in all schools.

Non-Indian students and teachers were encouraged not to be shy, but to ask anything they really wanted to know about Native American people and culture. The partnership attempted to overcome ignorance together. Students asked things like: Do you live in tipis? Have you ever seen a real Indian tipi? Can you vote? Are you angry at the United States? Do you smoke pot in those peace pipes? What things are important to you? (www.cradleboard.org)

The partner classes do researched together, established study buddies and some even arranged visits with the partnering class. The teachers also engaged in email exchanges and set up chat rooms for others to access.

Smith and Piele (1996) summarized:

> While not sufficient in itself to make schools more effective in educating students, school-based management gives school personnel who want to perform better an added means to do so. SBM gives site administrators and faculty members an opportunity to reexamine their goals and practices and to secure resources suitable for the improvement strategies they devise (P. 203).

Leadership in High-Poverty Schools

According to The Center for Public Education (2005), a principal who was an instructional leader was a common factor in high-performing high-poverty schools. Carter (2000) asserted that the presence of a strong principal who held everyone to the highest standards was the most notable factor in creating a high-performing school. Kannapel and Clements (2005) were surprised by the variety of leadership styles they observed among principals in high-poverty schools, yet found mostly “non-authoritarian” principals who led by collaborative decision-making. Carter (2000), in contrast, emphasized the autonomy of principals: "effective principals decided how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach."

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature that is pertinent to the research. To effectively address the research questions stated in Chapter One, it was necessary to review the areas of poverty, teacher self-efficacy, school culture and shared leadership. The research supported the stance that educating children in poverty was often challenging. This study examined how the

self-efficacy and perception of school culture of a teacher-leader (a member of a school leadership team), was affected when working in a high-poverty school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Origination of Dissertation

I began my career in education teaching English and Physical Education in a high-poverty high school. Recognizing that there were challenges in teaching children from this background, I became acutely aware of the difference that the relationship with a teacher could make. I believed then, as I do now, that children in poverty who have positive experiences in school will likely go on to achieve at a level comparable to their non-poverty counterparts. The teacher made the difference. I became an advocate for children and knew then that I wanted to be a teacher who made a significant difference in the lives of these children. As principal of a school where 98% of the children live in poverty, there were many opportunities to work with families and community leaders who were agents for change. Working with the teachers was most interesting albeit challenging at times.

I had always loved change. New challenges and experiences had always provided purpose and drive for me to develop myself into a better person, despite the difficulties. The experience of being a principal at a high-poverty, typically low-performing school enhanced my enthusiasm for studies related to educating children in poverty.

Prior to my appointment to principal, I served as an assistant principal in an affluent middle school. During my tenure in this position, I often felt an internal conflict. Although most

of the students at this school came from an affluent background there were many who did not and I witnessed the difference in how these children were treated and how they were perceived by their teachers. Having grown up in poverty myself, this did not bode well with me. I made the decision to apply for and was offered the principalship in which I served for four years. The experience of being a principal in a high-poverty school led me to crave to learn more about the challenges faced by the teachers who choose to teach in this environment.

Qualitative Research Design

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) described qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p.3). The basic purposes of qualitative research were to describe, interpret, verify, and evaluate. The use of qualitative methods allowed the researcher to inductively answer research questions through rational data analysis (Hittleman and Simon, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methods eliminate constraints and allows for detailed and in depth study of selected issues (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). This design was most appropriate when quantitative measures cannot adequately describe or interpret a situation. The emergent nature of the qualitative research design afforded a degree of flexibility, openness, and heightened responsiveness.

Merriam (1998) emphasized that qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding and summarized its five basis characteristics:

1. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed with regard to their experiences.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.

4. Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy.

5. The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive (pp. 5-9).

Portraiture as a Research Methodology

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture was an eclectic process that searches for what was good and healthy and made the assumption that the expression of goodness would also reveal imperfections. They further ascertained:

> I wanted to reshape the relationship between researcher and audience. More specifically, I was concerned with broadening the audience for my work, with communicating beyond the walls of the academy. Academicians tend to speak to one another in a language that is often opaque and esoteric. Rarely do the analyses and texts we produce invite dialogue with people in the "real world". Instead, academic documents, even those that focus on issues of broad public concern, are read by a small audience of people in the same disciplinary field, who often share similar conceptual frameworks and rhetoric (pp. 9-10).

The focus of the portraiture was intended to be on narrative and the use of metaphors and symbols with the intent to address a wider more eclectic audience. The writer wrote to inform and to inspire the reader and to entice readers to think more deeply about the issues that concern them (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). "The portrait then creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history." (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997 p.11)

The portraitist sought to identify emergent themes in the metaphors, symbols, and vernacular of the actors (the study participants). The central core of the institutional culture was then represented by the words or phrases that resonate through meaning and symbolism (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). In generating this portrait, my intention was for the stories shared to embody the values and perspectives of the teachers. I listened for stories that

related to rituals and ceremonies that punctuated the role of these teacher leaders in the lives of the children and community in which they served.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated that the themes often take shape through the triangulation of data. The convergent themes sometimes did not emerge through the triangulation of data sources. As a result, the consensus was not clear and the story was more scattered. If using a quantitative method, the scattered data points would mean that the investigator would not have a story to tell. In converse, a qualitative researcher, viewed the divergent and dissonant views themselves as a story. The portraitist attended to the lack of consensus, in an effort to make sense out of the dissonance, often trying to discern the underlying patterns. The researcher questioned whether or not there was coherence underneath this seeming chaos. "Is there a line of reasoning, a logic, a reasonable explanation for why these perspectives seem divergent? We see the portraitist's hand as she constructs a theme that will explain the dissonance, that will bring order to the chaos" (p. 209).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), in summary:

> Portraiture is a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography. But it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy (thus linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation), in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity (the traditional standards of quantitative and qualitative inquiry), and in its explicit recognition ofthe use of the self as a primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied (pp. 13-14).

Research Questions

The fundamental questions which guided this study were:

1. How does the experience of being a member of a school leadership team in a high-poverty school affect a teacher's self efficacy?
2. How does a shared leadership model within a school partnership affect a teacher's perception of the culture of a high poverty elementary school? and
3. How do teacher leaders in high-poverty schools view the students and parents of their school community?

Selection of Study Participants

Because this study was based on the view of teacher leaders, the participants were members of their school leadership team. Because the research study involved school employees, permission from the superintendent was first obtained. Patton (1990) stated that, "qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully" (p.169). He further stated that, "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p.169).

In addition to being on the school leadership team, the following criteria was used to select participants: 1) At least 5 years of teaching experience in a high-poverty setting; 2) Demonstrated involvement in school activities outside the classroom (such as member of school committees or PTA); 3) Demonstrated school leadership activities (i.e. chairing committees or applying for National Board Certification); and 4) Involvement in community activities outside of school.

Potential participants identified through the sampling strategy were be contacted via telephone to secure an initial agreement of participation and to schedule a subsequent interview date and time. The nature of the research questions, methods, and procedures were discussed. An

email acknowledging participation and interview confirmation was sent to each participant. Participant availability, time constraints, and other logistical concerns were considered and factored as appropriate.

Ethics and Qualitative Research

Merriam (1998) stated, "Concerns about validity and reliability are common to all forms of research, as is the concern that the investigation be conducted in an ethical manner (p. 212)." She went on to state:

The investigator-participant relationship and the risks differed considerably between experimental and qualitative research. Cassell proposed a continuum for analyzing risk risks and benefits in different types of research. At one end was biomedical experimentation; the investigator had considerable power. Other categories, placed in descending order of control, were psychological experimentation, face-to-face surveys, mailed surveys, field or participant observation studies, nonreactive observation, and secondary analysis of data. Obviously, whenever the investigator held great power and control, there was a danger of abuse and thus a great need for guidelines and regulations (p.213).

Study Safeguards

The teacher leaders were teachers from two high-poverty schools within the same school district. Because I served as principal of one of the schools, special care was taken to ensure that any risk to participants was eliminated. To this end, all teachers were tenured in their positions and were not on an evaluation cycle. Furthermore, a post-interview was conducted. This peer interview process was done by Dr. Leroy Gradford, a retired educator, who was in no way

affiliated with either school. During this process, participants had an opportunity to anonymously express any concerns that they may have had about the study. This information was relayed to me with their identity protected. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to review documents written prior to their submission. Feedback was encouraged throughout the process of this study and participants were made aware that they could withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

"Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict (Merriam, 1998 p. 214)." As a researcher, I took great strides to ensure that the participants of this study were protected and that their privacy was safeguarded each step of the way. As an ethical leader, I took exceptional care in working with these teachers so that they did not feel judged. As the researcher and interviewer, I acted as "neither a judge nor a therapist nor a cold slab of granite- unresponsive to the human issues, including great suffering and pain that may unfold during an interview (Merriam, 1998 p. 214)."

Data Collection Techniques and Interview Protocol

According to Patton (1990) "qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents" (p.10). The primary data source in this study was in-depth, open-ended interviews with the study participants. Study participants underwent two or more recorded interviews conducted by the researcher. These recorded interviews were transcribed or summarized. Each participant was given an opportunity to review and edit the transcript or summary before publication. Follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant in order to clarify data analysis, confirm

interpretations, and further explore emerging themes. The researcher ensured that the interview environment was comfortable and conducive to confidential discussion.

Interviewing was viewed as possibly the most common data collection technique used in qualitative studies in education and program evaluation (Denzin and Guba, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) detailed the purpose of the interview.

> The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind…but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (p. 278).

There were several types of questions that an interviewer may ask: hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position and interpretive (Merriam, 1998). I used a combination of these while avoiding yes-or-no questions and leading questions. Sample interview questions included the following:

1. Tell me about your background and educational experiences. Where did you grow up? Number of siblings? Family structure?
2. Do you remember when you made the decision to teach? What was your vision of being a teacher?
3. Suppose I am a student in your class who is struggling academically. What would it be like?
4. Some people would say that an academically gifted student would suffer academically in a high-poverty school. What would you say to them?
5. Would you say that teaching in a high-poverty school is different from what you expected? Explain.

6. Describe the students of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.
7. Describe the parents of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.
8. Describe the teachers and staff of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.
9. What is your greatest challenge teaching at this school? How do you overcome it?
10. Some people would say that schools with low test scores must have ineffective teachers. What would you say to them?
11. How important is shared leadership to you and what role, if any, does it play in your ability to be an effective teacher?
12. Suppose I am a new teacher on your school leadership team. What should I expect for the school year?
13. On a scale of 1 to 10 how much influence do you feel you have towards student achievement? Student behavior?
14. Do you see yourself as a teacher-leader? If yes, how does this effect your interaction with other teachers?
15. Describe a time when you experimented with a new strategy or method in an effort to reach a struggling student.
16. If you could change one thing about this school, what would it be and why?

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative data analysis, was described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) as the process of systematically searching and arranging data accumulated through interview transcripts, field notes, and other related materials. Analyzing data involved organizing, categorizing,

synthesizing, and defining patterns that are significant and meaningful to the case under study. Patton (1990) proposed an inductive analysis of data. This meant that the critical patterns, themes, and categories emerged and were identified from the data rather than being imposed before data was actually collected and analyzed (p. 390).

Data analysis techniques could have taken on several forms. According to Merriam (1998) "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 162). Data collection methods in this study included interviews (transcriptions), notes, and researcher observations. Data and interpretations were continuously checked with study participants to determine and document accuracy and validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These monitoring guided decisions related to further data collection. Interviews were summarized or transcribed, then coded along categories and analyzed qualitatively.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the research methodology to be used to conduct this study. Research questions and sample interview questions were included. Additionally, this chapter reviewed the qualitative method portraiture as well as the data analysis process to be used. Ethical concerns and safeguards to protect the participants were also discussed. My role as principal and researcher must be considered as I proceed with this study. Acting in an ethical manner while conducting this study was imperative to not only protect my participants but also to ensure the validity of my research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Story telling was a common form of teaching and learning in an elementary school classroom. As such it was an appropriate and profound method to express the complex and intangible truths as seen through the eyes of the five teacher leaders who participated in this study. The focus of this portraiture study was on narrative and the use of metaphors and symbols with the intent to address the audience in a wider more eclectic aspect. This portraiture was written to inform and inspire the reader and to entice readers to think more deeply about the issues that concern them (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). I, the portraitist, created "a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p.11).

This study included five participants. Five portraits were written to address the responses and observations attained from each. The portraits were divided into sections that included the teacher in the classroom, his or her view on educating children on poverty and his or her views on shared leadership, teacher self-efficacy and school culture.

I identified emergent themes in the metaphors, symbols, and vernacular of the actors (the study participants) through interviews and observations. As I interpreted the actions of the participants through observations, the central core of the institutional culture of each of the two schools was represented by the words or phrases that resonate through meaning and symbolism.

In generating these portraits, my intention was for the stories shared to embody the values and perspectives of the teachers. I listened for stories that related to rituals and ceremonies that punctuated the role of these teacher leaders in the lives of the children and community in which they serve.

The portraits included in this study encompassed much more than mere story telling. My intent was to gather data while in the field and give an authentic voice to my participants. While doing so, I recognized and acknowledged that as the portraitist, my voice was everywhere. This included my assumptions and preoccupations as well as my own world view. The questions that I asked were guided by my own experiences which included my cultural and educational background. Despite this, my voice must not overshadow those of the participants although at times it may be heard in unison. I spent hours talking to and observing my participants, and attempting to draw clear meanings from the data. After coding and hours of analytic scrutiny, emergent themes presented themselves.

In my view, teacher leaders in high-poverty schools were often overlooked by researchers who study school or teacher effectiveness, teacher self-efficacy and school culture. The ability to give a voice to those not often heard was an attribute of portraiture that makes it an appropriate methodology for this study. I wanted to investigate the phenomena and experiences that created meaning, values, and attitudes for teachers in connection to teaching children in poverty. More specifically, my purpose was to explore their level of self-efficacy and how teacher leaders perceived the culture of their high-poverty schools. The goal of this study was to use teachers' portraits as voices to advocate and empower not only themselves, but the voices of their students and school community. The secondary goal was to use the process of portraiture as a reflective

tool for helping teachers understand their own influence in the lives of the children they teach. The research questions were:

1. How does the experience of being a member of a school leadership team in a high-poverty school affect a teacher's perceptions of his/her self efficacy?
2. How does a shared leadership model within a school partnership affect a teacher's perception of the culture of a high poverty elementary school? and
3. How do teacher leaders in high-poverty schools view the students and parents of their school community?

In this investigation there were three data sources: interviews, observations, and documents. These data served as multiple sources of data for triangulation and as checks for trustworthiness and validity. I analyzed the data using a sensitizing framework of theory, assumption, and thought experiments related to my own experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Background

Meeting of the Minds

I believed that addressing my background would add to the understanding of this study, because my own experiences, beliefs and perceptions were a guiding factor in completing this research. As a first year principal, I learned rather quickly that the role of a principal was complex and the day to day tasks were often daunting. Perhaps this was intensified because of the high poverty level of the school community, low test scores and the apparent discord among the faculty and staff. I enjoyed change and I welcomed new challenges so the idea of transforming this school (maybe even the community) into a source of pride, intrigued me. I

believed then and do today that leadership was the key, but I also recognized that as a newcomer, my influence could be somewhat limited as some of the teachers and staff had been at this school nearly as long as I had been alive. Over the years, they had witnessed principals, policies, programs and procedures come and go.

In an effort to solve problems, I began regular brainstorming meetings with a colleague from a similar school. Initially, we jokingly referred to our sessions as Meeting of the Minds. Acting as sounding boards for one another, we planned faculty meeting topics, completed paperwork, discussed school budgets, journaled and even conducted a two-person book study about effective leadership. Taking place in one of our offices, our favorite eatery or the comfort of one of our homes, our meetings were sometimes impromptu and other times scheduled in advance. Either way, we looked forward to our sessions and as a result, problem solving became a pleasant challenge rather than an overwhelming task and my confidence as a leader dramatically improved. It was no longer "lonely at the top". After several months, however, we decided that if two heads were better than one, then surely two school teams were better than one as well; thus we began our school partnership or "Meeting of the Minds". Each school's leadership team consisted of certified teachers and support staff.

We developed a schedule of meeting dates and chose unique locations such as a children's museum, the Chamber of Commerce and even a local law firm's conference room. Our meetings included leadership breakfasts, quarterly off-site meetings and monthly committee planning meetings. Guest speakers and presenters included the school superintendent, local CEOs, community organizers, and the like.

We knew that we needed team members who could influence others in ways that, even as principals, we could not. After reading and discussing the merits of an article by Reeves (2006),

we were convinced that change in "behavior does not stem from a rational consideration of evidence, but from an emotional attachment to a trusted colleague. Most workers do not feel this kind of attachment to higher-ups" (Reeves, 2006). We therefore chose our leadership team members based on their abilities to reach and influence the rest of the faculty and staff. Those selected included some unlikely choices if viewed from an outside perspective.

The Leadership Teams

At our first joint leadership team meeting, we spoke to our teams about shared vision and mission statements and the power of school culture. Out of this meeting we developed a clear vision and mission for the school partnership. Our vision, we determined, was to create model schools that succeed against the odds. Our mission was to empower students in high-poverty schools to maximize their potential despite the obstacles of their everyday lives.

With a vision and mission in place, we sought to collaborate more effectively with our teachers and to assist them at doing so with one another. My colleague and I also considered the role of our joint leadership team. We needed our team members to provide input through research and collaboration, chair various committees, disseminate information, provide mentorship within the school and district and to act as change agents. Above all, we needed our team members to maintain a strict focus on student learning. By ensuring teacher empowerment and school autonomy, our teacher leaders were free to do what they believed was best for their students' learning.

Realizing that we were placing new demands on teachers, we considered ways to nurture and support our leadership team members. We wanted them to have a larger degree of autonomy but did not want to overwhelm them. One step to this end was to pair a teacher leader at one

school with one from the other thereby creating individual support networks. Teachers were encouraged to plan together and to use their partners in much the same way that I and my principal colleague had worked together for the previous year.

Additionally, we ensured that our leadership team meetings were fulfilling and that we in no way came across as "just one more thing" for our hard working teachers to do. For example, we included teachers in the planning process of meetings and used their feed back to guide the agenda. We sought sponsorship from business partners and provided the teams with excellent meals and a professional setting. In addition to leadership training, guest speakers provided words of encouragement and shared success stories that were possible because of inspirational teachers. The meetings provided invaluable professional development and team building but also gave teachers a motivational boost unlike any that we could have perceived possible prior to the school partnership. The result was two leadership teams, often functioning as one very well-oiled machine.

The Schools

Mid-City Elementary and West Side Elementary Schools were high-poverty schools within the same school district. The district was considered inner-city by some but that term was frowned upon by many others. Of the two schools, Mid-City had the higher poverty level at ninety-eight percent while West-Side reported a rate of eighty-one percent poverty.

Mid-City Elementary School had traditionally been one of the lowest performing schools in the district. The school community was visibly impoverished. The majority of the students lived in single-parent families with mothers who had little or no post-secondary education. For example, one mother was under 30 years of age with three children and felt as though it was too

late to pursue a GED and showed little interest in job training programs offered by the local housing authority. She, like most of the parents had not completed high school. Many students came from families that were second and third generation impoverished and were considered to be in deep poverty. In any given year, up to fifteen percent of students were in foster care and another twenty to twenty-five percent were being raised by a grandparent or other relative. Students entered school with limited background knowledge, as most do not attend a high-quality preschool program, if any at all, despite the fact that there was a Head Start program sharing the campus of the school.

The veteran faculty and staff of Mid-City had a strong bond with one another and it was often difficult for newcomers to feel accepted. Praise was given cautiously as teachers were sometimes jealous of other teacher's success and often reacted negatively when a colleague succeeded or was praised. The degree to which this affected teacher performance and collegial interactions was best seen during monthly data meetings. During these meetings, recent student data were analyzed and opportunities for celebration were sought. Upon praising the success of one teacher, another would likely react by saying, "well we're doing that too but my kids just didn't get it." Sometimes the teacher being praised would make an effort to minimize her role in the student's success so as not to shine brighter than her peers.

As with many work environments, the faculty and staff of both schools included several cliques. At Mid-City the lines were drawn primarily based on grade-level taught and age of the teachers. However, at West-Side, for years the dividing line had been primarily racial. The faculty and staff were equally divided between black and white members but their student body was eight-five percent black. Although the racial tension decreased in recent years, there was a time when one had to act with extreme caution when approaching a teacher or student of the

opposite race for fear of being misunderstood. For example, some black teachers were offended when a white teacher referred to a student as a "little black boy or little black girl" even though they often used the same language.

The community surrounding West Side consisted of primarily working class families that some may refer to as the working poor. There was also a middle-class sub-division within walking distance of the school. Most of the families with school-age children, however, requested and received transfers to schools that were not Title I and were located in other parts of the school district. Although not considered as at-risk as Mid-City, the students brought similar backgrounds and issues to the table. Student test scores tended to be higher as well as the education level of the majority of the parents. Still, both schools fought to rise above the stigma that was often attached to high-poverty schools: that the teachers were ineffective and the students were not as capable as their middle-class counterparts. My hope was that the portraits that follow will illustrate talented teachers who teach from their heart while serving children and families living in poverty.

Jessica's Portrait

Jessica, a veteran teacher at Mid-City, grew up idolizing her teachers. Her family was not wealthy and she describes it as not being the "educational type of home" yet she and her three siblings were expected to do very well in school. "We got no support what so ever. We never had books in our house until we got big enough to go to the library to check them out ourselves." She has often stated that her brother was highly gifted and taught himself to read before starting school. Jessica did not follow suit and described herself as an average student who worked hard because she knew she was supposed to.

Early in her life, Jessica always admired her teachers and enjoyed being at school. She put her teachers on a pedestal. As early as age nine, she remembered being drawn to young children and looked forward to playing with them. She knew long before college that she would be a teacher but reflects fondly on a time while in college. It was an Easter egg hunt with plenty of youngsters and she recalls "loving it" as she interacted with them and helped them hunt for eggs.

"I had lots of jobs before teaching and I really never enjoyed a single job, even the library job. I didn't enjoy working in stores or serving food. Office work was the worst! I don't like filing!" She laughed as she reminisced about her life before teaching.

During her college years, Jessica envisioned her life as a teacher. It revolved around working with young children and because of the lack of support that she felt at home, she wanted to "help kids who others may not see as strong students."

"I knew that my math skills were weak and that I needed to do a lot of reading." It was easy for her to teach children and to enjoy it because she had spent so much time learning for herself. She truly valued the power of learning and the miracle that takes place when students read a book and open their imagination.

Jessica took a serious and personal interest in students who were not working on grade level. In a classroom setting her goal was to provide encouragement which meant sometimes behaving in ways that many might considered going overboard. This was evident the day she taught writing to fifth graders.

Jessica's Classroom: No Apologies

As I looked at the young faces in this classroom, I saw anticipation. I saw a hunger to learn and an even greater desire to succeed. In the same observation, I also saw several boys and girls who were frustrated and likely felt a sense of dread. Many of the students in this class were weak writers and without an intense dosage of focused instruction, they would likely score poorly on the upcoming state direct assessment of writing test. Jessica was animated as she encouraged her students to think and to imagine. Several students raised their hands to respond to her query as to what should occur next in their narrative.

"Yes! That's perfect Tony!" she energetically responded to one student's response. Her energy was contagious. Looking around the room, I observed that each of the seventeen students in her class is engaged and they each seemed to understand what was expected of them.

Jessica was a curriculum specialist who previously consulted with a number of schools in the district. Writing was her specialty and this was quite evident as she expertly questioned students and pulled responses from them that many teachers could not. For example, she was able to do this even with students who were considered difficult or struggling learners. Jessica believed in equity in education and ensured that she was not a teacher who only called on students who were sure to know the answer. Instead, she worked the room and did not accept no for an answer.

"I don't want to leave those students out who need a little think time or maybe some prompting." Jessica demonstrated this as she used body language to encourage a student to keep going with her train of thought. She motioned for others not to interrupt giving the girl who appeared to be shy, time to articulate her response. She apparently felt that doing otherwise would be doing her students a disservice. Even when working with students who did not read very well, Jessica

insisted that they participate in literature circles or writing lessons and that they listened while she instructed. This was a challenge for many of the students in this class because many were poor writers and had routinely scored low on local and state level assessments. Jessica believed that she had to "make some students put forth their best effort because they will wait until answers are given to them and let their classmates perform the bulk of the work. It's the nature of the beast," she said jokingly.

She expressed some regret as to how some of her lessons may be perceived by outsiders but made no apologies for her intent to engage the students academically and to motivate them to try their best. "Give it a try. Some of you are just sitting there and I know that you can do this. The words are up here," she emphasized pointing to the board. Jessica was emphatic as she instructed fourth grade students on how to answer open-ended math questions requiring multiplication. "I want to know if you're having a problem or if you get stuck but I won't have time to check everyone's work right now. Who is over there yacking? You don't do that in the middle of my class. You need to listen to this. Temeka, do you know what you will write here? Come on! Look at it and read it again if you need to."

As I observed the students, many were in deep concentration and were clearly working to gain an understanding of the concepts being taught. Several others talked to one another when Jessica was not looking and made fun of one another for no reason that was apparent to me. I recognized that this is the type of behavior that created a source of frustration for Jessica, especially at this point in the school year.

She later explained to me that "these types of word problems stump our kids if they get stuck on the vocabulary or the way the sentences are structured. That's why I spend so much time just looking at the way the problems are written and giving them lots of examples just using

different numbers or slightly different scenarios. I know they can do it but they need lots and lots of repetition. I just wish that the [other] teachers had done more during the school year so we didn't have to push so hard just before testing." She shook her head and appears obviously frustrated. These feelings were significant for Jessica because they not only reflected her professional expectations but also touched on her perception of the school culture.

Jessica on School Culture: A Needed Sense of Urgency

As a leadership team member, Jessica had been trained in and exposed to varied definitions of school culture. When asked how she defined school culture she replied, "It's the way we treat one another and it defines what is and is not acceptable in how we do our jobs. It can be positive where we work well together with a common focus or negative where people do their own thing." When Jessica considered what an ideal school culture would look like, she used words such as organized, security and happy. She believed that teachers and staff should be on time and prepared daily, entering the building and their classrooms with a positive attitude and expectations of student success. Parents should be welcomed and made to feel comfortable but would also be a source of assistance for teachers by grading papers and allowing teachers to have duty-free lunch periodically. Jessica asserted that "Parents would ask questions about grades and for clarification of the rules, rather than only coming to the school when students misbehave." There would be security for students and staff members that would create a sense of trust and comfort. Above all, "there would be a sense of urgency and a renewed sense of purpose and hope each day. Failures would be discarded and it would be acceptable to express that you care about individual students."

The culture of Mid-City was lacking a sense of urgency according to her perception. She looked disappointed as she explained that "teachers are not looking for more information or to borrow books and I have never worked in an environment where that was the case. They are not open for change. They're not looking for answers. They're not excited. The teachers are mostly dedicated but are gripey and too harsh to the students. They are not tender or sweet although I have seen it improve a little over the last year or so. Some are jaded about what the kids can do."

"Why do you believe that some teachers are jaded?" I asked. She sat, thoughtful for a moment and then replied, "They just don't truly believe that all of our kids can excel. I know that we have a high percentage of students who perform low but nearly all of them make a measured amount of progress each grading period. The progress could be even greater if there was more of a sense of urgency and belief that it's possible."

When asked to elaborate about the statement of the teachers being dedicated she replied, "I just mean they spend lots of hours at the school. They are here every weekend and until late in the evenings during the week. Some of them talk about teaching at this school as a calling from God and I think they believe that. They would not want to teach anywhere else."

We talked more about the dedication that she saw and how it conflicted with the other attitudes mentioned. "They work hard but not smart. Too many times they cover for each other." She described a time when a new teacher, Mr. Moore (pseudonym), repeatedly came to work late and his grade-level partner, Ms. Tate (pseudonym), covered both classes and made a variety of excuses for his tardiness. Ms. Tate even lied for him on occasion. Eventually it became known that Mr. Moore was working a second job and was not released until 7:30 making it impossible for him to be at work until shortly after 8:00. Teachers were to be in place by 7:45. Jessica never understood why Ms. Tate felt it necessary to lie rather than tell Mr. Moore to come and talk to

the principal. “I know you well enough to know that you would have understood and I know you would have worked with him; especially considering the fact that he needed that job until he started receiving his teacher pay.” She described the behavior exhibited in this scenario as counter-productive.

As I reflected on the example given, I too remembered the situation quite clearly. I recalled feeling a sense of dismay that Mr. Moore felt like he needed to be dishonest. Even more than that, I remembered being disappointed that Ms. Tate, who I had known for nearly two years, also felt it necessary to be dishonest. I thought it interesting that Jessica insisted that she knew that I would have “worked with” Mr. Moore had I known. Her assertion was correct. She knew this because my relationship with Jessica was different in part because of her membership on the leadership team.

Clearly, Jessica saw some faults in the existing school culture of Mid-City. Her overall score on the School Culture Triage Survey was 58 which indicated that change and improvements were needed. A score of 60 would have indicated that the current culture should be monitored and positive adjustments should continue. When asked about specific responses she emphasized that it was difficult to answer certain parts of the survey. Professional collaboration for instance took place to some extent school-wide but the varying degrees of implementation were based on grade-level and the depth of the teachers’ relationships.

According to Jessica, this was particularly true for the statement “Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues”. She had observed some teachers engaged in these kinds of discussions on their own but believes that to be a rare occurrence. Instead, she explained that teachers had to be prompted to discuss these items and that most such conversations occurred at data or faculty meetings.

According to Jessica, she could have positively impacted the school culture of Mid-City by demonstrating the proper way to speak to students and adults politely. She believed that we must "hold students to high expectations for civility. Encourage cleanliness and neatness in the building and in work done by students. Be prompt and prepared for duties, instruction and all other responsibilities. Communicate with faculty, students, and parents. Include support staff in faculty activities and make them a part of the educational process." She paused briefly before she concluded.

"We need to all work better as a team and avoid negative conversation that has no meaningful purpose. The list could go on and on but I do think we need to always consider the types of conversations we have with each other. Being negative or mean serves no purpose and it sets a poor example for our students." We both agreed that the students were quite perceptive and paid very close attention to the relationships and conversations held by the adults in the building.

Jessica on Poverty: Learning Mercy

"This year was one of the best because of the large number of volunteers. We had so many to come for the entire year. Many students put forth the effort to work for the volunteers" Jessica recalled.

The volunteers came from local churches, businesses, fraternities and colleges. They were recruited to work with the students of Mid-City due to the high level of poverty which resulted in a lack of resources and support, to include academic support. Jessica was the key contact person for the volunteers.

As she thought about her early teaching years, Jessica remembers, "When I first worked with children in poverty, I was shocked. It was harder than I could have ever imagined. You just cannot understand the magnitude of the problem. It took me a while to really understand the children. I remember getting angry at one student who always fell asleep in my class. I was really hard on him and it didn't seem to matter to him so I took him to the office. The principal said a few words to him and sent him back to class. He then explained to me that the family owned a small gas station and he worked nights pumping gas. I always imagined that little boy pumping gas at 11 or 12 at night and I felt horrible. You have to know where they come from. My mindset was not there in my first year teaching. I learned mercy."

Jessica described a student ("Terry") who she had encountered more recently as being "troublesome and angry" until she had established a relationship with him. This particular young man was in third grade when Jessica first encountered him. Although his performance in class indicated he was working slightly below grade-level, standardized tests showed that he was proficient, or working on grade-level, in both reading and math. Jessica worked closely with his teacher and began to develop positive relationships with most of the students in his math group. Terry, however, was quite resistant and defiant. He talked while she was teaching, harassed other students, and refused to follow directions.

When Terry was in third grade, Jessica pulled him aside to discuss his behavior before sending him to the office. He still refused to comply and was sent to the office numerous times throughout the year. The following year proved to be just as challenging.

"I hug all the kids and even though he wanted to refuse, I hugged him anyway. Finally, when he was in fifth grade, he accepted me and my hugs. I don't know if it's because I'm white or what but for whatever reason it took time for him to trust me. A lot of them (students) have a

hard time with trust because of what they have been exposed to in relationships with other adults." Jessica made it clear that, although it remained a challenge, "ensuring positive interactions with children in poverty contributes to the overall school culture."

Shared Leadership – We Need More!

Jessica described the shared leadership and school partnering model as "absolutely necessary and we need more!" As a consultant for the school district before she became a teacher at mid-city, she had established relationships with many of the teachers prior to her employment. That insight allowed her to better understand her colleagues' teaching styles but did not make her an integral part of the school community. She was an outsider.

"I have never been on the outside until now but I don't think it's racial I think it's my position." Jessica was white and all of the classroom teachers were black. There were other white teachers and staff including several leadership team members. Her position as curriculum specialist required that she give feedback to teachers based on observations, walk-throughs or because of my direction. Needless to say, the feedback was not always positive and "that made things tough for me. I want to be accepted by the teachers but I am walking a fine line between telling them what to do and being accepted. I try to be supportive but I'm going to do what I have to do as far as curriculum. I accept them and try to prove myself to them by how I treat the children and if that's not enough then, I'm sorry" she complained.

When I asked if she felt her isolation was because of the leadership team or her position, she was not sure. "I like the leadership team. Classroom teachers are the most important. Being on the team gives them a better understanding of what needs to be done. I know I have a job to

do. When I am not included in social affairs [outside of school hours] it kinda bothers me a little and I hope it's not my personality."

Jessica described the team meetings as collaborative, engaging and enjoyable. When at meetings she participated generously and gave input and insight that was beneficial in decision-making and completing processes. During the team's first off-site meeting of the year, she was asked to present a session relating to using test score data to complete the school Continuous Improvement Plan. Jessica was quite thorough and patient with the teachers from both schools. She prepared materials for each teacher and masterfully explained herself while making connections with the teachers. Many considered this as her area of strength.

"I enjoy teaching. I love the kids but teaching my peers is a great way for me to remain sharp." Jessica's enthusiasm and positive demeanor were true assets to the leadership team meetings. Other teachers flocked to her table and clearly enjoyed working with her and being in her presence. Teachers may not have included her socially but there was no question that they respected her knowledge, dedication and work ethic.

Jessica on Self-Efficacy: Teachers Have Power

Jessica moved about the room effortlessly as she conducted a review of skills. She was comfortable and confident and it resonated clearly as she interacted with a small group of four students. Watching her left little doubt that she believed that what she was teaching would have an impact on her students. Not only that, but she obviously believed that what she was teaching was important for the students to learn. Most of her students seemed to respect the fact that she would not allow them to fail.

"I am capable of helping a child succeed as long as time is available and the child will make an effort," Jessica stated emphatically. She described a scenario involving two students who were working at about the same level academically. One worked hard and was persistent and the other had a lax demeanor and displayed challenging behaviors. For example, he typically stopped working within minutes of getting his assignment. Whether it was math or writing, he would scribble his answers quickly and then start talking to other students or get up and walk around, bothering other students. Jessica worked equally hard with each child and the student who worked the hardest made more progress. She did not give up on the other student though and continued to push and encourage him.

"I want students to believe in themselves. I give them opportunities to succeed. I start them on a level that is below the frustration level so that success is a probable outcome. Then, find their areas of interest and expertise so that we can focus on topics that will hook them. Then learning becomes fun and rewarding."

Jessica believed firmly that time and effort from the child was most important although she also fully accepted and acknowledged her role and responsibility as a teacher. Her experiences taught her that teachers have the power to make an academic impact on their students. In her classroom, all students were treated as if they are gifted because she believed that all students can be high achievers.

Mid-City Elementary had for years been one of the lowest performing schools in the school district. Like most educators, Jessica recognized that test scores did not tell the whole story. She regretted that many members of the school community had a negative opinion of Mid-City simply because of the test scores. "Test scores are not all our fault. We have a difficult time attracting experienced teachers. Stronger and more experienced teachers would improve scores

in schools like ours. I think that more experienced teachers should be placed in schools [like ours]" she said.

In the years that she has taught at Mid-City she has seen a number of new teachers come and go. On two occasions, the teacher did not survive for a complete school year. One teacher, Ms. Jones (pseudonym), taught fifth grade and cried almost daily. On one particular day, the students were talking loud to her and being extremely disrespectful. Jessica was delivering materials to the adjoining classroom and went to assist Ms. Jones. Several students had to be removed and isolated. The following day Jessica asked if she could be assigned to assist Ms. Jones during her small group instruction. We made adjustments in her schedule to allow time for her to team teach and conduct one small group in the fifth grade classroom. The students behaved better during the time that Jessica was present but would resume the rowdy behavior almost immediately after she left.

"Ms. Jones was scared of the students and had little confidence in herself. She did not believe that she could make the students behave or that she could truly teach them because of their attitudes. And she was probably right!" Jessica exclaimed. Ms. Jones resigned after less than three months. That experience helped shape Jessica's view of what skills and attributes are necessary to successfully teach students in Mid-City.

Unlike Jessica, Ms. Jones did not exhibit high self-efficacy. Teacher efficacy has significant implications. It not only affects a teacher's behavior in the classroom, but also the amount of effort that he or she will exert in teaching (Tschannen-Moran and A. Hoy, 2001). Teachers with a high sense of instructional efficacy operate on the belief that difficult students are teachable through extra effort and appropriate teaching techniques. Jessica argued that

because she lacked efficacy, Ms. Jones was unable to successfully engage her fifth grade class at Mid-City.

Jessica, in contrast, believed that she can reach even the most difficult student and would certainly embrace the challenge. “I have a lot of influence but the data may not show it immediately. It takes years to see the results.” Jessica was visibly disappointed at the realization that her efforts may not be seen for years to come although this thought in no way discouraged her from putting forth the effort to give each child that she encountered her very best.

Barbara’s Portrait

Growing up in Miami, FL, Barbara recalled her childhood with a slight grin. She grew up as the only child of “an older set of parents.” Summers were filled with many opportunities to work with children and she took full advantage of that.

“My mother was in education for 32 years and I remember helping her set up her classroom in the summer and coming to her room after I got out of school. She seemed happy. I used to think that teaching was the only career option worth pursuing.”

Barbara’s father, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, was supportive and worked briefly as an educator too. He was a math professor at a local community college and worked with the Boys Scouts of America where he later retired. She stated that her parents molded her way of thinking as it relates to loving children and treating people fairly regardless of their background.

She reflected, “I believe that I am able to teach at a school like Mid-City because of how I was raised. My parents instilled a caring spirit in me that I hope my students and their parents

can see." Her sincerity and thoughtfulness were seen in the creases of her forehead as she taps on the table and reflects.

Barbara's Classroom: No Excuses

"Eyes on who?"

"Eyes on you ma'am!" Barbara secured the attention of the 20 kindergarten children in her charge. She sat in her rocking chair as the students gathered around sitting on the carpet for whole-group reading instruction. Colorful posters emphasized the shapes, words, animals and other concepts that had been taught.

Barbara was quite patient as she reviewed the previous days' lesson. "What would you see in Antarctica? Look at the story book. Who can remember? Yes, we talked about icebergs! Could we write about that in our writing center?" The students responded with a resounding "Yes!"

"We could also write about penguins and glaciers. Turn and talk to your neighbor about what you want to write about today." The students were engaged and in full throttle as they expressed their topics for writing. Many writing samples were displayed on the walls and it is clear that the students were being challenged and were held to high expectations.

The interactions were positive and the praise was generous as the enthusiastic students clamor for her attention. Barbara was animated as she spoke to her students. "I need listening ears. What sound do icebergs make when they fall to sea? How can you tell that it's cold in this picture? Turn and talk to your neighbor."

Barbara listened to their responses to one another. "Guess what you just did!" she exclaimed, genuinely pleased. "Critical thinking! Excellent! Some of you talked about the

clothes that the penguins are wearing and some of you even knew that penguins can only live where it's cold. Great job!"

Barbara then instructed the students to line up for P.E. and move like a penguin would. Her students began to get in line and she praised each one as they waddled towards the door. She appeared to be proud and satisfied with the progression of the lesson. In previous conversations, she made it clear that she was acutely aware that many of her students entered kindergarten at a level that was considered academically at-risk according to district and state standards. This motivated her to be more creative and to help provide balance in the lives of her students.

"Our parents are young and have not been out of this area. They have limited exposure and cannot always adapt to the way that we operate. The way they handle a situation in their yard does not work here so most of my kids have not had good examples of what is and is not appropriate. If we didn't have to teach those skills to such a great extent, I think we could make much more progress and our test scores would zoom!"

Still Barbara taught with passion that was unmatched by most of the other teachers on her hall. In her classroom, students had fun but learning was made a priority and excuses were not accepted because "if we start accepting excuses now, we'll deal with the consequences later!"

Barbara on School Culture: We Could Always Get Better.

Barbara believed that "this community and the poverty are the basis of our school culture." She defined school culture as "how we treat each other and what we value." As we talk, she recalled a leadership team meeting when the presenter gave several scenarios that could create a positive school culture and some that could lead to a toxic culture. For example, positive conflict resolution was demonstrated as an element of a positive school culture and lack of

accountability was a feature said to be present in toxic cultures. Barbara stated "I wish that the entire faculty and staff had been there for that presentation."

I thought it interesting that she referred to the community and the poverty level as the basis of the culture and I asked her to explain. Barbara had taught at Mid-City for more than twelve years and in this time she has had some unique experiences. These experiences ranged from parents fighting in halls to students not knowing what a color is. Barbara attributed these issues to the culture of the community, and to the fact that nearly all of the families who send their children to Mid-City were extremely poor and uneducated.

"Our teachers have a lot to deal with on a daily basis. If we sometimes seem harsh, it's because we know that we have to teach these babies. An education is their only chance of getting out of this neighborhood and having a chance of a normal life. How most of them live now is not normal by anybody's standard," she added.

From her perspective, the teachers were great and each brought his or her own special gifts to the profession. She viewed this school as unique because it was a true community school and the majority of the teachers were seasoned. They knew each other very well which created a family-like environment. She admired the longevity of the staff and believed that it was one of the school's greatest strengths.

"We could have gotten jobs elsewhere, but we chose to stay here. That says a lot about our commitment to the community and to the kids. These are our kids. Someone from outside may not understand why we stay here and would not understand everything about our school culture but we are here because it is our choice. I think that speaks volumes."

Her passion was obvious. Barbara knew that there was a perception that Mid-City was a "bad" school. She did not worry about this because those preconceived notions were based on

the opinions of people who were not associated with the school. It was her belief that this could have a negative impact on the school culture if those perceptions were seen as true by the teachers and staff. “We believe in ourselves and in our kids regardless of what others may think. They assume that our children are low achievers, with a lack of motivation and that we have low expectations of them. This is simply not true.”

Barbara’s score on the School Culture Triage Survey was amazingly high. A perfect score is 85 and she scored 79. Despite the positive comments about the culture of Mid-City, Barbara acknowledged that not everyone was a “team player.” She felt that there were several people on staff who were very negative and treated students, parents and teachers unfairly.

“There is no perfect school and ours is no exception. I wish that everyone could get along or at least leave each other alone. I guess that’s not realistic. The good outweighs the bad, but I think we could always get better. Every school could.”

Barbara on Poverty: Kids Like Any Other”

Like many veteran teachers, Barbara had taught in a number of different types of schools and her experiences were varied. She taught for several years in a school in an affluent community where a large percent of the students were gifted.

“Parents who are upper middle class have different priorities for their children and they expect a lot more of the teachers and the school as a whole. Well, I should say they expect different things, not necessarily more. Very different,” Barbara stated.

She recalled a time at Mid-City where she taught a student who was a twin and remembered vividly the issues that she had with the mother. The mother routinely sent the girls to school late and often times dirty and with no book bag or other materials. On one particular

day she expected Barbara to stop teaching to talk to her about the fact that her utility bill was due on that day and that non-payment would result in having her water and electricity turned off. Barbara listened and remembered trying very hard not to be rude and "tell her off" but when she told the mother that she had to get back to her class, the mother lashed out at her verbally. She used profanity, called her names and said that the school didn't care about the kids. She even accused Barbara of not liking her daughter. The school secretary called security but the mother left the premises before they arrived.

"That would never happen at a school down south." Barbara is referring to the schools on the south side of town where the median income is higher and the schools are predominantly white.

She continued, "I believe that teachers in high-poverty schools work much harder than those in non-title schools. We have to parent the students and we give, give, give but despite that we still get cursed out and mistreated! It's frustrating at times. The parents think the kids are [cute when they misbehave] and will try to send their kids to another school just because they are mad."

Barbara attributed the behaviors and the low academics to the fact that the parents did not follow through. In her view, even though the kids were poor and lacked resources, with more consistency and support at home they would have flourished. She believed that their family income should not define their future because "they are just kids. Kids like any other."

Barbara on Self-Efficacy: My Job is to Teach!

Based on her statements about children in poverty, it was clear that Barbara did not believe that socioeconomic status should have a large impact on student learning. She did not

feel that teachers or others ought to use poverty as an excuse to accept below average academic performance or behavior. Instead, Barbara believed that teachers had enough influence to make a difference even when the student has a disadvantaged background.

"By encouraging students and giving positive feed-back I know that I can make a difference. I'm not saying that it's easy to feel that way especially when our test scores are low; but if you look at how much our students grow and improve, you can see that how we teach does make a difference," she explained.

When I was observing her teach, there was little doubt that Barbara maintained high expectations for her students. Her students demonstrated respect and a curiosity that was natural in kindergarten aged children. As the children gathered on the carpet for story-time, they each sat on their carpet square. At one point, two girls began to elbow each other as they struggled to sit in the same spot. Barbara simply called their names and looked at them sternly. The girls then sat quietly as if there had never been a conflict.

Barbara had a positive outlook as it related to teaching at Mid-City. Still she acknowledged that her confidence and efficacy had been challenged on more than a few occasions. She again recalled the twin.

"First of all the child barely knew her name because her mother referred to both girls as "Twin". But my biggest concern was that she did not know how to hold a pencil and even after several months of me working with her, she struggled with even the simplest concepts like coloring in the lines and drawing lines to match."

I asked Barbara how it made her feel to work with a student for the better part of the year and see so little progress. She sighed heavily and thought for a moment before responding.

"It wasn't the first time that I had encountered a student this low. I would be lying if I said it didn't bother me. I didn't give up on her. At that age, I still believe that help from home would have made the biggest difference."

We talked more about the fact that many of the teachers at Mid-City are parent figures to their students. When students struggled the teachers did not have an expectation that the parent would play a vital role in finding solutions. Barbara believed that she was personally responsible for ensuring that her students learned. When a student was struggling she would give more individualized instruction and sought additional help from the reading coach or another teacher. Giving instructions using pictures and hands-on examples, taking field trips and having guest speakers were ways that she attempted to provide wider experiences for her students.

"Part of the reason that my kids are behind is that they simply lack exposure. I believe that by providing experiences and opportunities for success that they can make progress. I want all of my students to work on grade-level, but I want them to feel a level of success regardless. All students deserve that."

Barbara completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Short form) and responded on each of the twelve questions with an answer of either 8 or 9 (out of 9). Upon reviewing her form, I pressed her on one of her responses.

Question 2 asked "How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?" Because she taught kindergarten, Barbara saw this as a simple task. She believed that learning should be fun and engaging and that a good teacher knows how to establish and maintain student interest.

"I love teaching kindergarten!" she exclaimed. "My kids come to me with a certain amount of excitement. I just have to maintain it and that's what teaching is all about."

Barbara taught third grade at Mid-City for six years and says that her answers to the survey would have been slightly lower had she responded as a third grade teacher. In her view, third graders at Mid-City were more difficult to motivate and their behavior was often disruptive. As a teacher-leader though, she believed that she was still capable of having an impact despite the age, grade-level, or other issues.

"Being on the leadership team has helped me understand what self-efficacy is. I do believe that I have high self-efficacy. I don't make excuses or defer blame to others or to circumstances. I am a teacher and my job is to teach. Period."

Barbara on Shared Leadership

At leadership team meetings Barbara was often quiet and observant. She often to sat with and socialized with other classroom teachers from Mid-City as well as West Side. She was quiet and had a calm presence during meetings yet would not hesitate to ask a tough but pertinent question. She was a teacher-leader but did not want or enjoy the attention that her role may have incurred.

She explained "I like our leadership team and working with the teachers from [West Side]. My job is to communicate and collaborate with the other teachers at our school and I was not comfortable with this role in the beginning."

Barbara discussed with me how she believed that she had evolved as a teacher-leader in the last three years. Initially, she was hesitant to talk to her non-team member counterparts about the experience because "it almost felt like bragging. I mean we met in executive conference rooms and had meals catered! This is not something that was ever done in our school. After the first year, I finally got it!"

Empowering and encouraging were the words that Barbara uses to describe the team meetings. She was encouraged to collaborate with her colleagues and ultimately enjoyed doing so. To this teacher-leader, shared leadership "enables [a teacher] to feel some ownership and allows one to believe that [her] opinions and judgments about our craft are validated. It boosts morale."

Leadership team membership had personal benefits for Barbara as well. She described these benefits.

"I have stepped up my game and come out of my shell. Others are looking to me for answers and guidance and it feels good to me personally to be in that position. At first I didn't know why I was chosen but now I understand and I think we all have received it in a positive way. When I am asked for comments I can give feedback and I know it means something."

In a conversation with Barbara at the close of the school year, she expressed her dismay about Mid-City closing to consolidate with another Title I school. She wished that the partnership with West Side could continue and will miss the camaraderie that had been established.

"We have worked so hard and I just hope that we are able to continue. I know that change is inevitable but what we have is too good to let go."

Roxanne's Portrait

Roxanne was raised in a "military, middle class, traditional, conservative family with strong Christian values." As part of a military family, she lived in many different locations while growing up including Illinois, New Jersey, Maryland, Italy, Texas, Georgia, Alabama and Oklahoma. She was the only girl in a family of five children. Roxanne attended Brigham Young

University in Utah and earned a Bachelor's degree in social work with a minor in psychology. She then moved to Scarsdale, NY and attended The College of New Rochelle where she earned a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education through their fifth year program.

"I moved back to Alabama and began my teaching career and have been here ever since. I am now married and have four children, all still living at home and in school."

Although Roxanne considered teaching during the time that she worked on her undergraduate degree, it was not until she was offered a grant giving her the opportunity to participate in the fifth year program that the decision to teach was made. She reflected, "Since teaching had always been something I had considered, I decided this would be a good time to try and I found it was something I enjoyed and was fairly good at. My vision then was simply to teach all children the things they would need to know to be successful in life."

Roxanne was the reading coach at West Side Elementary and had been a member of the leadership team for four years. Her position required her to work directly with teachers in a coaching capacity. She was frequently required to attend meetings with other reading coaches in the school district and then returned to the school to train teachers and also worked directly with selected students. This was a vital role for the elementary schools in the district and particularly for the high-poverty schools where there tended to be a large number of students who were struggling readers.

On the Job with Roxanne

Roxanne worked closely with the principal of West Side. They read and interpreted data frequently and often met with teachers in small, grade level groups. During data meetings she led the discussion.

"Let's look at your data. What surprises do you see? What are our areas that deserve celebration and where do we need growth?"

She paused as the four teachers study the data that was just given to them. After a few moments, one teacher began to speak. "Two of my students who I thought were on track to benchmark did not [make it] but they made a lot of progress. The other three who I targeted did bench though so that's reason to celebrate. I'm still a little concerned about this one." The teacher pointed to a name listed on her chart. The child was listed as intensive and in need of intervention.

Roxanne responded to the teacher and encouraged the others to follow suit until all had discussed her data and mentioned some specific concerns. The meeting lasted about an hour and ended with Barbara giving the teachers an article to read that addressed some explicit teaching strategies that teachers must implement with the new reading series. As they left the meeting, I could see two of the teachers talking, apparently about the article. Roxanne said that many of the teachers were frustrated about the reading series and the amount of additional work it had created.

"In some ways I understand their complaints because this series is very different from our previous one. But on the other hand, we are teachers and professionals and [we] ought to be able to adjust to changes in curriculum," Roxanne stated with conviction.

Roxanne on Poverty: A Wonderful Group of Students

When Roxanne began working in a high-poverty setting, she did not have any specific expectations. Her experiences prior to West Side included students from both high-poverty and middle-income families and she felt that there were marked differences.

"The biggest difference is that the teacher has to work harder in a high-poverty school. The planning has to be much more thought out and strategic as there are often more academic and social gaps to fill among high-poverty students." Despite the numerous challenges that this setting presented she felt that her job was very rewarding and she enjoyed finding innovative ways to meet the needs of her students.

When asked to describe the students at her school Roxanne began by giving the demographic information such as racial breakdown and percent of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. She stated that, "Most of our students come from working class poor families. Many come from broken single parent homes. Some are being raised by grandparents."

Even with the challenges that these living environments may have inferred, Roxanne believed that West Side had a good group of parents who were generally supportive. "They may not be able to be as involved as they would like to be at our school, but most are supportive. Most do not have formal education beyond high school." Still, she was proud of the PTA board as well as other volunteers and their diligent work.

The high-poverty and the family structure appeared to take its toll academically. Because her job entailed working with student data, Roxanne was aware of how the students performed on the Stanford Achievement Test and the state criterion-referenced test. "On the SAT, the majority of our student stanine scores fall in the range of below average to average. On our state test, our students fall in the range of approximately 50% proficiency and 50% non-proficiency."

She attributed these scores to the lack of background knowledge and limited life experiences that most of their students had. She also found that many of them had inadequate oral language development. "It's because of these factors that our teachers need to work harder. We have to use our data and develop strategies to meet needs that the general curriculum may

not fully address. Our test scores do not tell the whole story though. Most of our students enjoy school and are eager to learn. I find them to be a wonderful group of students to work with."

Roxanne on School Culture

Roxanne said that school culture was based on attitudes and the beliefs of those who have a vested interest in the school. In her view the teachers and staff made the culture. She had a clear perception of the culture of West Side.

"Many of our teachers are dedicated to doing all they can to meet the needs of our students. What they often lack is time for strategic planning and reflection. Professionalism can be an issue at our school. Valuable time is spent complaining among staff rather than doing. When I compare this experience to my previous school, I recall that there was some complaining but the vast majority still did their best to meet all expectations. I can't say the same for this school."

She described the teachers as being "highly qualified according to state requirements." Despite this, she noted that it was a challenge to work to meet the diverse needs of the faculty members. She attempted to overcome this issue by reflecting and keeping her focus on using the data to drive instruction. In working with the teachers of West Side, she found that some were not open to new methods of teaching to meet student needs and they feel it was "being forced upon them when they already know how to teach." This created attitudes that were difficult to work with and she believed it also led to an unprofessional learning environment. She wished that teachers would not complain about issues that cannot be changed. Specifically, the chosen reading series or certain teaching methods that were mandated by the school district (small-group instruction and scripted intervention programs). According to Roxanne, the teachers with

complaints or negative attitudes did not bring alternative solutions or work well with others to problem solve.

To Roxanne, an ideal school culture was one where "everyone's focus is on what students need, what we need to do to provide that, and then doing it. This would develop a climate where teacher learning and doing is valued by all. We don't have this at this time."

As she reflected on the previous years, Roxanne did acknowledge that the school culture had improved to some degree. This was primarily because of the "awareness of the issues that we've had. Our principal is not afraid to address the problems with unprofessionalism. Her openness has caused, or maybe even forced, some of us to be more open too." She continued and described an incident that occurred the year before.

A teacher at the school had conspired with another teacher to "get one of [their] colleagues in trouble" by accusing her of violating testing procedures for a local assessment. The principal was contacted by someone in the Research, Development and testing department of the district and had to investigate. The claim was unfounded but the incident caused a conflict among the faculty. Some teachers knew which of their co-workers had made the accusation and confronted her during their planning time. Words were exchanged and the principal addressed the incident at the faculty meeting later that afternoon.

"Our principal is usually very composed and professional but she was really mad. She talked to us about professionalism for the sake of our kids, not just ourselves. She said that what had taken place between the teachers was damaging to our school culture."

Roxanne recalled that the faculty felt convicted because even if they were not directly involved, they knew that the principal was rightly disappointed in everyone. The principal called several of the teachers in during the days that followed and individual conferences were held.

Apologies were made and hurt feelings were mended. Roxanne believed that had the incident happened several years before, chaos would have ensued and the damage would have been deeper and longer term.

Roxanne went on to say "I think we understand the power of having a positive school culture. Even though I personally have some issues with the lack of professionalism and especially the negativity at my school, I still know that it has gotten better."

Roxanne on Shared Leadership

I wondered if the changes in school culture that she described were related to the school partnering or whether Roxanne's perception may have been in part due to her membership on the leadership team. She acknowledged that being on the leadership team had marked benefits. Specifically, she was not even clear on the meaning of school culture or why it mattered until the leadership training. As for the school partnering, she thought it is great but also knew that some benefitted from it more than others. I asked her to explain.

"I love having another reading coach to collaborate with and even to vent to but I know that some of our team members didn't really take advantage of it. I mean at meetings we worked well together but some team members didn't communicate between meetings."

She believed that certain teacher-leaders were just more open than others. The benefits of the school partnering were dependent upon the openness of the individual. As for her own openness, Roxanne admitted that the relationships that she has established with other teacher-leaders, at her school and at Mid-City have made her more open and receptive to others' ideas.

"The bottom line is that we are individuals so the impact is not going to be the same for everyone. But I don't think that anyone could deny that our leadership team and the school partnership were both a good thing for West Side."

Roxanne on Self-Efficacy: We Set the Tone

Roxanne believed that her actions as a teacher could contribute significantly to student success. When students do not respond positively to an existing teaching method, she was confident that she could implement an alternative strategy to improve student learning. Furthermore, if a student did not understand a given explanation, she had been successful in providing alternative examples, thereby engaging an otherwise struggling teacher. In short, Roxanne possessed a healthy sense of efficacy.

She explained her feelings, "Students needs as well as instructional challenges are often greater at low performing schools. Therefore, teachers need more tools/strategies available to them to meet the varying needs. Teachers [that] are open and who apply what they learn will be successful in meeting the challenges of low test scores."

Roxanne considered her reading coach position as one of great influence. She worked with nearly all teachers but her focus was on the teachers in grades kindergarten through three. With years of training and education, it was vital that she was able to articulate matters related to curriculum, student data and research based instructional strategies.

"I have a good understanding of self-efficacy and I believe that if I had low self-efficacy, it would be impossible for me to do my job. The teachers are counting on me to answer their questions and to provide answers and support when they have struggling students. I just don't

believe that a person with low self-efficacy would find any success as a reading coach or really as a teacher in general."

Her healthy sense of efficacy, allowed her to work in such a capacity that she has the ability to affect student achievement and student behavior. The potential influence was great as she ascertained, "We set the tone through our expectations and through how we interact with our students. If we develop our capacity to teach and respect our students we have the potential to change lives."

Jay's Portrait

Jay was born in Santa Cruz, CA and lived there until he was 24 years old. He describes himself as a "good ole California boy" and is the youngest sibling in a family of three children. His mother became pregnant during her senior year of high school and married his father after she graduated. As a family, they were close to middle class until his parents divorced when he was 8 years old. At that point, he and his brother and sister were raised by their mother and were living at the poverty level.

Jay described Santa Cruz as a small community. During his childhood and teen years he attended one elementary school, one middle school and one high school with many of the same students. Despite this stability, he quit high school in his senior year and then completed his GED and attended a junior college in Northern California. He also attended Indiana University, and several other junior colleges where he eventually earned an associate's degree in accounting. After working in a bank for 6 six years, Jay decided that he wanted to be a physical educator. He was 30 years old and attended Alabama A&M University and Athens State College where he earned a bachelor's degree and the credentials for a teaching certificate.

"My vision of teaching was that my students would work hard, have fun in P.E. and enjoy many of the activities while learning things new about themselves and their abilities." As such, he believed that teaching should be engaging and interactive and that all teachers, regardless of their subject matter, have a responsibility to meet their students' needs.

Jay's Classroom–Patience is Key

Jay was the only P.E. teacher at West Side Elementary and he is one of only two male teachers. When he was teaching, his love for children and passion for his subject matter were apparent. He described his teaching style as "a mix of love and knowledge. This is an elementary school and I think that learning should be fun. When I first started teaching, I thought that teachers had to be serious most of the time but I no longer believe that."

As I watched Jay interact with students, I am most impressed with how he balanced the need for correction with his understanding and patience. He had to correct three boys who were pushing on each other as they lined up to return to class. Jay blew his whistle and yelled loudly, "Tyler, are you following the rules? I need you to get in line and keep your hands to yourself. The same goes for you two. Got it?"

The boys responded in unison, "Yes, coach" as they got in line. Then in an orderly fashion, the students exited the building and returned to class. Jay quickly began organizing for his next class by gathering jump ropes and replacing cones that were strategically placed. In a previous conversation, he addressed his need to remain organized.

"I see every student in this building and if I wasn't organized, it would cause undue stress. Part of my preparation for my students includes having my materials and supplies in

order." He moved quickly and deliberately and just as he finished two third grade classes entered and the students were obviously enthused and ready to begin.

Jay on Poverty–Make no Judgment

According to Jay, "The students at this school come to us from all situations." He recalled how there were many who would come up and hug teachers first thing in the morning wearing clean clothes, excellent hygiene, smiling with their backpack strapped to their back ready for their day. Others entered the school without a greeting to a teacher who may have said good morning several times. These students often appeared sleepy and look grouchy and weary. Their clothes were soiled, too big or small and do not match. Often their teeth are not brushed and they have what Jay described as "crust on their mouth and nose."

I wondered to what Jay attributed the differences and he shook his head several times before responding. "I would never accuse a parent of not caring because I do not know what is in their heart. The parents of our school come from varied situations. Some are really outgoing towards the teachers and others are not."

Jay has had parents come to him and ask what they could do to help with a school function and others would not even acknowledge his presence even when he put his head in their car to say have a good afternoon. He described a time when he attempted to talk to a parent about an incident that had occurred in his class. The parent was in the car line and on her cell phone. Even when Jay indicated that he needed to talk to her and told her what it was about, she simply held up her hand and continued to talk and laugh on her cell phone. His frustration was obvious as he talked about this incident.

"I want to help our kids and work with our parents but some of them do not make it easy," Jay stated. He told me about an incident involving children in foster care. The mother was arrested on a drug-related charge after it was reported that she routinely left her three school-aged children home alone for more than a day at a time. The children were all students at West Side and their classroom teachers were concerned because their level of care and lack of proper hygiene had become increasingly alarming. The mother was reported to the Pupil Services Department and a school social worker investigated their concerns. Within a few weeks the children were placed in a foster home. Jay was not sure of all that took place or how long the mother was in jail but he recalls hearing that she had been released by the end of the school year and was attempting to regain custody of her children.

"People in poverty experience that type of thing more frequently than middle-class families. We have to be sensitive to all our students needs but some live such tragic lives," Jay shook his head and was visibly emotional. He took a few moments and then redirected our conversation by explaining why he was happy to be a physical educator at West Side.

"The great thing about my job is that the kids look forward to coming to my class and they know they are going to have fun! I hear some of the classroom teachers complaining about their kids or about something that they are teaching. No one can say that they have ever heard me do either," he said happily.

Jay closed out our discussion about poverty by emphasizing that he loves children, all children. "Anybody who makes the decision to teach should be prepared to work with kids from all backgrounds and should not make judgments based on the financial means of a family. Any one of us or a member of our family could be in poverty one day. You never know."

Jay on School Culture–School is a Place to Learn

Jay defined school culture as "rules that define what is and is not acceptable." He went on to describe the culture of West Side as being one of hard work, stating that the demands were great and often overwhelming to the teachers. To an extent, he believed that these demands contributed to some teachers having negative attitudes. I asked him to explain.

Jay stated, "I think most if not all of our teachers work hard, but I can see and hear the frustration that a lot of them feel. Like when they know we are having a walk-through."

I understood that walk-throughs occurred frequently at West Side so I asked Jay to tell me more about the frustration. He was referring to walk-throughs that were led by members of the school district's School Improvement Team. The team visited Title I schools several times a year and according to Jay, many teachers felt undue pressure and stress as a result. The teachers viewed the visits in a negative way.

"I'm easy to talk to so many teachers will vent to me. Several believed that they know more about what our kids need than the people doing the walk-throughs. I always thought they had a good point because they are here every day and some of the team members have not been in a classroom [as a teacher] in years. I just think that type of pressure is not good for the school culture or for our morale," Jay replied.

The pressure that Jay described was in part due to the fact that West Side was a high-poverty school. Members of the district team visit all Title I schools to check the progress of the School Improvement Plan. Although, West Side generally performed better academically than other Title I schools in the district, teachers were still bound by the same guidelines.

Overall, Jay did not believe that the school culture should be dependent upon the socioeconomic level of the school community. In his view, "most schools foster learning in

relative ways. I believe that students approach school as a place to learn. I believe that the majority of students and teachers believe that they are at the school to make a difference. I believe that all schools have behavior problems, distractions, high and low students and a majority of people that care what happens there."

When completing the School Culture Triage Survey, Jay scored an overall 57. This score indicated that "Modifications and improvements are necessary." Jay responded to the majority of the statements with a 3 (Sometimes) or 4 (Often); however, he answered with a 2 (Rarely) for the following the statement: "Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company."

According to Jay, there were a few teachers who socialized outside of school but most do not. He recalled several events that were exceptions. "I didn't go on the cruise two years ago but I did hear that those who did had a great time. I think there were only about 8 or 10 who attended."

Jay was referring to a Western Caribbean cruise that 36 faculty members, family and friends from West Side and Mid-City attended in the summer of 2007. I attended along with the principal of West Side. He was correct in stating that overall only a small percent of faculty/staff attended from each school. This was due to the cost and for some the timing. The event was considered a success by those who attended to the extent that many wanted to plan another vacation for the next year. Aside from the cruise and a few other isolated holiday parties, Jay did not feel that teachers and staff wanted to be around each other outside what was required.

Despite his feelings about faculty and staff collegiality, Jay's description of what he would change about the culture of West Side revolved around the building itself. He stated that, "the building that is our school doesn't feel inviting. It is made of cinderblocks and many

classrooms do not have windows so there is very little natural light. The classrooms are small which fosters clutter and the roof leaks."

Jay believed that the teachers and students spent a great deal of time in the building and that everyone would be happier and the students would be more interested if it was naturally bright, comfortable and free of clutter. Because so much was expected of the students and staff, he would like to have seen better accommodations. Realistically, though he does not expect that these issues will be addressed in the immediate future. He concluded by recalling, "I am always in amazement when I go to beautiful campuses. I would love to explore the possibility of improving our atmosphere so that we are more comfortable and we want to be here."

Jay on Self-Efficacy–I can make a Difference

Overall Jay believed that he was able to do quite a bit to influence student learning. He does, however, recognize that as a teacher of a non-academic subject his input may not be sought to address issues concerning student learning. Jay thought, "The classroom teacher has the greatest influence. She has daily contact for [at least] 4 to 5 hours."

As we discussed the implications of teacher efficacy, Jay stated confidently, "I know that I can make a difference. I know that a student could change because of what I say or don't say. That's what I love about being a teacher." Jay went on to describe several encounters with former students who came to "check in" with him. The students had developed enough of a bond with him that they even asked his advice about high school classes. He knew that the students trusted him and that trust made him a person of influence in their lives.

He described the feeling, "It's really an honor. I mean years from now, a kid could look back and view me as part of the reason that he made it. I don't take that lightly."

Within his classroom, Jay explained that he can influence student achievement as well as behavior, "Either modeling a physical concept or behavior, I realize that students are watching. I can show students how to perform certain activities and I know students also monitor my behavior towards other students and staff. I offer corrective advice in a positive manner. Students respond to positive, respectful corrections over rigid rules. In this way, I feel that I have influence."

As a teacher with a healthy sense of efficacy, Jay also understood the importance of not abusing the influence. He admitted to knowing at least one teacher in his career who had what he described as a "God complex". "This teacher felt that she was better than her students and she mistreated them by talking down to them. She thought she was using tough love but to me she was abusing her power. Students know the difference especially when they also have teachers who truly care." Jay wanted to be viewed as one who cares about children. He would like for his teaching legacy to speak volumes of the fact that he made a difference in lives of his students.

Jay on Shared Leadership–Teachers Must "Step Up"

Jay served as a member of the school leadership team for four years. He stated that being on the team made him feel valued and involved. He explained, "Shared leadership means that even as a teacher, I can make decisions and give input about how things are done and what our goals and priorities should be. That's good. After meetings I am expected to pass information along to other teachers."

Jay remembered not fully understanding this aspect of his role of a teacher leader. He recalled attending meetings and receiving the information and talking to other teachers but not in such a way as to influence them. "At our second or third [joint] meeting [with Mid-City] the

principals did a presentation on shared leadership. I think we were given an article to read also. Basically, it was made clear that we were chosen to be on the leadership team in order to help make decisions but also to get buy-in from the other teachers."

Jay described the leadership team meetings as "packed with information" that made him think about his teaching and his relationships with others. He remembered one meeting in particular where the speaker gave a presentation on a leadership book (Maxwell, 2005). Even though Jay viewed himself as a leader he had not considered the concepts addressed in this book. The premise of the book was to lead from anyplace within an organization.

Jay stated, "I learned that there are things that I can do to lead my supervisor and my fellow-teachers. Then I read the book and was amazed to learn that most leaders are not at the top but in the middle of an [organization]."

He went on to explain how he, like many, only thought of leaders as the head of an organization. Being a member of the school leadership team changed his view. He described shared leadership as an important aspect of his teaching. Jay enjoyed the team meetings where he says team members debated ideas and concerns of the school and then actively sought solutions. In his opinion this was important. He believed that, "teachers need to be role models for their students and for one another. If all teachers are not stepping up to their own responsibilities then the school isn't most effective. The administration cannot be the sole bearer for leadership."

Carla's Portrait

A product of a blue-collar family from Connecticut, Carla always knew that she wanted to teach. She does not recall any particular moment or event that caused her to make this decision but she remembered playing school as a child and insisting that she play the role of the teacher.

During our talk, we both laughed as we each recalled our own experiences of pretending to be a teacher.

School was a special place for Carla. She explained, “I just loved school. I had a sister and two brothers and we lived in a 5-room home with a carport. My dad drank a lot and school was an escape for me. I felt safe [there] and I felt important.”

These feelings contributed to Carla’s desire to be a teacher. Growing up with an alcoholic father, she understands that children often have problems at home that greatly affect how they perform at school. She stated that she has a compassionate view of her role as a teacher because of her own background. In her career she has often been bothered by adults who lack the will to understand that a child’s home life and background play crucial roles in their ability and desire to learn.

She stated, “I remember early in my career hearing two teachers speak negatively about how a little girl was dressed for school. The child was usually not clean and sometimes had an odor. Well, I knew that the poor child lived with an aging grandmother who was raising four other grandchildren. The mother was in jail and I knew the grandmother was doing the best she could on a limited income. I also knew she loved the little girl and that it was a better alternative than foster care.”

Carla was visibly emotional as she recalled this time in her career. I asked her if she ever shared the details of the child’s life with the other teachers. She shook her head and states the regret that she feels for not having the courage to speak up for the child. “I told my principal and school counselor about it. I have grown so much as a teacher and a person since that time. If that were to happen now, I would not hesitate to speak with the teachers.”

Carla's Classroom–A Caring Spirit

Carla began her career as a kindergarten teacher. She had lots of struggling students but doubted that they realized that they were behind. As a mother of three sons, one of which is dyslexic, Carla taught her students and treated them as she would her own. In her words, "I always asked what would I do for my own? That's how I treated [my students], all the children, whether they were struggling or not. I never, ever let a child feel bad about what he or she cannot do."

As we talked, her caring spirit was obvious. Carla was the librarian at West Side and we sat in her library for our interview. During my visit she excused herself on several occasions to tend to the needs of students. She did so with patience. Several students gave her hugs as they entered or exited the library and she conversed with a few about how they enjoyed a particular book. It was clear that she had established positive relationships with her students and that she loved her job.

The library was arranged and decorated in such a way that it felt welcoming. I asked her about her space and she responded, "This library is small so there aren't a lot of options for moving things around, but it also makes it cozy. I want the students and teachers to feel comfortable. If they are comfortable and feel welcomed then they will want to come back. The students know that if they are in here, they are expected to read or check out books that they will read later."

Carla said she believes that every teacher is in a position to encourage academic achievement through reading. As the librarian, she feels that she should show exceptional leadership in this effort. She does so by working directly with teachers and students on monitoring and increasing volume of reading.

Carla on Poverty–All Kids want to be Loved

Carla acknowledged that there are challenges in teaching children in poverty, "Children (and adults) in poverty often think there is no way out of it. Sometimes they think everyone else has always had it so easy. When we discussed what they want to be when they grow up or discuss going to college sometimes a student will say he or she can't go to college because there is no money. I then share the fact that my parents paid $0.00 for me to go to school. I had to work and get loans and grants. I hope that sharing this makes them realize that others have done it and they can too."

West Side was not the first high-poverty school in which Carla has taught. In South Texas, she taught at a school with a large Mexican-American population. This was her first teaching position. Over half of her students could not speak English and an interpreter had to interpret everything she said. There were limited amounts of books, toys and teaching resources, but the school set high goals for academic achievement to be reached by the end of the year.

Carla also taught at a private Catholic school and a Blue Ribbon magnet school in California. This was her tenth year at West Side and she has seen it change significantly over the years. She explained, "My first year, I taught kindergarten and on Open House, one parent came. That would not happen now. We have much more parental involvement. Back then I was told that I had a child that was a crack baby and I had severe discipline problems. Now, I don't think we have any severe discipline problems. The whole culture is much better."

In discussing poverty, I asked Carla to describe the students of West Side. She felt that they are just like kids everywhere. They like to pretend. They want to be loved and want people to listen to them. She described them as "just kids."

She recalled the recent Fall Festival held at the school, “Most of our students attended and I was standing outside the haunted house and a group of ten or twelve of our kids surrounded me and they were jumping up and down yelling ‘I wanna go with you Ms. Carla!’ They were excited and I went with them through the haunted house laughing and screaming and they had so much fun! I was a little sore afterwards!” We both laughed at the mental picture that her story created.

Carla described teaching in a high-poverty school as rewarding and “worth any amount of challenges. Kids help restore life in me and give a greater sense of purpose. The fact that some of them are poor only makes me want to serve them better. They certainly didn’t get to choose their circumstances, anymore than I was able to choose mine.”

Carla on Self-Efficacy–Trust is the Key

Teacher influence is important according to Carla. She said she believes that the key to influencing students is trust and that, “trust is a big issue with many of our students. We must help the student understand that the sole reason for working in the school is to help the students grow up and have a productive and good life. If I gain the student’s trust, he or she is more willing to cooperate and try to understand and learn what I am teaching. All the students need to know the ‘why’: Why is it important that they know this skill or information?”

Whether at a high-poverty school or other school, Carla believed that the teacher is the key to student success. She does not believe that the type of school matters as long as the teachers work hard and work together. Teachers must work to ensure that students believe in themselves and Carla states that it is vital that students know that teachers believe in them as

well. For example, teachers can make comments such as “when you go to college” and praise students by telling them, “I knew you could do it. I’m so proud of you.”

Carla said she also believes in telling stories that illustrate how working hard and perseverance can lead to success. One such story begins with her displaying a bottle of Formula 409 and discussing why it is called that. She tells her students that, “It took 409 times of trying different formulas before the company and its scientists got it right. I tell them to never give up, that some things come easy and some things are difficult to learn and they differ for everyone. I always share something that was difficult of me to learn like learning to read music. I tell my students about one of my sons and his troubles in school due to dyslexia and that now he is a successful adult.

Based on her survey answers, Carla believed that she can influence student behavior and their attitudes towards learning. She sees relationship building as the key and takes time to listen to her students and ask them questions about their weekends or their extra-curricular activities. She explained why, “Our principal has often stated that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care and I believe this to be true in working with our kids. I enjoy getting to know my kids and believe that they know I care.”

Most other responses on her survey supported her statement. Carla stated she believes that the teacher can make a difference by establishing classroom rules and a classroom management system that meets the needs of the students. Additionally, she contended that the teacher can do a great deal to calm and even teach a disruptive student although she admits that doing so is often “easier said than done.”

She said she believes that teachers should work with parents and should include families in the learning process as much as possible. Despite this belief, Carla rated her ability to assist

families with their children relatively low on the efficacy scale. During our conversation she explained, “I do get to know some of our parents and if I was a classroom teacher I would try to know and help all of my parents. Working in the library is different because I have 300 students instead of 25. I enjoy working with our parents and I think our PTA and many of our teachers really have an impact. My focus is on the kids.”

As I speak with Carla and when I observe her interactions with others, I noticed that she smiles a lot and speaks in a soft yet confident voice to her students. I have no doubt that she enjoys her job and that she has a healthy sense of efficacy. Her library is a happy, safe place for all students at West Side.

Carla on School Culture–We need Common Goals

Carla defined school culture as “the values that others see when they come into our building.” In her view the school culture of West Side needs to be improved. Her concerns primarily revolve around the teachers attitudes towards one another and the lack of focus on student achievement. She admits that her perception is based on comparing West Side to other places where she has taught.

She explained, “This school culture is different and even after the number of years that I have been here, I don’t understand. Not everyone here is focused on the same goals or on the students. Some of our teachers complain about the kids and even hold grudges against them.”

In other schools where she has worked, Carla says the teachers were more cohesive and seemed to care more. She is accustomed to the adults working together and getting along with one another. That is not how she views the adult relationships at West Side. She recalled several

instances where teachers would not even speak to one another because of differences or disagreements.

Carla was visibly bothered by her perception of the school culture and stated, “In a school, especially an elementary school, teachers should be positive people and not take things personally. As professionals, we should be fair and respectful and treat faculty members and students the same. Everyone should be given the benefit of a doubt and the same chances.” Yet, according to Carla this was not the predominant culture that is in place at West Side.

Despite her view of the school culture, Carla scored 70 on the School Culture Triage Survey. I asked her about her responses and she admitted that there were several instances where she could have given lower scores and went on to say, “I’m not saying it’s horrible here, just that it could be so much better.” She laughs as she states, “I guess I rounded up if I was torn between a 3 and a 4! And that was what made sense to me because things have certainly gotten better over the past few years.”

Carla explained that not everyone gets along and some teachers seem to be threatened by others. This makes it difficult to collaborate. She continually emphasized that it was only some of the teachers and staff that are not open to others ideas. Still, there appears to be an underlying respect that prevents the problems from getting worse. She was not sure if the respect is actually towards one another or the principal. Either way she hoped that she continues to see positive changes and that more of her colleagues will insist upon it.

Earlier in our conversation, Carla described the differences in parental involvement since her early years at West Side. During her first year at the school, while teaching kindergarten, she was called the “white bitch.” She seems pleased to say, “That would not happen now. The

parents do feel more welcomed and they have gotten to know me. But also, the overall culture of the school is so different now."

She concluded our discussion by stating, "Everyone needs to realize we make our own type of world by how we respond to and treat each other. We need to do better. Students should always come first. They are our future and I want them to be thinkers and to know their value."

Carla on Shared Leadership–Worthy Work

For Carla, the shared leadership structure at West Side has been extremely helpful to her ability to function as the librarian. "[Our principal] has allowed me to have complete charge of the library. I'm on the budget committee so I'm able to help make decisions about what needs to be purchased and I think I'm respected and trusted by most of the staff."

According to Carla, leadership team meetings involve serious work such as completing the Continuous Improvement Plan and Safety Plan. Despite the work involved, Carla said the meetings were fun. She stated, "We always have a few good laughs as we complete our tasks. The meetings are upbeat and positive which makes the time just fly by."

As a teacher, being a life-long learner is important to Carla. She has seen the term used as a "catch phrase" but believes that all teachers whether on leadership teams or not, should continually develop themselves and seek new knowledge. For her, the leadership team meetings are structured with this in mind and she has seen the team evolve over the span of the last 2-3 years.

She explained, "We have gotten to know each others' personality which has made it easier for us to work together. Trust has been developed and I think we genuinely enjoy being around each other."

I asked Carla if she believed that the shared leadership structure, to include the school partnering was beneficial. For her, it was instrumental to have the opportunity to work with teachers outside her school because it, "allowed me to see a broader picture of our school system and the city. [West Side and Mid-City] have many similarities but the differences are most interesting. I would have never experienced this had it not been for the school partnering."

Carla appreciated the fact that she has developed a "deeper knowledge" of what it means to be a leader. She stated, "I know that the team has to be limited to 10-12 people, but I just wish that the entire faculty could be exposed to this. It would change how they view themselves as teachers." Those changes, Carla concludes, could be enough to transform the entire school culture of West Side Elementary.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an overview of the background relevant to this study. This included a brief description of each school and of the shared leadership structure, Meeting of the Minds. The primary purpose of this chapter was to present the portraits of the five teacher leaders who participated in this study. Each portrait detailed the teachers' views on shared leadership, school culture, educating children in poverty and teacher self-efficacy. The portraits were told from the teacher's perspective in his or her voice. Through interviews, observations and written notes, all five of the participants described meaningful moments and events that defined their views both professionally and personally.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The selected participants for this study were all teachers who served on the leadership team of their high-poverty school. Although their backgrounds varied, they exhibited similar ideologies about teaching children in poverty, school culture and the importance of healthy teacher efficacy. Shared themes that appeared in the portraits of these five participants were: link between poverty and academic challenges, link between school culture and poverty, link between school culture and shared leadership, and the importance of healthy teacher efficacy.

Each participant acknowledged that teaching children in poverty had its challenges. Their underlying reasons for believing this, however, varied. Jessica, Barbara and Jay mentioned the parents as a particular concern. The lack of resources and parental attitudes that often conflict with their own created divergence and caused difficulties in establishing positive relationships. As a reading coach, Roxanne believed that teachers in high-poverty schools must work more strategically to meet student needs due to limited background knowledge. Carla viewed her students as being like any other children, despite their backgrounds or socioeconomic levels.

Jessica and Barbara were teachers at Mid-City where I served as principal until summer of 2009 when the school closed and was consolidated with another high-poverty school. Jessica is white and Barbara is black. Jessica had a master's degree and Barbara was currently pursuing hers. Jessica was in her 50's and Barbara her 40's. They each viewed the school culture of Mid-City differently. Jessica found difficulty being accepted and wondered if it was because she is

white. She believed that many of the teachers needed to place more effort on encouraging student achievement. Additionally, she expressed difficulty in working with parents. Barbara, in contrast, believed that the school has a positive culture that resembles that of a close-knit family.

Roxanne, Jay and Carla were teachers at West Side. They are white. Roxanne and Carla had master's degrees and Jay had a bachelor's degree. Jay was in his 30's and Roxanne and Carla were over 40. They each viewed the school culture at West Side as improving but still in need of changes. Teachers complaining and not working towards common goals were concerns expressed by each. Jay also expressed a desire to change the physical environment of the school in an effort to improve the culture.

A healthy sense of efficacy was seen in each of the participants. They held firm beliefs that the teacher can influence student learning and behavior. The participants also expressed their belief that the teacher sets the tone for what was expected from their students.

All five of the research participants described a desire to make a difference in the lives of the children they teach. With emotion and conviction, they acknowledged and welcomed the challenges that they faced as teachers. As teacher leaders they felt an added responsibility to their peers, their school and the community in which they served.

At the beginning of this study, I sought to gain a greater understanding of how teacher leaders in two high poverty schools viewed themselves, their school and their role as teachers. During the majority of the time spent "in the field", I served as principal of one of the two schools. My role as principal gave me insight into many of the challenges faced by educators who work with children in poverty. However, I believed that this study was important because it gave a voice to the teachers who work so closely with the children and families. This study was guided by three fundamental questions:

1. How does the experience of being a member of a school leadership team in a high-poverty school affect a teacher's self efficacy?
2. How does a shared leadership model within a school partnership affect a teacher's perception of the culture of a high poverty elementary school? and
3. How do teacher leaders in high-poverty schools view the students and parents of their school community?

Five teacher-leaders participated in the study. Each served on the school leadership team of their respective school and had worked in a school with a high-poverty ratio for at least 5 years. Additionally, the participants were involved in school activities such as PTA and membership on local school committees. Each teacher expressed an interest in the study and was eager to express themselves and to tell their story.

Following this research, I realized that my original research questions now appear somewhat simplistic and a definitive answer or solution was much more complex. Looking more closely at these questions, a new phenomenon was brought to light. I discovered when posing these questions in a variety of contexts that the answers varied to some extent according to perspective. Therefore drawing definitive conclusions about the reality of these questions became more difficult than I had originally imagined.

With that being stated, a qualitative research methodology was the natural choice to describe and interpret the experiences shared by these teachers. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to inductively answer research questions through rational data analysis (Hittleman and Simon, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) emphasized that qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding and that the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive.

In consideration of my research questions and the nature of the story that I desired to tell, portraiture appeared to fit as the appropriate research design. This portraiture study was framed primarily through dialogue between me, the portraitist, and the participants of my study. As I created the portraits, I was challenged not to impose my own definitions but rather to diminish my own voice. My primary role as portraitist was to ensure that I balanced my personal disposition with disciplined skepticism and critique. This was surprisingly easy, despite the fact that I served as a principal for two of the study participants.

I communicated the purpose of the study and collaborated with the teachers to set clear boundaries. I also established safe-guards to protect the participants. Interviews and observations were conducted at their convenience. Furthermore, they had the option to read and/or listen to their responses as the study progressed. An additional safe-guard included the use of a post-interview with responses conveyed to me anonymously by a third-party. For the post-interview, participants responded to a short questionnaire that addressed their comfort level with me during the study. None of the teachers expressed concerns about the study, the questions asked or about me as the researcher. In fact, they complimented my professionalism and gave positive feedback about the merits of my study.

Study Implications

Klein and Knitzer (2007) reported that at age 4, children who live below the poverty line are 18 months below what is considered normal for their age group. They further ascertained that the vocabulary of poor children was severely lacking compared to that of their middle-class counterparts. The study participants affirmed this report. For example, Barbara and Roxanne

both shared experiences and data that demonstrated serious academic deficiencies in the students that they served.

Link between Poverty and Student Achievement

Barbara, a kindergarten teacher at Mid-City, worked daily with students who lacked basic, age-appropriate cognitive skills. While teaching, she addressed student deficiencies and acknowledged the link between poverty and academic challenges. Low test scores along with added responsibilities and pressures from superiors created even more challenges for teachers at both schools. It was my assumption that the teachers would view poverty as a key factor in their ability (or inability) to educate all their students.

Although there was some validity to my assumption, the background and level of empathy of the teachers contributed to their feelings towards educating children in poverty. Jessica learned empathy early in her teaching career. Her approach to teaching children in poverty was one of understanding and servitude. In some ways she seemed to feel sorry for her students and wanted to mitigate their pain yet it was clear that she was emphatic about ensuring that her students learned. Like the other participants in this study, she believed that an education was the best hope for an escape from poverty.

Link between Poverty and School Culture

It was worth noting that all of the teacher-leaders were able to articulate the meaning of school culture. Each participant acknowledged that poverty played a role in the culture of their school although they did not all believe that the socioeconomic level of the community should determine the school culture. Still, their description of an ideal school culture differed from their

daily reality. Jessica referred to the lack of sense of urgency as the defining aspect of Mid-City's culture. Her perception was formed based on her previous experiences as well as her view of the teachers of Mid-City. She perceived them as not being open for change and having a weak belief system as it relates to what the children were capable of achieving.

At the same school, Barbara viewed Mid-City as having a family-oriented staff. She saw a direct link between the poverty of the community and school culture. She defended the teachers and praised them for teaching at Mid-City rather than seeking a job elsewhere. As the principal, I understood her statements. When a teaching position was available, it was often difficult to fill it with a qualified teacher who had the desire to teach in a Title I school, on a long-term basis.

The teacher-leaders at West Side expressed different concerns about the culture of their school. Each, however, stated that it had improved over the years but there continued to be concerns. The concerns were related to the adult interactions for Carla and Roxanne whereas Jay was more concerned about the workload and working conditions. In stating their concerns it did not appear that their perception was directly related to the poverty level of their school. I believe that this was partly because the poverty seen at West Side was what would be described as the working poor. This was as opposed to the deep poverty seen at Mid-City. The difference in poverty levels and type of poverty may have contributed to the teachers at West Side having a different focus when considering their perception of school culture.

Link between School Culture and Shared Leadership

The shared leadership structure that was in place in the schools, appeared to have a positive effect on the school culture. Yet Jessica noted that she often felt like an outsider partially due to her role on the leadership team but primarily because of her position as curriculum

specialist. The value of the meetings and the importance of their involvement were noted by each participant.

The teachers said that the leadership team helped to develop them as professionals. The school partnership provided support which seemed to give the teachers confidence and assurance. With Mid-City slated to close at the end of the 2009 school year, Barbara expressed dismay. She said she would miss the relationships that were formed and the camaraderie that was established with West Side. The participants from West Side also expressed positive perceptions about the school partnership. Jay enjoyed the joint leadership meetings and talked about how they were filled with opportunities to learn. Carla acknowledged that the leadership team work was serious. She felt validated by being a part of the team because she valued the concept of life-long learning.

These teacher-leaders valued the shared leadership structure of the Meeting of the Minds. A shortcoming that was noted was that the entire faculty and staff would have benefitted from the training and other aspects of being on the school leadership team. I recalled hearing several teachers make such comments after our meetings. Although I believed that the team members did an adequate job of relaying important details to other teachers, I still felt that the training received would have been more effective had it been delivered school-wide.

The teachers expressed a degree of sadness about the ending of the school partnership with the closing of Mid-City and new leadership at West Side. I too wished that the structure could have continued but realized that it was beyond my control. The former principal of West Side and I continued to communicate with one another and many of our teacher-leaders despite the ending of the Meeting of the Minds meetings held during the school partnership.

Importance of Teacher Self-Efficacy

Each of the teacher-leaders in the study believed that they made a difference in the lives of their students by teaching them despite the challenges. Prior to beginning this study, I believed that healthy teacher self-efficacy was vital when teaching children in poverty. From my experiences, children in poverty lacked structure at home which caused classroom behavior problems. The children also lacked key academic skills which could cause frustration in a teacher who was struggling with his or her own efficacy or confidence.

The participants of this study understood the need to hold their students to high expectations. As teacher-leaders they took their responsibilities seriously. They worked in high-poverty schools because they wanted to make positive contributions to the lives of children. One belief that seemed to be consistent among all five participants was that they could reach even difficult students by developing relationships with them. They used words such as compassion, influence and empathy to describe their attitudes towards their students and their roles as teachers.

The motivation level of these teachers was clear. They were highly motivated and desired to support student learning and accept no excuses. Although they admitted that their influence over the parents of their students was limited, it was clear that they believed that they could have a significant impact on their students. The teachers also demonstrated that they were receptive to new ideas and willing to experiment with new techniques to better meet the needs of their students.

Future Study Implications

Upon completion of this study, I felt satisfied that my research questions were thoroughly addressed. There were however, implications for future research opportunities. This study focused on teacher-leaders in high-poverty schools. I questioned what the study results would have revealed had the participants not been members of a school leadership team or if they worked in schools that served families from higher socioeconomic levels. A future study might involve a comparison of the teachers' leadership levels and/or the family socioeconomic levels

I thought such a study would produce different results because I believed that the fact that the participants were teacher-leaders influenced their perceptions of school culture and of educating children in poverty. Additionally, I believed that the participants of my study exhibited a higher level of self-efficacy than what would have been seen had they not served in leadership roles.

Another question for future research is, "Is teacher self-efficacy enough to conquer the tremendous impact that poverty has on children academically?" Clearly there are many social and community issues, such as poverty, that may impact a teacher's effectiveness. When children are living in poverty, learning may very well be the farthest thing from their minds at 8:30 in the morning. Yet the teacher's job and her daily schedule demand that she teach that child reading or math at this time. This child, her student, may not have a bed, clean clothes or healthy food. He may have four or five siblings with different fathers and reading or math may not be viewed as important by the child or the parent.

Many parents in poverty are in survival mode. Providing a place for a child to do homework or time to read with him or her may not make their priority list. That is not to say that

these structures are not important to the parent. Regardless as to whether or not the parent is educated, I believe that parents do want what is best for their children.

I further believe that having a teacher with a healthy sense of self-efficacy, while may not create a perfect scenario, it will certainly allow for students to be challenged and held to high expectations. A teacher with a healthy sense of efficacy will better educate a child in poverty than one who is weak and is lacking in a self-system that would motivate him or her to believe that despite the odds and the challenges that students in their class not only can learn but must learn.

Conclusion

Completing this study was a challenge for me. As I conducted my research and worked closely with my participants, the school where I served as principal was voted to be closed and to consolidate with another high-poverty school. This created an emotional backdrop for the duration of the study. Despite the challenges, I enjoyed working with the teacher-leaders who were my participants. I respected their candor in light of the changes that they faced.

A teacher of children in poverty must demonstrate compassion as well as have a healthy sense of efficacy. There are challenges that this study could not adequately display. My hope is that readers of this study will take a closer look at teaching children in poverty. I also anticipate that the reader might develop a better understanding of the role of the teacher in the lives of students. In doing so, I believe that critics of educational structures might take a closer look and find that being a teacher in a high-poverty setting involves much more than earning a degree and a teaching certificate.

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APPENDIX

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Shared Leadership:

Portraits of Teachers in High Poverty Schools

Initial Interview Instrument

Participant Pseudonym _____ **Date**_____

Location _____ **Time** _____

1. Tell me about your background and educational experiences. Where did you grow up? Number of siblings? Family structure?

2. Do you remember when you made the decision to teach? What was your vision of being a teacher?

3. Suppose I am a student in your class who is struggling academically. What would it be like?

4. Some people would say that an academically gifted student would suffer academically in a high-poverty school. What would you say to them?

5. Would you say that teaching in a high-poverty school is different from what you expected? Explain.

6. Describe the students of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.

7. Describe the parents of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.

8. Describe the teachers and staff of this school. Tell me a story to illustrate your description.

9. What is your greatest challenge teaching at this school? How do you overcome it?

10. Some people would say that schools with low test scores must have ineffective teachers. What do you think low test scores say about teacher effectiveness?

11. How important is shared leadership to you and what role, if any, does it play in your ability to be an effective teacher?

12. Suppose I am a new teacher on your school leadership team. What should I expect for the school year?

13. How much influence do you feel you have towards student achievement? Student behavior?

14. Describe yourself as a teacher-leader. How does being a teacher leader effect your interaction with other teachers?

15. Describe a time when you experimented with a new strategy or method in an effort to reach a struggling student.

16. After reading a definition of school culture. Would you say that the culture of a high-poverty school differs from a middle or upper-income level school? Explain.

17. Describe the culture of the school where you work.

18. What do you think the ideal culture of a school would look like?

19. If you could change one thing about this school, what would it be and why?

Researcher Comments/Notes:

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Shared Leadership:

Portraits of Teachers in High Poverty Schools

Follow-up Interview Instrument

Participant Pseudonym _____ **Date**_____

Location _____ **Time** _____

1. What are the misunderstandings that other people have about high-poverty schools?

2. How do you respond to the misunderstandings?

3. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?

4. How much can you do get students to believe that they can do well in school work?

5. How much can you do to improve the culture of your school?

Researcher comments/notes:

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Shared Leadership:

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Observation Instrument

Participant Pseudonym _____ **Date**_____

Location _____ **Time** _____

1. What is the physical environment like? What objects, resources and technologies are present?

2. Who is in the scene (number of people and their roles)?

3. What are the physical characteristics of the teacher, students and others?

4. What is going on? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions?

5. What is the content of conversations? Who speaks to whom? Who listens?

6. Nonverbal communication observed (body language, dress, etc.)

7. Researcher Behavior: Am I a part of the scene? How does my presence affect the scene?

Researcher comments/notes: