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## Resilient leadership in high poverty schools

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RESILIENT LEADERSHIP IN  
HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

by

Edward P. San Nicolas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
May 2011

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

**Edward San Nicolas**

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## ABSTRACT

### RESILIENT LEADERSHIP IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

by

Edward San Nicolas

Dr. Edith Rusch, Committee Chair  
Professor of Educational Leadership  
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“You have all the thing and we do not have all the thing... Can you help us” [sic]?  
– Alliyah, a third grader from the Bronx  
in Jonathan Kozol’s (2005) *The Shame of the Nation*

Children in high poverty schools often receive inadequate services in dilapidated facilities while enduring inexperienced and unprepared educators (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Communities with a dense impoverished population in turn create school wide poverty, which is ultimately more detrimental than individual family poverty (Books, 2004). With most teachers leaving impoverished urban schools within the first five years, it is no surprise of the difficulty to retain qualified and professional school leaders. As suggested by Haberman (2005), attracting educators with specific qualities to fill these critical roles may be the best route to lasting success. Equally important is the possibility to transform existing principals serving these communities into resilient leaders whom generations of students may admire and find success. Addressing educator resiliency has positive returns on retention, school culture, and professional satisfaction (Milstein & Henry, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics and traits of school leaders who successfully navigate high poverty communities and make a true

commitment to change the educational experience of children. Specifically, this study focused on the resiliency characteristics of these principals. The intent of the research was to locate critical information that leads to new understandings about preparing school leaders who can successfully lead high poverty schools. Informed by critical theory, this multiple case study included three public school principals, one elementary and two secondary, in high poverty communities found in a large urban center in a western state. School leader resiliency served as the analytical framework for the study. The researcher reviewed the data for External and Internal Resiliency Factors as well as Core Values, which formed the social justice lens of the leaders.

*Keywords:* educational leadership, principal, resiliency, high poverty schools, social justice

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Finally, I thank Dr. Edith Rusch for taking a chance on me and always finding ways to keep me on the path. I recognize the privilege that I gained through her personal struggles as one of the first women to break through the all-male club of school leadership. I only hope to remain true to the title of colleague and friend. I remain grateful for her insight.

## DEDICATION

To God Almighty, who has called me to pursue permanent missionary work.

To my parents, Joseph and Edwina, who served as my first teachers and taught me to  
share my time, talent, and treasure.

To my boys, Tommy, Joey, and Eddie, who taught me that life skills are as important as  
adventure and that the ability to forge is critical.

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Most importantly to my best friend, life partner and the love of my life, Denise, who  
teaches me to always look “in the between.”

To these whom I love, I make the promise to never quit and never betray the little ones  
whose voices are not heard.

This is for you.



*“Manmetgot-ña hit ki ta hongge ya siña ta  
apátta hit ginen ini na tãotao hiyong siha  
ya ta na'ta'lo tãtte i minagof  
yan i minãolek lina'lã'-ta.”*

“We are stronger than we think!  
We can quickly free ourselves...  
We must regain our former freedom”!  
(Hurão, 1671)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“Perhaps the greatest myth of all is the one that dubs education the ‘great equalizer.’ Without considerable change, it cannot be anything of the sort” (Gorski, 2008b, p. 34).

Peppered along hillsides, on the fringe of landfills, or in the shadow of smoke stacks, children sit in homes without books to read, a few broken toys to spark their imagination, and little food to fill their bellies. In their neighborhoods, one may find a sanctuary of caring adults, a dining hall filled with fresh foods, and desks holding numerous supplies and reading materials. Unfortunately, many schools that serve these communities are often in the same condition as the homes of these children. Whether they live in massive urban centers, on the green rolling hills of rural communities, or apartment complexes in suburban areas, poverty manages to show its ugly face in the nightmares of children.

The purpose of this study was to research the characteristics and actions of school leaders navigating through high poverty communities and making a true commitment to change. I felt a desire to pursue the task of exploring the skills and talents of leaders that others often ignore or devalue. I wished to demonstrate interactions and struggles found in school sites of high poverty communities and the persistence of school leaders wanting to cultivate a positive experience for children. I hoped to produce a resulting study that will encourage policy makers, educators, and me to consider the importance of social justice and the talents of people willing to negotiate change and situations often avoided by others. In turn, I trust this study produced critical information that prepares principals



to restructure their thinking to the possibilities of engaging impoverished schools.

### **Choice of the Research Problem**

I chose this research problem as a result of my experiences as a student, the events that shape the daily encounters of my current urban education assignments, and my previous experience in a rural setting. As a student of humble beginnings, the prevalence of poverty and lack of resources were of great importance to my perspective and desire to promote equity in education. In my experience, this viewpoint was strikingly unlike the standpoint promoted directly or indirectly by popular culture. My family relations and educational background were influenced by our experiences in generational poverty. Although poverty is a relative term, it influenced my intentions, research pursuits, and desires as an educational leader. This need to assist students in impoverished conditions was merely an echo of my parents' teachings to share treasure, talent, and time with others lacking my opportunities.

My initial teaching experiences included remedial high school science classes in a low to moderate socioeconomic rural school district. With meager programs used to address student outcomes, my colleagues made valiant attempts to increase student achievement. After years of traditional and some innovative teaching, students' scores remained in the lower quartile of achievement. It became apparent that mainstream programs were not effective. Cynicism grew with the public and student population, while teachers became frustrated.

Although many of us wanted to quit, we would regain focus and motivation after a conversation with our principal. Despite our fluctuating resources and economic ability to attract qualified teachers, the principal promised to come to school every day with a

smile and determination if we would. Then one day, she returned from a frustrating principals' meeting and abruptly announced her retirement. Many of us shared concerns about the direction of the school and the needs of the students. Until the day she left, she reminded us that our perseverance was one of the few advantages for our students.

As my career delivered me to different schools in struggling neighborhoods, I was fortunate to work with many different types of leaders. While impressed with the style and fashion that some principals incorporated, I found their passion and drive to provide the best for the students to be most endearing. Although I often found myself alone and under continuous scrutiny by my colleagues, I was reminded that quitting on the idea of equity and social justice leadership takes many forms. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) advised that quitting the work of social justice and equity was to “betray the children who do not get the choice or the chance to quit” (p. 104). I recognized my isolation as a badge of courage along with so many colleagues who deal with silence, seclusion, and invisibility as they explore ideas of to counter classism in leadership and education (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995).

My attraction was heightened as states and school districts defined and incorporated provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the new Blueprint to Reform version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization (NCLB, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010).

While my schools failed to educate the students according to some predefined target of success, similar schools throughout the nation met success in closing the achievement gap of so-called disadvantaged populations. I was interested in exploring

the possible success for all schools with similar populations and identifying the fashion in which these leaders negotiate the community and find success.

## **Exploration of High Poverty and Education**

### **A Brief History of Poverty and Schooling**

Although researchers like Smeeding (2005, May) described poverty as a relative concept, there are specific international and national perceptions that influence how education policy is molded. These policies are often a reflection of certain community members, which in turn influence the opinions of the general public. Such influences lead way to the delivery of education services and how educators perceive their effectiveness in impoverished communities.

### **Poverty Defined**

Various disciplines and the general public use many accepted definitions and descriptions of poverty. Broader definitions of poverty extend beyond income measurements to include access to nutrition, shelter, health care, education, and empowerment (White, Leavy, & Masters, 2003). Although financial information is important, these additional markers are used to describe generational poverty and obstacles sustaining poverty. Non-income indicators of child poverty, such as teenage pregnancy rates, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse rates, and child mental health are more widely accepted and utilized in developed countries due to availability of statistics, applicability opinions, and political priority (White et al., 2003). In contrast, childhood poverty concerns in developing nations are focused on starvation, malnutrition, illiteracy, chronic illness, and premature death (White et al., 2003).

Still, there are a few northern European nations that do not calculate poverty rates; rather, these nations are more concerned about intergenerational mobility, income inequality, and social exclusion (Smeeding, 2005, December). These policy decisions bring the focus on education and job development as a means of addressing poverty. Investing in education programs stimulates economic growth and redistributes wealth in poor areas of developing countries (Besley & Burgess, 2003). According to Duflo (2001), every formal year of education raises the household earnings in developing countries between 6-10 percent (Besley & Burgess, 2003). For the purpose of this study, these indicators are important in addressing the education of children.

Within the United States, a Social Security Administration statistician, Mollie Orshansky, first developed a definition of poverty in 1955. Orshansky based the poverty level on an adequate nutrition plan developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Fisher, 1997; Katz, 1990). Orshansky hypothesized that families spent one-third of their family income to purchase food meeting the nutrition plan (Fisher, 1997). Compared to international statistics, the World Bank estimated that impoverished families in developing countries spend 73% of their daily income and budget for food (Besley & Burgess, 2003). Currently, the United States federal government defines poverty as “people’s lack of economic resources for consumption of economic goods and services” (Citro & Michael, 1995). The formula now calculates the necessities of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and personal care (Citro & Michael, 1995). About 20% of all children in the United States live in conditions at or below the federal definition of poverty (Katz, 1995).

According to the Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education

Statistics (2007), high-poverty schools are public schools with a population of more than 75% eligible and participate in the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. Due to the smaller sizes of elementary schools and the unwillingness of older schoolchildren to be identified as impoverished, middle and high school participation may be much lower (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007). Household income below the 130 percent of the poverty line or between the 130 to 180 percent of the poverty line determined the eligibility for the free lunch program. In the 2006-2007 school year, approximately 7.7 million students attended high-poverty schools, of which 4.5 million attended urban public schools (Planty et al., 2009).

Whatever definition of poverty or method of measurement is used, all characterizations expose the pain and distress that poor children face day in and day out (Books, 2004). One does not find the true shortcoming of popular poverty measurements in these formulas, but rather in the true intention of the measurement. Current poverty measurements report a reduced, manageable, and unthreatening level of poor individuals to devalue politically the true state of human suffering (Books, 2004).

### **U.S. Education and Anti-Poverty Policies**

Haveman (1977) discussed a need to provide more and better educational opportunities for poor students who suffered from less education than their non-poor counterparts did. Eventually, President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty platform during the 1960s placed a greater importance on education to advance low-income workers and future generations (Levin, 1977). The government implemented a series of social reform programs in order to meet the needs of specific populations. As a result, the Office of Economic Opportunity developed Head Start, Title I of the Aid to

Education Act, Upward Bound, Follow Through, and Teacher Corps in order to address education disparity between those who have and those who do not (Haveman, 1977).

Levin (1977) categorized the War on Poverty education programs into three main strategies: basic cognitive skills, increased educational attainments, and specific job skill development. Head Start, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act (Title I), Adult Education Act, and Bilingual Education programs targeted the improvement of basic cognitive skills of poor students (Levin, 1977). In his discussion, Levin (1977) explained how these programs used test scores to measure educational outcomes and how it reduced poverty since there was a strong perceived relationship between test scores and future income. “The presumption was that a person’s productivity is largely determined by what he knows, and that poverty populations are often handicapped in improving their incomes by their lack of basic cognitive knowledge” (Levin, 1977, p. 153). By far, the greatest educational effort in the War on Poverty was the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which was considered the most significant effort of the federal government for education (Levin, 1977).

Within time, additional health and welfare issues came to light. The School Lunch Program, under the direction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, used eligibility guidelines based on public assistance criteria (Levin, 1977). As discussed by Levin (1977), this program addressed the nutritional needs of poor children as well as educational objectives by providing nutrition which allowed students to be nourished and motivated to attend school. The School Lunch Program was established prior to 1966, but was improved with the passage of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (Levin, 1977). Along with the upgrade of the lunch program, the nutrition legislation established the

School Breakfast Program which began in 1967.

To help prepare youngsters for their education career, proponents sought to address needs of children transitioning from home to school. Head Start began in 1965, serving about one-half million students with a budget of \$100 million (Levin, 1977). The intent of the program was to address the school readiness level of deprived students as well as providing medical, nutritional, and social services (Levin, 1977). Although most programs focused on pre-school curriculum, local school districts varied their program and funding to address the needs of their locality such as nutrition or medical needs (Levin, 1977).

Finally, Title I garnished the lion's share of the ESEA funding with the intent of increasing per pupil funding for each eligible child by 50% to provide compensatory resources (Levin, 1977). It was no surprise that personnel salaries were the most common expenditure for Title I. More specifically, monies were used to reduce the teacher to student ratio, provide remedial lessons, and specialized services (Levin, 1977).

### **Coleman Report**

One landmark research project made in education was reported in July 1966. As required by federal law, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Harold Howe II, presented the President and the Congress a report entitled Equality of Educational Opportunity, commonly referred to as the Coleman Report. The National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Office of Education under the direction of consultants, James Coleman of Johns Hopkins University and others designed, administered, and analyzed the report consisting of survey data.

Mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the survey study attempted to measure

and report presence or lack of educational opportunities due to race, color, religion, or national origin in public education. The survey, with a 70% participation rate, gathered data from almost 600,000 students, 60,000 teachers, and principals from 4000 schools (Coleman, 1990). The Commissioner of Education had to report the findings of the survey within 2 years of the Civil Rights Act enactment.

The Education Commission claimed that the data gathered could provide rough descriptions of student socioeconomic backgrounds and success. The number of children in the family and the number of possessions in student homes measured several key measurements of student wealth (Coleman et al., 1966). A major finding of the study was the strong relationship between a student's family background and achievement, which was stronger than any other school factor measured (Coleman, 1990).

### **Schooling in High Poverty Communities**

Multiple constructs related to poverty influence the views of educators in poor areas. Within the field of education, most policy makers and general media place an emphasis on these educational constructs to determine the success and achievement possibility for districts and individual schools. As noted in current legislation, parental involvement and teacher qualifications are essential factors in the success of students and schools. Deficiencies of these factors can influence teacher and leadership attitudes, which can ultimately influence the fate of the school, especially those found in high poverty neighborhoods.

The United States maintains a dual track education system that sustains achievement patterns for middle and upper class students in suburban areas and routine failure for impoverished children in urban centers (Berube, 1984). Researchers theorized



the underachievement of some groups by three theories: the Deficit Theory, Cultural Differences Model, and Culturally Congruent and Centered Model (Pang & Sablan, 1998).

In Deficit Theory, educators believe that students lack the ability to succeed and among other things have deprived childhood experiences (Pang & Sablan, 1998). Many schools communities pride themselves in addressing the needs for all students, but the practice of most schools is to pursue the deficit view that minority and low-income students are unable to succeed (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). In the Cultural Difference Model, minority student underachievement is the result of cultural differences between home and school and they can only succeed when they assimilate into mainstream culture (Pang & Sablan, 1998). In the Culturally Congruent and Centered Model, student success occurs when teachers gear activities and learning experiences that provide minority students with the opportunity to create a fair society (Pang & Sablan, 1998).

Another attempt to explain the consistent pattern of failure among poor students was developed in the 1960s (Katz, 1990; Levin, 1977). The theory went beyond the lack of income and expanded to include several characteristics such as attitudes and values that reinforce and sustain intergenerational poverty (Katz, 1990; Levin, 1977). Levin (1977) listed two main facets of the theory: parents passed on the characteristics of the culture and interventions had to begin at a young age.

Although the culture of poverty appeared to be pervasive among the impoverished, it was believed that only 20% of the poor in the U.S. were victims of the culture of poverty (Katz, 1990). In order to defy the culture, proponents of the Head Start program hoped to instill a new and productive culture countering environmental and

family disadvantages (Katz, 1990).

**Teacher quality.** Although monetary resources were made available, teacher preparedness and preparation were yet another complexity. One of the most significant influences on achievement, identified by research, is the percentage of teaching staff members lacking appropriate certification and teacher licensure (McCargar, 2004). Teacher readiness, general academic knowledge, subject knowledge, teacher education knowledge, and teaching experience are contributing factors, which have the greatest influence on learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In fact, Darling-Hammond (2004) discussed teacher preparation as one of the strongest predictors of mathematics and reading achievement at the school level. Although McCargar's (2004) study concluded that school poverty did not have an impact on student achievement, Darling-Hammond (2004) found that most schools in low socioeconomic communities had a greater chance of having more teachers lacking full certification.

Darling-Hammond (2004) discussed the rise and fall of education in the state of California, noting that this once model for the rest of the nation, was now treading near the bottom in reading and writing achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Her RAND Corporation sponsored report concluded that teacher quality was a major contributing factor to the state of education in California and explained how students of low-income and high-minority communities were more likely to have under-qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In fact, a staggering statistic was that low-socioeconomic communities were six times more likely to have under-qualified teachers than affluent counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Schools with a high rate of under-qualified teachers (20% or more) create major

consequences for students including an exposure to teaching that was more damaging than exposure to a year of poor teaching and the inability for the school to make sound decisions for collegial learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Consequently, schools with under-qualified teachers face a major financial drain on human resources due to the need to continuously recruit, retrain, and develop teachers who lack proper certification (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Darling-Hammond (2004) indicated that California did not lack certificated teachers, but the shortage was attributed to factors related to recruitment issues, such as noncompetitive teacher salaries, and inadequate recruitment incentives. Some factors were related to teacher licensure, such as state reciprocity restrictions, reliance on emergency certification processes and hiring, or alternate teacher preparation restrictions. Other factors were related to the work environment, including: poor working conditions, lack of mentoring for new and veteran teachers, structural obstacles in personnel practices, and lack of accountability in hiring practices (Darling-Hammond, 2004). These factors play a vital role on the perceptions of students and educators alike.

**Educator attitudes.** “Teachers’ expectations about students’ ability appear to be the single most influential student characteristic affecting their behavior” (Ashton & Webb, 1986, p. 14). In the Voices from Inside the Classroom study, students noted that the classroom relationship and interactions with teachers are what is significantly wrong with schools (Rivera & Poplin, 1997). Their study of Southern Californian schools showed that classroom management, which included the use of sarcasm, disrespectful, unkind, sluggish, and fake interactions were met with unproductive behaviors (Rivera & Poplin, 1997). Other outward displays of behavioral issues can be attributed to the

students mimicking the attitudes of influential adults in their lives, especially adults within the school (Rivera & Poplin, 1997).

The researchers argued that the obvious benefit of building positive relationships with students was increased achievement. Hidden benefits included teachers having the opportunity to identify and purge unproductive attitudes within themselves (Rivera & Poplin, 1997). When effective and failing schools are compared, failing schools have teachers and leaders who encourage failure through pessimism (Edmonds, 1979).

Anxiety arising from cultural and socioeconomic disconnections between teachers and the school community can result in a low sense of efficacy of parents and students from different backgrounds (Ashton & Webb, 1986). In order to create personal and neighborhood success, educators should value the sense of belonging and be actively involved in the community. This is especially true since students are more connected to their families, rather than members of their school (Rivera & Poplin, 1997).

When teachers have a large number of minority students in their classroom, they have the tendency to become more authoritarian in their teaching practices and management (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Most educators who were academically successful in their professional studies often avoided high poverty schools, which they regarded as locations with a primary mission of safety and control. It was rare that educators see a chance to promote equity and accountability for student success (Rivera & Poplin, 1997).

Goodman (2000) explored the motivations for persons to support equity; his focus was on groups of dominant backgrounds. Three main reasons revealed in his discussion were empathy, high moral principles and spiritual values, and self-interest (Goodman

2000). Although some were able to empathize with a group or individual, there were notable limitations for this type of motivation. Goodman (2000) discussed the need for a person to have the cognitive ability and emotional flexibility to make a true connection with another person. Adding to these conditions, popular culture often afforded people the opportunity to rationalize the sufferings of others by portraying the plight as a deserving condition. In order for educators to increase their empathy, opportunities to read, hear, and discuss the experiences of individuals from difficult backgrounds is the first step. The next step would be to engage in activities to meet and learn from others in internships, volunteer work, or service projects (Goodman, 2000). One final step may be to encourage support from parents, educators, and caregivers.

**School constructs of poverty.** Educators also draw on multiple constructs of poverty to determine their capacity to combat poverty. With so many antipoverty programs found in schools, such Title I, it may be assumed that schools have a strong influence on poverty. Like most social programs, education becomes a reflection of popular culture. In this case, poverty influenced schooling and educators. Another perspective on the relationship between the education system and poverty is likened to the subordinate and dominant relationship. It is not that impoverished students are unable to succeed; it has been offered that the current system, through teaching professionals, encourages failure (Edmonds, 1979). It is through the U.S. educational system that teachers and administrators act as preservation agents of the dominant power by using classism to work against student success (Gorski, 2008a).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The intent of this study was to gain insight into the resiliency of school leaders

serving impoverished communities that educators often avoided. I wanted to explore the perceptions that influence educational services about high poverty neighborhoods and the constructs that shape policy and practice. I wished to present some insight of successful leadership in challenging environments to serve a growing population of the poor and disenfranchised.

The study was informed by critical theory because it required a serious look at societal elements that required a relationship in an organization of status and perceived importance established within a historical context. The Frankfurt School, the origins of critical theory, established an environment that encourages an analysis “between what is and what should be” (Giroux, 1983, p. 9).

### **Human Capital Theory**

Human capital is a complex process, that stretches through the lifespan of an individual. Success of schools is often linked in scholastic achievement measured by assessments and student participation. With the focus on cognitive skills and test results, other critical characteristics are often ignored. Non-cognitive skills and abilities, although more difficult to measure, are critical to the overall success of students in schools and the workforce (Heckman, 2003).

Research in non-cognitive skills is scarce due to many factors, including the difficulty of measuring them in a reliable fashion. Instead, researchers have clumped traits such as perseverance, dependability, consistency, various personality traits, and other motivational traits into a single category (Heckman, 2003). Additional educational research with a focus on families and work environments can be beneficial. These studies charge family environments and income influence so-called non-cognitive and

cognitive deficiencies. The findings stated that students could surpass these obstacles with education, especially in early intervention programs (Heckman, 2003).

Aside from traditional abilities obtained in schools, non-cognitive skills are equally important and can change throughout a student's life cycle (Heckman, 2003). Within a society of currency and materials, economic definitions are important and probably the most convenient measurement of success. However, to understand the function and organization of social structures, it is critical to consider not only economic, but all forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2001). Although popular society places a greater emphasis on economic capital, the measure of material possessions and monetary wealth, Bourdieu's (2001) notion of cultural wealth is measured in three main types of assets: social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital. He hypothesized that all three capitals could be acquired through familial assets and formal education (Yosso, 2005).

Bourdieu (2001) described capital as possessing material and non-material forms with an original orientation while existing in other forms. All forms of capital may be transmitted or converted into its economic counterpart. Cultural capital originates in an individual's knowledge and skills that allows her/him to move upward; this mobility is supported by the individual's educational and cultural background (Bourdieu, 2001). Similar to the importance of economic capital to economic institutions, cultural capital is critical to social institutions such as the educational system. Therefore, schools appear to be structured to favor students and educators in possession of cultural capital (Harker, 1990). One's background is reproduced from the family to the recipient as behaviors and traditions of the culture are obtained. Social capital consists of knowledge and influences obtained through a network or counterparts within a common realm. The importance or

value found within social capital is shared among the network membership but originates from the privileged constituents (Bourdieu, 2001).

Social and cultural capital can be reproduced and distributed through different means such as educational systems. As a complex and well-established social institution, the education system can influence the flow of capital and maintain social reproduction, including inequity and inequality (Symeou, 2007). Through curricula, school leadership, testing requirements, and school practices, privileged class' social and cultural capitals are promoted and reproduced as the dominant group (Symeou, 2007). Our structure rewards success to those possessing cultural capital, while others who do not have cultural capital find they are failing in the current school structure (Harker, 1990).

Henderson and Milstein (2003) contend that "American culture fixates on the negative and in education, too often, the discouraged and discouraging" (p. 2). From an early age, students are taught to dismantle situations into smaller and more manageable parts. Each part is then analyzed to determine the fault or weakness. Educators are rarely taught to focus on the positive aspects of learners and the benefits of programs. Research indicates that leadership preparation not only maintains privilege for the dominant class, but encourages educators to defend the constructs (Rusch, 2004). In fact, it is common for school leaders to incorporate "deficit thinking" when working with students of color or need (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Although educators of all levels have the power to change their perspective and practices, many view the underperformance of minority and impoverished students as inevitable and beyond their control (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) identify these constructs to be supported and reproduced within the school system through the beliefs and communication of both principals and



teachers.

### **Deficit Thinking**

In the 1960s, following the hereditary deficit school of thought, researchers revived deprivation through the culture of poverty model, in order to validate divisions of economic and academic success for impoverished children (Pearl, 1997a). This theory, which can be traced back to the time of Aristotle, is the idea that families and the home environment transferred disadvantages to children thereby crippling their chance of success (Pearl, 1997b). As schools and policy makers accepted these popular theories, specific interventions were developed to counter the almost-irreversible damage suffered by poor children.

Valencia and Solózano (1997) pointed out three pervasive and modern-day deficit thinking aspects: a diminished parental involvement in education, the conceptualization of the “at-risk” family and “at-risk child, and inferior childrearing practices that produces an attitude that success is unlikely if not impossible. With educators responding to public opinion and national leaders, it is no wonder that deficit thinking models of culture of poverty, accumulated environmental deficit, and genetic inferiority explanations have gained a public resurgence (Valencia & Solózano, 1997).

As students enter the education system with cultural capital gained from their parents, educators mentor the students to either uphold their culture or choose an alternative. In order to navigate certain educational systems, individuals may find it more important to discount their talents and adopt characteristics that are positively aligned to the rewards and consequences system in schools (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Since U.S. educational providers often embrace deficit theory, it has become a

contemporary form of racism that is ever-present and widely accepted. The theory postulates that poor performance is a result of parental tendencies to minimize education and the students' lack of knowledge held in popular culture (Yosso, 2005). Deficit theory and similar approaches of racism are often promoted, directly or indirectly, by educators and stakeholders who rationalize that the U.S. educational system is effective in its current form and that the community needs to change in order to benefit (Yosso, 2005). Paolo Freire (1970) likened schools to the banking practice of depositing of information in order to counter the deficit preparedness of most students. If this analogy holds true, then racing through curriculum material acts as the deposits and high-stakes testing as the process of account reconciliation.

Today, researchers are interested in exploring methods and means that help us overcome institutionalized racism. One perspective promotes cultural wealth, a concept which extends beyond knowledge and skills inherited from parents to include abilities and contacts for ethnic groups to resist and survive oppression and racism (Yosso, 2005, Yosso & Garcia, 2007). In order to help survive the power and constructs of popular culture, many groups of color begin survival lessons through family coaching of “resistance capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Resistance capital provides an individual the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Similarly, advances in resiliency research “challenges educators to focus more on strengths instead of deficits, to look through a lens of strength in analyzing individual behaviors, and confirms the power of those strengths as a lifeline to resiliency” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 3).

## **Leading in High Poverty School Environments**

How do we increase the cultural wealth in school communities that are avoided time and time again by educators and policymakers? Rejected by most scholarly teacher candidates and often regarded as a disciplinary assignment, impoverished neighborhoods most often deal with substandard school facilities and educators waiting for an opportunity to transfer to a less stressful assignment. From the advent of the War on Poverty, politicians misguided the public on the redeeming qualities of schools to eliminate poverty, violence, and segregation (Katz, 1995). Although schools have mistakenly been used as the sole source to eradicate poverty from American society, we should not ignore the need for advancements in educational opportunities for high concentrated poverty communities.

Addressing the needs of schools in high poverty neighborhoods has been studied from different angles and through the actions of different stakeholders. Previous research included a focus on teachers, students, and families. Haberman (1995) began to research the lack of qualified teacher candidates interested in serving underprivileged neighborhoods. Effective schools research listed different factors about teaching, shared governance, and other support systems. Despite the progress of research in high poverty schools, clear knowledge about school leaders is lacking. A starting point may be to apply the research of teachers in urban impoverished schools to school leaders.

Of all the teachers found in the nation's largest urban school districts, a mere 8% can be considered successful (Haberman, 1995). Compounded with half of new teachers leaving these urban districts within 3 to 5 years, providing sound education to poor children is problematic (Haberman, 1995). Although many pre-service and post-service

teacher education programs address the needs of urban communities, the qualities of “star” educators are not easily transmitted to persons lacking a desire to help the impoverished (Haberman, 1995). In fact, some researchers doubt that this ability and motivation cannot be obtained through pre- and post-candidate professional development.

Like the qualities and ideology discussed by Haberman, the philosophy and ideology of school leaders is difficult to unwrap. To address the needs of urban schools with concentrated poverty, the recruitment of dedicated and successful teacher and leader candidates is critical. Since transferring desirable traits to educators cannot be accomplished through the conventional in-service “10-step program” (Haberman, 1995) and overcoming the typical non-event attitudes of equality (Anderson, 1990) are still pervasive, additional research in this area is sensible. This research may be considered essential if it will increase the number of appropriate principal candidates willing to address the needs of the most neglected student populations.

### **Design of Study**

The preceding discussion described the complexity of education for students in the most economically challenged communities of our nation. Despite their willingness to overcome poverty, traditional forces and community forces may prevent them from succeeding. Normore and Blanco (2008) contend that our nation’s education system has merely addressed food services and remediation programs geared to the student’s deficiency “. . . rather than school-discriminatory programs” (p. 216). To best serve this growing population, the need for expert and thriving school principals is ever more critical to student success. Darling-Hammond (2004) pointed to California studies that suggested teacher attrition was related to poor working conditions and student population

demographics. At the same time, impoverished neighborhood schools are often staffed with unqualified teachers. With greater demands for higher test scores and graduation rates from federal and state entities, the attraction to these schools is becoming less and less appealing.

With most teachers leaving impoverished urban schools within the first 5 years, we are not surprised to find retention difficulties of qualified and professional school leaders (Haberman, 2007). As suggested by Haberman (1995), attracting educators with specific qualities to fill these critical roles may be the best route to lasting success. Equally important is the possibility to transform existing leaders serving these communities into a resource that generations of students may admire and find success. Addressing educator resiliency has positive returns on retention, school culture, and professional satisfaction (Milstein & Henry, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this study was to explore the role of educational leaders in providing educational opportunity for students in communities and schools with concentrated poverty. Preparation programs, including in-service professional development, often lack adequate coverage concerning diverse populations to effectively address the needs of low socioeconomic students (Haberman, 2005). Darling-Hammond (2004) described how schoolchildren in high poverty schools not only sit in rundown facilities but also receive inadequate opportunities from inexperienced and underprepared teachers. Although many school districts attempt to address these challenges, disparity remains between affluent and economically challenged communities.

Therefore, I attempted to identify the characteristics and actions of school leaders

serving high-poverty schools who were interested in providing equitable opportunities for their student population. Specifically, it focused on resiliency characteristics of these principals, with the hope that their motivation and passion can be transferred to principal candidates who are willing to continue the fight for students held as “disadvantaged.” Eventually this can lead to an understanding of the trials and needs of students from impoverished neighborhoods.

Studying educator resiliency is an important step to promote resiliency of students (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Some may argue that concentrating research efforts on student efficacy and motivation may be more beneficial. In fact, a majority of early resiliency studies in education focused on children and adolescents (Christman & McClellan, 2007, Henderson & Milstein, 2003). In order to expand the literature and knowledge of successful schools, I based this study on the premise that research beyond students was necessary in order to understand characteristics of school leadership in high poverty schools, especially those related to the leader’s resiliency.

### **Significance of Study**

This study addressed the issues of equity and poverty in the school setting. The topic of poverty limiting the educational experiences of students remains a particular interest for parents, educational leaders, and policy makers. Through this exploration, I outlined common themes of leaders and teachers in high-poverty schools. These common themes and characteristics may be used to provide professional development opportunities for educational leaders and compile vital information necessary for teacher and leader selection. The findings from this study may also lead to opportunities for parents, policy makers, education leaders to shape public education into an opportunity

for equity and adequacy while promoting the American dream.

### **Research Questions**

During the exploration of related literature in the areas of poverty and education, several questions emerged.

1. Why do successful principals in high poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite the odds stacked against success?
2. Why do successful school leaders in high poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite the environmental barriers commonly found in high poverty communities?

### **Research Plan**

The intent of this study was to identify the characteristics and qualities of school leaders in high-poverty schools who were pursuing a more equitable schooling experience for students residing with concentrated poverty challenges. This research was limited to three public schools in a large urban center. Although similar characteristics are found in rural and small urban center schools, significant challenges in the larger urban centers were of particular interest to this researcher. The research was delimited to public high schools in medium to large urban centers with financial and budget records available from 2007-2010. Additionally, the research was delimited to schools with participants willing to complete interviews and allow shadowing visits throughout this process.

Using case study methods with a qualitative approach, I identified characteristics and actions of principals who navigated through the tensions of high poverty schools and

succeeded. I identified six school principal participants Los Angeles and Orange Counties of California. This purposeful sampling of accessible participants was used to minimize difficulties throughout the study (Cresswell, 1998).

These sites were public schools with open enrollment policies and largely served schoolchildren in their immediate area. Secondly, the sites had at least the average number of students enrolled as other schools within their district. Next, the principal had at least 3 years of experience in the school site, but previous experience as the site assistant principal was acceptable. Finally, elementary schools had student participation rate of at least 75% and secondary school participation rates were at least 50% in the free and reduced-price lunch program. Three school principals accepted the research solicitation.

To produce a robust qualitative study, multiple sources of information, including interviews, snowball interviews, document reviews, and school observations were used to develop each case study (Cresswell, 1998). The snowball sampling method was used to interview a colleague within the school site. Using multiple cases provided distinct pieces of information and allowed the study to have a more convincing analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). I used NVivo9, a QSR International case study data software program, to systematically organize and code data into hypothesized themes

This study was based on a few assumptions of public school principals serving in high poverty schools. First, I assumed that public school principals possess a common expertise of successful school leadership obtained through pre-service development and early career experiences. Secondly, I assumed that a leader's core values and identity could change. The next assumption was that over time, a leader develops external and



internal resilience factors that can influence the core values and identity. I assumed that the core identity of a leader serves as the primary level of resilience. Next, I assumed that educators as professionals were able to recognize their role as a dominant structure agent and can manage their actions that promote racism and classism. Finally, I assumed that these characteristics and actions of resilient principals were transferable to candidates and veteran school leaders.

### **Operational Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms and concepts were important guideposts in the design and execution of the study.

1. Creative Tension – When an individual becomes overwhelmed and frustrated that change is unattainable, emotional tension pulls his or her personal vision towards current reality (Flood, 1999). Creative tension allows an individual to pull current reality toward their personal vision (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, Kleiner, et al., 2000).
2. Emotional Intelligence – “The appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making, knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions” (George, 2000, p. 1034).
3. Educational Equality – This term entered into the field by way of school finance and school law when James Coleman presented his landmark report on opportunity in the education system, *Equality of educational opportunity* (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, et al., 1966). For this study, I rely on the educational opportunity construct offered by Theoharis (2009), “. . . school experiences, access, and opportunity . . .”(p. 6) and how poverty, race,

and achievement are affected by the imperfections in educational system and practices.

4. Personal Mastery – Senge and his colleagues (2000) describe personal mastery as a lifelong process requiring personal reflection as a person’s vision and reality develop and change through major life events (Senge et al., 2000).
5. High-poverty – As defined by the Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2009), high-poverty schools are public schools with a population of more than 75% participation in the Free-and-Reduced Lunch program.
6. Resiliency – For the purposes of this study, the definition of resiliency is “the ability to bounce back from adversity, learn new skills, develop creative ways of coping, and become stronger” (Milstein & Henry, 2008, pg. 7).
7. Resilient Principals – Resilient leaders often pursue educational opportunities, participate in social activism, regard themselves as religious or spiritual, and recognize opportunities in traumatic events (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2).
8. Social Justice – With the absence of a clear definition, I submit to Normore’s (2007) construct of social justice leadership which includes the expectation of justice with the stance against injustice and through social justice practice. “Individuals for social justice seek to challenge political, economic, and social structures that privilege some and disadvantage others (Normore, 2007, p. 50).

## **Conclusion**

In my explanation for choosing this research topic, I was awestruck by the fervor

and near obsession displayed by a few principals who were willing to find success in high poverty schools. At the same time, I was saddened by neglect and awkwardness that other principals demonstrate when given the opportunity to lead a high poverty neighborhood. I first attempted to define poverty and how policymakers addressed the issues in schools. Secondly, I tried to make a connection between research studies of the school community that attempted to cope with poverty. Furthermore, I outlined how previous attempts to “cure” poverty and the ailments of impoverished students were merely attempts to maintain the current power structure.

The preceding was a description of the purpose of this study. With the idea firmly planted, I await the fruit of my labors with anticipation. I liken the description in the following chapters to the process of germinating seeds for vegetables and trees in my family garden. At the start of our summer vacation, my brothers and I would enjoy the fruits of the harvest. This also meant that our tropical rainy season would soon be upon us and we needed to prepare for the next season by propagating seeds.

In chapter 2, the review of related literature, I examined related literature to frame previous research in the arena of educational opportunity in communities with concentrated poverty. By exploring social constructs of poverty, school structures and poverty, effective leadership in schools, and resiliency, I was able to sharpen my framework for the study. In chapter 3, I outlined the process of gathering and analyzing data. It summarized the qualitative inquiry used to collect and construct the data from participants.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Although important, the state of affairs on the national and global level is discouraging to say the least. Yet, economists, social scientists, and policy makers continue to pursue the elusive goal of a poverty free society. Why do the United Nations and World Bank want to eliminate global poverty? Why did President Johnson decide to declare War on Poverty? Is it instrumentally possible for educators to eliminate poverty from our nation?

While addressing the nation at the University of Michigan, President Johnson presented his Great Society platform. Prior to the implementation, there were few community drivers and political machines actively seeking governmental action to rid the nation of poverty. The cries of the poor were merely whimpers from isolated communities of Appalachia and inner cities. Yet President Johnson began a full charge of plans and anti-poverty strategies mainly without permission or encouragement of the Congress (Haveman, 1977). Was this the action and direction motivated by President Kennedy (Katz, 1996)? Did Johnson's motivation originate from Lady Bird Johnson? Was it the pressures of a rumored citizen and poor uprising or the need for Democratic votes (Katz, 1990)? Whatever the reasoning behind the decisions, the War on Poverty began an era of addressing poverty in the nation. Most importantly, it forced the public to deal with a critical area, while strengthening the civil rights movement (Katz, 1996).

As the richest nation in the world, it is important to question how poverty exists in our developed country. Another cohort of concerned taxpayers may want to address how poverty is perpetuated in our country. Like President Johnson, are there a few key

individuals in critical positions to help eradicate poverty from our society? What motivates an educational leader to pursue a task regarded as an impossibility to accomplish?

In chapter two, the review of related literature, examined related literature used to frame previous research in the arena of educational opportunity in communities with concentrated poverty. I completed online and library database searches with the use of keywords and subject terms: poverty, school leadership, schooling, leader resiliency, educator attitudes, and student achievement. The Review of Literature is divided into four significant areas: (1) social constructs of poverty, (2) school structures and poverty, (3) effective leadership in schools, and (4) educational leader resiliency.

### **Poverty in America**

The United States of America developed through the perseverance and strong backs of natives and immigrants who were hungry and poor. Early levels of inequality spurred success from drive, determination, and innovation. Some believe that a careful balance of inequality and equality were and is maintained for the good of our nation and the promotion of democracy (Krueger, 2003).

Poverty is a relative concept, especially in international comparisons (Smeeding, 2005, May). Addressing the poverty status of children is important because indicators such as child nutrition, health, educational status, and child development are closely related to their quality of life and future outcomes (White, Leavy, & Masters, 2003).

Although the definition of poverty differs throughout the world, the horrid effects are similar. Since most countries do not have a well-defined poverty line, international comparison of developed countries can be completed with data from the Luxemburg

Income Study (LIS) and data from the US Congressional Budget Office (Smeeding, 2005, May). Timothy Smeeding (2005, December) concluded that in comparison with ten other developed countries, the United States had the highest level of poverty at 17%.

General practices in the United States places the poverty line at 40% of the median income level, while other developed nations such as the United Kingdom set the level at 60% of their median level (Smeeding, 2005, December). In comparison to World Bank poverty measures, the United States' poverty level is 12 times higher than the \$1-\$2 a day for Asian and Latin American countries. Additionally, the United States' poverty line is six times higher than the \$2-\$3 a day for Eastern European countries (Smeeding, 2005, May).

Using the LIS results, poverty comparisons are made with the use of a relative measure of poverty that typically classifies individuals and families as poor if their annual income falls below 40-50% of the median income of their country (Kenworthy, 1999; Weinshener & Heuveline, 2006). Using 1991 LIS data, Kenworthy (1999) calculated absolute poverty rates for fifteen nations by adjusting the relative poverty rates to the purchasing power of each currency to the United States Dollar. Kenworthy (1999) concluded that the United States had the highest median income and was the richest nation, but was ranked with the fifth highest poverty rate.

Childhood poverty, which includes individuals 15 years or less, was high in developed nations for the last 2 decades (Weinshener & Heuveline, 2006). While the United States differs in dollar amount per year, inequitable distribution of wealth and resources lead to deprived educational opportunities. Weinshener & Heuveline (2006) attributed poverty in the United States to the variations of household income, which

produces greater income inequalities and insufficient government programs for income redistribution (Weinshener & Heuveline, 2006). Additional factors influencing the higher poverty rate include family units, living arrangements of single parent households, and the number of single mother head of households (Weinshener & Heuveline, 2006).

### **Federal Anti-Poverty Programs**

“The federal government remains potentially the most powerful weapon in the antipoverty arsenal” (Katz, 1995, p. 72). Early forms of family assistance such as the mother’s pension assisted widows with dependent children as early as 1911 in Missouri and Illinois (Katz, 1995). By 1931, the mother’s pension allowed widows to support their dependent children and kept most families intact (Katz, 1995).

During the Great Depression, state and local government policies addressing poverty proved inadequate (Katz, 1995). In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt established the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to address the overwhelming numbers of families living in poverty with expenditures totaling \$3 billion over the program term (Katz, 1995). FERA was modeled after a state of New York agency that administered mother’s pensions while Roosevelt served as the Governor of New York (Katz, 1995).

Roosevelt then introduced the Economic Security Act of 1935, which included a mother’s pension replacement, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) (Katz, 1995). Additional programs in Roosevelt’s New Deal included the 1933 National Recovery Act and the 1935 Wagner Act, which paved the way for labor organizations to establish collective bargaining, wage protection, and labor practice regulations (Katz, 1995).

The next advancement to address poverty occurred during the Kennedy

administration with plans for expanded anti-poverty programs in 1963. After the death of John F. Kennedy, President Johnson (1964, May) addressed Congress and laid out a battle plan in his War on Poverty and the Great Society platform. At the University of Michigan in 1964, President L.B. Johnson introduced this platform, which concentrated on the critical needs of urban centers, rural areas, and education.

Johnson (1964, January) described education as the great escape route out of poverty. Without asking Congress to consider education, job creation, and income maintenance as weapons against poverty, he created the Office of Economic Opportunity, which helped develop Project Head Start, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Upward Bound, School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Programs, Food Stamp Act, College Work Study, and the Job Corps (LBJ Library and Museum, 2001).

### **Current Poverty Trends**

In his analysis of the War on Poverty programs designed to address the education and skill development of the poor, Haveman (1977) labeled the federal government's efforts less than effective. Eradication of poverty was not completed, but improvements were made throughout the nation. Globally, the overall trend of poverty for most developed nations in the LIS program increased in poverty between the 1980s and the 1990s (Smeeding, 2005, May). In the United States, wages for the poor and unskilled workers declined over the last 30 years despite the increase in per pupil expenditures (Heckman, 2003).

Historically, the narrowing of the poverty gap indicated the maturing and advancement of the economies for developed nations (Friedman, 2003). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the poverty population was large and began to shrink at the end of



World War II (Friedman, 2003). Following historical patterns, this population should have continued to shrink through the start of the current century. Since the 1970s, there has been an increase in wealth inequality with greater shares of income belonging to the wealthiest persons in America (Friedman, 2003, Krueger, 2003).

The persistence of poverty in developing nations and the widening gap of income is controlled by small populations was theorized in three “poverty traps” (Bowles, Durlauf, & Hoff, 2006). These explanations include “critical thresholds,” “neighborhood effects,” and “dysfunctional institutions” (Bowles et al., 2006). In order for the populations to escape poverty, critical thresholds of human capital, such as a balance between unskilled and skilled labor needs, must be met before general competitive market characteristics are realized.

### **Poverty and Education**

This literature review presents concepts of leadership qualities found in principals and teachers of successful high poverty schools. The concepts selected in this exploration address concentrations of high poverty schools, the presence of inequity, the importance of social justice, and characteristics of effective school leaders.

Poverty is not a lack of money, a lack of nutrition, or a lack of basic necessity; poverty is a function of the nation’s political economy (Books, 2004). Poor children suffer in an environment lacking fundamental human needs only to enter into some of the nation’s worst schools with the lowest per pupil funding (Books, 2004). Although there are definite exceptions to these children labeled as underperforming, these few cases of success and resiliency foster the notion that individuals are solely responsible for their own achievement. The general public often regards these cases of success and servitude

as firm evidence that justifies ignoring and denying poor students the resources necessary to alleviate their misery (Books, 2004).

### **Issues Related to Poverty in Education**

Currently, providing education for all students with limited resources, silver bullets and single program recipes are popular. With the diverse populations of different family backgrounds and ability levels, a single concept of education to fit all needs is unacceptable (Coleman, 1990). At the same time, the notion that a single educational concept is able to equalize educational opportunities for all students is just as ludicrous (Coleman, 1990, p. 310). This is evident by past attempts to equalize impoverished students in the community and educational settings resulting in higher levels of impoverished children, dropouts, and dissatisfaction of education.

Economically challenged residents systematically receive fewer opportunities through our established educational system and its reinforced social system practices. Some liberal viewpoints charge that established social structures, such as the current educational system maintain inequality for lower class citizens by methodically denying opportunities to gain knowledge and facilitating opportunities to all others (Bruner, 1971). Scheurich and his colleagues (2000) argued that state assessments are often biased to middle-class white cultures. A student's social class, income-level, and skin color do not determine his or her academic achievement, but the associated attributes and differences do influence success (Rothstein, 2004). These characteristics of poverty may include access to quality healthcare, clean and affordable housing, or quality afterschool or summer programs that are often found in middle or upper-class neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2004).

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law required states to pay closer attention to the improvement of student achievement. With a mandated 100% achievement rate for all students, the law also required that student achievement is met for all students, especially specific student groups. One such subgroup determined by the US Congress was the economically disadvantaged populations often identified through participation of the National School Lunch Program (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Past legislation provided assistance for schools to address the needs of impoverished populations through program funds and recommended activities such as the Title I program of ESEA. Naturally with new federal mandates, states and school districts sought answers from consultants and research communities to address the specific needs for testing and alternative educational programs for student groups including the poor (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semington, 2008).

Ruby Payne, self-proclaimed poverty expert and successful educational consultant who has sold over 1-million copies of her books to educators, is held as the leading educational consultant on poverty and class in the U.S. system (Gorski, 2008a). Payne and similar consultants provide a unique perspective into the challenges of schools serving impoverished populations; in her view since middle-class values structured the dominant culture in American schools, poor students are often unable to navigate through school due to cultural differences (Payne, 2005a). In order for teachers and administrators to help lift impoverished students, she offers nine strategies and particular insights into the culture of the poor (Payne, 2008). She points out that these strategies are effective in helping poor students who have a deficiency in social skills, behaviors, and

the understanding of rules that are needed for success (Payne, 2008). Some of these strategies include the use of formal school language over the use of personal language or “register,” building respectful relationships between authority and students, and assessing the limited resources of students (Payne, 2008, p. 49).

Critics of Payne argue that her perspectives support unconstructive stereotypes of how impoverished populations handled their burdensome needs (Bomer et al., 2008). They critique Payne’s approach to addressing the needs of the impoverished as centered on the deficit thinking that the poor maintain a “culture of poverty” even after their financial situation improves (Bomer et al., 2008, p. 2504). It is through this culture that this class develops and sustains barriers for financial independence. Their alleged culture prevents them from sharing the importance of middle class rules and attitudes, which can be altered through the education system (Bomer et al., 2008).

Payne’s data collection process questioned by critics such as Bomer remains unclear and consists of questionable participants. Payne (2005b) and her associates do not hide the fact that her research base “does not qualify as ‘research’ against university standards because it does not have a clean methodology” (p. 1). Yet, Payne is still revered as the most influential voice of class and poverty in the U.S. educational system (Gorski, 2008a). Bomer and his colleagues (2008) credit the success of Ruby Payne and similar educational consultants to not only opportunity but to the oppressive structures perpetuated and secured by the American educational system. In fact, the popularity and acceptance of Payne’s work by so many educators, some believe, is a clear indicator of the existence of racism and classism deeply embedded within the U.S. educational system (Gorski, 2008a).

## **School Structures and Poverty**

In a report published by the Center on Education Policy, Nancy Kober (2001) explored the effects of “home,” “community,” and “society” factors that influence the success of students in poverty. She found that some of these obstacles, such as the lack of parental encouragement to perform academically, the disparity of resource availability in high-poverty schools, and lack of parent education, hindered the success of students (Kober, 2001).

With the introduction of federal programs targeted to the needs of impoverished students, the achievement gap decreased. Special programs, such as Head Start and Title I diminished the gap in the 1970s and 1980s (Kober, 2001). Yet, several challenges were found in schools located in impoverished neighborhoods, including the availability of qualified teachers, dilapidated facilities, and low expectations. The availability of school resources, infrastructure, and qualified teachers in high-poverty communities were very different from those found in affluent neighborhoods. Although striking differences were easily identified, policy makers had difficulty acknowledging the disparities since their children attend rich, bright, and well-managed public or private schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Many researchers and policy makers disregarded the harsh circumstances of students in high poverty and made flawed assumptions. First, impoverished schools have difficulties implementing programs and curricular methods used in well-funded schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Secondly, Darling-Hammond (1997) explained that implementation of harsh and punitive standards did not motivate teachers and students to increase overall achievement. Finally, implementing special programs with increased

funding had not countered the effects of a flawed and inadequate education program (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Stated curriculum and the actual curriculum presented in the classroom “...has typically been dismal...” and substandard for low-income students (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000). The availability of teachers for students of low-income has not been of the highest caliber (Scheurich et al., 2000). Historically, educators of disadvantaged students often had lowered expectations of success (Scheurich et al., 2000).

### **Learning in High Poverty Schools**

The United States maintains a dual track education system that maintains achievement patterns for middle and upper class students in suburban areas and routine failure for impoverished children in urban centers (Berube, 1984). Researchers theorized the underachievement of some groups by three theories: the Deficit Theory, Cultural Differences Model, and Culturally Congruent and Centered Model (Pang & Sablan, 1998).

According to Deficit Theory, educators believe that students lack the ability to succeed or have inadequate rearing experiences (Pang & Sablan, 1998). Many schools tout their pursuit of addressing the educational needs of all students, but in reality, the practice of most schools is to pursue the deficit view that minority or low-income students are unable to succeed (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). The Cultural Difference Model explains minority student underachievement as the result of cultural differences between home and school, contending they can only succeed when they assimilate into mainstream culture (Pang & Sablan, 1998). This model shares similarities and resembles perspectives by Ruby Payne, who prescribes that poor students can succeed if they learn

how to discover or imitate a successful culture. In the Culturally Congruent and Centered Model, student success occurs when teachers gear activities and learning experiences that provide minority students with the opportunity to create a fair society (Pang & Sablan, 1998).

Another attempt to explain the consistent pattern of failure among poor students was developed in the 1960s. Oscar Lewis, an anthropologist, attempted to explain the culture of poverty based on ethnographic studies of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans (Katz, 1990; Levin, 1977). The theory went beyond the mere lack of income and expanded to include several characteristics such as attitudes and values that reinforce and sustain poverty from generation to generation (Katz, 1990; Levin, 1977). Levin (1977) listed two main facets of the theory: parents passed on the characteristics of the culture and that interventions must begin at a young age. In order to defy the culture, proponents of the Head Start program hoped to instill a new and productive culture countering environmental and family disadvantages (Katz, 1990). Although the culture of poverty appeared to be pervasive among the impoverished, it was believed that only 20% of the poor were victims of the culture of poverty (Katz, 1990).

### **Ghetto Schools**

Communities with a dense population in poverty in turn create school wide poverty, which is ultimately more detrimental than individual family poverty (Books, 2004). Schools become inundated with demands backed with limited resources, larger student populations, and fewer qualified teachers. School leaders and teachers become more concerned about maintaining control and discipline, rather than delivering education (Haberman, 2000). By fixating on crowd control, these urban schools

maintained their expected role of keeping social order of the classes. Rothstein (1994) suggested that ghetto schools are the social instruments for educational and class segregation. This reality permeated the nation so much so that the definition of learning and success is unclear.

Urban schools, labeled as successful, are more similar to successful day camps than effective schools (Haberman, 2000). Unsuccessful urban schools create an environment that uses coercion and involuntary control to operate tasks and classroom activities and are very similar to custodial institutes (Haberman, 2000). The methods of discipline, curriculum, and traditional pedagogy mirrored the restrained and authoritarian organization of factories demanding compliance and discipline from its workers (Rothstein, 1994). Instead of being educated and developed as intellectuals, the ghetto schools serve to prepare students for daily routines and the monotony of the workplace through isolation control (Rothstein, 1994).

Urban students completing the traditional 13 years of elementary and secondary schools may be worse off than urban dropouts (Haberman, 2000). Contrary to this result, urban graduates have the perception of acquired knowledge and skills that will successfully guide them through employment or higher education (Haberman, 2000).

### **Essentials for High Achieving Schools**

To counter the inadequacy of certain schools, researchers began to look at practices and characteristics found in desirable school environments. In the 1970s, school research included the identification of traits commonly found in high achieving schools with “at-risk” students (O’Neill, 2003).



## **Effective Schools Research**

According to O'Neill (2003), researchers identified seven key characteristics of successful schools, including enhanced communication, frequent progress monitoring, opportunity to learn, instructional leadership, high expectations, safe learning environment, and a focused mission. Researchers attempted to transfer certain qualities and characteristics of the successful schools to other institutions serving poor students. The supporters of the Effective Schools Research assume that long-term change can be accomplished without addressing the poverty conditions of those suffering in urban centers (Berube, 1984).

After decades of research, the debate of student background and socioeconomic status influencing success rages on. Although high expectations was designated as an effective school characteristic, students did not fail in high poverty schools due to the lack of expectations. Instead of living with low expectations, students in poverty are deprived educationally because they grew up in poverty and entered into a structure that systematically gives them less (Books, 2004).

The characteristic of high expectations was sometimes identified with a “no excuses” stance. The notion of “no excuses” emerged in 2000 from the Heritage Foundation, a political think tank. Proponents stressed the educability of all students but forced the notion that through education reform, poverty should not matter (Books, 2004, Rothstein, 2004). This popular political statement has mandated educators to hide the ugliness of poverty (Books, 2004). Also well-hidden, were underlying and fundamental characteristics found in the sites of the effective schools research that is unexplored and absent in the discussion. Duffy and Chance (2007) note the vital role of trust and

effective communication that is apparent in the effective schools. Students may believe that success is possible through improved communication and trust.

### **Learner Self-Worth, Student Efficacy & Teacher Efficacy**

Maintaining interest in the classroom helps students find success and empowerment. Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as an individual's personal belief in his or her ability to learn specific skills at specific degrees of difficulty (Bandura, 1986). With each successful experience in the classroom, a student's self-worth grows. Self-efficacy influences an individual's choice in activities, effort placed on a task, duration of concentration, and determination to complete the task (Bandura, 1986). "Compared with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those with high self-efficacy for accomplishing a task participate more readily, work harder, and persist longer when they encounter difficulties" (Schunk, 1994, p.79).

The source of self-efficacy in students originates from different people in the school community. The importance of peers, parents, siblings, and adults in the school help shape their sense of value. Although students develop their self-efficacy by observing the success of their peers, performance-based incidents overshadow social experiences due to imposed failure guaranteed in the educational system (Schunk, 1994). As observed in a rural high school, the efficacy of adults, individual and collective, within the school setting, enhanced the academic program and student performance (Casanova, 2010). Starting with the school leaders and immersing teachers in each classroom, the faculty worked to build their self-efficacy and efficacy of the staff as single committed group (Casanova, 2010).

## **Quality Teachers**

Teachers as a single political group are unable to change the labor market, social organization of urban centers, or wealth distribution, but are key factors in countering the injustice that poor children witness and live with on a daily basis (Books, 2004). In order for teachers to reject their current political definition, they must take on the new position as a “radical educator” (Giroux, 1983, p. 240). This requires a critique of the history of class, gender, race, and culture, which defines their role to maintain the current power structure and how they impose this status to students (Giroux, 1983). It also means redefining themselves as theorists that confer with other groups such as parents and students to redesign a new structure of mutual benefit (Giroux, 1983). Instead, teachers fill or are forced to fill the role of maintaining control in the classroom.

A mere 15% of newly graduated and certified teachers from universities and colleges around the country seek employment in the 120 largest urban school districts (Haberman, 2005). In 5 years or less of teaching in these urban centers, over half of these qualified teachers fail and quit (Haberman, 2005). A meager 8% of urban teachers in the nation are considered “stars” and effective (Haberman, 2005). The nation’s public education system spends \$2.6 billion a year due to teachers leaving or quitting education (Haberman, 2005).

Effective urban teachers understand that their commitment to the teacher career provides a critical life or death service for students who otherwise would have no hope (Haberman, 2005). Teachers nurture and curate an essential student-teacher relationship necessary to provide compassion, flexibility, and warmth required prior to achievement (Books, 2004). In 2006, Duncan studied the success of Hispanic students who completed

high school successfully and listed strong relationships with teachers as a contributing factor. Mutchler (2005) described relationships as the single most important factor for teachers and attrition in her naturalistic study. Teachers possessing a functional base knowledge have sincere empathy that encourages them to respond to the demands of state and local curriculum while meeting the needs of their parents and personal goals within the context of the community (Haberman & Post, 1998). The commitment to teaching in environments with concentrated poverty was driven by experiences and a connection to students' strife was a common finding in Mutchler's (2005) study.

In order for teachers to address effectively the needs of students in poverty, Book (2004) discussed four critical characteristics that teachers must understand. These included (1) poverty as a function of a political economy; (2) poverty is not a result of genetics, attitude, or national origin; (3) most parents and guardians, including those in poverty, have a strong desire for academic student success; (4) poverty in schooling matters, but is not a determinant of failure.

After years of research and over 1000 teacher interviews, Haberman (1995) developed 15 critical traits of successful teachers capable of addressing the needs of children in poverty. Teachers that can effectively meet the needs of urban schools are not inherently born with such skills or trained to do so (Haberman & Post, 1998). Unlike many researchers or consultants touting well-developed teacher training programs, Haberman (1995) suggests that these successful teachers possess qualities that cannot be transposed to others through some "10 easy steps" program (p.21). The prevailing indicator of effective teaching is the determination of quality teachers to not place blame on the victims, in this case impoverished students, but rather find more ways to reach

each child (Haberman, 1995). The “star” quality of persistence pushes teachers to look for more resources, opportunities, activities, levels, chances, and everything else to help move poor students to the next level.

Another “star” quality is the ability to provide gentle teaching to counter violence that may exist in the community. In a violent society, teachers must recognize the fragile calm and peace that can easily detonate into uncontrollable rage (Haberman, 2005). Through a caring and empowering atmosphere, students will keep frustrations, fear, and anger outside the classroom (Haberman, 2005). Haberman links this violence to a lack of trust in adults, violence of the neighborhood, lack of hope, inhumane bureaucracies, and authoritarian organizations. Successful teachers in urban schools understand the violence and environment of high poverty communities through personal experiences. It is only through the incorporation of life experiences and pertinent teaching skills that successful educators are able to meet urban community needs (Haberman & Post, 1998). Haberman & Post contend that candidates with a specific ideology developed from life experiences can best benefit from teacher training conducive to high poverty schools.

### **Effective School Leadership**

Along with well-prepared teachers are the professionals needed to guide and motivate learning within the building. In a qualitative study conducted by David Palzet (2006) of eight high poverty schools in Illinois, data analysis revealed six themes common in school leadership. The themes included relationships, social justice, vision, programming, high expectations, and experience, of which relationships proved to be the most critical (Palzet, 2006).

Studies completed by Douglas Reeves (2005) and associates at the Center of

Performance Assessment in the popular 90/90/90 schools research revealed reproducible results especially in at-risk schools. The 90/90/90 schools were originally completed between 1995 and 1998 in schools achieving 90% achievement with a 90% minority population and 90% receiving free and reduced lunch benefits (Reeves, 2005). Reeves (2005) did not see that high teacher turnover and inconsistent school leadership as obstacles for student success. However, he admitted, that although ethnic demographics were not necessarily a factor for student achievement, poverty was complex and the data did not eliminate it as a factor.

Another effective trait is for a leader to have a vision. In 2004, Powell discussed leadership traits and characteristics found in successful schools. Of all the leadership behaviors measured, the development and communicated vision of the principal is fundamentally important (Powell, 2004). The shared vision of the principal and teaching staff was the key characteristic identified in the data (Powell, 2004).

Additionally, while fostering the relationships with all stakeholders, effective principals used several conventional and innovative methods of establishing and maintaining communication, especially with parents (Palzet, 2006). With a combination of electronic communication, open houses, PTA meetings, surveys, and everyday conversations, relationships with stakeholders created trust and respect with the principals (Palzet, 2006). Through diversified activities such as cultural celebrations, fundraising activities, community outreach for members in need, community and family relations with the school are improved (Powell, 2004). Whatever the activity, Mutchler (2005) discussed the importance for leaders and teachers to explore common and uncommon connections between teachers and students.

In O'Neill's 2003 study, 10 major components affected student achievement in high-performing and high-poverty schools. Although most components were centered on the readiness of teachers, many were dependent on the effectiveness of the school leader (O'Neill, 2003). O'Neill (2003) contended that these high-performing schools had a significant culture where all members believed that they had an important role of improving student achievement despite the community's condition.

Finally, a critical school leader empowers and protects teachers from the ever-popular move to devalue teacher expertise through prescriptive curricula and policies advertised as effective and all encompassing (Foster, 1986). Protection of teachers includes unwanted and numerous mandates from external organizations. Haberman and Post (1998) warned school leaders of the adverse and unexpected consequences of implementing too many school initiatives or programs. Instead, empowerment and safeguarding is accomplished in various ways such as reflective clinical supervision (Foster, 1986). With a critical approach, school leaders can redraw their role in schools and the organization by increasing advocacy practices and intense self-reflection (Anderson, 1990). Anderson's (1990) examples of increased advocacy advanced beyond concerns of single school sites to include changes in the structure and community to redefine relationships with empowered groups and disadvantaged groups.

Like most areas of research, scholars often approach education issues with a focus on deficits and areas of weakness. An important component of cultural wealth is aspirational capital, which allows persons to persist with dreams of greater success in the presence of true and supposed obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Research utilizing an assets approach shifts the focal point of improvement from flaws to strengths and what is

working well in education. Concentrating on resiliency allows the focus to be placed on positive aspects and adaptations, instead of deficits and problems (Richardson, 2002; Bosworth & Earthman, 2002; Milstein & Henry, 2008).

**Personal mastery and creative tension.** Personal Mastery is a lifelong process of developing one's individual proficiency to achieve a vision (Flood, 1999). During one's life, conflict and emotional tension develop as an individual's vision moves away from current reality (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, Kleiner, 2000). When an individual becomes overwhelmed and frustrated that change is unattainable, emotional tension pulls his or her personal vision towards current reality (Flood, 1999). Through experience and reflection, a person is able to meet a challenge with enthusiasm and excitement which in turn allows for creative tension (Flood, 1999). Creative tension allows an individual to pull current reality toward their personal vision (Senge et al., 2000). With enhanced creativity, leaders and organizations will have improved decision-making skills, which lead to effectiveness in new situations (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002).

Senge and his colleagues (2000) describe personal mastery as a lifelong process requiring personal reflection as a person's vision and reality develop and change through major life events. Organizations such as schools are primed to provide opportunities for individuals to reflect on their vision (Senge et al., 2000). By developing a clear personal vision and becoming fully aware of current reality, adults and children are able to manage situations that can often lead to disruption and anxiety. This notion of managing goals and life events is parallel with the resilient process. Werner and Smith initiated studies of resiliency with a longitudinal study of over 600 children with perinatal complications on



the island of Kauai starting in 1955. After 10 years, the researchers found resilient children who suffered moderate to severe perinatal complications succeeding (Werner et al., 1968).

Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) discussed resilience as a process that can be easily lost. In order for organizations to remain “committed to resilience,” (p.73) members must be surprised to a situation and commit resources (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). While dealing with the change, the organization must freely be able to change their approach as they gain information and receive feedback (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Organization creativity is preserved through “conceptual slack” which allows critical members to be flexible in their analysis and encourage respectful exchange of information between members (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 73).

**Emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence consists of “the appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making, knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions” (George, 2000, p. 1034). In her description of emotional intelligence, George (2000) noted of four main areas of using feelings and emotions in the decision making process: “emotions can be useful in terms of directing attention,” “emotions can be used in choosing among options,” “emotions can be used to facilitate certain kinds of cognitive processes,” and “shifts in emotions can lead to more flexible planning, the generation of multiple alternatives, and a broadened perspective on problems” (p. 1036).

Emotional intelligence allows a leader to be flexible and widen their perspective in several ways (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002). First, emotions allow an individual to prioritize the tasks and demands requiring attention (George, 2000). Flexibility

emerges as the emotional intelligence of a person allows them to recognize the connections between situations and other issues within the organization. This is apparent when leaders are able to manage their feelings, promote good feelings, and ultimately generate their best work (Goleman et al., 2002). With information from all related issues, a prepared leader is able to address several concerns at the same time (George, 2000).

Emotional intelligence is a critical talent of leadership that remains sealed in a box hidden from practitioners and stakeholders. Education leaders are encouraged to hide their emotions or seek professional development. States certification do not require this knowledge set as a standard worth studying and pre-service training programs do not promote this intelligence (Ginsberg, 2008). When leaders gather for infrequent formal and informal meetings, they may share tribulations. For most, it is difficult to share their feelings or state that they are wrestling with difficulties (Ginsberg, 2008). Rather, leaders deal with emotions of their work in private at the school site. Traditionally, education leaders are supposed to be members of an institution that foster rational thinking and clear judgment (Ginsberg, 2008). In fact, emotions present in the workplace are regarded frequently as a threat to the stability of the organization (Fambrough & Hart, 2008). By promoting the stereotypical rational thinker as effective decision makers, the importance of feelings and emotions as a critical part of decisions can be overlooked (George, 2000).

In Goleman's (2001) framework for emotional competencies, he listed self-management as a major emotional intelligence cluster that includes six competencies: emotional self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement drive, and initiative. He explained that a critical competence to survive "present times" was the adaptability (Goleman, 2001, p. 35). Components of this "adaptability", the

creativity to deal with changes, developing new ideas, and remaining calm during high-stress times, are qualities necessary for emotional resilience (Goleman, 2001).

As a consequence to possessing emotional intelligence, leaders run the risk of repeated failures and prolonged struggles. These damaging consequences extend through the organization and within the person as health problems emerge (Ginsberg, 2008).

In Ginsberg (2008) study of 100 principals, three key strategies emerged while leaders dealt with confrontations: finding order out of chaos, communication and strategizing, and following your heart. The first and most notable is the strategy to find order in the chaos. Ginsberg (2008) described principals finding opportunities in their struggle and adapting the organization to meet the needs of the environment. It is important to mention that Ginsberg's participants shared that even traumatic events can produce knowledge and skills for the future.

**Passion for social justice.** Throughout an educational leader's career, there are risks associated with pursuing the work of social justice. Marshall (2009) and Williams (2009) propose that educators pursuing an activist standpoint in their leadership work assume professional risks to their careers. Through her research, Williams (2009) discovered that the frequency of risks and threats to an educator's career falls within a bell curve over time from the early stages toward the retirement stage with the highest levels of threats to career advancement at the mid-career point. Leaders seeking positive change often deal with mental clashes between their personal belief to continue social justice work and the need to maintain their professional status and career opportunities (Marshall, 2009).

***Traits of a social justice principal.*** George Theoharis (2008) postulates that we

can observe those specific traits, “arrogant humility, passionate leadership, and a tenacious commitment to social justice,” in principals who are true advocates for social justice (p.3). For these types of leaders, their work in social justice is so tightly wound into their very being and work in schools that it is not possible to separate commitment and leadership from their identity (Theoharis, 2008). In the trait of arrogant humility, the paradox of possessing a strong belief that their superior expertise is coupled with humble public displays of self-doubt and insecurity (Theoharis, 2008). Passionate leadership is a trait that allows the social justice principal to have a vision and a sincerity to promote social justice for the school community despite public and professional resistance to their cause (Theoharis, 2008). Most importantly, their social justice struggles, failures, and slow moving changes are internalized and become personal conflicts of deep disappointment and turbulence (Theoharis, 2008). Finally, Theoharis (2008) defined the trait of a tenacious commitment to justice as “a steady and persistent focus on equity and justice for their staff as well as for themselves” (p. 19).

As social justice principals performed the necessary activities and duties to promote equity, they often work against traditional norms in the schooling process. Theoharis (2008) described how these principals strengthened their resolve through occasional and sometimes insignificant victories. As part of the trait of arrogant humility, such leaders possessed a high level of intelligence that was beneficial to their problem solving and creative thinking abilities. Conversely, their arrogant intelligence forced them to recognize all the external forces working against their progress, which ultimately pushes an intolerable weight of frustration and discouragement (Theoharis,

2008). He observed that the inner toll and continuous discouragement can affect a principal's emotional, mental, and physical health (Theoharis, 2007). Their intelligence and arrogance allows them to recognize inner turmoil, but their humility encourages them to seek assistance and support from the community and professionals (Theoharis, 2008).

In order to deal with public and professional opposition as a social justice principal, the leader must be able to develop his or her own tolerance strategies, "proactive and coping" strategies (Theoharis, 2007, p. 245; Theoharis, 2009). Theoharis (2007) outlined proactive strategies to include "communicating purposefully and authentically, developing a supportive administrative network, working together for change, keeping their eyes on the prize, prioritizing their work, engaging in professional learning, and building relationships" (p. 244). Theoharis (2007; 2009) continued with coping strategies that principals employed in order for them to survive a relatively tough day, week, or extended period and not necessarily used for day-to-day operations as a social justice advocate. These survival techniques included nurturing a private life with family and friends that are separate from professional work, maintaining a physical exercise routine, enjoying creative leisure activity, and utilizing unhealthy behaviors or habits (Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009).

Proactive strategies (Theoharis, 2007) or professional strategies (Theoharis, 2009) are tactics used by successful principals to handle daily work as a social justice leader and makes the obstacles to success less burdensome. First, principals of social justice "communicate purposefully and authentically" which provided them the opportunity to share ideas, develop support, and engage against viewpoints that are contrary to their integrity and belief system (Theoharis, 2009). Secondly, principals developed a

professional support network of practitioners to share ideas and find necessary support, which breaks through the isolation that plagued social justice leaders (Theoharis, 2007, 2009). The third strategy was to empower school and community members to engage in the work necessary to make necessary changes for social justice.

Theoharis (2009) concluded that principals must maintain a focus of equity and justice in all aspects of work or to “keep your eyes on the prize” of social justice. The fifth form of professional survival was to organize tasks by priority through delegating certain tasks and engaging in those requiring greater impact (Theoharis, 2009). The sixth strategy was to engage in professional development that supported their goals and objectives most critical for school improvement and growth (Theoharis, 2009). The final strategy was to build relationships with students, community members, parents, and teachers, which provide formal and informal opportunities to encourage social justice (Theoharis, 2009).

Coping (Theoharis, 2007) or personal strategies (Theoharis, 2009) are used by social justice leaders in order to find emotional and physical balance against the daily resistance to their work. The strategies included developing a strong personal life outside of work, using “mindful diversions,” acknowledging external justification, keeping a physical exercise schedule, providing for the family, and infrequently engaging in damaging behaviors (Theoharis, 2009). The first personal strategy was to develop a healthy and strong personal life by setting time limits for working on school priorities in order to spend quality time with close family members and loved ones (Theoharis, 2007).

Secondly, social justice principals used “mindful diversions” such as working on hobbies, crafts, leisure reading, or any personal enjoyment activity (Theoharis, 2009).

Such activities allowed the leader to free themselves from the intellectual and physical stresses associated with social justice. Next, the notion of acknowledging external justification provided formal and informal validation for their priorities (Theoharis, 2009). Whether it was accepting a formal commendation for excellence or verbal praises from family and friends, social justice leaders used such honors as emotional stepping-stones to support their dedication and strife. The fourth strategy was to enjoy a regular exercise routine with family members or professional associates (Theoharis, 2009).

Next, these principals found the joy in providing for others who are lovingly important in their life. Theoharis (2009) mentioned examples of family and community service outside the realm of the school such as yard work for elderly neighbors or homecare for physically challenged relatives. The final coping tactic of using harmful habits was strikingly shocking and at the same time often expected. In the face of adversity, even the best people find themselves turning inward in order to anesthetize the powerful feelings of inadequacy and failure. Theoharis (2007) described principals working extended hours at their school site in excess of 90 hours per week and instances of increasing their consumption of alcohol.

“Each interaction – each decision – becomes about enacting justice” (Theoharis, 2008, p. 21). Theoharis (2008) described how principals recognized how equity and justice may be thwarted in daily activities and interactions with students. He described how a social justice leader takes responsibility for his or her act of injustice and finds a resolution with humility.

## **Resiliency**

Although there are common factors and descriptors, there is no generally accepted

definition of resiliency (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Bosworth & Earthman, 2002).

Thomas (2008) noted three key moments when resilience was observable: “recognizing the tension, reframing the tension as something knowable and manageable, and resolving the tension constructively” (p. 27).

### **Defining Resiliency**

Chrisman and McClellan (2007) describe resiliency as “an adaptive and coping trait that forms and hones positive character skills, such as patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, and risk taking” (p. 7). “Behavioral scientists have used the term resilience to describe three kinds of phenomena: (1) positive developmental outcomes among children who live in ‘high-risk’ contexts, such as chronic poverty or parental substance abuse; (2) sustained competence under prolonged stress, such as the events surrounding the break-up of their parents’ marriage; and (3) recovery from trauma, especially the horrors of civil wars and concentration camps” (Werner, 2003, p. viii).

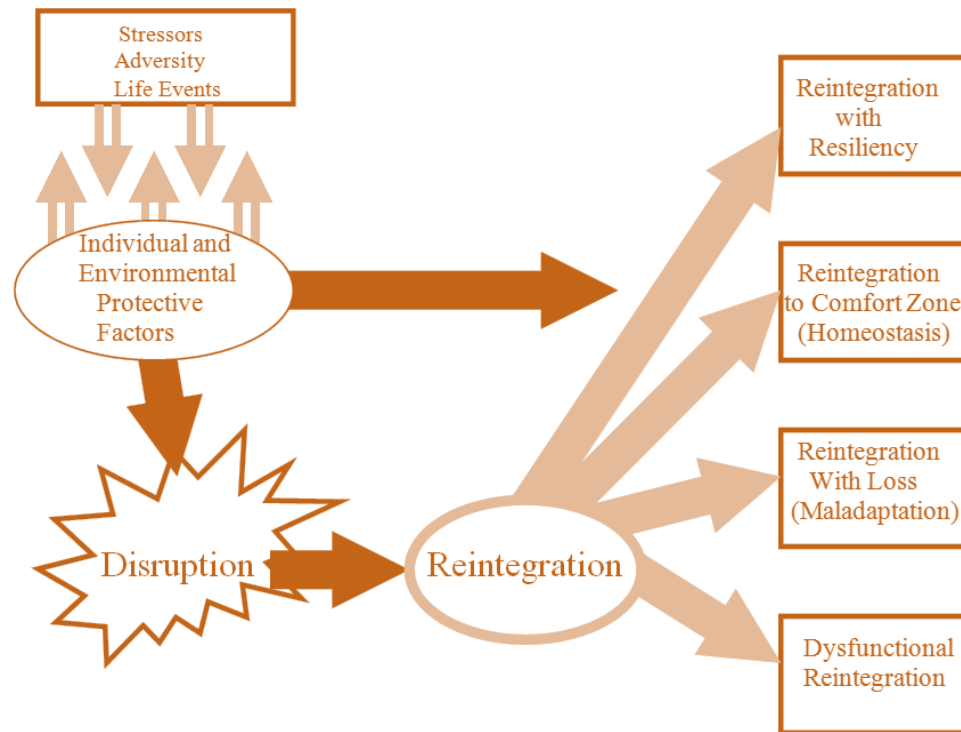
Until recently, a majority of resiliency studies focused on students with operational definitions reflecting this fact. Bosworth and Earthman (2002) described resiliency as “the ability of children to overcome adversity and become successful adults” (p.299). Resiliency may be defined as “. . . using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions” (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2003, p. 3). Finally, Richardson and his colleagues (1990) defined resiliency as a process of coping with hectic and stressful life events in a fashion that allows a person to gain additional protective skills prior to the disruptive event.

Resiliency describes how “people can bounce back from negative life experiences



and often become even stronger in the process of overcoming them” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). According to Milstein and Henderson (2003), an education operational definition of resiliency is “the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent to today’s world” (p. 7). For the purposes of this study, the definition of resiliency is “the ability to bounce back from adversity, learn new skills, develop creative ways of coping, and become stronger” (Milstein & Henry, 2008, pg. 7).

Resiliency studies emerged through three surges of research: the characteristics, the process, and innate resilience or the driving force in people (Richardson, 2002). The first process description of resilience emerged in 1990 with the presentation of the Resiliency Model by Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (see *Figure 1*). The concept of resiliency surfaced from mental health field research that concentrated on persons maintaining positive lifestyles during traumatic or stressful life events when many counterpart subjects suffered inadequate adaptation (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990).



*Figure 1.* The Resiliency Model (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990) Reprinted with permission.

Resiliency has been proposed as a process rather than a personality trait or characteristic common found in previous research (Richardson et al., 1990). In the Richardson’s (1990) Resiliency Model, life disruptions may span between a few minutes to events lasting years. These unavoidable challenges produce chaos, which allows an individual to reorganize his life creatively and gain knowledge and insight from the experience. When faced with a stressful life event, the coping skills of an individual may be adequate to overcome the situation. Otherwise, the event may lead to disruption in his or her life that may result ultimately in maladaptation or an opportunity to gain skills and knowledge (Richardson et al., 1990).

When an individual is unable to cope with a life event, a disruption in the person’s outlook, routine, and understanding of the world occurs. For some, a disruption can lead

to adverse results that can be harmful. A disruption is an opportunity to learn and grow as an individual (Richardson et al., 1990). With stress and anxiety produced during the disruption, people do not stay in this stage. Rather people seek ways to find balance or “a new state of homeostasis in order to function” (Richardson et al., 1990, p. 37). As an individual deals with the disorganization, learning occurs and the person gains experience and knowledge allowing them to be more and more creative (Richardson et al., 1990).

Focusing on resiliency of children and adults in education allows leaders to consider the positive perspective of performance rather than the negative behaviors and risks associated with traditional research (Richardson et al., 1990). The resilience process can be studied and applied to individuals, communities, and schools (Richardson, 2002). Henderson and Milstein’s Resiliency wheel (*Figure 2*) was developed from the Resiliency Model of Richardson and his colleagues (Roman-Oertwig, 2004). Eventually, Milstein and Henry’s Resiliency Elements Wheel (*Figure 3*) was developed to emphasize the interplay between each of the elements or factors (Milstein & Henry, 2008).

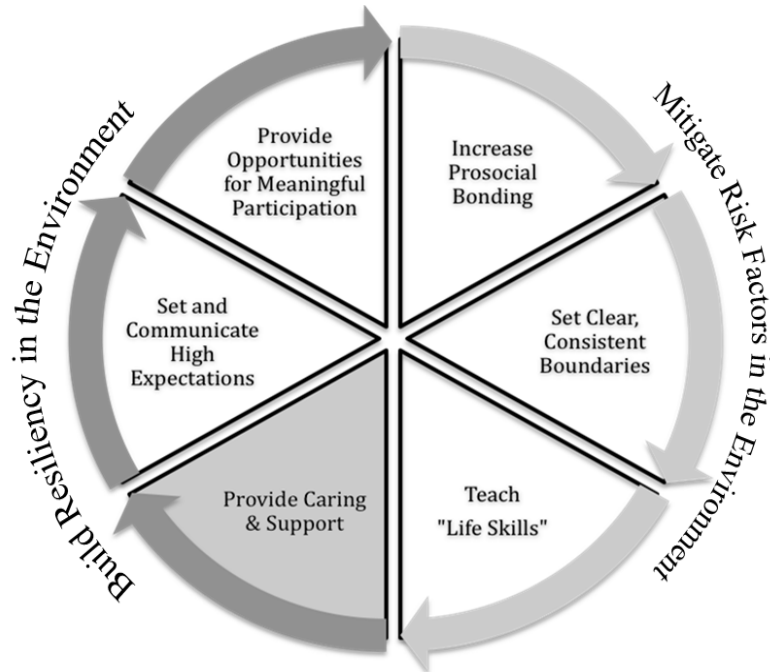


Figure 2. Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Printed with permission.

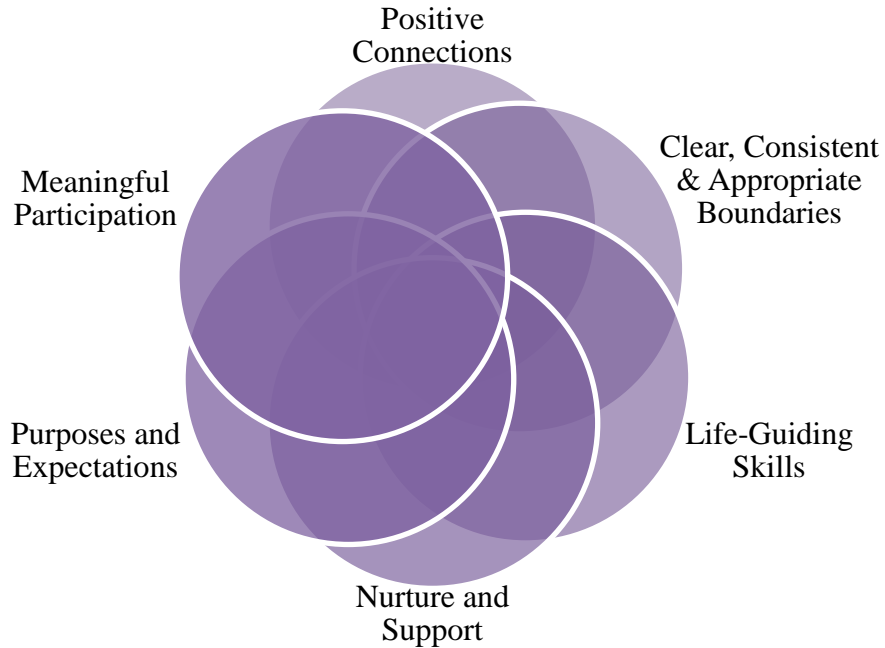


Figure 3. Resiliency Elements Wheel (Milstein & Henry, 2008, p. 13). Printed with permission.

Education leadership research is rich with many studies about different weaknesses and strengths of successful school leaders. Previous research on resiliency in education focused on children. Additional research about schools and adults in education is necessary for student success. “More than any institution except the family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency in today’s youth and tomorrow’s adults (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). School leader resiliency is critical, especially in urban schools, so that they may promote change and other necessary activities in order to encourage school success (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2003). During the most challenging times, resilience allows a leader to make the best of their resources and find answers necessary to overcome adversity (Thomas, 2008).

Monitoring and promoting leader resiliency help ensure that the business of learning and growth occurs for individuals and the whole school. School organizations in impoverished communities deal with extraordinary conditions far beyond difficulties and challenges from external forces found in schools from all types of communities. Resilience is a major attribute which builds an outstanding leader’s adaptive capacity, which is necessary to engage others during the most difficult circumstances (Thomas, 2008).

Resilient leaders often pursue educational opportunities, participate in social activism, regard themselves as religious or spiritual, and recognize opportunities in traumatic events (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). Although resiliency may be an inherited trait for some adults, others develop their resilience through a routine that is practiced (Thomas, 2008; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Review of related literature indicates that there are several characteristics of

resiliency found in students and adults. Although there are many differences, parallel or common traits may be found among researchers. Patterson, Patterson, and Collins (2002) share seven fundamental strengths that support resiliency include staying positive, focusing on important matters, being flexible, take charge, promote a supportive climate, have high expectations, and promote shared responsibility. Henderson & Milstein (1996) presented similar research in their resiliency wheel model. There are six key resiliency characteristics for school administrators: develop relationships, establish limits, teach life skills, provide support, communicate high expectations, and provide opportunities for participation (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). This six-prong approach is divided into “mitigating risk factors in the environment” and “building resiliency in the environment” (2003).

1. The first step is to increase prosocial bonding relationships with other positive individuals or activities.
2. Secondly, set clear and consistent boundaries with well-developed expectations, procedures, and consequences.
3. The third step is to teach and reinforce “life skills” which promote a favorable environment for learning and interaction. “Life skills” include conflict resolution, communication skills, decision-making, stress management, and cooperation strategies.
4. The fourth step is to provide caring, support, and encouragement which is the most important step in the process and is critical in educational settings.
5. Next, set and communicate high expectations.
6. Finally, provide opportunities for significant participation that allow

participants to set goals, problem solve, and make decisions with considerable responsibilities for school success. (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, pg. 11-14)

Each factor influences the resiliency of students and educators and is not altogether protective individually, but collectively (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Zunz & Chernesky, 2000). According to the resiliency model, people can survive adverse situations if they have a sufficient amount of defensive factors.

With enough ‘protection,’ the individual adapts to that adversity without experiencing a significant disruption in his or her life. The individual stays within a comfort zone, or at ‘homeostasis,’ or moves to a level of increased resiliency because of the emotional strength and healthy coping mechanisms developed in the process of overcoming adversity. (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 5)

### **Promoting Resiliency**

Although resiliency studies have started in the last 50 years or so, this research remains a fairly new field worthy of exploration (Richardson et al., 1990). Increasing public criticism, increasing complexity of student populations, and changing school expectations are three environmental factors that hinder educator resiliency (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Four internal education factors that thwart resiliency are educator resistance, an older educator pool, organizational constraints, and shared governance (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 37). The Henderson and Milstein resiliency model is effective for school leaders and can be implemented and evaluated (Bosworth & Earthman, 2002, p. 305).

As part of the six steps to promote resiliency, educators must be allowed to

increase bonding with other professional and positive educators, such as mentors and peer work groups (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). The third step of teaching life skills is naturally found in professional development opportunities that promote conflict resolution, stress management, problem solving and communication skills (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). The most important step of providing caring and support is difficult to establish with salaries and rewards determined by policies and worker contracts. Rather, essential rewards and support can be inherently found in feedback communicated between peers and supervisors regarding the importance of their work and the degree of success (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

In her 2008 study, Erika Vernold surveyed special education teachers and found three factors to be of greatest importance: working in a caring and supportive environment, providing meaningful participation opportunities, and promoting high expectations. Each factor was critical for resiliency and retention of special education teachers (Vernold, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Although true educational change is dependent on a transformation of the social system, leaders should not sit on their hands waiting for social change (Berube, 1984). Action should not be delayed because the number of impoverished students has swelled to an unimaginable number. Action should not be delayed because many children live in drear and miserable environments with smiles and laughter. These common excuses should not be a justification for ignoring their needs or rationalized that poverty is relative (Books, 2004).

Whether or not poverty is perpetuated through generations by means of a complex



culture or through family roles, the answer does not rest solely with the family. Rather, it is through empowerment, a greater sense of community, and skill to envision the future that the answer may be found (Bruner, 1971). In order for the equality of education to be delivered to students suffering in poverty, poverty itself must be eradicated or minimized (Books, 2004). The questions remains then how do school leaders take on the impossible task of combating poverty?

With decades of accountability policies and educational reform measures, it is easy to find leaders that have experienced continuous public critique on education since the start of their career. It is beneficial for systems and leaders to address the resiliency of educators who have felt the pressures and combative environment of punitive reform efforts (Milstein & Henry, 2000).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

With an upbringing in an isolated rural environment, my educational experiences did not provide elite opportunities and exclusive resources. I was fortunate to have a supportive familial network that persistently provided experiences that many neighbors did not even consider. Nonetheless, my educational experience consisted of teachers and administrators who used acceptable teaching techniques, often without materials and supplies to compliment learning. Most of my friends and neighbors participated in the free and reduced lunch program with delight. I often thought that breakfast and lunch were free for all students.

As I progressed through my school years, I attended schools with mismatched paint, inoperable windows or no climate control. Typical fixtures of the landscape were overgrown lawns, flickering lights, and “funny-tasting” water from fountains. Interactions with adults in the schools were limited to disciplinary commands or rote memorization directives. Discussions and contact with the principal or vice-principals were pleasantly absent for only child menaces had to deal with them. In fact, I recall a rule for survival was avoiding eye contact with the administrators while walking down the hall.

During my adolescence, I was fortunate enough to attend a school considered to be reserved for the community’s elite. I was proud of my preparation and my accomplishment to survive the perceived rigor of the curriculum. In time, the elitist reputation of the school became more apparent. My classmates included children of politicians, business owners, and the wealthy. I often found myself grouped with

students with similar economic levels to mine or with those struggling in their studies. Every year, I was often placed in mathematics and reading classes below my academic ability. As an outsider placed within a privileged environment, I was encouraged by my parents and older siblings to accept my placement quietly and work hard to gain the confidence of my instructors. Like most students, I was taught to accept this reality as normal and justified. As an outsider looking within the system, I realized that certain structures were in place to hold the position of dominant power. These experiences as a student and a teacher within impoverished environments no doubt influenced my data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, I hold these experiences as insightful lessons that allowed me to recognize the barriers and structures within the system and battling in the hearts of those seeking social justice for all students.

This chapter outlines the details of the study, design, and the process of gathering and analyzing data. A qualitative inquiry based on a multiple case study design framed the study. With clear boundaries set for space and time and the opportunity to collect different sources of data, using a case study methodology for each subject was appropriate (Cresswell, 1998). To be more specific, I was interested in understanding the characteristics and behaviors of several school principals. This methodology was most appropriate to address my “why” research questions within a real leadership context under conditions, events, and behaviors that were beyond my control (Yin, 1994). Since we cannot generalize case study findings to different populations, I hoped to use my findings to make generalizations for theoretical proposals (Yin, 1994).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to identify the actions and qualities of successful

leaders in schools with concentrated poverty. The identification of these characteristics and actions may help guide professional development for administrators and leaders as well as identifying potential candidates for schools with high poverty. Current research provided a plethora of studies discussing strategies utilized by thriving leaders, but to date few if no studies have focused on successful leaders who choose to work the most difficult poverty-stricken school environments. In fact, little was known about principals who effectively traverse the challenging educational environments suffering from concentrated poverty while so many of their counterparts fail.

This study may potentially serve as a compass for school and district leaders to guide principals within the same school sites to better serve students and become lasting and successful leaders. The focus of data collection was to ascertain why these particular leaders stayed, the issues of their greatest concern, and specific supporting elements that encouraged them to remain in these school sites.

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Henderson and Milstein's (2003) Resiliency Wheel addressed the dynamics of how an educator navigates oppression and crisis with resiliency. Although some readers may extend the examples to challenges found in concentrated poverty schools and communities, the Resiliency Wheel does not address these specific trials. The researchers outlined 12 different characteristics of individuals who are resilient, including giving selflessly; possessing life skills; being friendly and well liked; sense of humor; internal locus of control; independent; positive outlook; flexible; desire for learning; motivated; competent; and confident (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). From these competencies, Milstein and Henderson (2003) outlined six main factors demonstrated by

a resilient individual. These factors are divided into “mitigate risk factors in the environment” and “build resiliency in the environment” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). According to Henderson and Milstein, the first division was developed from previous research explored by Hawkins, Catalano and Miller in 1992 who outlined three important strategies to decrease risks for children. The second division, first developed by Bonnie Benard in 1991, outlines three major external assets that are environmental protective factors for individuals (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). With a supportive environment and protective factors, individuals can learn and develop through modeling and experiences within a particular environment (Benard, 2004). In short, the first division outlines factors for environmental risks, while the second division outlines protective assets in the environment.

Theoharis (2007, 2009), who studied principals with a focus on social justice, framed the characteristics of a social justice leader with his seven keys. Theoharis’ keys outline the complex nature of providing all students opportunities and closing the achievement gap (2007, 2009). The seventh and most relevant key of becoming a Social Justice Leader is the development of resilience, which was expanded from previous research on resistance (Theoharis, 2009). In order to deal with public and professional opposition as a principal focused on social justice issues such as poverty, leaders must be able to develop their own tolerance strategies, “proactive and coping” strategies (Theoharis, 2007, p. 245, & Theoharis, 2009). He outlined proactive strategies to include “communicating purposefully and authentically, developing a supportive administrative network, working together for change, keeping their eyes on the prize, prioritizing their work, engaging in professional learning, and building relationships” (2007, p. 244).

Theoharis identified coping strategies that principals employ in order for them to survive a relatively tough day, week, or extended period of time and not necessarily used for day to day operations as a social justice advocate. These survival techniques include nurturing a private life with family and friends that are separate from professional work, maintaining a physical exercise routine, enjoying creative leisure activity, and utilizing unhealthy behaviors or habits (Theoharis, 2007, 2009).

Although Theoharis' research concentrated on a specific group of adults in a particular work environment, there are some parallel themes and ideas with Milstein and Henderson's resiliency concepts. Like Milstein and Henderson, Theoharis outlines the strategies of his seventh key for Social Justice Leadership as actions to strengthen the environment as opposed to a personality trait or inherent quality found in some individuals. Theoharis mentions that principals must redefine their perspective and reconsider their approach to the work of providing access (2009, p. 113). Milstein and Henderson (1996) maintain that resiliency development is a process and changes from moment to moment.

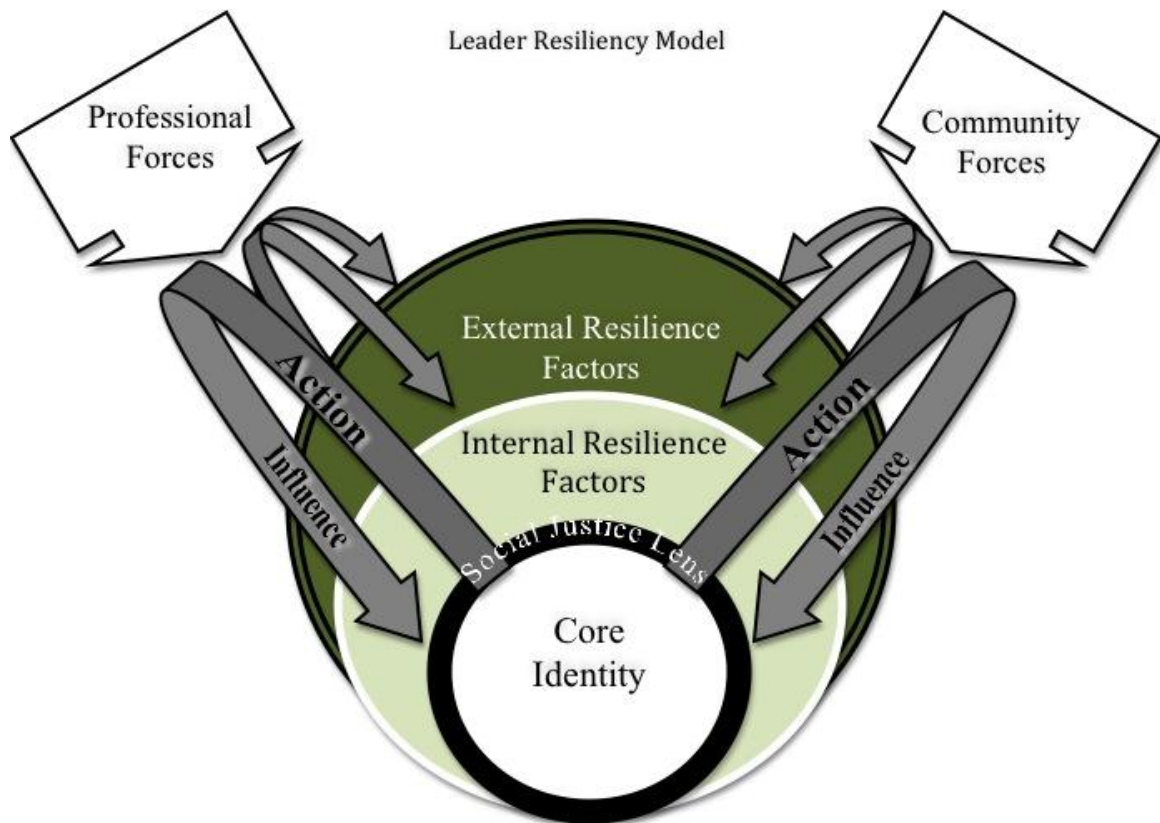
A third perspective of research that was critical to this study was developed by Patterson and his colleagues concerning qualities of leaders. Adding to the work of Milstein and Henderson, Patterson, Patterson, and Collins (2002) paid special attention to three key resiliency characteristics described in the Resiliency Wheel. In their research, they outlined participation, relationships, and expectations to be critical factors for promoting the resilience of leaders (Patterson et al., 2002). Patterson and his colleagues (2002) found seven fundamental strengths that support resiliency include staying positive, focusing on important matters, being flexible, take charge, promote a supportive

climate, have high expectations, and promote shared responsibility. After refining his research, Jerry Patterson, along with Peter Kelleher (2005) limited the resilient leader points to six key strengths. They described such points as strengths when a leader is able to move from their resilience aptitude to some form of action that maintains or improves resilience (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). The six strengths are evaluating current and past reality, staying positive about the future, holding true to personal values, keeping a personal efficacy in perspective, using “personal energy” sensibly, and upholding personal convictions (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

Finally, Yosso explored the Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital with a new perspective of Community Cultural Wealth developed through six forms of capital developed through communities of color (2005). In opposition of deficit thinking, Yosso postulated that individuals and cultural groups develop and maintain capital which can be defined as wealth or accumulated resources (2005, p. 78). Through this framework, an educator or a researcher is able to develop a theoretical lens that allows them to recognize the wealth and capital ignored by the dominant group. This lens promotes the possibility of success and strategic maneuvers to survive the ever-present structures of racism (Yosso, 2005). The lens is a critical quality for a principal wishing to engage in the difficult work of social justice such as assisting the impoverished.

For the purpose of this study, I focused on the components of Milstein and Henderson’s Resiliency Wheel, Patterson, Patterson and Collins’ seven strengths of resilient educators and Theoharis’ professional and personal strategies to build resiliency. Additionally, I explored how some principals moved beyond their personal motivation and resiliency and extend their efforts of becoming an activist against oppression. To

complete this task, I submitted a compilation of ideas extending from the aforementioned research. The study looked at three distinct and interrelated segments for leadership resiliency (see *Figure 4*). The primary layer of resiliency is the External Resiliency Factors. The inner tier of resiliency is the leader's Internal Resiliency Factors. Finally, the essence of the leader's resiliency rests within their Core Identity.



*Figure 4.* Leader Resiliency Model proposed by San Nicolas (2011).

As previously outlined, researchers collected data on factors that built resiliency by mitigating influences within the environment. In this study, I identified common External Resiliency Factors that were the first line of defense against external forces. Parallel to Milstein and Henderson's (2003) work, I looked at leader actions that built a



favorable environment. Milstein and Henderson (2003) listed the competencies as increasing prosocial bonding, setting boundaries, teaching life skills, providing support, setting high expectations, and providing participation.

Additionally, I looked for Internal Resilience Factors that influenced the personal works of the resilient school principal engaged in work to address the needs of our impoverished populations. Such factors may be the result of experiences and testing or supporting a leader's core values. In most situations, external factors provided adequate resiliency to endure most challenges. These internal factors bridged the core values and the external factors and helped promote the core values. The leader persevered and found strength to continue the difficult work while professional and community forces place countermeasures on the mission.

Finally, I identified Core Identity and Values of these leaders. These personal principles have been learned through key experiences and influential persons in their lives. This set of Core Identity and Values promoted an indissoluble worldview to champion social justice for the most impoverished children. This worldview or social justice lens shaped the actions and priorities of these school principals. The leader perpetuated his or her need to promote success for the most impoverished students because of core leadership values. Theoharis (2009) described many characteristics, but pointed out the three common leadership traits as “arrogant humility” (p. 143), a “tenacious commitment to justice” (p. 147), and “passionate vision” (p. 146).

### **Research Questions**

After my exploration of related literature in the areas of poverty and education, I developed the following questions for this study.

1. Why do successful principals in concentrated poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite traditional barriers to success?
2. Why do successful school leaders in high poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite the environmental barriers commonly found in concentrated poverty communities?

### **Research Design**

In order to have a rich understanding of the characteristics and actions of principals who navigated through the tensions of high poverty schools that experienced growth and achievement, I used a multiple case study design (Stake, 1995). This methodology was most appropriate to address my “why” research questions within a real leadership context under conditions, events, and behaviors that were beyond my control (Yin, 1994). These leaders faced social realities found in so-called tough neighborhoods and popular culture holds such assignments to have a lack of economic and social support, yet these leaders possessed characteristics that supported their efforts to engage in complex social conditions. The cases were designed in order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon. Merriam (1998) argued that the heuristic multiple case study approach supported rethinking and reconsidering understandings of the experiences, unknown variables, and relationships. With a greater understanding of these “phenomena, knowledge we could not otherwise have access to,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33) it may be possible to transfer these leadership talents to new candidates who will serve these communities. I was interested in such characteristics and actions.

## **Participants**

Purposeful sampling of accessible participants was used to minimize difficulties throughout the study (Cresswell, 1998). My original intention was to identify school principals in all three levels of public schools serving in high poverty schools within the largest school districts of the United States. According the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences National Center of Education Statistics, New York City, Los Angeles Unified, City of Chicago, Dade, and Clark County are the five largest school districts in the United States (2009). The 2009 data set indicted that New York City, Los Angeles Unified, City of Chicago, Dade, and Clark County school districts had a 2007 enrollment of 5 to 17 year old students in poverty of 26.7%, 23.1%, 26.9%, 18.7% and 14.1% respectively. Due to resource limits and AYP designations, I first limited the search to Nevada and California.

### **Site Selection**

After an initial review of possible participants in the Clark County School District, many challenges emerged. First, it was difficult to find a school principal that had remained in the same school site for at least 3 years. Due to previous population growth in the Las Vegas valley, Clark County opened many new schools and at one point needed to open “. . . a new school approximately every 38 days . . .” (McCord, 2002) . With the opening of many schools, school administrators transferred between schools at a surprising rate. Secondly, there were few middle schools and no high schools that recently met the all AYP requirements for the last 3 consecutive years. Although many schools earned the AYP designation for the entire school, all failed to meet AYP growth for different student populations.

In California, identifying school sites with a continuous successful student achievement record was very difficult. State accountability data records sorted out schools meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the state for at least 2 years. Since there were very few schools within urban school districts, the selection criterion was expanded to include the highest scoring school levels. Each school site had a traditional public school program for a majority of its student population. Sites with attendance by application or magnet programs were included if it served less than 20% of the student population.

**Modifying selection criteria.** The selection criteria were then expanded to include the Obama administration's proposed changes of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Changes to NCLB had a handful of states piloting growth model programs to measure student progression to achievement and proficiency. So, I searched for schools with evidence of increase student achievement and growth. In the proposed "Blueprint for Reform" version of the ESEA reauthorization, testing data may be expanded beyond AYP current measures to include NCLB piloted achievement growth models for student groups and individuals and the State of California's progress index model was a parallel concept. The California Department of Education used an Academic Progress Index (API) to measure the achievement progress of schools, but not individual students. Although the California API was different from pilot growth model programs found in 15 other states, it was available and may be modified to meet future federal mandates.

Using data from schools in Southern California, I then narrowed the selection of public schools with similar achievement rates and socioeconomic demographics, 50% of

the populations participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. As discussed earlier, I was interested in principals that were dedicated to students in communities with high poverty. These sites were public schools with open enrollment policies and largely served schoolchildren in the immediate area. Secondly, the sites had the average number of students enrolled as other schools within their district. Additionally, the principal had at least 3 years of experience in the school site. The 3-year tenure limitation included site assignment as a principal, but previous experience as the site assistant principal was acceptable. Finally, elementary schools had student participation rate in the free and reduced-price lunch program at minimum of 75%. Addressing student reluctance and increased school size, middle and high school population participation rates were at least 50%. A review of these data led to the identification of six potential participants.

### **Participant Solicitation**

Letters were sent to school district personnel for permission to solicit participation from the selected participants. After gaining permission from the superintendents, I contacted the principals from urban and urban fringe schools serving communities with concentrated poverty in each district. The participants were contacted through letter and by telephone asking if they would participate in the study. Follow-up letters and telephone calls were attempted to gain a minimum of three participants. Initial attempts led to two principals accepting the invitation. A visit to a third participant increased the sample principal participant number to three. After a final attempt to contact the remaining principals, solicitation efforts ceased. Each participant agreed to at least one interview session and one day of shadowing or observations. Each participant also agreed to identify a teacher or administrator colleague most familiar with their efforts to

provide opportunities for all students. This snowball interview concept identified an additional data source to triangulate the principals' interviews and observations.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

To produce a robust qualitative study, multiple sources of information, including interviews, snowball interviews, document reviews and school observations were used to develop each case study (Cresswell, 1998). Using multiple cases provided more distinct information pieces and allowed the study to have a more convincing analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1998).

Interviews served as the primary method of data collection. I reviewed the interview protocols of Henderson & Milstein (1996), Patterson and his colleagues (2002; 2003; 2005), Carnes (2009), Theoharis (2003), and Yosso (2005). I used their interview questions to guide my protocol so each question was centered on the concept of resilience or social justice leadership (see Appendices A, B, & C). As a final step, I reviewed and aligned my interview questions to the resilience factors of Henderson and Milstein (1996) since I was most interested in the characteristics and actions of a resilient school leader.

To ensure that the methodology protocol was appropriate for my research objectives, I piloted the interview questions with one school leader from an urban school district with similar contextual features; the pilot participant was outside the target population for this study. During the pilot interview, I discovered a few inadequacies in the delivery of questions and the pacing of the interview.

With prepared questions and points to discuss (see Appendix D), the in-depth interview was less formal than structured interviews and resembled a conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Allowing the interviewee to discuss her or his perspective

preserved a core assumption that the phenomena was explained through the participant's viewpoint and not mine (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To obtain as much information as possible to explain the phenomenon of resiliency, I attempted a three-interview series to collect information that was more "meaningful and understandable" (Seidman, 2006, p. 16). The first interview allowed the participant to share the context of her/his experience (Seidman, 2006). With a better understanding of the context, the second interview allowed the interviewer to have a better understanding of the events as the participant recreated the experience (Seidman, 2006). The third interview provided an opportunity for the participant to ponder the experiences and consider how it influenced them (Seidman, 2006). All three interviews were planned to total 60-minutes. Each successive interview was spaced during the scheduled observation days. When a participant had too many schedule constraints, all interviews were completed within a sitting.

In addition to interviews, I shadowed the school leader and noted observations of interactions while on campus. These shadowing sessions provided an opportunity to record behaviors and learn the meanings of these observed behaviors (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). At that point in time, each principal was asked for supporting documents regarding their experiences as a successful principal such as journal logs, news media articles and supervisor evaluation reports. The observation served as a way to compare data and facts against the participant's description (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To triangulate the interview data, observations, documents, and interviews from colleagues chosen by the principal participants were used.

The snowball sampling method was used to interview a colleague within the school site. Since little is known about the faculty's knowledge and commitment to

assisting the student population in concentrated poverty, this non-statistical sampling method led to the best candidate and helped confirm information gathered during the site principal interviews. This second site interviewee was an individual who was very familiar with the principal's commitment to success of the impoverished students. The principals identified a variety of professionals, an assistant principal, a program specialist, and a program coordinator. Each colleague was given an institutional consent form (see Appendices F & G); the same interview protocol was used with the snowball interviewees with a focus on their principals (see Appendix D). The interviewee not only knew and understood the commitment expressed through emotional and personal descriptions, but s/he was able to describe decisions and policies that were aligned with the commitment. These six audio recorded discussions produced over 12-hours of interview data used for analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Merriam (1998) emphasized that the correct procedure of collecting and analyzing data was to simultaneously initiate both processes at the start of data gathering. To prevent data overload and the fear of being overrun with data, it was critical to begin the process of analysis while at each school site (Merriam, 1998). During this process, I sought additional and sometimes substitute data collection sessions (Merriam, 1998). To systematically organize and code data into hypothesized themes, I used NVivo9, a QSR International qualitative data analysis software program.

Merriam (1998) described two major phases in multiple case studies as the "within-case analysis," followed by the "cross-case analysis" (p. 194) phase. Using Merriam's (1998) and Yin's (2003) explanations, I completed analysis of each case



individually during the first stage. After describing the environment and variables for each principal and school site, I started the phase of analysis across each case. I scanned the evidence for contradictions and constructs in all cases by describing how a theme or idea fit into each case. I then described each case individually and presented themes and concepts that were representative of that case. Next, I began the cross-case analysis and looked for common themes among all three cases in the study (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2003) suggested the use of word tables for cross-case analysis. The use of word frequency capabilities in the NVivo9 program was used to systematically organize the data. Using the information and themes developed in the initial stage, patterns from the word frequency and the coded data were used to help find patterns between the cases (Yin, 2003). For each area of interest developed during the data collection and preliminary analysis, I used the word and phase table in the listing function of NVivo9. I then used the word frequency analysis function in NVivo9 to look for similarities and differences across all school leaders and data themes.

### **Data Coding**

Archival documentation and public documents readily available through state, district, and school websites were used to develop a thick description of each leader. Upon formal acceptance of study invitation, a minimum of 2 days were scheduled for observations and interview sessions at the convenience of the school leader. School observation field notes, leader interview transcripts, and colleague interview transcripts were reviewed. Each school leader was asked to forward documentation of special interest to them or the researcher after the interviews. Using pattern matching as an analytical technique allowed the formulation of logic to match the pragmatic pattern with

the hypothesized one (Yin, 2009).

The field notes, transcripts, and documents were reviewed for themes and supporting subthemes by coding key terms, phrases, sentence clauses, sentences, and paragraphs into specific codes. All electronic data were imported into NVivo9, a QSR International software program. With the use NVivo9, documents and transcripts were classified into specific case nodes and theme nodes. These nodes, NVivo9's proprietary function, were assigned as coding themes. These words and passages were coded into seven main themes: rival arguments, school leader and site, interview question, core identity factors, internal resilience factors, external resilience factors, and cross nodes for each factor theme. Each major theme was coded further into subthemes.

The NVivo9 software was then used to list text by major themes and subthemes. These lists were used to describe each theme and subtheme in this chapter. The lists were prioritized and listed by similar interest or intended population of the leader case. For instance, in the description of arrogant humility, lists of coded text from all core identity lists and arrogant humility lists for each individual leader were compiled. I arranged the list of emerged patterns into a logical order. This researcher specifically formed a sense of logic between hypothesized themes and realistic patterns found in the data.

The number of coded data for each theme and subtheme were used to make sense of the priority use of each major resilience factor and major factor level. Patterns emerged in the frequency for each theme and subtheme. To triangulate the significance of a theme and subtheme, the number of coded reference to each theme and subtheme was compiled into frequency. These percentages were then graphed to display patterns of significant frequency. I paid special attention to coded themes with a frequency of 20%

or higher.

In the cross case analysis, the NVivo9 software was used to compile data from all participants into a node or major themes: Cross Case Core Identity, Cross Case Internal, Cross Case External, and Cross Case All Factors. Each of these major themes was then divided into their subthemes of resilience factors. The coded themes were analyzed by aggregated and disaggregated frequency. Logical patterns of agreement were reviewed and variances in the patterns of agreement were explored.

Finally, NVivo9's function of "Word Frequency Query" was processed for each theme and subtheme for the cross case node. The Word Frequency Query Properties were adjusted to collect the 100 most frequently used terms. The function of "Finding Matches" was set to "including stem words" and the query was processed. Then the "Finding Matches" function was set to "synonyms" and the query was processed again. The results were reviewed and one report was kept for each. Each word frequency query report included a spreadsheet of the 100 words and a cloud tag, which is a visual representation of a weighted word list. The cloud tag was used to identify key terms that were logical and of key interest to the researcher. The spreadsheet was used to confirm unique words to the subtheme or the group of subthemes. The unique word list was then used to identify its content within the data which in turn was used to describe the theme or subtheme among the cases.

### **Analytical Framework**

In this multiple case study, I studied principals serving public schools with high poverty populations. I concentrated my research efforts in describing the actions and characteristics of these leaders who successfully led this particular student population to

success as defined by popular culture. Although the dominant culture defined communities and schools that serve high poverty populations as difficult and unfavorable, these leaders remain dedicated to these urban sanctuaries and appreciate their value. Such resiliency can be found in many adults, but may not persist. It was this leadership resiliency found within these building principals that was the unit of analysis for my research.

### **Resiliency Variables**

In previous resiliency studies, researchers collected data on fortifying environmental factors for resiliency. I identified common External Resilience Factors that were the first line of defense against professional and community forces. These resilience builders were previously described by former resiliency research as actions taken in order to build a favorable environment. In this study, I looked at the six components described by Henderson and Milstein (2003). Milstein and Henderson (2003) listed the competencies as increasing prosocial bonding, setting consistent boundaries, teaching life skills, providing caring and support, setting high expectations, and providing opportunities for participation.

Additionally, I looked for Internal Resilience Factors that influence the personal decisions and works of the resilient school principal. These resilience factors included internalized emotions, motivations, and strengths that have been developed through experience. They served as a bridge between the leader's core values and the drive to mitigate the environment. Such strengths helped the leader to continue their passion to assist impoverished students while professional and community forces place counteractions and influences. These competencies provided a resiliency for the leader to

continue through difficulties lasting momentarily or throughout the term of their tenure. The Internal Resilience Factors included: high self-expectations as a leader; reliance on a close personal and professional network; appreciating and learning from experiences which increase social or cultural capital; and remaining true in personal works.

Finally, I identified Core Values that perform as the fundamental resilience builders for the leaders. These were identifiable ideals and personal principles gained and enhanced through key experiences and influential persons in their lives. Core Values not only influences actions and the worldview of each principal, but it preserved an inseparable attitude that social justice must be delivered to all. This was especially true for the most impoverished children in our public schools. I concluded that that the leader's actions and motivations were shaped and developed through a social justice lens and framework. The leader perpetuated her/his need to promote success for the most impoverished students because of core leadership values. Theoharis (2009) described many characteristics, but pointed to three common leadership traits as "arrogant humility" (p.143), a "tenacious commitment to justice" (p. 147), and "passionate vision" (p.146).

I then aligned the data with the interview protocol using the concepts from Milstein and Henderson (2003), the fundamental components of resiliency, coupled with Theoharis (2009), Patterson, Patterson and Collins (2002), and Carnes (2009), I integrated complementing concepts into six resiliency factors. This compilation guided the analysis of the data collected from the interviews (see Appendices A, B, & C).

### **Bias and Error**

I served as an educator in one of the school districts originally targeted in this

research. Although the size of the school district was large, educators had an impressive network of colleagues and participants who were well known by community members. Despite my personal and professional relationships in the school district, I assumed the role of a researcher. I was aware of the possible bias as an employee in the school district. To minimize bias, I did not include participants whom I have worked with in the past and school sites that I have previously served. Additionally, I used multiple forms of data collection in order to triangulate the qualitative data.

To maintain anonymity of the participants and the school sites, names of schools and participants were not identified and posted in any report or findings. I ensured participants that the protection and possession of the raw data was preserved throughout the entire process. All electronic files were password protected, while field notes and audio files were locked in a secured place outside of school district property. Finally, the population demographic specifics, school level of each site, and the gender of the school leaders were withheld. Since three school principals were in the sample size, the gender, school population, and school level designation would have pointed to the identity of participants.

### **Accuracy of the Findings**

Like most researchers, I am concerned with developing research that meets an acceptable level of accuracy in the data and findings. Cresswell (2003) encouraged the case findings to be truthful to the perspectives of the researcher, the participant, and the readers of the study. Cresswell (2003) listed eight strategies to maintain a satisfactory level of accuracy in the cases, which included “triangulate different data sources,” “member-checking,” rich, thick description,” “clarify the bias,” present negative or

discrepant information,” “prolonged time in the field,” “peer debriefing,” and “use an external auditor” (p. 196).

Using Cresswell’s (2004) recommendation “to identify and discuss one or more strategies available to check the accuracy of the findings” (p. 196), I utilized 4 of the 8 strategies. First, I triangulated data and findings within the process using of multiple methods to analyze and confirm data and using of different sources of data (Merriam, 1998). Secondly, I attempted to provide a rich and thick description of the findings so the reader may have an “. . .element of shared experiences” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 196).

Third, I presented information that contradicted themes and attempted to explain alternative perspectives in the findings. By doing so, I hope that “. . . discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 196). Finally, I shared my biases as a researcher. Merriam (1998) suggested that the researcher explains his or her assumptions, theoretical framework, and world outlook at the start of the study.

I hoped to produce reader generalizability (Merriam, 1998) and naturalistic generalizability (Stake, 1995). To encourage reader generalizability of this study, I developed a rich and thick description so the reader may decide if the case situation can be transferred and applied to their specific situation (Merriam, 1998). This description may allow the user to find patterns within their knowledge and experience (Stake, 1995, Merriam, 1998). I also used multiple cases in “multisites” that allow the readers “. . . a greater range of other situations” through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998, p. 212)

As suggested by Merriam (1998), I presented the findings and results that “. . . make sense – they are consistent and dependable” (p.206). Merriam also suggested to

maintain results that are dependable against the collected data, I stated the “investigator’s position” on assumptions and theory, used triangulation, and developed an “audit trail” (p. 207). The audit trail required the stated method of selecting data sources and collection of information. I maintained an audit trail by noting procedural changes and managed this study “as if someone were always looking over [my] your shoulder” (p.38).

### **Summary**

In conclusion, I outlined the process of gathering and analyzing data for this qualitative inquiry. I was interested in understanding the characteristics and behaviors of several school principals. In order to have a rich understanding of their accomplishments, I used a multiple case study design (Stake, 1995). This methodology was most appropriate to address my “why” research questions within a real leadership context under conditions, events, and behaviors that were beyond my control (Yin, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to identify the actions and qualities of successful leaders in schools with concentrated poverty which may help guide professional development for administrators and leaders as well as identifying potential candidates for schools with high-poverty. With a recent interest in successful school leaders and increasing performance in high poverty schools, there was a clear need to explore effective leaders who thrive in these economically challenged communities.

I hope this study serves as a guide to districts that have a real need for successful and resilient principals. The focus of data collection was to ascertain why these particular leaders stayed in these school sites, the issues of their greatest concern, and specific supporting elements that encouraged them to remain in these school sites.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: ROOTS IN THE COMMUNITY**

As a young boy, my siblings and I walked the edge of our land to clear the property markers at each corner. My older brothers rushed through the thick brush in the direction of a large old mango tree. My father was concerned that it was too old to survive much longer, so we were going to plant niyok, a coconut, in its place. The trunk of the tree was thick and the roots grew deep, but the branches were short and the leaves scarce. In our happy labor, my father spoke about his father who made it a point to care for the old trees. Some 20 years later, I again found myself in the middle of our kitchen, feeling helpless and anxious while my heart rate grew along with the sweat on my brow. A low hum engulfed the room as the howling winds brought debris flying through the air. I can see neighboring trees swaying back and forth in the violent wind. I knew that some of the old trees would fall during the typhoon; our family needed each tree to survive and produce fruit. More importantly, these trees were my connection to my grandparents who passed some time ago. I needed each tree to survive this brutal environment; I hoped none of them would fall.

Like the trees found on ancestral land, school leaders serve as the cornerstone of the community. Although there are significant spans of time for development, bouts of hostile climates and challenging environments can easily impede growth and ultimately uproot any best-intentioned leader.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify the actions and qualities of successful

leaders in schools with concentrated poverty; it specifically focused on resiliency characteristics of these principals. The identification of these characteristics and actions may help guide professional development for administrators and leaders as well as identifying potential candidates for schools with high-poverty. The focus of data collection was to ascertain why these particular leaders stayed in these school sites, the issues of their greatest concern, and specific supporting elements that encouraged them to remain in these school sites.

The results of this study is divided into two major portions; I will first explore each case individually and the emergent themes. A cross-case analysis will then follow with an exploration of all the themes and subthemes discovered between all three cases. This research study began in February 2011 with the acceptance of invitations to participate from three school principals. Six different principals were invited to participate, but half of these leaders declined through response or refusal to respond. In order to increase the participation rate, multiple mailings, telephone calls, and email notices were sent to the perspective participants. Some of the participants were asked to defer their invitation rejections to a more convenient time. By the end of March, three principals, two secondary and one elementary, were interviewed and shadowed. In addition, each principal identified a colleague who also agreed to an interview about his or her school leader. The findings were based on the six interviews, field notes from observations, and supporting documents.

Using the data analysis procedures detailed in the previous chapters, I found three major themes and fourteen subthemes among the three leaders; these included Core Identity, Internal Resiliency, and External Resiliency. In addition to subthemes

hypothesized through the literature review, new subthemes in the arena of Internal Resilience Factors emerged. These Internal Resiliency Factor subthemes included maintaining high expectations for self; holding true in personal works; recognizing supporting and testing capital experiences; finding strength against countermeasures; and trusting close networks through strong relationships. These themes were identified through participant interviews, colleague interviews, field observations, and document reviews. This multiple case study encompassed three willing leader participants from distinct schools in three different school districts within the same large urban center in California.

Focusing on the actions and characteristics of the leaders, the emergent themes shed light on their persistence to successfully serve these school sites. The U.S. Department of Education and general public define a successful school as meeting the education policy of adequate yearly progress (AYP) in student achievement and progress. Additionally, these sites demonstrated increased progress in the state of California's definition of achievement through annual yearly progress with the adopted growth model that complements the previously mandated status model of AYP. California's growth model of Academic Progress Index (API) was used to measure each school site and school district's growth progress in achievement and not individual students (California Department of Education, 2011). States piloting a growth model introduced programs which measure the if students are academically growing to meet or exceed a state's proficiency cut-off point and escape the "non-proficient" label (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2011, p. xv). As the U.S. federal policy and popular opinion leaned

toward a new structure for student achievement monitoring that may include a growth model, I found it appropriate to include leaders serving schools with demonstrated API growth for this study.

### **Participants as Cases**

The participants of this study were school leaders serving in traditional public schools with high poverty populations in urban or urban fringe communities. All three leaders served in communities with population densities varying between 8,000 and 14,000 residents per square mile of the same county. All three schools were large schools with student populations well over the average size schools found in Los Angeles County. The participating secondary schools had 700 to 1200 more students than the average Los Angeles county high school population size of 2200 students. The elementary school had a student population close to 100 more students than the average Los Angeles County elementary school population size of 600 students.

With a limited number of school leaders meeting the selection criterion noted in the previous chapter, privacy and anonymity were a major concern of the participating principals. Complicating the concern was the demographics of each participant, which could inadvertently provide identity information. Since two secondary and one elementary school principals accepted the invitation, the school level was omitted from the description. Additionally, since only one female leader participated, gender references were excluded. As a social justice researcher, blinding the gender identity of each leader was difficult for me. As a struggling practitioner, it was critical for me to protect the privacy concerns of each individual. Remaining true to my promise of anonymity, the case descriptions that follow use gender neutral references.

## **Principal Jones of The Niyok School**

At the very root of my upbringing are skills and experiences that involved a tree that is the most recognized symbol of most Pacific island cultures and locations, the “tronkon niyok” or coconut tree. Adorned on most official emblems including the flag, this particular tree is of critical importance to the quality of life for residents relying on nature. In fact, this tree is honored as the “tree of life” on the territory flag. Aside from the obvious benefits of nutrition, components of this simple tree can be used for transportation, shelter, clothing, tools, and protection. Most importantly, this resilient tree provides an emergency source for the basis of all life, water, up to a full quart. During the hottest days of the year, my brothers and I would climb our tallest tree to pick young coconut, “manha,” in order to quench our thirst and find relief from the heat and humidity. Although there was an apparent abundance, we often got in trouble for overharvesting and acting on greedy impulses. At the time, we grumbled in bewilderment about the punishment, but in time, we appreciated the lessons of living within our means.

Driving to this school site, the types of residences and storefronts vary from new construction to older homes and apartment complexes. Approaching the school, I found more and more students and parents walking toward the site and the quality of homes drastically improved. With the faculty and visitor parking lot in view, I noticed three or four police vehicles and motorcycle officers along the main stretch of road in front of the school. I wondered if the need for such a display of police force was also necessary within the school. Looking beyond the 7-foot fence enclosing the school, it was obvious that additional tax dollars were needed to remodel the buildings. Walking through the

front gate, a security guard politely asked for the purpose of my visit and then directed me to the main office.

Principal Jones who appeared calm and confident greeted me and I reviewed the purpose of the visit. I reminded Jones that I wanted to observe the usual events of the Niyok School. We immediately left the office to observe a few classes. After walking through a few classrooms, Principal Jones asked me if there was a particular class I was interested in observing. I reminded Jones that I was interested in her or his typical routine and not necessarily a specific class or teacher. It became more obvious that s/he was a bit nervous by my presence. As the bell rang, Jones' nervousness was dashed as s/he noticed a staff member in the courtyard and wanted to discuss the recent layoff notices. The nervousness transferred to me as Jones listened to the employee's career and livelihood concerns. After the brief exchange, the staff member was smiling while Jones had a sense of sadness. Jones explained that the district recently distributed layoff notices to several staff members, including that particular individual. It was obvious that Jones respected each employee at the site and was concerned about the families who relied on their salaries.

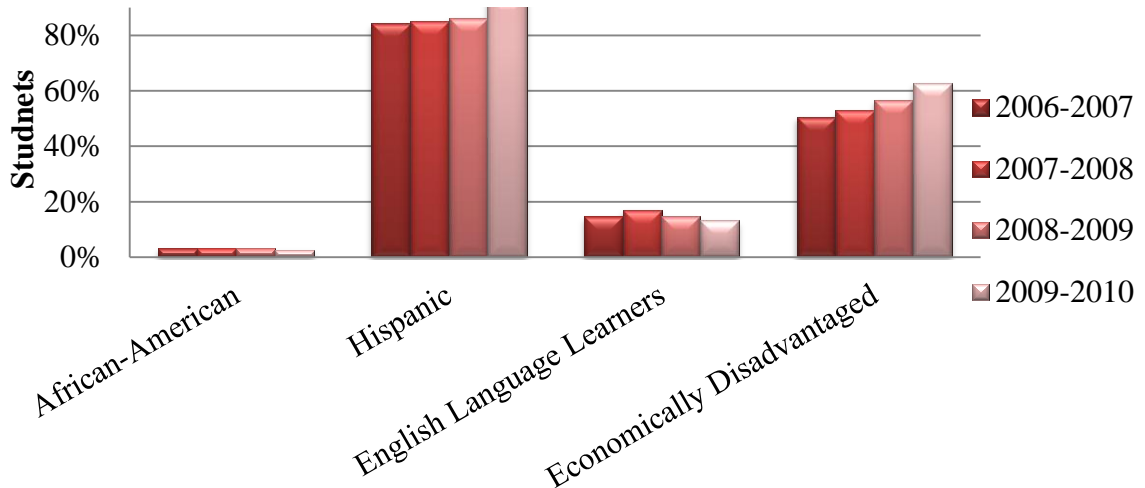
Of the three principal participants, Principal Jones had the longest length of service at her or his current school site. This school principal was interested in remaining at her/his current school site out of convenience and a connection with the community. Jones served the same school site for almost 15 years. Starting as a student-teacher, this leader eventually became the principal. The leader was a first-generation college graduate. Jones explained how her/his parents wanted their children to attend college and they "knew that...would be my sister and I that would be our path." This benchmark of

success was taught early, "...just like you went from 7th to 8th grade, you went from high school to college. And that was not an option; it was just a natural progression for what we assumed for everybody." This "natural progression" may describe how Jones held the aspirations of all students guided by her/his leadership.

Dedication and hard work were not unknown concepts for this relatively young administrator. Jones recalled how at "an early age, 7 years old, when I could reach the pedals on the tractor and I could drive it. I think starting there and [a] really hard working agricultural community instills some of those values." In fact, everyone in that agricultural town understood hard work and defined success with hard work. Jones learned through the residents by "seeing families having more than one job... and they did all they could to support their families and their communities. People gave back."

### **The Niyok School**

Bordered by one of the busiest interstate highways in Los Angeles County, The Niyok School experienced major changes in population demographics over the last few years. With almost a 100% ethnically diverse population, the Niyok School has the highest percentage of African American students in the immediate area, but in sharp contrast to Hispanic students, this student population was still less than 10% of the total school population (see *Figure 5*). Over the last few years, the population of economically challenged families had grown high enough for the Niyok School to have over 60% of the student population participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (see *Figure 5*).



*Figure 5.* The Niyok School population. The number of students attending The Niyok School by major demographic groups.

When comparing the English Language Arts and math proficiency rates among student groups, one sees a pattern of steady growth. In fact, the Niyok School was one of a few area schools that had enjoyed steady growth in achievement growth for over 10 years. While most groups, including the economically disadvantaged students, have performed close to the same rate as the total school population, English Language Learners have remain behind (see *Figure 6* and *Figure 7*). In order to address the obvious need for testing and learning success with this student group, Principal Jones and language learner professionals in the Niyok School introduced a focused effort for these students, many whom were recent immigrants.



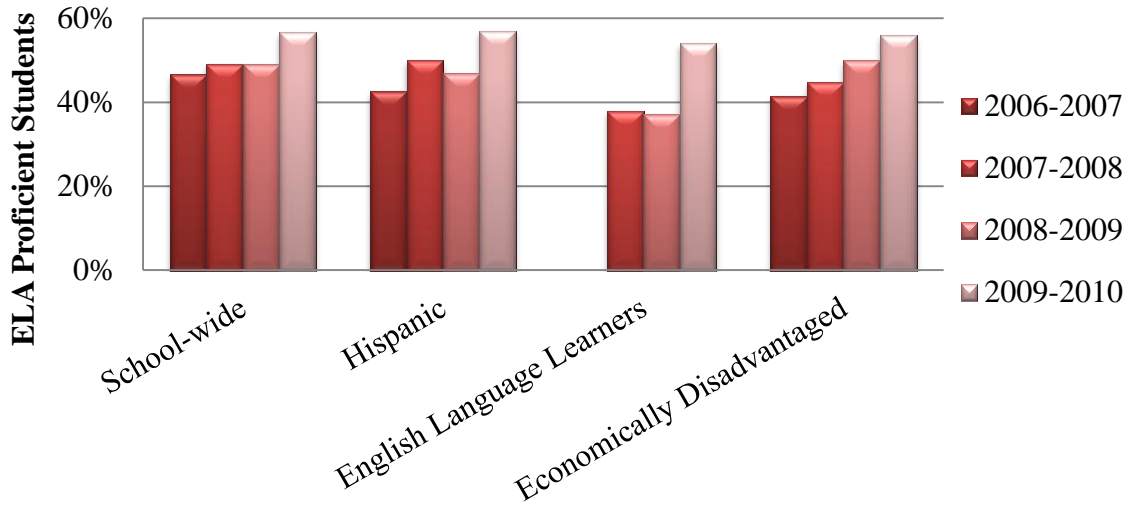


Figure 6. The Niyok School AYP ELA proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly Progress proficiency rates in English and Language Arts subject testing.

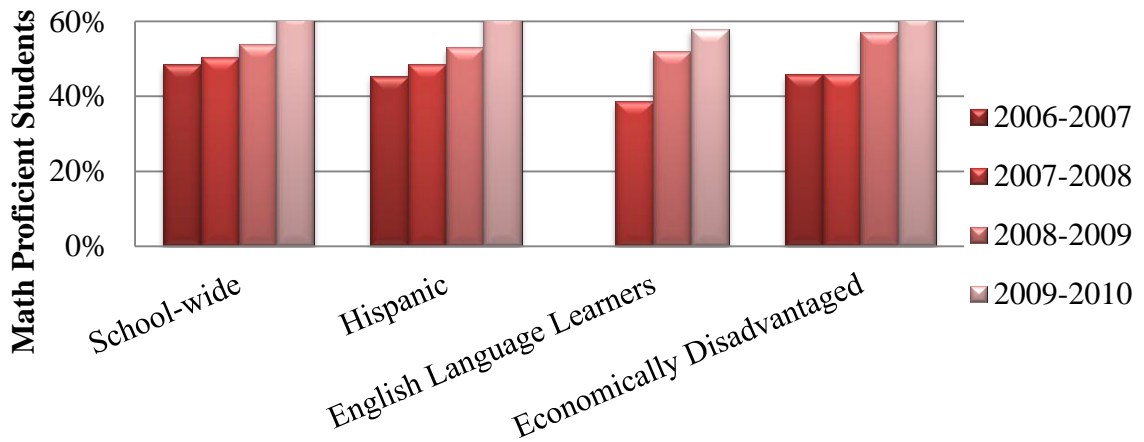
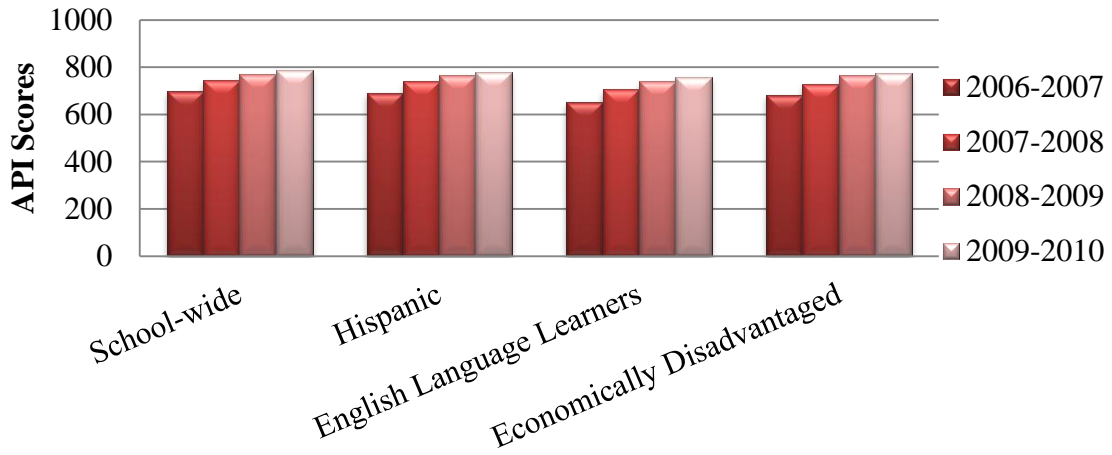


Figure 7. The Niyok School AYP Math proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly proficiency rates in Math subject testing.

Jones was disappointed that the target API score of 800 was not achieved in the last school year, but s/he was confident that the overall school score would exceed the 800 mark. In Jones' view, as the school concentrates on test preparation for the English Language Learner population, all student groups should be able to follow the school-wide

trend (see *Figure 8*).



*Figure 8.* The Niyok School API score by student group. Growth trend for API score for each student group at The Niyok School from 2006-2010.

With a recent improvement in English Language Learner ELA proficiency pass rates, the Niyok School was designated a 10 on the API Ranking in Similar Schools (see *Figure 9*). Although the California Department of Education has yet to grant the highest State API Ranking, the Niyok School is moving steadily to that particular goal.

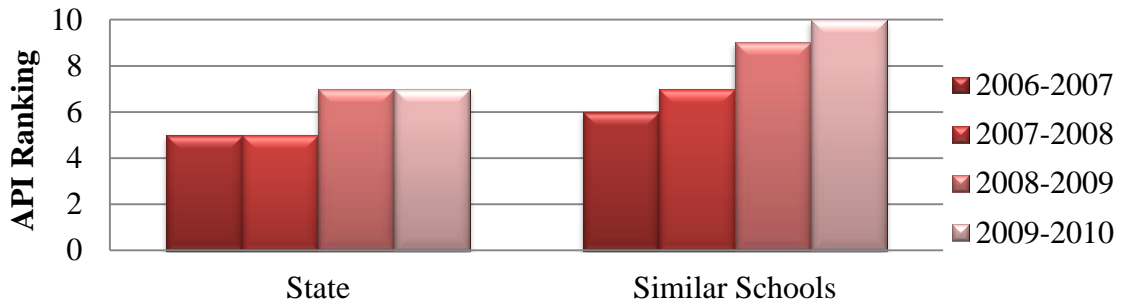


Figure 9. The Niyok School API ranking. Growth trend of State API ranking and Similar Schools ranking for The Niyok School from 2006-2010.

### Niyok Leadership Themes and Subthemes

Of all the expected outcomes found in Principal Jones, all three major resilience factors emerged as key reasons for this leader’s success. While coding data from the Niyok School, occurrences of the Core Identity and Internal Resilience Factors themes emerged equally. The External Resilience Factors proved to be the most significant theme to emerge from the data (see *Figure 10*).

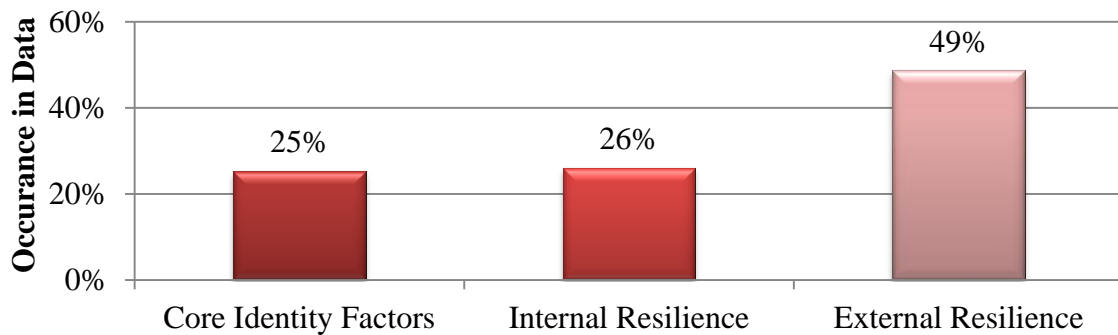


Figure 10. Major themes coded from Principal Jones’ data.

**Niyok external resilience factors and subthemes.** Appearing in almost half of all the coded data entries, it was obvious that Principal Jones placed focus and efforts on the External Resilience Factors. Henderson and Milstein (2003) divided the six different

external resilience factors into Building Resiliency in the Environment and Mitigate Risk Factors in the Environment. According to the data, Jones concentrated on the factors to Build Resiliency in the Environment; specifically, these factors occurred between 19% to 29% in the data as opposed to 6% to 12% for factors leading to Mitigating Risk Factors in the Environment (see Figure 11).

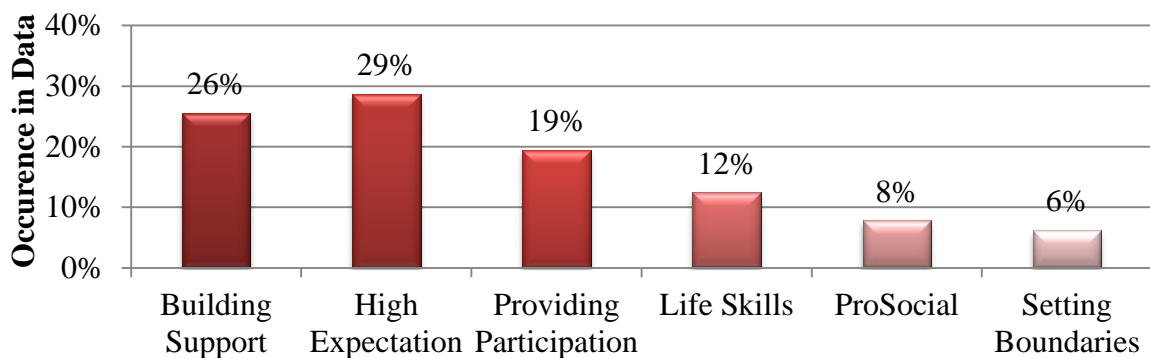


Figure 11. External resilience factors coded from Principal Jones' data.

**Promoting high expectations the Niyok way.** The external resilience factor of Promoting High Expectations within all stakeholders of the school community appeared in almost one-third of the data. Their 2008 accreditation report draft stated, “staff responded favorably that they knew what was expected of them” and this confidence was sustained such that “99% of parents believe our staff has high expectations for student achievement.” Extending from a strong desire to promote excellence, Jones promoted high expectations based on realistic teacher abilities; high expectations served as a motivation for success (Milstein and Henderson, 2003). Jones setup obtainable expectations for students, parents, and teachers; s/he shared how they “... have continued our commitment to a rigorous and relevant educational experience for every student that

promotes meaningful connections and provides comprehensive support.” This leader understood the ability of individuals and where the school could have risen at an acceptable rate. The principal described the complexity, “I think if the people in place and the mechanisms or structures are in place and the cultures are in place then we can do that [reach success].”

Even with the best laid plans and the most capable professionals available, personalities and personal ambitions can easily transform from assets to liabilities. Jones recalled how “...often times we see things differently...and at times there’s a discomfort because of some conflict that is happening between members of the team.” To remediate and prevent these obstacles, Jones described the importance of “talking about it upfront before those things happen and developing expectations on ways that we’re going to resolve [conflict].” He also observed how the staff recognized that competition might be fruitful, because “we are okay with productive conflict.”

This leader continuously appraised the climate, collegial relationships, and individuals’ sense of personal effectiveness in order to maintain higher expectations for each professional. S/He described a delicate balance that could have changed from moment to moment noting, “. . . people are collaborating well, classroom instruction looks good, discipline is down, attendance is high, and everybody seems to be functioning well together. . . .And it [a small incident] set off a panic and really disrupted [our progress].” Jones recalled how a short power outage during a test quickly turned the most prepared professionals into pessimists; they “felt that everything was perfect to ‘Oh, my God, we spent all this time prepping for this...and all of these efforts [are] being destroyed.’ It could be that quick.”

Instead of pressing on the teaching staff and managing behaviors, Jones described an elixir that was contrary to many practices as “. . . leaving out the statistics, [and having] a lot of the trust.” The complex remedy did not revert to the old model of teaching in isolation, rather s/he described a trust “. . .and belief that we're doing the right things here, faith in the school leadership, faith in the classroom, structures, faith in everything may change.” This “trust and faith” that change was possible required an iron stomach and nerves of steel. The contrary result would hold consequences and ill effects that lay solely on the shoulders of the principal. So Jones acknowledged the reverse outcome, “if it doesn't work; if all of sudden we are last in attendance, then people will point fingers and start suggesting the reasons why. . .and that can destroy the culture.” Nevertheless, promoting high expectations required a commitment to deliver professional development, like “reading these leadership books,” “having these discussions [with teachers and students],” and “hope that *the work* is truly is out there [sic].”

The high expectations resulted in national awards and recognition for being a program demonstration school “to showcase the outstanding work that is being done for our students” as noted in district documents. Revealed in accreditation reports, the school community “led the district with the highest daily attendance rate for six years running.” In addition, the district newsletter boasted that Jones’ school garnished over 10 consecutive years of improvement in standardized student achievement scores.

High expectations in teachers translated into goals and objectives for students to produce work at or above standards. The accreditation self-study included, the “. . .staff works hard to hold students to high expectations and provide access to rigorous classes for all students.” The high expectations extended from core subjects to elective educators

such as physical education teachers who required “every student [to complete] three written assignments quarterly on a health, sport, or other fitness-related news/periodical article.”

High expectations for educators can often be translated into difficult coursework, rigorous grading requirements, or ironhanded disciplinary practices. Jones’ colleague explained how the principal as a teacher held high expectations with positive relationships, and how s/he “...had very low D and F rates,...had good relationships with kids but also that those relationships transferred to students performing and wanting to perform better in classes...” This professional was inspired to follow the lead as

...both of us having different safety measures to ensure that students don't fail.

So if they begin to fail, we figure out a way to get them back on track. It has nothing to do with grade inflation, but rather a safety net.

This then translated to actions that required “...every student learns versus at some point giving up on students.”

With these experiences, Jones understood that “the work is done out there” and that the “...biggest tickets are taking place out in the classroom.” As the leader, the responsibility of matching talent with need required, “finding the right people to lead the classrooms...to the biggest impact on students.” Selecting the “right people” was challenging and changes as the school developed and focused on specific areas. As more restrictions and more challenges revealed themselves with budgetary constraints, Jones maintained that “...probably the most powerful thing that we've done is try to hire teachers that are role models for our kids [and] who have similar backgrounds as our kids.” Specifically, they “have the skills, the commitment, the characteristics that are

going to allow them to collaborate with their peers, connect with the students, [and] build strong relationships with kids.”

Jones was confident that through high expectations of teachers, external forces could be managed. In her/his view, “. . . whatever those outside factors contribute to the school site, we want to know that the team and the core of who we are which is our classrooms. Our teachers [and] our staff are able to respond to those pressures and change with the need.” High expectations translated to student expectations demonstrated in a “meaningful capstone experience for seniors.” In the self-study, faculty described how the senior project “. . . provide a true depiction of what all graduating seniors must know and be able to do [sic].” It resulted in productive community members where close to 80% of graduates sought post-secondary training or degrees.

Getting to that point required, not only a focus on academic growth, but expectations for students as members of a community. This concentrated effort to increase citizenship was portrayed as a whole group responsibility. This leader explained that “they are our future community leaders and if we can build a connection early . . . we will have a productive citizenry in this area and hopefully keep them in the community.” In letters and announcements to students, Jones reminded students that they must “. . . help in keeping [the school] a positive place for students and a source of pride for all of us. It can be a major responsibility as discouraging bullying to as insignificant as litter. “I have been embarrassed by the lack of responsibility displayed by some of our students despite the numerous trash and recycling bins found across the campus.”

These expectations remained consistent in time and with each individual, no



matter how difficult. In speaking with students, Jones' colleague described how language and the demeanor should not soften despite student background or the administration would be held as "a fraud or see me as a person with low expectations for them."

To motivate high expectations for teachers and students, Jones keeps high expectations for the administrative team as instructional leaders and professional learners. In order to sustain advances in student achievement, Jones wanted team members to demonstrate and take a "harder look at instruction in our classrooms and try to create the momentum to improve and continue to improve it." Jones colleague explained how their role as instructional leaders, it meant team members were researchers and opened to critique as they brought ideas "to the table...where we all add to it or adjust or modify, so you take a good idea and you make it a great idea." The colleague continuously learned from experiences and how Jones' wanted teachers and students to realize that all decisions were calculated and thoroughly examined, "[Jones] told me over and over and over, 'you don't have to do this in 10 seconds' and sometimes the better decisions might take 10 minutes versus 10 seconds."

This expectation for administrative team members, to invoke motivation and classroom support, required a sense of worth and trust "that the staff provides direct service." Jones explained the critical understanding of focusing on teachers,

regardless of how good a relationship I can have with students on this campus, it is not going to be as strong or what is possible with the teacher and a student who has consistently seeing them in the class day in and day out [and] know them academically [sic].

Jones believed that each team member was capable of instructional leadership and

understanding that “supporting our teachers is our focus...and we can have our teachers maximizing their abilities then kids are going to be affected.” High expectations for all stakeholders are difficult to accomplish with the challenge of authentic engagement and faith in these students and teachers. Jones outlined how this level of “faith” is difficult and the “...team has to believe and carry out consistently [and]... it can't be something that is perceived as not genuine.”

*Building caring and support the Niyok way.* The second most significant subtheme was Building Care and Support that was the most valued factor identified by Henderson and Milstein (2003). Jones’ authentic approach to stakeholders provided encouragement and trust that developed a sense of love and respect for each individual and translated to an increased self-worth as a leader (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). The key to this authentic approach was to provide caring and support by fostering and advancing relationships through a “network of collaboration as opposed to a chain of command.” Jones admitted that any job found on campus required a finite amount of technical skills, but success required professionals to possess “...the interpersonal skills, be able to listen, be able to connect to other people and...people that have the qualities that we want to display.”

The support and caring that existed between adults and students required a relationship that does not focus on scores of academic achievement, but the whole student. Jones explained that the relationships must resemble that found in a family, “...to eliminate that distance between students and not just administration but faculty as well...so they feel the teachers are working with them . . . [and the] administration is working with them to support them.” This sense of family produced results that if

“...kids feel supported everyday; they want to come to school.”

At times support did not appear to be trusting or friendly; rather it took on the familiar identity of tough and necessary. With the flexibility of creative schedules, Jones implemented a bell schedule that allowed teachers to hold students during nutrition and lunch breaks, which totaled 40-minutes every week, to receive small group instruction or disciplinary action. Jones recalled his experiences as an assistant with the charge of school disciplinarian, s/he started with convincing “...students [that] we're not working against you, we are here to support you for us to be success, we need you to be successful.” Jones explained that this support existed because of the collective effort with the student at the center, “Win together or lose together...academic gains together...whatever it may be it is what we do together.”

For some students that meant learning how take responsibility for their actions and how to regain trust in relationships with teachers, peers, and parents. Jones always found this to be a delicate process, especially the call home. Jones encouraged the student to inform parents of a disciplinary issue before speaking with a school official, “Mom would rather hear it from you before they hear it from the school.” This practice included coaching on taking responsibility for the action,

What you don't need to be is defensive. You need to own your behavior and your parents will appreciate that. They will still be mad. But their parents will still appreciate it that you are mature enough to own your decision and what you did wrong as opposed to making excuses on why I didn't do better.

In the end, the litmus test of successful support and achievement was defined by Jones in the traditional sense of an informed and contributing citizenry. Jones explained,

if students continue to learn and are successful at [this school] progressing and graduating and demonstrating that they are learning and leave prepared for college or prepared for careers [and] prepared for life after high school, then we feel that we've done our job.

The principal explained that the apex of this caring and supportive network were the teachers, “finding the right people to lead the classrooms is where we could get the biggest impact on students.” A self-study survey reported that over 95% of the staff enjoy the relationships built at the school site. With a slow and cautious start years ago, the faculty began moving from teaching in isolation to collaborative work. Weekly meetings of discussing student work, assessments, and best practices were shared in a caring and protected environment. Although the school has been recognized by the school district for its level of collaboration, it is still far from where Jones believes the school can be. Jones stated that finding the right pace for implementation was delicate, “the challenge [is doing that] with enough momentum that it is driven from the classrooms and not something that is perceived as the administration is telling us how to teach our classes. And that's challenging.”

The supportive and familial relationships were developed and maintained with the leadership. Jones' colleague, an assistant principal, expressed a sense of trust and caring, “I could trust [Jones] and I could share with [Jones] when things aren't going well and it will be okay. I knew that [Jones] would help me; these were big pluses.” The colleague's sense of protection was described as a means for growth, “high levels of trust [and] confidentiality...that the person is going to help us...[and] move us in a certain direction...” Jones' colleague was confident of personal ambitions and natural

competitiveness, “very rarely do I see people feeling like their shoes are being stepped on and I think that is pretty unique at this school.”

Developing the supportive relationships was a difficult and laborious task that was not always successful. Opposite of the 95% of faculty members who enjoyed the collegial climate were the 5% who did not enjoy working at the site. Principal Jones’ description communicated a sense of determination that was enveloped with sadness.

You are not going to be able to give everybody everything... just being available to listen and to understand their perspective...will give some sort of venue to making a difference...we are not there yet...So we will continue to try...it is important for us.

When it does work, it works well, despite the length of time to cultivate the relationship. Jones recalled how a faculty member felt betrayed over a decade before and recoiled from active participation. Being available and patiently waiting for “a venue”, Jones reported,

He's been involved with that [a personal project] and enjoyed all that...his D and F rate has gone down...is attending meetings. He's smiling and he's involved...to the degree that he can, to a degree that he feels comfortable. His colleagues have come and said I haven't seen him smile or as be as positive like this in many, many years.

This small victory required hours of listening and waiting for “the venue” and an emotional investment in teachers. The benefit of this investment was a larger victory of a contributing professional and more engagement in his classroom. This opportunity

would not be realized if caring did not exist in the leadership; Jones explained how s/he attempted to teach leaders to care.

...one of the coaching points of one of our assistant principals was your work isn't just that report that you are doing. Your work is the conversation that you are having with everybody that may seem important [or] it may seem unimportant. It may just seem like small talk at times. That 'time' we spend with people is also very important to our work [and] to not just dismiss those things as distractions to the work but as part of the work. Not everybody sees it that way; it takes some coaching.

These conversations and emotional investments were found everywhere and required time away from completing the "report that you are doing":

...finding a way to engage them in the work. It is the focus of our work and [it]... existed out there. They exist out in the classrooms. They exist out in departments. And so if that is what we value as the model for continuous school improvement, then we need to support what happens there.

***Providing opportunities for participation the Niyok way.*** Providing Opportunities for Participation was the last external factor with a significant number of coded excerpts in the data. Within this subtheme, Principal Jones repeatedly described the importance of authentically engaging the teachers in promoting success within individual classrooms and it "...extends even beyond the campus boundaries to the city. Often times they will provide resources to help us with the same thing realizing that our students are their students."

Jones understood the importance of engaging the very first teachers of each student, their parents, because “they will take care of our kids.” To promote a guided effort at home and at school, this leader described how critical the task of “providing parents with as much information about education as possible so that they were involved in the educational process.” Sharing ideas through workshops outlined in quarterly newsletters, included college information, rites of passage, character development, home-school partnerships, gifted child promotion, and gender identity issues. And these efforts began prior to the first day of school with all incoming students and parents, “so that we start building that partnership with homes in addition to building those relationships with our staff members, so that students are in the best place possible.”

The commitment to the teaching staff was a top priority and the genuine willingness to include them in the development and maintenance of success was obvious in the actions and conversations with the principal. By promoting servant and distributed leadership, Jones hoped that “I am having a positive influence on them, so they can have a positive influence on their teams [of teachers] that they lead.” While implementing an initiative or focusing on a specific student outcome, Jones was not afraid to take the long route of implementation by

providing them [teachers] choices in which they choose, but providing them with enough professional development and support so that we can go beyond just recommending certain strategies to reaching a point where it is an accepted strategy by the staff.

Jones recognized the recklessness of pushing down an initiative without teacher input, so s/he encouraged professional development and observation sessions so “that if

they see the value then it will happen [and] if there is no value seen in it, then it will be perceived as [the principal] is requiring us to do that.” The effort required planning and conversations; Principal Jones recalled “how do we expose the staff to enough of a variety of instructional strategies that they can choose from.” And these ideas were developed mainly from a core group of educators who generated strategies.

Although every student deserves best efforts of their teachers and the principal, Jones focused on the English Language Learners. Instead of relying on personal expertise, this leader “. . . need to be able to provide support from somebody who has those skills and that background [sic].” Although Jones stayed abreast of language learner research, s/he understood that others have a “background and experience is rich in that area. . . [to] draw from their experiences to create a situation for our current students.”

Ultimately, Jones hoped that the opportunities for participation will “get to that point to make sure that our teacher leaders are on board and they will be able to create that movement within their [grade level or department].” By encouraging their contribution as professionals, the teachers as individuals or departments/grade levels can share best practices to implement proven strategies and to develop innovative methods. As reported by the superintendent, consultants applauded the labors of district educators to develop “next practices” to keep students moving further in the direction of success (personal communication, 2011).

All of these efforts were the result of conversations with other educators and teachers who were inspired by Jones’ passion for learning which was developed through formal degree programs and self-identified professional development opportunities. At the district level, supervisors provided a series of workshops with focused outcomes and



informal options as Jones described how “site principals will read a book every year and... debrief it at our weekly meetings...and retreat in the summer.” Jones recalled how it began with a naïve idea of pursuing an advanced degree which developed into a stimulating experience of learning from instructors and practitioners. S/he was intrigued by “what I called talent that they displayed and the ease in which they spoke about these items and the comfort that they were able to establish in the classroom.” So as a leader, Jones reflected on providing the same reflective practice as a student of leadership learning from “their [the instructors] personal experiences in their positions and it became a real model for administration...” Now assuming the instructor position for educators under her/his immediate supervision, Jones was reminded how daily challenges are reflective opportunities, “to openly talk about...let's learn from this situation.”

**Niyok internal resilience factors and subthemes.** Two subthemes appeared at the same rate as core values. The internal resilience factors consisted of (1) relying on a close network of support and (2) developing high self-expectations (see *Figure 12*). The other subthemes of growing and recognizing capital experiences, along with remaining true in personal works, emerged half as much as the former.

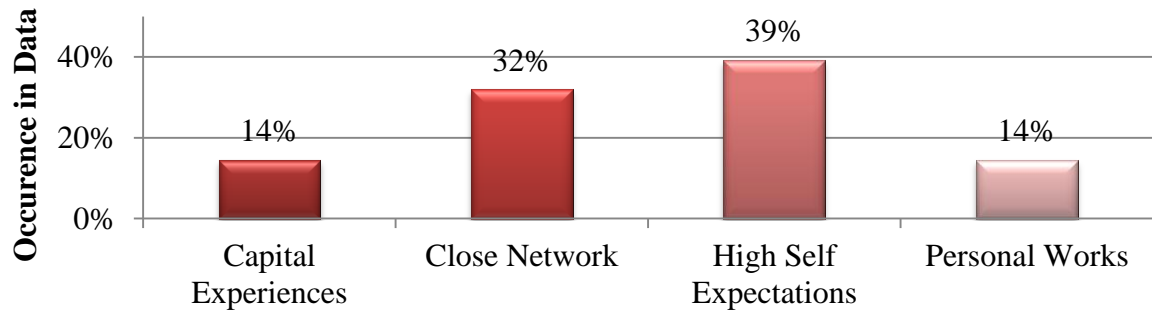


Figure 12. Internal resilience factors coded from Principal Jones' data.

*Forming high self expectations the Niyok way.* When is good, good enough, for this school principal? The Niyok School earned performance index scores near the target state scores and earned the highest API similar school ranking score. When asked about satisfaction with the current progress and simply maintaining the current level of success, Jones squirmed in the seat and displayed an uncomfortable grimace. While shaking her/his head, Jones explained, “it’s fragile...or it’s fragile enough.” To assume that the “work” is going to ever be completed would be naïve. Although the achievement gap between all groups have diminished in recent years, Jones’ self-expectations of addressing the needs for all students and a elevated sense of self-worth would not allow this principal to “ease up.” S/He continued, “The model that we've used in identifying best practices in common assessments is great and has taken us a certain distance.” The next step to success remained elusive, “My concern is how to continue to feed those discussions... with enough input where people are trying new things.”

Inspired by other administrators, Jones found a few leadership instructors who “...delivered this information that was very engaging” and administrators “serve in the role he does” because they posses “some sort of talent and something that is drawing people to him and I can see why he...or she has been so successful.” Along with the

other graduate experiences, Jones deeply reflected if “I really... am I really interested... really stimulated an interest.” So the idea of becoming an administrator required a self-discovery of the type of leader one can be, “what has influenced you...what will influence you? What kind of leader do you want to be . . . “?

This practice of self-reflection and a vision of becoming the best leader served Jones well. This principal has avoided the all-too-familiar need to “define my authority” approach, as this leader explained, “it is not necessarily age; inexperienced administrators feel the need to establish themselves as the leader, but I think with confidence...you understand that's not the best way to do it.” This confidence allowed this leader to “really focus on being a more effective leader...not worry about perceptions about is [s/he] a strong enough leader.”

The motivation of maintaining high self-expectations paved the way for others to possess high expectations. This mutual influence lends confidence in personal and student success as Jones explained, “...the thing that I would have to identify [as] a success has been the ability to build teams and build teams that believe we could make a difference.” As a byproduct of a high self-efficacy, the teaching faculty translated this from a pipedream into a plan for success. This principal explained the hope, “you will see it when you do a walk...you will see it in just about every classroom that you visit.” To get to that point requires a confidence and expectation that permeates the self and flows to professionals following with minds and hearts. Jones explained that this happens only with authentic expectations. S/He explained,

I think it is conscious it is not something that will happen on a large scale by chance. I think it is something that our leadership group, our leadership

administrative team has to believe and carry out consistently. It can't be something that is perceived as not genuine. It has to be from a true place that... A belief that we can make this better by building relationships with each other. That's all.

Believing in oneself and the ability of others, “from a true place” found within, was not taken lightly; nor was it a small order. Jones explained and warned, “...we will be able to resolve just about any problem. It's a... It's work.” The source of this elevated level of expectations as a leader stemmed from her/his childhood experiences. Jones reminisced how “it was an expectation, an educational expectation in our family [and] there was expectations that we would work hard.”

Jones' colleague verified the high level of open communication within the leadership team, but like Jones, he believed “that we do a very good job with it, but I think that it could always get better.” As an administrator, Jones understood the importance of the role, the required investment of time, a belief in oneself and the belief of positively affecting the adults in the school. Jones realized, “that our primary goal is not directly to support students but is to support staff members so that they can affect more students.” This leader aligned her/his expectations, so “if we have everybody going in the same direction, it is much easier to effect the whole student body; again that is challenging.”

***Relying on a close network of support the Niyok way.*** One of the most persistent subtheme that emerged with this particular leader was the importance of building relationships. The principal explained a key to success was “building relationships, building effective teams, [was] the best approach anywhere.” “And although it is a

rewarding job” Jones revealed that the most important network sometimes suffered: “it is a hard job, it is a time consuming job [and] I have a small and a young family.”

Important nonetheless, and it required a relying on this close network.

Jones described three layers of a intimate support network: colleagues in the administrative team, professionals within the school district, and a personal network originating from childhood friendships. This first consisted of coworkers who had known this principal for almost a decade. Jones description and obvious passion for the faculty began with “the time here on this campus [which] has allowed for the development [of] these relationships and a connection to the staff. I know everybody on this campus.” This afforded the opportunity for a strong sense of trust for team success as described by Jones’ colleague, “everyone wants to shine...I should say that everybody wants the team to shine.” Even if philosophies and strengths differ, Jones “. . . recognize that I need to surround myself with people that aren't necessarily like me [sic].” And with different backgrounds, this principal trusted that “their background and experience is rich...and [I] often bring those people that we can draw from their experiences.”

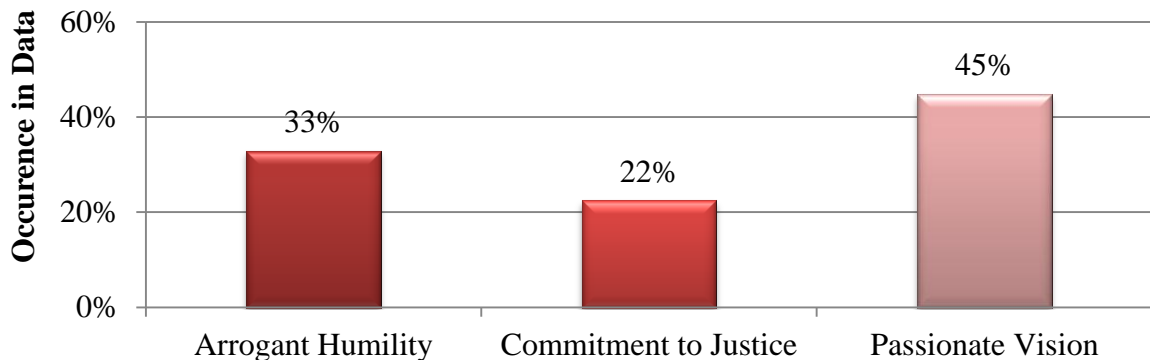
Aside from relying on coworkers, Jones admitted to a shallow support system, saying, “. . . when I first became an administrator; it felt like my network was relatively small...I have gained a few.” But this professional network remained fairly limited to “my former principal at the neighboring [school]...I learned a lot from her... [and] I have a few that I go to and trust...many of them are in the district.” This system of close support and close proximity remained a priority for Jones, “trying to develop those relationship first within the district, and then beyond.”

On a personal level, Jones maintained a strong network of support with critical

individuals. This principal described her/his spouse as the more intelligent individual in the relationship who was better able to manage critical tasks for their young family.

Jones described a trust and respect of her/his parents who “really influenced us [my sister and I]” to study hard and not to be afraid of backbreaking work. Finally, Jones described a teenage friendship that started with lazy days at a ballgame or going to dinner at each other’s homes. This close friend serves as an administrator for a rural district and they exchange ideas and concerns frequently.

**Niyok core identity resilience factors and subthemes.** All three subthemes of arrogant humility, a true commitment to justice and a passionate vision emerged in the data at significant rates (see *Figure 13*).



*Figure 13.* Core identity factors coded from Principal Jones’ data.

***A passionate vision through the Niyok way.*** One of the most consistent descriptors used by this school leader in the discussion of the school and leadership vision was found in the word, *relationship*. Consultant reports, district newsletters, and self-study reports all described the vision of building relationships and “meaningful connections [and]... comprehensive support”, as a prerequisite to “design challenging

work that makes sense to them is an important aspect of getting students to work really hard at very high levels.”

This particular school leader was not just interested in student achievement scores. Jones wanted to “ensure that every student demonstrates success.” This required creative scheduling for students, innovative bell schedules, and developing relationships at all levels and especially with students. Jones’ colleague remembered how Jones’ innovative spirit developed as a classroom teacher and “...was one of the few who was very open to progressive ideas and new ideas on education.”

As a teacher, Jones fostered relationships with students that produced one of the lowest D and F rates on campus. And this did not happen by chance; the relationship allowed for insight in “...how strong they are academically; what will work with them and what will not work with them and their learning style. And beyond that, knowing them as people and seeing them grow.” With hard work, persistence, and passion, Jones wanted “...to see that transition from a kid ultimately to a productive young man or woman who is ready to enter the work force and become a citizen of the state in this community.”

To build the vision of developing effective relationships with adults and students, Jones maintained a servant-leadership approach of placing individual needs behind the needs of others. In doing so, this principal did not become overly concerned about opinions and traditional definitions of a tough and strong principal. Instead, Jones was convinced of the benefits of serving the needs of others, especially in building teams and strong relationships. With the vision interwoven into the lives of teachers and students, Jones explained that “a central vision [of] building people that understand it and can

articulate it and support it is much easier than having to make every decision or having the answer [to a problem].” The trust that developed allowed the leaders in the offices and classrooms to implement strategies and plans that benefits individual learners. Sometimes these strategies included recruiting and selecting teachers who attended the Niyok School as a student and still reside in the community. Jones predicted that “people that understand what the central vision is here for our campus and the purpose of our campus and will continue to stay focused on that work.” This statement paralleled Casanova’s (2010) case study of a school that “. . . has been able to beat the odds so consistently . . .” was directly related to “. . . the continuity of the vision of the school held by its leaders” (p.40).

*An arrogant humility of the Niyok way.* One of the best ways to describe this school principal was through a subtheme that depicted two different personalities as found in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Although not as extreme, this leader did maintain a calm and modest approach to tasks and interactions with colleagues and students. At the same time, Jones’ presence did command a sense of confidence and presence amongst peers and students. At first it appeared to be related to this leader’s title, age, or length of experience, but this argument faded with further observations and document reviews.

This mild mannered school leader used words such as: us, we, together, servant, style, beliefs, and commitment. When asked about ambitions or the moment when s/he decided to become a school administrator, Jones replied that the classroom was the best assignment for anyone or that the idea of moving up or moving into the main office was nerve-racking. As a novice school leader, Jones was forced to evaluate different types of leadership styles in order to make decisions and “feeling like I needed to be strong.” This



was a common approach observed from counterparts at other school sites and offices and considered the possibility that these leadership models may be successful at other schools and with different types of people. Jones suggested, “. . . everybody brings a . . . different style or approach [and] . . . it shows differently at different campuses.” Based on these observations and knowledge gained from research, this leader refrained from using a top-down approach, but justified this style for others, “I have also seen other campuses at various stages of implementation . . . but I'm also a strong believer that situations may dictate.”

Jones' ownership of success and personal effectiveness of leadership can be described as mild, if not absent. This principal regarded her/his current assignment as a gift in which s/he admitted, “I have been extremely fortunate.” At the same time, Jones regarded teaching as a much more rewarding job where days were filled with joy and laughter with students and the “work is different as an administrator; I don't think [there] is as much direct gratification.” With all of the personal and professional successes met over the last few years, Jones retreated, “I would think if someone were to ask me what do you do well on? I could list a lot of things that I don't do well.” And when reflecting on student success, Jones added, “. . . a good part of the ship . . . has been built over many years. It is something I can't take credit for; it is something that many people have added to over the years.”

On the flip-side of this leadership personality, this principal exhibited a poise and confidence combined with humility that may be mistaken for insecurity. With a self-professed use of servant-leadership, Jones was certain that the approach was necessary in “pulling the best of others” and developing teams even though other schools developed a

“mid-significant program.” Jones built a repertoire of leadership through experience and reflection. Jones was previously trained by supervisors who ruled the school site with a ironfisted approach that was “necessary...in the most dire situations.” Her/His observations of other site leaders included very similar hard-nosed approaches which Jones considered as “. . . not sustainable over a long period of time.” The traditional approach to leadership was contrary to Jones’ personal definition of leadership and her/his “true support for vision.” Validating this perception, Jones described a neighboring school with similar student demographics that have not had the level of success, but has suffered through “. . . high [teacher] turnover and administration over the last 5 years; they've had four administrative teams in 5 years.”

In contrast to many schools within the school district, Jones was proud of 11 years of continuous achievement growth, the highest attendance rate despite the walking population of students, a leadership team recognized by the district for their collaborative efforts, few major disciplinary issues, and the highest rate of student diversity in the school district. Support from Jones’ professional network network remained minimal, which was made obvious as s/he shared, “I wouldn't say that I have an extensive outside group of people that are resources.” To break this cycle of failure, Jones hoped “I am having a positive influence on them” and in turn, “they can have a positive influence on their teams.” Eventually, this principal would like to see as these novice leaders “move on to other campuses...hopefully [they] take some of the culture that is here and be able to grow it on other campuses.”

*A true commitment to justice in the Niyok way.* The schools self-study report, included several items that were evidence of a commitment to justice under the

leadership of Principal Jones. Through a shared leadership structure, math and English teachers were assigned to courses and student populations that allowed “our best teachers work with students with the greatest needs [sic]. Pledged to maintain access to the best opportunities, Jones and teaching staff received national recognition in the top 5% of schools nationwide for student access to the top honors classes. , Over 95% of respondents in the self-study survey believed that the staff treated “all students with respect and dignity” and the school community “promotes understanding and acceptance among its racially, ethnically and culturally diverse student body.” The school was commended in a district newsletter for earning a national designation as an observation school which promoted student success for “the least served students in the academic middle...”

On the surface, the school climate appeared to be free of tension among student groups. But Jones’ colleague discussed how issues had escalated from a single incident and “now it is being perceived...and now you have race issues and the student community will see it as race...” Therefore, the team and Jones remained vigilant in those incidents that escalated into serious events due to perceptions.

Academically, the commitment obligated Jones to look at struggling students who did not fit the traditional definition of a model student. This principal shared the practice of “recognizing that we have significant struggles of significant students that have some significant challenges or had challenges in education in the past.” Being committed to justice required learning from other schools or hiring professionals that reflect the demographics of the student population. Jones admitted there was a need for a specific teacher, “so if we can find an equally talented male English teacher, [who] is bilingual

and has grown up in this community, that only helps their chances of being hired at this school.”

A high level of commitment for justice on all levels within the schools required a long-term promise to be present despite financial stability, emotional readiness or personal ambition. S/he explained, “even if you get to a place where you feel like the ideal model has been achieved, to maintain that model is a great deal of work.” And Jones has been told by key individuals in the school district of promotion possibilities, but is hesitant to consider them. This leader shared his/her love for the work as an educator and the current site assignment, “It didn't feel like work, it felt like what I do. I just felt like fun.” And when asked where s/he wants to be or assigned to in the future, Jones admitted, “I see myself here, hopefully... I have been extremely fortunate.”

### **Principal Johnson of The Pi’ao School**

Of the three trees being explored, pi’ao is the fastest growing and probably the most versatile. As a child, I was taught to gather young portions of pi’ao to make soup for my family. Later on, I was taught to make fishing traps to catch fresh water fish and shrimp from the river. As a young adolescent, I was taught how to select pi’ao for building temporary housing walls and floors. At the end of my teenage years, I learned that pi’ao was not a tree, but rather a tall grass. Also known as bamboo, pi’ao is delicate and fast growing. After harvesting, the green bamboo can easily have the strength as many soft woods as it turns dark. Observing the leadership resilience displayed by Principal Johnson was reminiscent of the pi’ao that quickly recovered from harsh drought conditions, toppled from unrelenting pressure of storm winds, or adapted to many different uses in the community.

If the conditions of a drought can be translated to economic conditions of a neighborhood, the community surrounding the Pi'ao School was in need of monetary precipitation. Bordered by busy streets, vacant business properties, apartment complexes, and chain-linked fences, this school site was one of the oldest structures in the community. Built during the last major recession, the Pi'ao School resembled a jigsaw of modern and older structures forced together as a single site. I later discovered that the school was originally a secondary school for the community. I parked along the city street and walked through the gate of a 12 to 15-foot fence enclosing the school site. Entered the main office, I was greeted by a receptionist who was very interested where I parked by vehicle. When I pointed in the direction of my vehicle, the receptionist and another employee insisted that I move my car onto the property through the automated gates. At first, I was more worried about my data collection, but the urgency in the receptionist's voice redirected my concern to my personal property.

After securing my vehicle, Principal Johnson greeted me and then led me to the courtyard for student supervision. Immediately, I noticed how Johnson greeted student after student by first name. This principal asked a few students about their homework or a class project, but most exchanges were about breakfast. As we returned to the main building, more first name greetings and food questions were entertained. Food service workers were delivering food coolers to the doorstep of each classroom down the main hallway. Johnson opened the nearest cooler, checked the contents, and carried a few coolers into the classrooms. S/He explained that delivering breakfast to the classroom allows the school to address nutrition needs while the students worked on classwork. It was obvious that Johnson was concerned about using every minute for instruction and

providing a nutritious meal for students. However, it was difficult to determine which was more important to this school leader.

As described in the opening chapters of this study, there are specific international and national indicators that help describe the lives of impoverished families. Of all three school leaders, Principal Johnson has life experiences that stem from these national and international indicators. Johnson is a first generation of sorts. She/he is a first generation school leader and educator. For most community members of her/his childhood, graduating from high school proved to be challenging. This former inner city resident is also first-generation college graduate and aspires to earn a doctorate degree.

As a long-time Los Angeles basin resident, Johnson completed teacher certification requirements in the Los Angeles area, including pre-teaching practicum and observations. These teaching opportunities included experiences with some of the most affluent communities, "...I student taught in different areas. When I was going to school for my teaching credential and I was in Beverly Hills...it's a totally different [experience]." With roots in communities of blue-collared workers, Johnson preferred teaching assignments with similar demographics from the past. "I grew up in the city. I grew up in L.A., near downtown. So it was a very similar demographic to this area. And again, I just feel like I connect with these parents..."

As a young leader, a majority of Johnson's education career has been outside of the classroom. Supervisors recognized Johnson's ability to build relationships and motivate fellow educators and offered new challenges, including serving as an assistant principal. Principal Johnson recalled the importance of helping more learners with every step taken on the educator career ladder. "I was in the classroom, obviously I was

impacting 20 lives...and then, when I became a special projects teacher, I was working with different groups of students. So, you know, it was like 100 students. And then I became an AP.” Although Johnson found rewards in helping directly in the classroom, this leader saw the value of helping even more students, “I just felt for me it was like I am making a difference as much as I can in the lives of all of these children.”

Johnson’s obvious passion for her students and economically struggling families stemmed from her own experiences as a child. With determined parents to guide her, she recognized the importance of determination and perseverance because, “both of my parents are from both from different countries. They both came here with very limited education...just working low paying jobs.” Although they had fewer material possessions than counterparts in other communities, Johnson’s parents had high expectations for the future

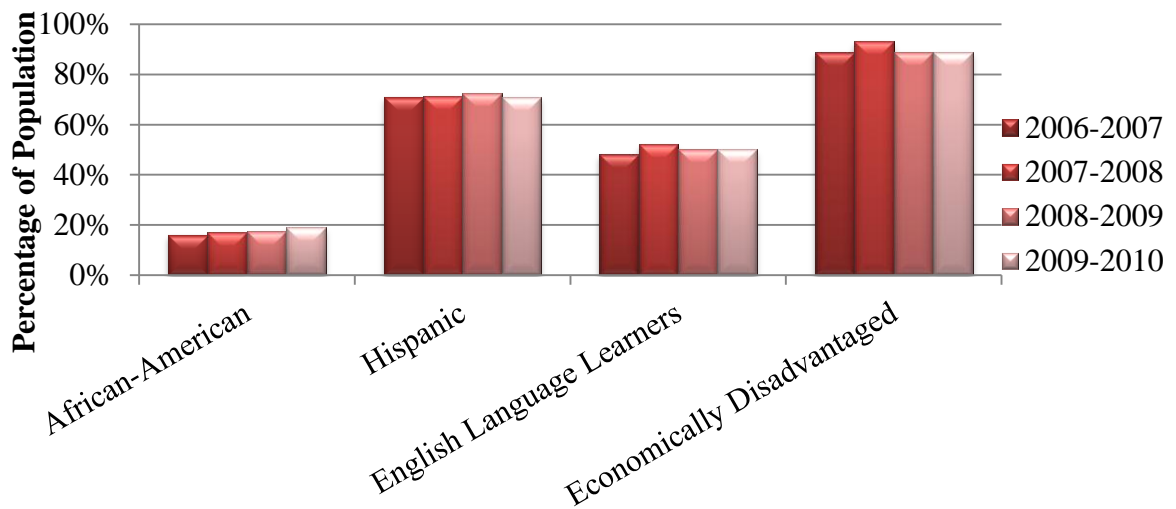
...because they wanted to be more than they were. Obviously for me to have different opportunities, [that] they weren't able to have in their country because of the limited income of their parents. ...They were not able to pursue any of the education, any schooling or academics.

They both wanted Johnson to take full advantage of educational opportunities in their new home.

### **The Pi’ao School**

Like most schools surrounding the Pi’ao School community, at least half of the students were English Language Learners. Close to 90% participated in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and 98% of the student population are members of minority

groups (see *Figure 14*). The school rests within a community of the Los Angeles basin with a population density of over 14,000 residents per square mile. The streets of the community are lined with small single-family homes and many multiple-family apartment complexes. Business establishments, more often than not, display marquees with both English and Spanish names and descriptions. Unfortunately, the local chamber of commerce has highlighted the increase of vacant store frontage over the last few years.



*Figure 14.* Pi'ao School population by student group.

A few years ago, the Pi'ao School was not consistently met the requirements for AYP and goals for API. When Principal Johnson arrived as leader, achievement goals were one of many different concerns in the community. Since 2006, Pi'ao School students have met the requirements of AYP consistently for both Math and ELA proficiency requirements (see *Figure 15* and *Figure 16*). In comparison to counterparts throughout the state, there is still much more ground to cover.



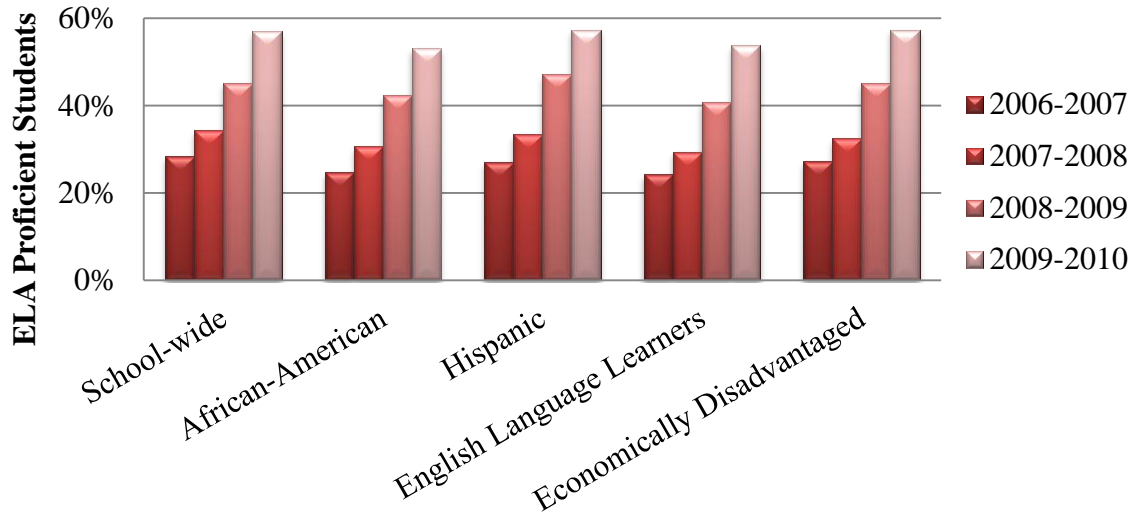


Figure 15. Pi'ao School AYP ELA proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly Progress proficiency rates in English and Language Arts subject testing.

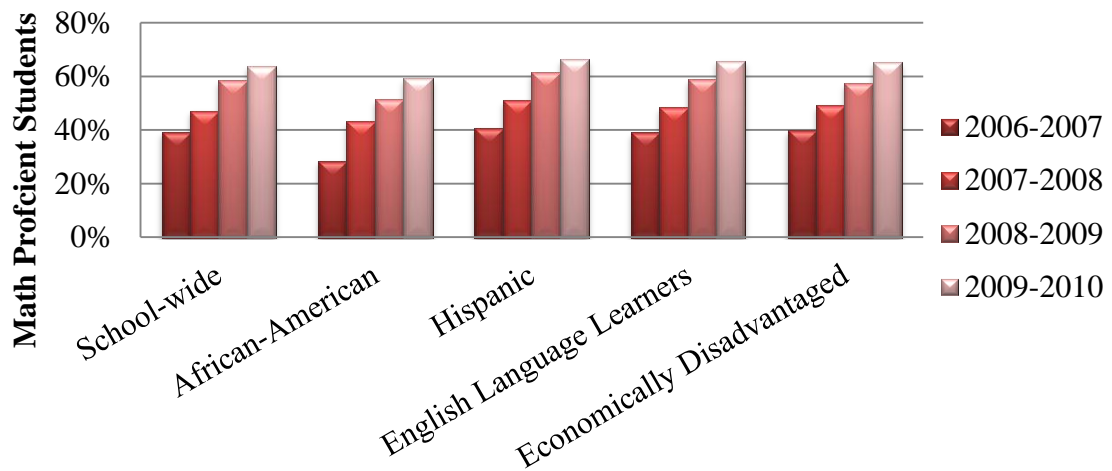
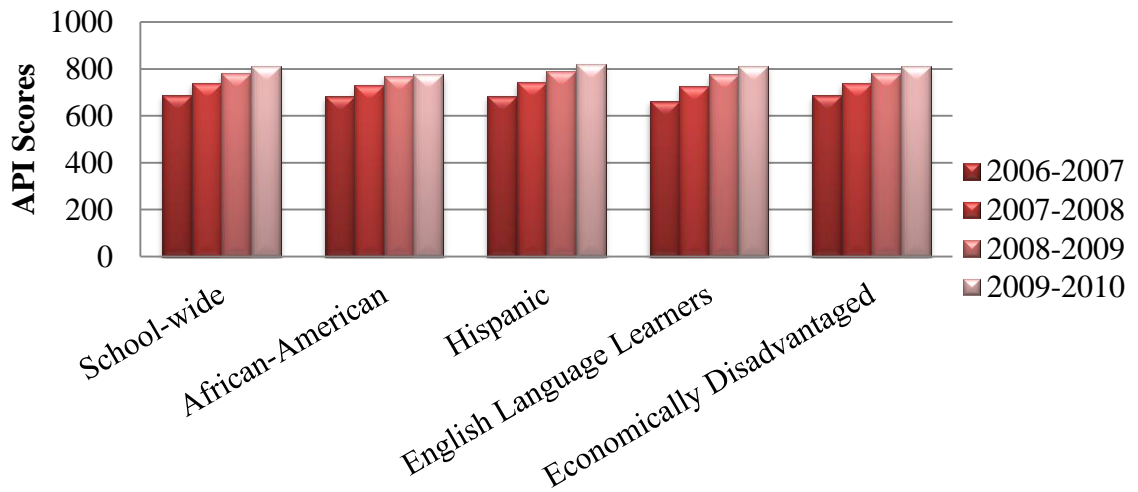


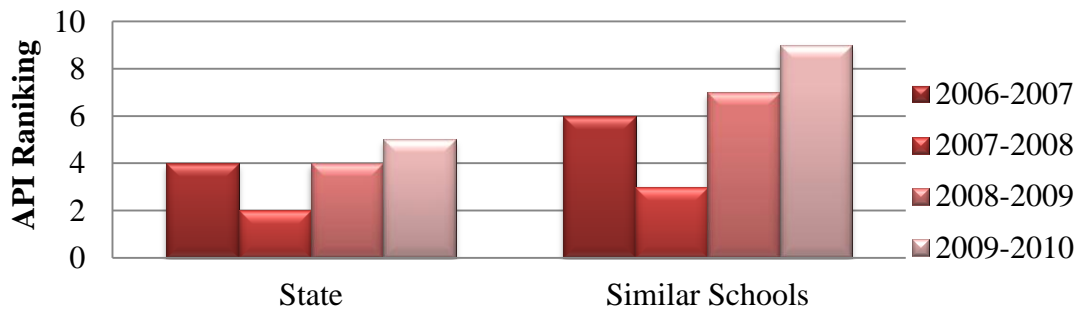
Figure 16. Pi'ao School AYP math proficiency. Pi'ao School AYP Math Proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly Progress proficiency rates in Math subject testing.

Since Principal Johnson joined the Pi'ao community, the school has enjoyed a steady climb above the state minimum recommended API score of 800. In fact, all API scores for student groups have risen above the 800 mark with the exception of the

African American student group (see *Figure 17*). The Pi'ao School's overall API ranking has climbed from a designation of 2 to 5. For the Similar Schools API ranking, the Pi'ao School has improved from a 3 to a rank of 9 (see *Figure 18*).



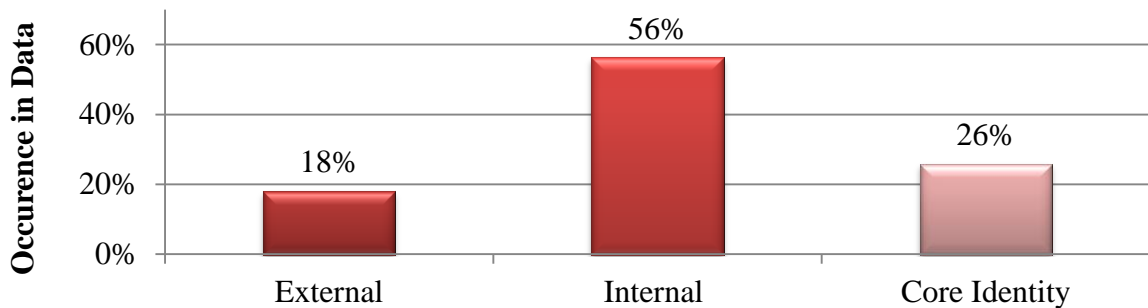
*Figure 17.* The Pi'ao School API score by student group. Growth trend for API score for each student group for the Pi'ao School site from 2006-2010.



*Figure 18.* Pi'ao School API ranking. Growth trend of State API ranking and Similar Schools ranking for the Pi'ao School site from 2006-2010.

## Pi'ao Leadership Themes and Subthemes

Of the three hypothesized levels of resiliency, all three variables emerged as significant in the success of Principal Johnson. When all three factors were compared, the Internal Resilience Factors emerged most often in the data (see *Figure 19*). This leader did not possess a deep professional or personal network of support so reliance on these factors is not surprising. Additionally, Johnson developed an external environment that may not need immediate attention in order to maintain or build leader resiliency.



*Figure 19.* Resilience factors coded in Principal Johnson data.

**Pi'ao's internal resilience factors.** Review of the data allowed this researcher to have a clearer understanding of Johnson's decisions and actions for handling influences from professional and community forces. Of all references in the coded data in Internal Resilience Factors, three of the four subthemes emerged most often: Capital Experiences, High Self-Expectations, and Personal Works (see *Figure 20*).

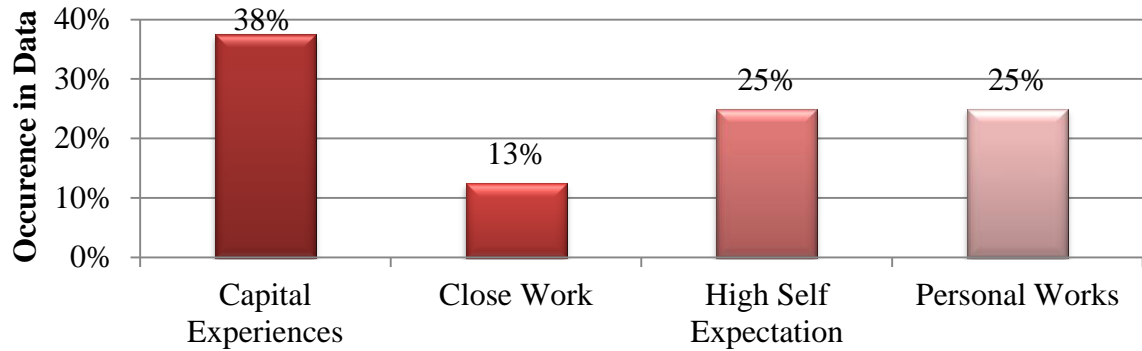


Figure 20. Internal resilience factors coded in Principal Johnson data.

*Recognizing capital building experiences the Pi’ao way.* One of the most apparent subthemes was Johnson’s rethinking of interactions and experiences from professional forces. This leader was able to reorganize the interpretation of threatening or demeaning interactions into opportunities of self-reflection, strengthening, and learning. This fundamental intelligence provided Johnson with the ability to rely on strengths from within and found throughout the community. Johnson’s attempts to share experiences and decisions with counterparts was met with resistance. “They [leader colleagues] want to know what I am doing and why I am so successful. When I am sharing the things that I am doing, [they respond with] ‘oh, I wouldn’t do that.’” Instead of becoming discouraged or refraining from sharing, Johnson became reflective and questioned the motives of others, “How can you know...how can you be successful if you call yourself a leader?” At the core of interaction with other leaders, Johnson understood strengths and weaknesses in colleagues and observed, “...everybody has a different work ethic; everyone has different beliefs. So I don't expect them to, you know, follow what I am doing.”

Johnson spoke about lacking an extended network for support. There was sense

of loneliness or longing for professional camaraderie. “There aren't many people that you can really go to [for support].” With a smile and laugh, Johnson chose to remain true to a personal vision that encouraged isolation and a self-awareness of that choice. “I don't really respect what they [other school leaders] do. So I wouldn't call them for advice or I wouldn't ask them about anything.”

Early sources of this internal strength were rooted in the experiences of Johnson's parents. “My father fled all of the drugs...and all of the types of [violence]...that was going on there [childhood community]. My mom [ran]...from a place that had [extreme violence].” Their persistence and incredible resilience allowed both parents to pursue new opportunities with limited capital. “. . . Both [parents] came here with very limited education . . . just working low paying jobs, minimum wage jobs.” This gift to recognize opportunity translated to a rearing tradition.

So I had it in me since I was little....My parents instilled in me a love for education since the beginning, because they wanted [me] to be more than they were...and for me to have different opportunities they weren't able to have in their country because of the restricted income of their parents.

This respect for education and love for learning was interpreted into play for Johnson. “I used to do a lot of playing by myself. So my [toys and stuffed animals] were my students and I used to come home and put books in front of them and I pretended to teach them.” This pretend play was reinforced by her/his parents who encouraged Johnson to find the importance in school and her/his opportunities in education.

Johnson believed that, in order to understand the experiences of all stakeholders, it was important to be involved at different levels to encourage success. “I think that

maybe being a part of everything that goes on...helps as well because I know what their concerns are.” This demand for attention and participation required a tremendous amount of time from Principal Johnson. From time to time, this leader dealt with enough pressure and constraints that forced reluctance, a lack of motivation to continue, and to question the level of commitment and time spent away from family and personal life. This persisted until a single kind comment or conversation from a teacher, a parent, and most especially from a student that recoiled the leader’s focus and persistence for justice.

*High level of self expectations the Pi’ao way.* The experiences previously described work in unison with the leader’s high level of self-efficacy. Johnson’s list of responsibilities and level of involvement did not go unnoticed. In a conversation, a staff member noted her commitment, “I don’t know how [Johnson] does it personally, really! There are a lot of children here for just wanting for [her/him] to be at IEP meetings, the parents [have demands], the activities, and running the PTA.”

Local journalists described Principal Johnson as being committed to the stakeholders, but would never take any credit for the progress and works at the school site. Instead, Johnson insisted that the success resulted from formulating a team of professionals. Johnson stated how “...it is really important that you can build a team that you can work with.” This level of commitment must be supported in leadership with self-efficacy that can lead to a group with high expectations for themselves (Casanova, 2010). Johnson described the need for “a team that is going to follow what you believe in, but you have to make them believe it first. So, you have to work along with them, in order to build that trust and be able to be successful.” This process can be quick or can take an entire career to accomplish.

Whether attending to the growth needs of probationary teachers or challenging the belief system of veteran teachers, this leader was able to inspire a higher level of expectation for individual teachers. “There are expectations and there is follow through, so I think it is very clear to all.” Johnson described the need to judiciously challenge old and new perspectives of ability. Challenging the thinking of student ability was a daily task that required the forfeiture of personal time. To raise the expectations of others, Johnson demonstrated the commitment and belief in success through personal involvement. “I think that maybe me being a part of everything that goes on in...data analysis meetings, and the planning, and the collaboration... because I know what their concerns are.”

At some point, the principal made a personal decision to separate cynics from cohesive team members. Johnson described how suggestions from other colleagues proved discouraging and toxic, “she said, ‘I wouldn’t do that’ or ‘I wouldn’t do it that way.’” Recently, external help was needed in order to remediate teaching practices of the faculty teachers within the school, confirming the challenges of this decision. Johnson described how close attention must be paid to the technical assistance provided by members outside of the school site. In order to maintaining relationships with teachers and providing outside confirmation, Johnson employed the assistance of district experts to coach specific teachers with technical concerns as opposed to assistance from other sites.

***True in personal works the Pi’ao way.*** With a high level of self-efficacy and capital-building experiences, Johnson remains true even in personal works, which are responsibilities and volunteer work that are not associated with the school community.

Developing the boundaries between personal works in a professional setting and a personal setting proved to be very difficult. With a young family, aging parents, and special requests from school stakeholders, finding a healthy balance was a continuous task. “It is actually a goal of mine to be able to do that [increase family time]. I have gotten better at, but I am not where I would like to be.” Johnson spent most of the time during the school day addressing the needs of parents, teachers, and students. Addressing the personal needs of students and teachers led to late nights on campus and folders filled with paperwork to take home. Work was often completed at home after children went to sleep and chores were complete. Johnson felt a sense of guilt for using family time to address career needs, “Even when I say I’m going to separate my family from my career, it is just something that I cannot do.” Johnson’s internal conflict of family and commitment to the community was evident,

I would like to be a superintendent someday. I know that is not going to happen in the near future. With the babies, they take a lot of time...I already feel like I work a lot and I dedicate a lot more time to my work. Sometimes I feel like I am married [to work] than my family and it is really hard.

For this school leader, career goals, passion for justice and time with family, and time with students were almost inseparable.

**Pi’ao’s core identity resilience factors.** Sitting in the heart of a leader’s individuality, these resiliency factors shape the lens of their work and sense of self. All three core identities emerged as significant identifiers of Johnson’s success; Arrogant Humility emerged as the strongest factor for Johnson.



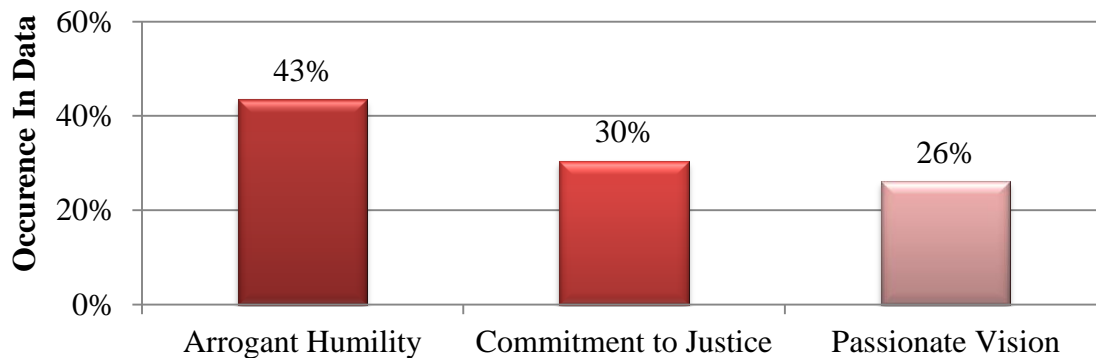


Figure 21. Core identity resilience factors coded in Principal Johnson data.

*Arrogant humility the Pi'ao way.* The term arrogant humility is actually an oxymoron, but it serves as a powerful descriptor of Johnson as a leader and an explanatory of the resistance to professional forces. From time to time, different administrators would ask how they are able to produce significant gains in such a short period of time. Johnson would attempt to explain her/his methods, but the other administrators usually dismissed the core understanding of the approach. When describing several interactions with other school leaders in the district and neighboring ones, Johnson revealed a reluctance to mimic their actions. “I don't really respect what they do...or I wouldn't ask them about anything.” Even with similar working conditions and student populations, finding replacement practices or viable solutions was indicative of this leader's arrogant humility.

Although many counterparts looked for emotional and professional support from neighboring site leaders, Johnson often held back in participating in professional development with colleagues. “I personally always feel like I just am sitting there. It is such a waste of time. I have so many valuable things to do at my site that I could be

doing, you know.” Finding a mentor or colleague to match Johnson’s level of dedication and focus on justice for children remains a real concern. Johnson shared how “it is not like a true leadership staff development, where I [go] to learn something and bring it back to my site and implement it or just something new that I am going to learn.” The isolation described by Johnson indicated a concern and need for district support that fosters and supports leading for social justice.

While many principals sit in isolation from other professionals in the same district, Johnson’s district recently implemented organizational meetings to discuss critical issues and best practices. In its early stages, there were many obstacles that prevented growth. Johnson criticized, “A lot of the times when we sit at those administrator meetings... people are just sitting there pretty much complaining about everything that is happening at their school site.” Johnson did see the need for the scheduled sessions and benefit of sharing practices “to develop as a professional. It is more of a complaint session about everybody’s problems at their school site.”

As previously mentioned, journalists have described Johnson as a successful principal who introduced special programs focusing on student success. When asked directly about the personal role in moving the school toward a positive direction, Johnson refrained from using the words “I” or “me”. This intentional or unintentional removal of self is consistent and may be related to a high sense of efficacy. Principal Johnson explained

I’ve never felt like, it is an *I* for sure. I’ve never felt [that], even once. People comment on the success that we’ve had, ‘you have brought the school along’ and ‘you have made this possible.’ And, I always say I couldn’t have done it without

my team because I really couldn't have done it without the teachers here.

A local newspaper quoted parents as praising the new principal's dedication to each individual student and observing the culture dramatically improved upon arrival of this leader. Even with the attention of supervisors and fellow leaders, Johnson remained true to a strong sense of arrogant humility. Multiple lines from the community newspaper and quarterly newsletters verified that this leader continuously insisted that the students and parents were responsible for the progress. Additionally, Johnson was quoted that the excellence of the learning program was directly related to the staff members at every level and their commitment and expectations. Johnson noted,

Without my support staff...down to the custodian to the teacher and everyone here. If my rooms weren't clean, then my kids couldn't learn in those rooms because obviously it wouldn't be conducive to the learning environment. So, I feel it's definitely a team.

Recognition awards and appreciation certificates professionally crafted and framed are often found in district or corporate offices. The leader's office had many certificates of recognition, but instead of shiny plaques and stately trophies, the most of the awards were crafted of markers, paint, glitter, and glue. Johnson's colleague pointed out

...the big poster in [the principal's] room and Boss' day and all the things that people say to her. And the district hasn't recognized all of...the growth. I understand that it [academic growth] is always a priority. You are not going to get any academic growth if you do not have teachers on board.

*Tenacious commitment to justice the Pi'ao way.* Deeply rooted in the identity as a person and a leader, Johnson's understanding of the world was melded to the Social Justice Lens and leadership identity. Johnson's colleague described how the school needed a leader who has focus "and you have to want to work with someone; one [who] loves their job and the children." Johnson reaffirmed the commitment to students and families in the community as described in parent letters and quarterly newsletters. The documents repeated terms that Johnson expressed in verbal exchanges, actions and in written language such as: "we believe in the equal worth and dignity of all students and we are committed..." In a newspaper article, parents described Principal Johnson as a "presence" who is available for students, parents, and staff. Despite challenges from professional and community forces, Johnson persevered through the pressure to maintain a commitment to students. Johnson's colleague described the pressure,

Believe me it is very stressful here...the pressure that the parents can put, the district and different things. But when you genuinely put a 100% because you are looking at their best interest, and [Johnson] is so involved, it makes all the difference.

With a student population that is largely of Latina/o descent, it could have been easy for other ethnic groups to feel lost and neglected. Johnson's colleague described how the principal paid attention to individual students, "I don't know of very many principals who know every African American child and their level on every assessment and every ELL [student]." Johnson was determined to increase family participation to 100% by believing in their efforts and the benefits of the learning programs for adults and children. Johnson's colleague described how Johnson would spend hours to "call home

to make sure that their kids are participating in after school program that we are offering, because the note never got home [sic].” She continued to explain the parent gratitude expressed, “They love her and they bring her food...all African American families, Middle-Eastern families, and any different background that we have. They are very thankful.”

As part of the commitment to justice, Johnson found it important to encourage the teaching staff to retool their perspectives and approach to students who need their coaching skills. The principal explained that “newer teachers sometimes have a difficult time coaching. I’m having to coach or give them some strategies to be able to cope with those difficult behaviors or student backgrounds.” Johnson continues the coaching until “they’re able to understand and meet their [students’] needs and kind of differentiate for those students that have difficult times.”

*Passionate vision the Pi’ao way.* Finally, Johnson’s persistent and passionate vision convinced this leader to use external forces as a motivator for continuing beyond the expectations of community members. Principal Johnson’s vision was to provide excellence to the stakeholders and admitted in the local newspaper that the commitment and success of the teachers was “for the students of this community.” Like Johnson’s commitment to justice, the words and actions of this leader were indicative of a passionate vision. Johnson’s colleague described how the principal was “so involved in the curriculum, with the parents, with the teachers, [and] with the students, that I really think that it was [Johnson’s] leadership that has made all of the difference.”

One major difference was her persistence to include the adults in the home front to be active participants in student learning. With meager beginnings, Johnson along

with a few teachers, planned and implemented family and home study workshops. Johnson shared how there were very few parents attending and almost no available resources. Almost 5 years later, close to 200 parents, students, and siblings fill the classrooms during the evening workshops held every month. As I shared my impression of the parent workshops and the number of participants, Principal Johnson listed strategies to attract more families to acquire a 100% participation rate. At the time, I found the percentage of attendees was very significant, but Johnson's comment revealed a vision and deep-rooted belief that the community was more than capable and could meet the standards of any other community.

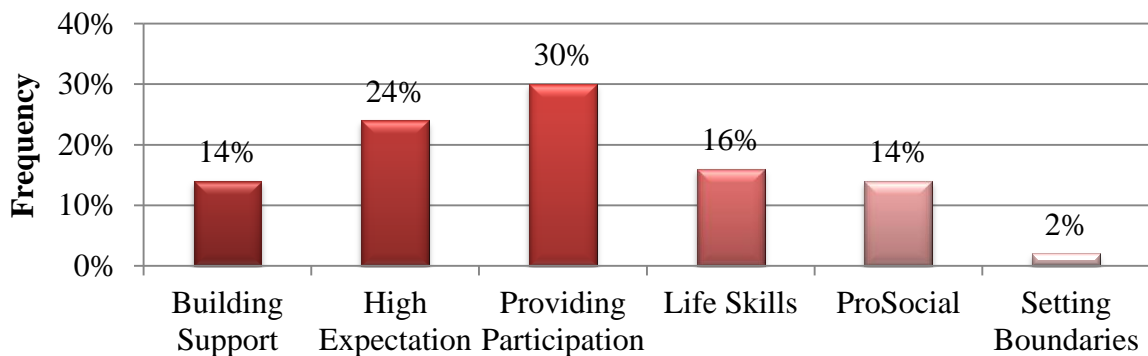
The passion that drives the school toward success can lead to isolation. As previously described, Johnson's strength and support did not come from administrator counterparts. Johnson understood that this passionate vision demanded a level of emotional commitment that could be physically exhausting. Johnson explained, "so I don't expect them to you know [or] follow what I am doing."

When asked what the source of this level of commitment was, Johnson had a difficult time verbalizing the source. Instead of speaking of a significant experience or the influence of a mentor, Johnson spoke of family members and childhood memories. Yet this leader did not equate such experiences or relationships with these childhood adults to leadership development. Instead, Johnson shared the quality of life despite barriers, "No one with an educational background in my family or anything. I mean I was the first to graduate high school. Just a lot of first generation to graduate..."

Johnson did share that part of the inner strength stemmed from childhood experiences, "I think my parents instilled in me, in order to get somewhere, you have to get an education

and work hard and be motivated and be passionate about what you do. I think I just followed that.”

**Pi’ao’s external resilience factors.** One environmental risk mitigation factor and one resiliency building factor emerged as significant factors (see *Figure 22*) served as the primary protection from external forces. Of all six external factors, Setting High Expectations and Providing Opportunities for Participation were indicative of the atmosphere and communal effort to address the needs of student learning and success. These two subthemes are both classified as factors for building resiliency in the environment (Milstein & Henry, 2000).



*Figure 22.* External resilience factors coded in Principal Johnson data.

***Providing Opportunities for Participation the Pi’ao Way.*** Immediately following the arrival of Principal Johnson, monthly workshops for parents and family members were planned. The leadership team implemented measures to promote attendance by all adults in the home and older siblings by addressing concerns of attendees their personal and family needs. These actions included: workshops in English and Spanish to support language learners; math and language arts topics to address proficiency success; flexible

workshop times offered in the morning and then the evening to address work schedules; daycare services so parents and younger siblings can learn age appropriate material; meals and nutritious snacks to address hectic parent schedules; small group sessions to provide individual attention and develop relationships with parents and teachers.

With humble beginnings, this school leader and leadership team member held workshops for a handful of parents. Johnson's colleague shared that more and more families began to attend "when they heard [the principal] was presenting. . . . They loved it, especially our Latino community." Within time and by supporting the needs of students and family members, six classrooms now hold parent, grandparent, sibling, and student attendees who listen, answer and ask questions, and smile at more than 10 presenters over the last few months. During an evening workshop, parents, students, and teacher-presenters stayed well past the scheduled end of the activity. After observing an evening workshop, I mentioned that the parent enthusiasm and gratitude was obvious in their level of engagement and smiles. Johnson simply replied "they always ask when the next workshop is scheduled" and that they are far from the goal of 100% participation.

These workshops compliment the regular education and after school programs which are led by the teachers. As discussed in a local newspaper, although teachers earn a stipend, many are more interested in seeing their students succeed, their own personal growth, and the gratitude of parents in attendance. Johnson's colleague was grateful for the level of involvement shared by the principal. "She allows me to share my vision and my ideas. If it is something that she agrees with or believes in, then she allows me to run with it." Compared to a previous site assignment, Johnson's colleague was not able to even present ideas much less implement any.



*High expectations the Pi'ao way.* With appropriate support, high expectations can pave the way to endless possibilities for success. To provide the opportunity of high expectations, Johnson prescribed, "I think that it is huge to just believe in the students and believe in the staff, that makes a huge difference." This was obvious in the curricular and assessment meetings for language arts and math. The level of involvement with this principal as an instructional leader and data analyst was commendable by any standard. Johnson's colleague described the time-consuming task of developing a student growth model at the school level independent of state or district programs or assistance.

This informal achievement tracking system allowed teachers and students to develop goals for themselves and individual classroom. The practice encouraged students and teachers to understand their ability and develop high expectations for them, the parents, and the teacher. During a particular assessment meeting, a veteran teacher expressed a concern, "They are so lazy [and] they don't do the work." Calmly and quickly Johnson responded, "You can expect them to do the work [and] encourage them and they will do it."

Johnson's colleague described the positive force of the principal,

When you are a strong leader and you have a goal and you stay focused and you keep everyone; and you have clear objectives; and you keep repeating those and you make sure everyone is clear and understands, and then you are going to have a successful school.

Although many of the students have challenges at home or lack resources like their counterparts in other schools, Johnson not only provides support, but also believes in the possibility of success. "...I expect for every teacher to believe in their children and hold

them to the highest expectations”, Principal Johnson shared.

### **Principal Smith of The Lemmai School**

Of all the trees on my family land, the lemmai trees stood firm and grew the longest. These breadfruit trees lined the southern end of the property line. Of all the trees we had, they were the largest and stood the longest. Of critical importance for my family, the breadfruit produced almost throughout the year was a staple of our family’s diet. For many of us, lemmai was a food that was absent of taste and sophistication and the tree was only a source of continuous labor. Very rarely did my father want to chop down a lemmai tree, even after severe damage from a windstorm or typhoon. Instead, a withered or damaged tree became a family project that most often led to fruit production within a year despite the age of the tree.

Minutes away from the Lemmai School, industrial plants, oil refineries, a sanitation yard, a sewage treatment plant, a few trailer and modular home parks, long-term motels, apartment complexes, and single-family homes surrounded the site. As I entered the main office, my attention immediately was drawn to the security window grates and bars that lined the side of each building. Turning the old-fashioned brass doorknob immediately told me that this school building has been here for some time. Security personnel and the receptionist greeted me at the same time. As the receptionist asked the purpose of my visit, the campus security guard waited for a nod from the receptionist before he turned away. As I waited for Principal Smith, a student asked the receptionist about a Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program application. The receptionist informed the student that it was late in the day and that particular office was closed. At that moment, Principal Smith entered the office and overheard the comment.

Smith then told the student to follow her/him and the two ran out the door in direction of that office. Within minutes, the two returned to the main office with the application. Smith proceeded to explain the most confusing parts of the application and encouraged the student to return the form directly to her/his office. The student quickly stuffed the form in his book bag and left the office without commenting. Principal smiled and turned to my direction. We discussed the purpose of my visit and a few challenges as a school leader.

The next scheduled day, I met Principal Smith who was working on a tall mug of hot tea. S/he invited me into the inner office and offered me a cup of tea. We reviewed the agenda for the day and we quickly headed to a class for observations. Before leaving the building, we detoured to an assistant principal's office who was suffering from a severe cold. Principal Smith praised the ill administrator for her dedication, but insisted that she take the day off to recuperate. We then continued our walk to a Language Arts classroom filled with students sitting at mismatched student desks that were repainted and resurfaced too many times. The teacher had filled the chalkboard from end to end with scribbled notes and the agenda for the entire day. I wondered to myself when was the last time I saw a chalkboard with dusty erasers and yellow-colored chalk. We then left the class and entered into a computer laboratory. Immediately, I noticed the amount of heat generated by the older computers and monitors that filled the classroom. The clean chalkboards at the front of the class reminded me of my elementary schooldays with chalkboards that were resurfaced with special green paint.

Until recently, Principal Smith spent her/his entire education career within the same community. In that community, Smith's tenure afforded her/him the confidence

and stature that was appreciated and envied by constituents and colleagues. As a veteran educator, Principal Smith served as a teacher, dean, and assistant principal in some of the most challenging inner-city communities in South Los Angeles. Many educators would find a new appointment to a fringe urban community of the Los Angeles basin, an improvement over the previous assignment. At one time, Smith applied for a principalship in south and south central LA, but instead of being appointed to that position, s/he was assigned to the Lemmai School. Fortunately or unfortunately, Principal Smith now serves a similar but different student population.

Born and raised in Los Angeles County, this principal was attracted to the hardships and trials suffered by many during the Civil Rights Era. Smith shared,

I think it was just seeing all the turmoil in the 60s with the war protestors and...what was going on with the civil rights [movement] and the unrest that was on campus [colleges]. I know that I wanted to help people.

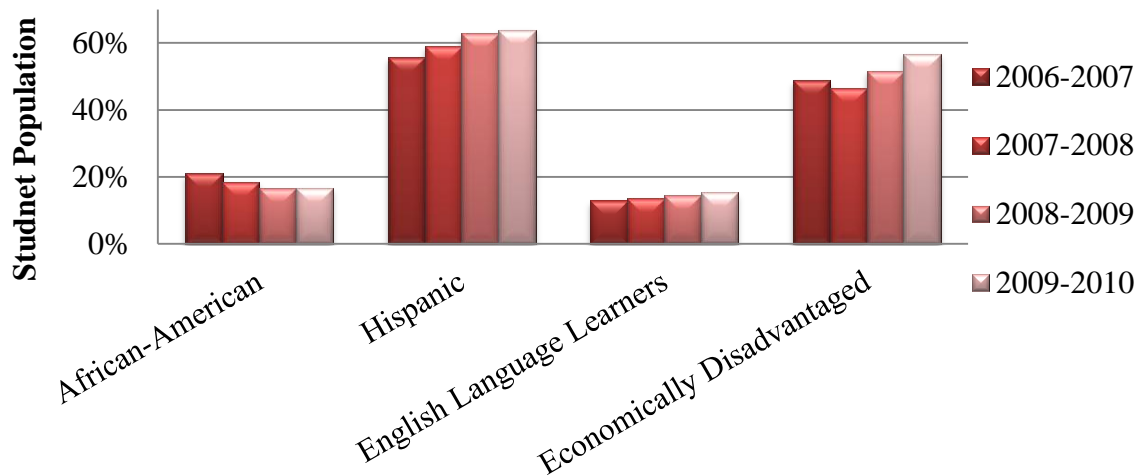
Smith was determined to change the world after watching the assassination of Robert Kennedy and observing key activists supporting civil rights reform. Smith was old enough to become involved in activism. S/he recalled, "I started campaigning for gun control and whatever there was." These ad-hoc leadership roles and a passion to help others led her/him to education and the idea of serving in the Peace Corp. Smith explained,

Then that sort of led me to teaching. I did not plan to be a teacher. But the minute I set foot into a classroom, I knew that this was where I wanted to be and it was with minority kids in impoverished areas.

## The Lemmai School

For an extended period of time, The Lemmai School was a great concern to the local school district. Bordering high crime neighborhoods and affluent communities, this site was always caught between two identities. Prior to Principal Smith's appointment to the Lemmai School, a magnet program was founded in order to attract some of the brightest students from the area. Although this program has met some success, the overall performance of the school lagged.

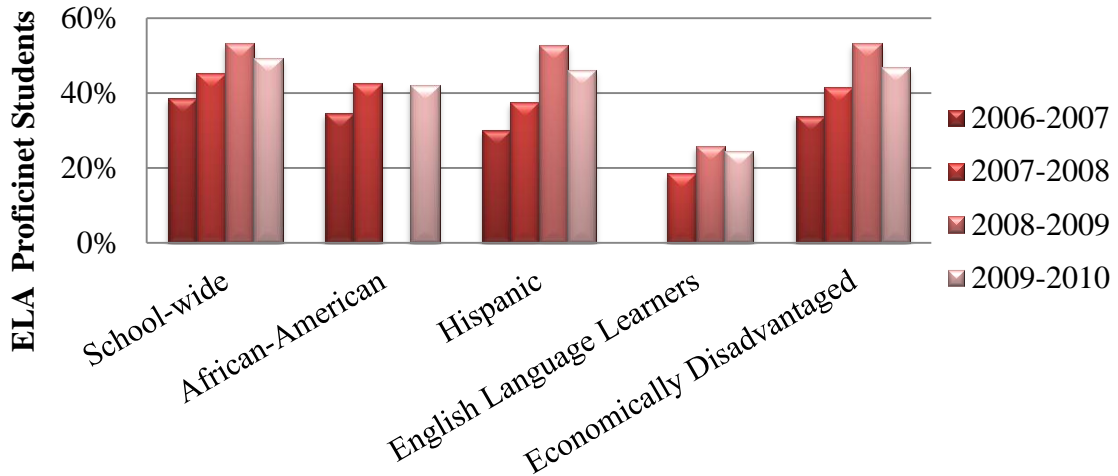
The Lemmai School has a fairly diverse population, with minority groups exceeding the white student population. Although the English Language Learner population is much smaller than counterpart schools to the north, the number of economically challenged students matched the northern counterparts. Over the last few years, the number of students participating in the FRL program has steadily risen (*Figure 23*).



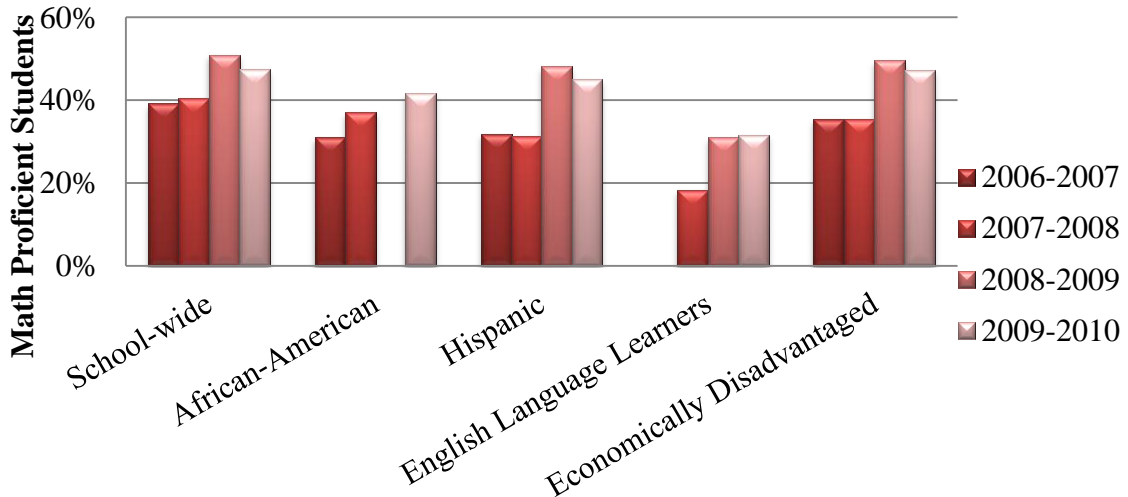
*Figure 23.* The Lemmai School population. The percentage of students attending The Lemmai School by major demographic groups.

Although the AYP and API goals for the Lemmai School remain below target

goals, the student population improved their performance at a steady rate (*Figure 24* and *Figure 25*). The major student groups performed consistently with the whole school population yet, the school was not able to close the English Language Learners gap.



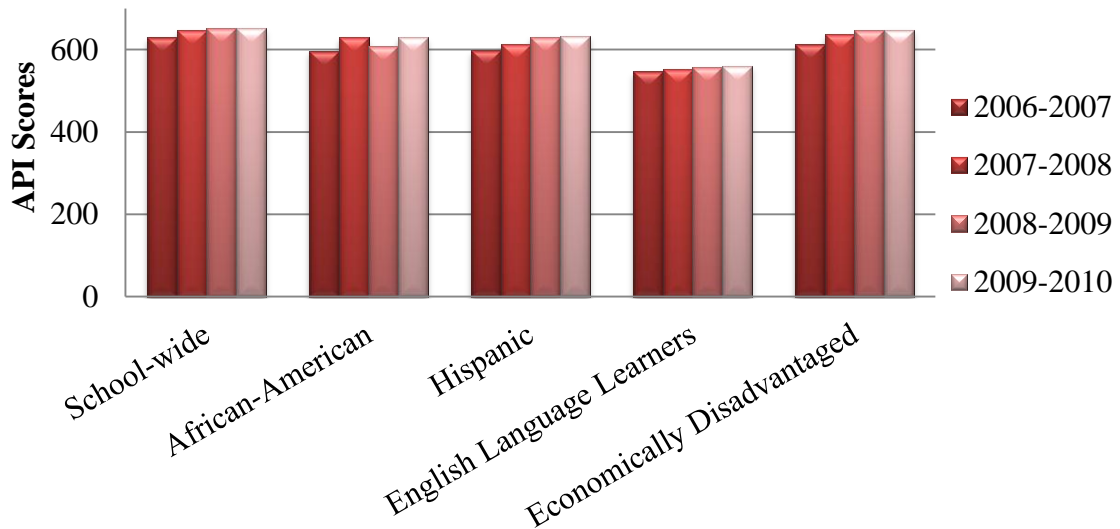
*Figure 24.* The Lemmai School AYP ELA proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly Progress proficiency rates in English and Language Arts subject testing.



*Figure 25.* The Lemmai School AYP math proficiency. Percentage of students meeting Adequate Yearly Progress proficiency rates in math subject testing.

Parallel to the proficiency in math and English Language Arts, the student group

API scores show steady growth scores over the last few years. Since Principal Smith was appointed leader of the Lemmai School, all students groups have moved closer to the target goal of 800 (*Figure 26*).



*Figure 26.* The Lemmai School API score by student group. Growth trend for API score for each student group for the Lemmai School site from 2006-2010.

Although the Lemmai School trails in the state API ranking, Lemmai’s Similar Schools ranking has increased by two ranks since Principal Smith stepped into the school (*Figure 27*). If the leadership and learning communities continue the general trend of growth and reform, the site should earn significant rank points over the next few years, a dramatic difference over the last decade.

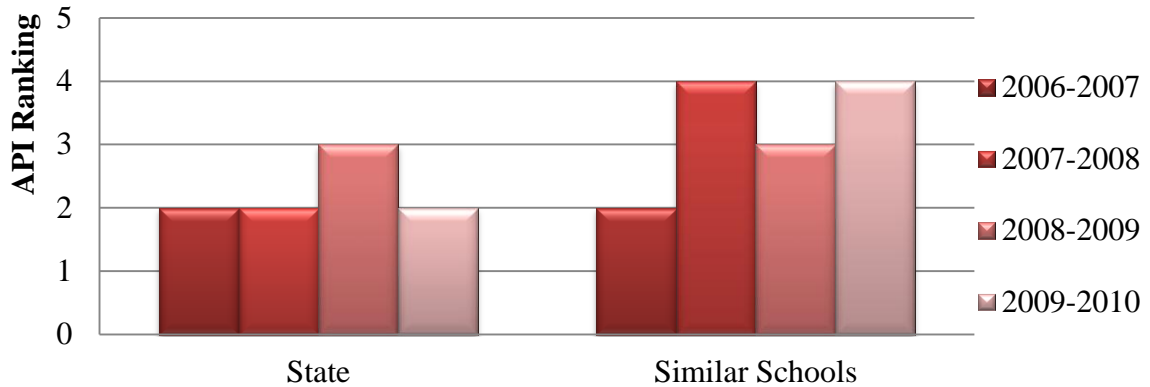


Figure 27. The Lemmai School API ranking. Growth trend of State API ranking and Similar Schools ranking for the Lemmai School site from 2006-2010.

### Lemmai Leadership Themes and Subthemes

As a new principal, Smith had the challenge of convincing constituents of her/his ability as a leader and readiness as an instructional coach. Although many were convinced that age was not a benefit in the profession as a new leader, some were concerned that s/he was at the end of her/his education career. Smith was comfortable in her/his own skin that change and success were not new ideas that required self-evaluation. Instead, Principal Smith worked on building and mitigating the environment in order to build a resilient school and team of resilient leaders. Comparing all three levels of resilience factors, core identity and internal factors were coded at the same rate and external factors emerged twice as much (*Figure 28*).



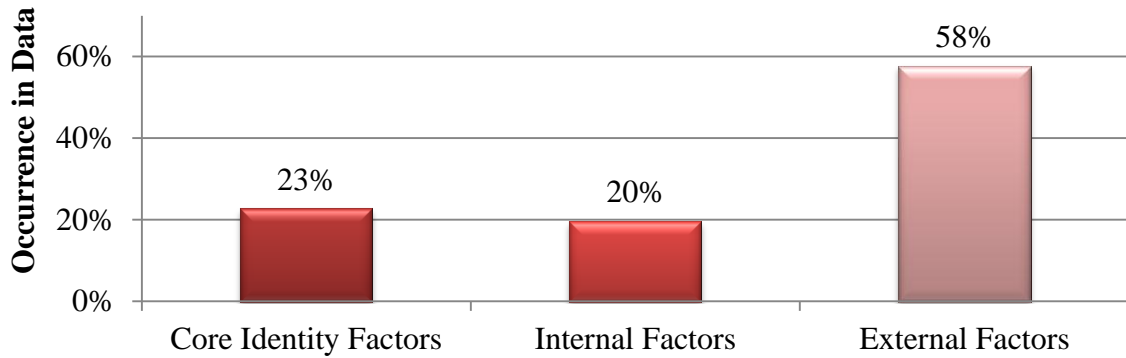


Figure 28. All resilience factors coded in Principal Smith's data

Although the external factors obviously tower over the other two classifications, it is important to explore all three.

**Lemmai's external resilience factors.** Of the three frequently coded external factors, building support, high expectations, and providing participation occurred twice as frequently as life skills, ProSocial, and setting boundaries (*Figure 29*). These three themes build resilience in the environment, according to Milstein and Henderson (2003). Building and addressing the needs of environmental factors may have been far more important for this principal than decreasing the threats and obstacles found in the environment. Smith measured the battle of addressing never-ending little threats over building an overall supportive school environment as s/he entered this school with a strong community history.

As a young child, we often found ourselves in the middle of an endless battle against insects and pests. Our family continuously dealt with an infinite amount of bugs found in most tropical climates. Many of these were harmful to plants or prevented fruits from growing. Instead of fighting the endless number of insects by using harmful chemicals, we often resorted to building resistance of our lemmai trees. This was easily

accomplished by allowing the tree to grow strong without insects prior to the flowering season. Every evening, my older brother and I would use smoke from a wood and coconut husk fire under the canopy to discourage insects from infiltrating the lemmai trees. Like the smoke from the fire used to cleanse the lemmai trees, Smith used certain factors to build resilience in order to flower and fruit in the environment.

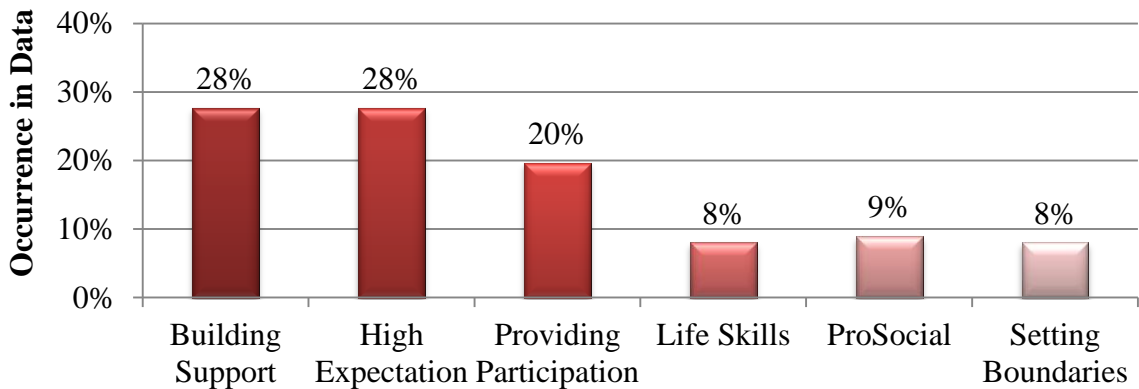


Figure 29. External resilience factors coded in Principal Smith's data

***Building caring and support the Lemmai way.*** As a site with a large population of FRL student participants, Lemmai had many programs supported by Title I program funding. To preserve the privacy of these students and to improve the entire education program, this funding source was used for school wide student support. Self-study documentation listed tutoring programs available for students with specific needs and education challenges. Lacking access to dental and healthcare, the self-study also listed programs available through the guidance offices. Most importantly and recently implemented, a formal professional development program was initiated “geared to incorporate best teaching practices.” One of the most notable programs was the after

school club that emphasized homework help. With an emphasis on self-selected participants, this program provided an environment of support and resources for learning.

With the use of learning communities, intensive testing preparation programs, homework assistance, teacher collaboration team training, and academy/smaller learning communities, the Lemmai School was able to meet AYP requirements after 4 years of missing target goals. The increased academic success and the student support had other benefits as the self-study surveys revealed that most stakeholders “felt respected and welcome on the school site.”

Smith’s focus on care and support means s/he walks into classrooms daily in order to observe teachers and students, “When I go into classrooms, I talk to kids to find out what kids are learning...not to just observe teachers,...but the kids.” With an emphasis on instruction, this principal was concerned with rigor and support for all learners, especially those struggling. Smith described the work of administration, “We see kids are struggling in far below basic, and below basic categories. We do pull those kids out to meet with them and let them know what support we have for them.” Sometimes the concern was not in the classroom performance but with state proficiency testing, “We pulled those kids and had a program in a small group setting and talked to them about enrolling in the prep class.” Although the class was offered after school, “it was voluntary...but we get quite a few kids participating.”

Learning communities were implemented for the teaching staff to encourage learning for all stakeholders. “People weren’t used to getting together to collaborate and talk to each other,” explained Smith. Most teachers were isolated in their classrooms and struggled with data and state requirements. With the professional learning community

(PLC) model, teachers were given the opportunity to learn and grow together. Instead of willing the success in the school, Smith provided support experts throughout the school to help guide teachers, “we had representatives from each area...and they went through the same training [as administrators].” Although the implementation process was still in the beginning stages, the benefits had been realized, “...they create their common assessments to use the same format, the same language, that the kids are going to see on the [state] test.” And in order to maintain growth in the program, Smith encouraged an open door policy of sharing suggestions and concerns, “we gave them a chance to talk; gave them a chance to give us feedback.”

Experiencing the benefits of providing caring and support, Smith made it a point to cultivate relationships. S/he detailed,

I started building relationships with. . . everybody and not just kids but with teachers. And what I mean with relationships is I talk to them and ask them how they are doing and I ask them if they need help or anything. So, it's [the climate] changed.

***Promoting high expectations the Lemmai way.*** With every flowering season, the hope and expectation for abundant lemmai provided a motivation for family members to work at the family garden with vigor. Through hard work and persistence these high hopes led to a relief with a bountiful harvest and the possibility of sharing with friends and extended family members. These high hopes and expectations were motivating factors to address the environmental obstacles such as pests, moisture or watering practices, and preseason pruning. Like the expectation of a full harvest basket, Smith had the hope of providing the best educational opportunities for all students, especially

students dealing with distractions.

Communicating high expectations was accomplished verbally, in written form, and by example. The principal, on a daily basis, modeled developing student and teacher relationships in order to encourage success. Smith described, “I make myself highly visible and I talk to kids all the time. . . . I think that I have a good relationship with most of the kids.” With an extensive network of students and teachers, the possibility of starting new programs became easier and expected by those familiar with the principal’s high expectations.

Smaller learning communities were embraced by the state of California, so Smith gambled on the support for an academy for all new students that could be expanded to other student groups or levels. Smith boasted, “. . . the academy was so successful and the results were so positive . . . [with] a 20% drop in our retention rates. . . . I think that spoke for itself.” Smith recruited and selected the most enthusiastic teachers on campus, especially those who realized the support and expectations for student success. The very next year, additional student academies were implemented.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) supported the changes and provided a venue for peer and administrator support. At first, teachers did not know how to focus on collaboration. Smith explained the expectation, “We set down ground rules basically . . . this is not a gripe session; you respect the opinions of others. . . . You don't get personal. When the PLCs work . . . they all talk about instruction.” With support and interest in success, the expectation for the leadership team was to engage in the PLCs as a member and not to supervise poor behavior, although Smith recalled that role as well. Smith described that sometimes the expectation included leadership sacrifice, “. . . we do

support them [and] we compensate teachers who want to meet after school to get together. To meet on Saturday to do it. So we [gave them] that option [sic].” In turn, leadership team members spend more time on campus and shifted funds for other purposes.

The high expectation for student and teacher success spanned the entire staff and was not limited to teachers concentrated on proficiency tests. All adults were expected to discuss instruction; Smith pondered, “What can we do to get students to do better and [how to get the school] where teachers now put a priority on instruction.” Observed during the PLC meetings, teachers collaborated with special education teachers to meet the needs of all learners and not concentrate on discriminatory practices. Eventually all activities may be secondary or act as a major support to learning. Smith revealed that:

. . . everything else like sports, cheerleading, drill team, student activities are all wonderful things . . . but they have to understand they cannot interfere with instruction. This means that instructional and class time remain sacred. . . . I tell my counselor[s] to never pull a kid out of a core academic class. If you have to meet with a kid, pull them out of an elective. Not that electives aren't important, but these are sacred: English, math, science, and social studies. Those kids stay in those classes, no matter what.

Like a scene from the movie, “Coach Carter”, Principal Smith placed a higher importance on graduation and advancing to post-secondary training than earning a state championship. With a love for athletics and student activities, choosing academics over sports would be difficult for many leaders, but not for this principal. Smith demanded

that changes at the school level to fight a system that promoted sports over academics. With students missing instruction due to athletic events, schedules were changed so that core classes were delivered in the morning for athletes. If a student was academically failing or lagging behind or not passing proficiency tests, “I’m not going to have a kid go to a game if [s/he] is . . . behind.” Patiently working with coaches to develop creative alternatives, this leader wanted to implement controversial school regulations to encourage academic success by increasing grade requirements. The principal boldly suggested, “If the student is not on track [for promotion] than that kid sits until he's caught up.”

This idea remained in the planning stage because of the implications for community backlash. “So we are still talking it over, because I want the coaches to be involved in the discussion.” It was a calculated chess game that was worth considering, according to Smith, “We try to stress academics in all the areas, especially athletics, because athletics kind of get a bad rap sometimes.” Until this pipedream becomes a regulation, Smith appealed to the athletic nature of competition, “We look at our team GPA and we kind of have a little competition.”

*Providing opportunities for participation the Lemmai way.* Caring for the lemmai trees, the entire family had an obligation to this resource and the family. Whether the task included harvesting, eliminating pests, irrigation, or cooking the fruit, the familial feeling and commitment to each other made the labor less taxing emotionally and mentally, despite how physically demanding the work. Smith was able to increase success through shared leadership practices and peer coaching. Prior to Smith’s arrival, smaller learning communities and professional learning communities were limited to

certain populations and teachers on campus. Understanding the benefits and emotional commitment for expanded implementation, Smith wanted the opportunity for more teachers and students to reap the observed benefits.

Starting with an entire grade level, the teachers were recruited to begin a new SLC. To support teacher learning, Smith explained, “We gave them the same literature. We talked about unpacking standards and . . . we gave them a chance to talk.” This format was very different from past sessions which included, “one presenter and with everybody in one room . . . [and] teachers did really have a chance to talk with people who [taught] the same subject.” By recruiting specific teachers to begin the first SLC, Smith wanted these educators to be “good effective leaders.” Starting with an opportunity for “. . . the PLC thing, they seemed to embrace from the beginning.”

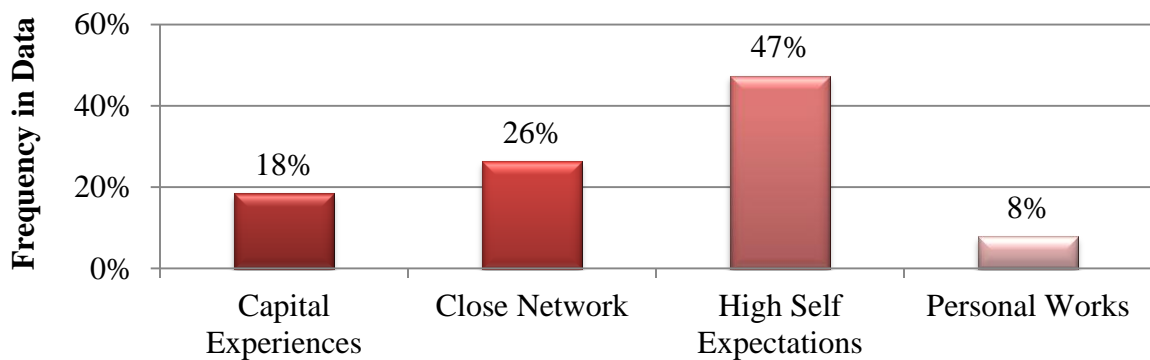
Admitting to the need for research and best practices, Smith’s need for knowledge and research was a self-realization. Smith’s outlet for best practices was limited to websites prioritized by Internet search engines such as Google and opportunities advertised by the school district. Smith divulged that the Sunday newspaper business section was a major personal source of information,

usually on Sundays, they interview like leaders in the corporate field and they talk about leadership. . . . and [how] do you think you are an effective leader, and I read that . . . 90% talk about relationships and so I believe that is the key to any successful person is.

Smith disclosed that educational research journals or practitioner journals were absent from her/his arsenal of resources, rather “I do a lot of online stuff. . . . I will [look on the Internet], for example . . . bell schedule and the different types of bell schedules.”



**Lemmai’s internal resilience factors.** As a young child, the thickness of the lemmai tree, and the height of the branches made the tree very difficult to climb. Tending to the tree trunk prevented disease and pests from hindering growth and fruit production. The dark wood would have very useful for lumber, but our family’s need for this food staple was a far greater priority. Like the trunk of the tree, the internal resilience factors are linked between the roots of the leader and the foliage of external factors. Although internal factors were coded half as much as the external resilience factors, the number of coded references were significant. Smith’s use of close networks and a reliance on high self-expectations were very important as coded data (*Figure 30*).



*Figure 30.* Internal resilience factors coded in Principal Smith's data

***High self expectations the Lemmai way.*** Principal Smith limited her/his reliance on a close professional and personal network and instead, leaned heavily on personal ability and a motivation to complete tasks related to success. With a high level of self expectations, the development of a close network and personal works, such as volunteer work, should develop as others feel empowered to succeed. Based on her/his self-confidence for success and the ability of students and teachers, Smith disregarded the

very cardinal rule of observing the first year and then implementing change the second. “I waited a semester,” explained Smith in the description of changing school programs and structures. Within a year, this principal was motivated to restructure two traditions, professional development and teacher schedules. Smith realized, “. . . that was two big undertakings and so some of the other administrators questioned me. Is that too many challenges for our staff to handle, because we thought they would be resistant [sic]”?

Expectations for success motivated a core group of team members to sacrifice time, reputation, and those choices influence staff fear and resistance. Instead of relying on assistance from team leaders, this principal was involved in every program and visited group meetings and activities with and without invitation. Smith revealed,

I don't always want to spend my time doing this, but I do like to support kids. That's the big things. I want kids to know that they have a principal who cares about them. . . . It is important to me. I don't know why. I don't know if kids feel that way. It is important to me.

This inner drive for expectation and commitment grew as this principal found a calling in education. With early interests in activism, Smith professed, “I would have ended up in education because I was looking at this program in Columbia University. Their school of education offered a master’s degree in what they call urban education. And you worked in a school in Harlem or Bronx...” With retirement in sight, Principal Smith was reluctant to leave education. S/he pondered:

. . . at some point, I would probably retire and sit out a year [and] go volunteer at a couple of places . . . and then come back and be an interim administrator at the

school where the principal is out for an extended period of time. Maybe I will get the best of both worlds. But it is hard to give up what is here at [the Lemmai School].

*Trusting a close network the Lemmai way.* Many lemmai trees stand fairly isolated from other trees in the woods. Although smaller lemmai trees may propagate close by, the lemmai trees on our family property were often alone. Just like those lemmai trees, Principal Smith often found her/himself alone and in isolation. Like most school leaders, there was a mentor who was frequently in contact but was generally absent. S/he reported, “I have known her for a number of years. She was an assistant principal when I was a teacher at my other school. And she became principal at that particular school. . . . So I sort of trained under her.”

With a short tenure at the school site, the relationships developed within that time were obvious, but few. The relationships Smith developed in her/his short tenure were obvious, but few trusting and close network was mired by the previous administrative practices that resulted in mistrust. Instead, Smith described the need for a new type of leadership,

It's not that the heavy handed approach would not have worked. I probably would not be here at [The Lemmai School], if I had come in with the heavy handed approach to get people to change. Because they probably would have driven me out in some form or fashion.

With so many daunting tasks and challenges, Smith explained, “. . . you can't do anything by yourself. You depend on people, good people . . . and you develop good people.”

These relationships proved to be critical for the tasks undertaken within months of Smith's arrival. Relying on the professionalism of the leadership team, this school leader attempted an early implementation of new programs. Smith explained how commonalities strengthened the bond, “. . . they want to be here and they have the same vision that as I do, pretty much and not necessarily because I promoted that.” These new initiatives required a leadership team member to gather observation data from another school site and develop a research committee to support the change. At times, team members felt discouraged and skeptical by the program benefits. By developing the close relationships and trusting the professionalism of the team, these skeptics aired their concerns directly with Smith instead of influencing the cynicism with others.

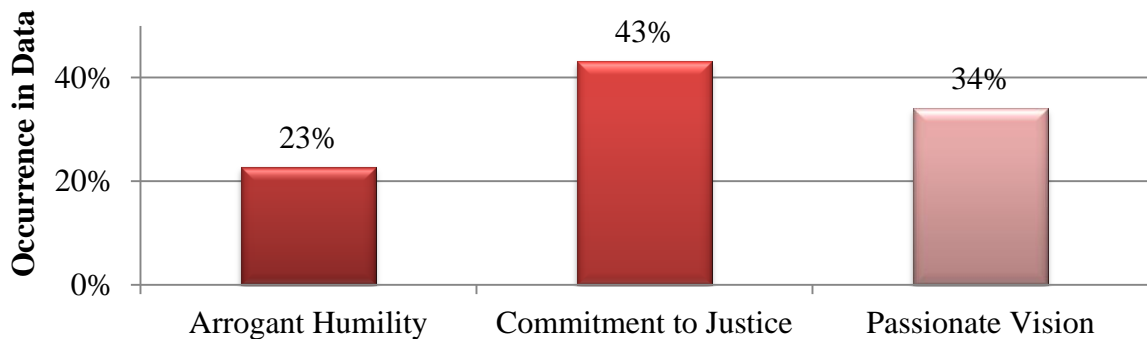
*Learning from capital building experiences the Lemmai way.* Some of the most difficult times in our nation shaped the lens and inner resiliency of Principal Smith. Working in the heart of poverty in the Los Angeles basin, Smith remembered the unrest and air thick with fear and frustration during the riots. In fact, this leader recalls both times when riots developed in Watts in 1965 and in Los Angeles in 1992. As a young person, Smith listened to Martin Luther King Jr. and remembered students getting beaten badly during the Civil Rights era. Smith shared, “. . . the idea of serving your country was that whole John F. Kennedy thing . . . and I was a huge admirer of his brother, Robert. So when Robert Kennedy got assassinated . . . I knew that I had to be some kind of activist [sic].” From activism, this leader found a path to education and working with minority populations.

Following this mantra, Smith's portrayed a sense of invincibility as a leader. With a keen perspective of success for students, the task of implementing programs to

meet this idea of success was far more important than remaining popular with stakeholders. Within a year of arrival, Smith recalled the quick and careful implementation of learning communities,

we put it to a vote that second semester . . . [and] we did a lot of research before. . . Was I nervous? Yes. First of all, I did not know if the teachers can handle these changes because this staff . . . [was] resistant to change.

**Lemmai’s core identity resilience factors.** Protected deep in the rich soil of the earth and deep into the bedrock below, the roots and core of the lemmai tree finds strength from high winds and water for drought resistance. The commitment to justice and passionate vision were the most significantly coded themes for this leaders core values (*Figure 31*).



*Figure 31.* Core identity resilience factors coded in Principal Smith’s data.

***Commitment to justice the Lemmai way.*** According to Smith, providing educational opportunities for all learners required special attention and a higher level of expertise to meet their needs. Other times, it only required fulfilling a promise to help

and the courage to deliver that promise, which often proved to be most difficult. Being available and open to talk with students and teachers was often the most accessible venue, “I go to them during lunch time when they do meet and talk to them as a group. I also talk to our leadership class. I listen to kids all the time.” At times this means sacrificing personal time and sacred weekends, “. . . the last one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . I worked the last nine Saturdays. I haven't had a Saturday free . . . it is important to show your support by participating showing up even for a brief time.”

In Principal Smith's previous assignment, mentors and supervisors indirectly encouraged the tough administrator personality. Smith recalled,

I was a teacher . . . an assistant . . . and a dean at another school. . . . It was in, I will call it a rough area. It was in South L.A. [Los Angeles]. We had a lot of stuff going on there. I thought that maybe administratively you needed to rule like with an iron fist.

Feeling the need to serve minority groups, Smith wanted to serve as principal in that particular school, “I actually applied to be [the] principals at inner city schools, some of the hard core school. . . . [It was a] calling, that was where I was meant to be.” In the mind of this committed leader, students of neighborhoods with the worst reputation were no different from students at the Lemmai School and that adults need to understand their kids. Ignoring the commitment to serve certain student groups, Smith explained, “I might have a bigger problem moving into Beverly Hills or Pacific Palisades or whatever. I'm comfortable in both settings, in inner-city or a suburban school. . . .”

*Passionate vision the Lemmai way.* Before the lemmai fruit is ready to be picked and harvested, my family would remember the best ways to prepare the fresh fruit. My

sister enjoyed it lightly fried with salt and sugar. My brothers enjoyed puff pastries baked with the fruit and powdered sugar. My father and I enjoyed the breadfruit roasted on an open fire or over hot coals in the early morning before the roosters woke my siblings. By the start of the rainy season, we would be tired of this staple until my mother found yet another way to prepare the lemmai fruit. As youngsters, the anticipation of the fruit that preoccupied our minds and how my mother looked for innovative ways to prepare this food, described a passion. Just like the passion and persistence demonstrated by my parents, the passionate vision of Principal Smith helped promote the instructional program and progress at the Lemmai School. Data, test scores, and student readiness were always on the thoughts of Smith, “we look at test scores all the time really. . . . And that kind of drives our instructional program.”

Eventually, Smith forecasts a professional learning faculty that has taken ownership of learning. Smith detailed a vision “where teachers are comfortable with me walking in the classroom; you [school visitors] walking in their classroom, other teachers walking in their classroom to observe.” In this vision, teachers would be proud to share their expertise and hoped that observers would learn and share their observations. Smith described students as learners who “. . . don't look up when a visitor walks in the classroom, because they are used to visitors walking in all the time.” If the economy and other constraints limit classroom and faculty resources, “when people talk they talk about how miserable the conditions are; they talk about instruction.” In Smith’s view, this vision was a place that could be observed by all and “. . . you can... so you can feel it.”

With these visions and the motivation to find them, Principal Smith was willing to hazard personal wellness and personal relationships for this idea of success. Realizing

these risks, Smith understood, “. . . it is about balance. I probably need a little more of that in my life. . . . Because I work long hours and I am tired all the time.” As s/he laughed off the concern, Smith wanted to see more kids succeed than the previous year, “It is important to me, I don’t know why.” This was an important point that deserved additional detail and explanation, but Smith had difficulty further explain her/his passion.

*Arrogant humility the Lemmai way.* A lemmai tree provided an almost unlimited amount of food for my family as I grew up. The fruit was a major staple for many who relied on supplemental income and the wealth of the land. Whether the trees stood tall or dwarfed from drought and windstorms, this distinctive tree had a presence of strength that appeared to suffer damage from the elements but almost always produced fruit the very next flowering season. Although the rustling leaves were quieter than other trees, the floor would be covered by leaves that discouraged invading weeds to grow in its shade.

Small in stature and with a kind smile, Principal Smith appeared to delicately hold the fruits of the school with care. This leader was involved in most aspects of operations and instructional activities, and was available to tackle concerns such as trash and campus appearance. Every afternoon, Smith spoke with students during nutrition breaks and encouraged them to throw away trash and recycle. Teachers and students commended the dedication to school pride and mentioned how the grounds look much better since Smith arrived as principal. The principal painted a different picture noting that the challenges of the litter increased with changes to the school climate. Smith admitted, “...for the most part they [students and teachers] do [their part]. It is not [a] perfect year, but we are working on it.”

This principal’s idea of perfection included high test scores, a beautiful campus,



and happy teachers. When initially asked to participate in this study, s/he politely declined and insisted that other school leaders were more suitable. In fact, during an initial meeting, Smith reluctantly accepted the invitation to participate only after politely listing two educators who that met some gains in high concentrated impoverished communities. As a school with newly developed programs and a positively growing culture, Lemmai School required more and more support from administration. It was commonplace for Smith to spend more time on campus than at home, including the weekends. With so many student activities and groups inviting the administration to participate, Smith often did not require other leadership team members to attend. “[They] work hard enough and they spend long hours doing the supervision of athletics, so I don't really want to impose on them and this is just me.”

In the same shoes of this mild personality, stood yet another person whose pride and esteem was found in the heart of the school. Since arriving at the school, Smith increased the student participation by maintaining high visibility. “I think all the kids on campus know me and know who I am and that is really my philosophy...previously, nobody knew who the principal was,” explained Smith. Perhaps the former principal’s popularity was influenced by her approach “. . . and her style . . . her style is much different from mine; she takes the heavy-handed approach.” Although Smith developed a more positive reputation than the previous principal, s/he knew that success was dependent on risky choices of solid programs. Disregarding advice from a mentor, this principal recalled, “She said my first year, ‘don't change anything [and] you just observe. And then the second year, that is when you do your change’. Well, I didn't wait a year. I waited a semester.”

I conclude this chapter with a description of three distinct school leaders who share many similarities among their communities and students. To decide whom was the best or most effective school principal was not the original intention of this researcher. Instead, I liken the challenge to choosing which tree in my family's garden was most valuable for our lives. Each tree was very different in size, age, shape, and growth; yet each tree held distinctive values for each individual family member. As a child, I remember how I needed all three for a complete garden.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: ANALYSIS OF THE WOODS**

Every year, there were predictable events that we prepared for as a family within a close-knit community. Whether or not one member was committed to a task or tools were available, the overall health and happiness of the family was the main focus of daily life. Like most youngsters, chores were sometimes completed with complaints or daydreams of a better life without manual labor. Still, the chores were completed and the garden tended.

#### **Surviving the (Un)known**

In order to prepare for the family harvest, six months of preparation were necessary; failure to care for the trees could mean a whole year without a harvest. To make life more exciting, we always prepared for the worst unknown environment. With limited means, we collected and stored rainwater for irrigation, grew certain shrubs to discourage pests, made coconut oil to deter fire ants, and pruned the trees after the harvest and before typhoon season. Despite my family's efforts, sometimes the trees did not survive and sometimes the weakest tree flourished after a strong windstorm. My parents never wanted to chop down a tree. They reminded me that the trees would flourish when my children were ready to climb and pick the fruit.

With the best educational leadership and administration programs in place, leaders in Southern California have many opportunities to prepare and continue their professional development in the various private and public institutions. Yet California like many states, has dealt with a shortage of well-qualified and prepared educators in

schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The resilience of certain school leaders may serve as a looking glass into characteristics and the decision-making actions that encourage success for all stakeholders. In a time of economic constraints and a demand for better results, the focus on leading educators has shifted away. Addressing the needs of all levels of resilience may encourage the most suitable school leaders to stay focused on the learner despite impending and unknown pressures.

### **The Lemmai, Niyok and Pi'ao Leaders**

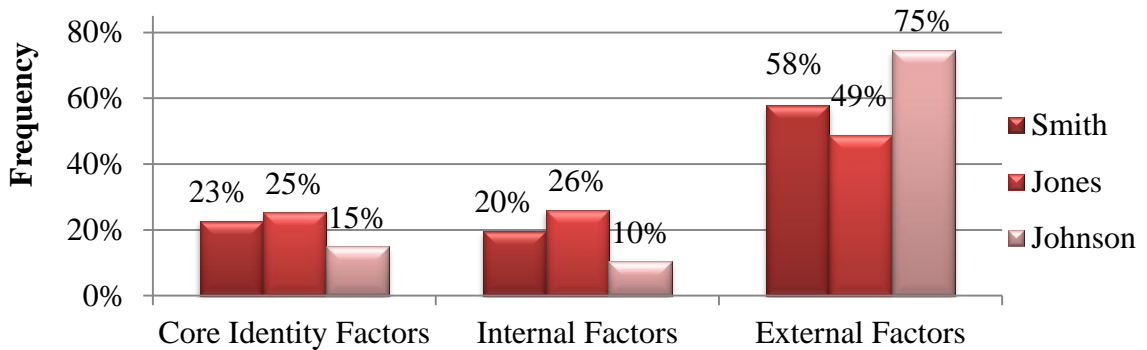
Like the three trees described in previous chapters, all three school leaders are very different, despite their common goal of providing educational opportunities for all students. First, one principal was the opposite gender from her/his counterparts. Second, one principal was assigned to the opposite grade level school from her/his counterparts. In terms of age, one school leader is at the end of her/his career. During our discussions, s/he spoke about retirement several times but would seek other employment opportunities as a school administrator. One school principal had close to fifteen years of experience in education. The third leader had almost ten years of experience as an educator. As school leaders, all three had approximately the same amount of time as administrators and almost an identical number of years as school principals.

In terms of personal life and personal commitments outside of the school site, all three principals did not discuss many obligations. Aside from family commitments, all three did not list hobbies, favorite pastimes, recreational activities, or volunteer projects. Through colleague discussions and leader interviews, it became clear that the three leaders spent an incredible amount of time away from family and friends in order to address commitments on campus. In fact, all three described spending unbelievable

hours at school and dismissed this fact stating that most principals held the same hours. This finding supports Theoharis' (2009) sixth personal strategy that social justice leaders employ to maintain their work professionally and personally. All three principals described long school days on site and sacrificing Saturdays in order to catch up on school documents, supervise activities, or to interact with stakeholders.

### Three Schools with Similar Missions

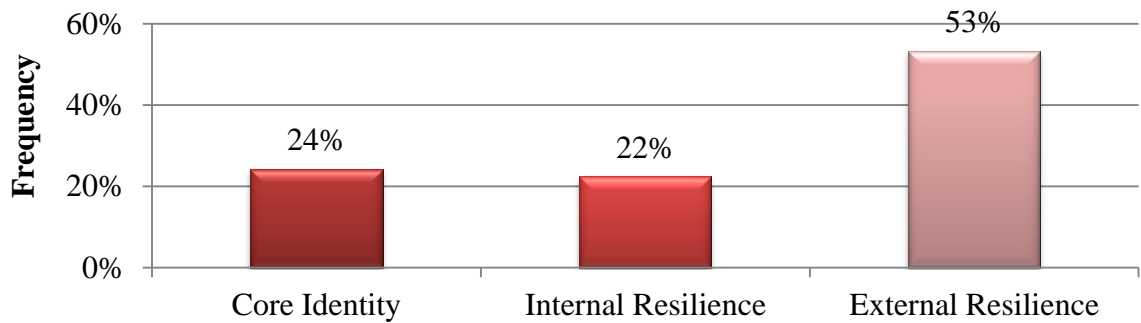
Cross case analysis of all three school leaders and coded data in the three levels of resilience factors reveal a common use of external factors over core identity and internal factors (see *Figure 32*). Averaging the coded data with all three leaders against the coded themes of individual school leaders suggested an agreement between all three cases (see *Figure 33*). This reliance of external resilience was a strong indicator that the leaders employed actions and personal characteristics to build resilience of others and to mitigate the threats of resilience in the school environment.



*Figure 32.* Resilience factors coded in each case data set.

The resilience factors found internally and within their core identity emerged consistently among all three school leaders. As a group, the frequency of these themes

was coded between 22%-24% (see *Figure 33*). These characteristics and actions were held as important tools to maintain the outward interactions with peers and stakeholders. The significant difference between the two inner levels and the external factor level may be explained with measurement issues.



*Figure 33.* Resilience factors coded cross case data.

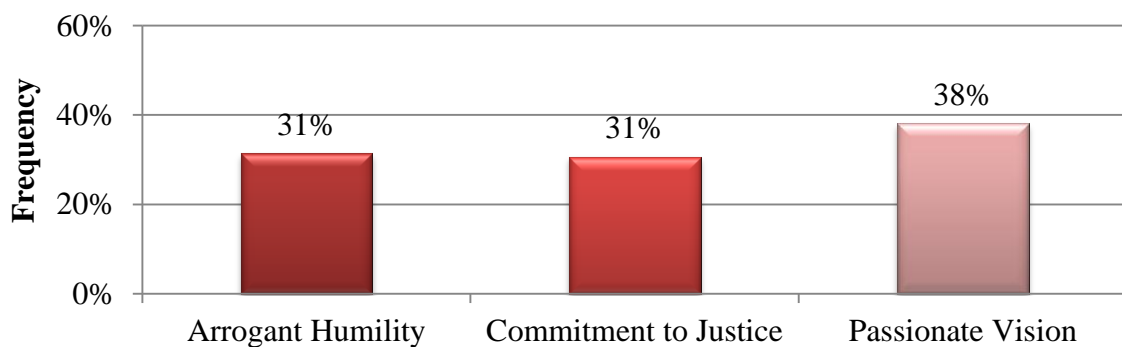
When analyzing all data sources from each case, a word frequency tool was used to find patterns common among the three leaders at all levels of resilience factors. The tool displayed some words with the highest frequency (see *Table 1*) including: having, we, kids, learning, people, school, students, working, them, think, and teachers. In this list of 100 words, some very interesting terms appeared such as: community, differently, first, feel, good, positive, relationships, successful, support, team, and way. With the pressures to implement remediation programs, mandated testing, safer schools, and shrinking budgets, the data found in documents and conversations are centered on obviously more important details.

Table 1. Cloud tag of word frequency from cross case resilience factors coded.



Protected by topsoil and anchored into the bedrock, our largest trees towered over the garden. Our tallest tree acted as a visual beacon to let my siblings and I know that home was around the corner. We measured the position of the sun against this tree to remind us to go in for lunch or wash up for dinner. The smaller trees were used to practice tree climbing and were protected as the future supply of food. All this was possible with strong roots and an inner core that drew up water for growth. Occasionally, some trees were uprooted during typhoons and windstorms. Our neighbors would bring their chainsaws and machetes to help remove the fallen tree. Almost always, my parents would turn down the help. Instead we would try our best to cover the roots with soil and lay stones over the pile of dirt and roots. Most of the time, the tree would flourish the following season.

Just like the roots that cut deep into the soil to find water and hold on to the earth to anchor itself down, these leaders have core values deep within that was formed some time ago. With a firm foundation rooted in social justice, they were able to engage in valuable work. Reviewing the themed data across all three leaders, each core identity or value emerged with similar frequency (see *Figure 34*). Analysis of this aggregated data suggested the established or developing social justice lens were used to inform the leaders' actions and decision-making process. These core values may act in unison allowing the leader flexibility to traverse the missions as required by the environmental force. Patterson and others (2002) suggested that core values shape the actions, intent of the actions, and the desired outcome of the leader's actions. These authors concluded that leadership core values or philosophies can be shaped, extended, and focused by individuals (Patterson et al., 2002). This may be helpful since some leaders may have a developing passion for social justice or a weak commitment to students in high poverty communities.



*Figure 34.* Core identity resilience factors coded cross case data.

As noted in the previous chapter, components of the core values were difficult to articulate by the participants. This subtle data point became more and more apparent as



each school leader alluded to a characteristic and motivation that developed when they were young learners and younger educators. Johnson described her/his passion as, “I think that I had it in me since I was little.” S/he stated at another time, “. . . So I had it in me since I was little.” When asked to expand, s/he stated, “. . . my parents instilled in me a love for education.” Principal Smith stated, “I want kids to know that they have a principal who cares about them. . . . It is important to me. I don't know why.” When asked to expand, the leaders repeated their statement or stared at the researcher incredulously.

Consistent with Theoharis’ (2009) description of social justice leaders, the participants’ reason for engaging in their difficult work was difficult to explain and differed between each leader. As I worked to align the various understandings of social justice leaders that informed this study including Theoharis and Patterson et al., I agreed that these traits are actually values that can be learned and not inherent to a person. With this understanding, the difference in frequency observed with disaggregated data was not unusual. Specifically, each core identity emerged differently with each participant: Johnson responses coded more frequently toward arrogant humility, Smith responses coded more frequently toward a commitment to justice, and Jones responses coded more frequently toward a passionate vision (see *Figure 35*).

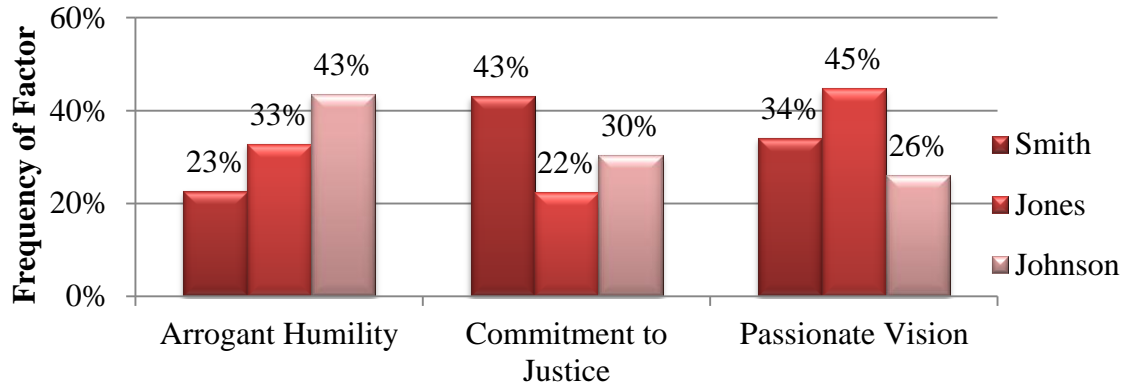
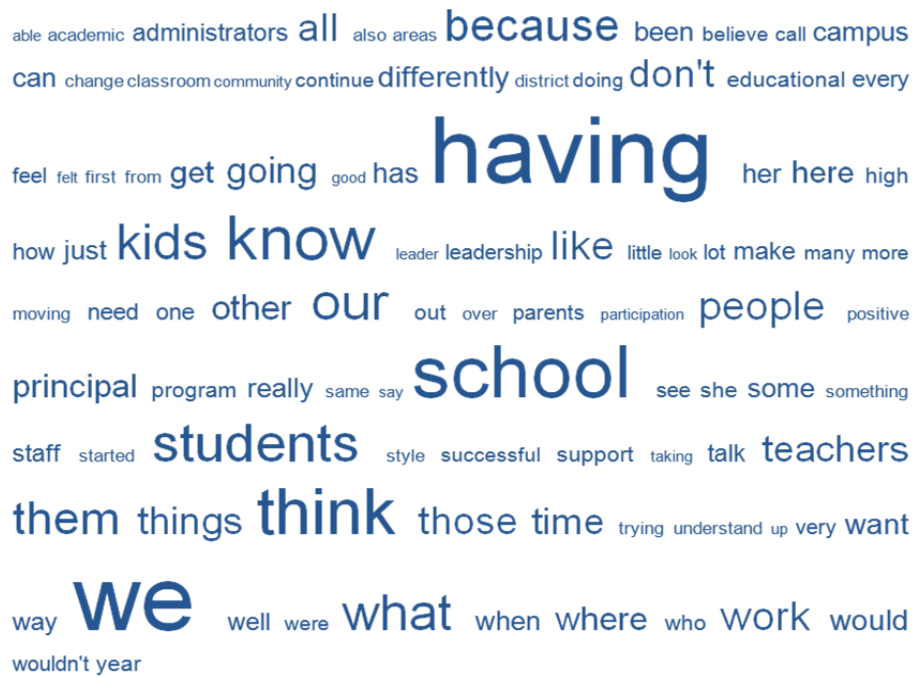


Figure 35. Core values coded cross case data.

To better understand these frequency results and how leaders develop their core values, specific terms emerged in word frequency analysis across all three leaders that were unique to core identity. Of the sixteen words found in the 100 most frequent terms, participation, style, and understand were of particular interest (see *Table 1* & *Table 2*).

Table 2. Cloud tag of word frequency of cross case core identity resilience factors.



For Johnson, a humility that was paired with a sense of arrogance strengthened her/his focus and prevented discouragement from community and professional forces. Within the data, Johnson used the term understand in her/his disbelief in the unwillingness of other school leaders, “They do not understand even if I were to have a conversation with them about what is going on here [or] where we are coming from. Yet they want to know what I am doing and why I am so successful.” At the same time, Johnson was able to utilize the strength and commitment to justice while helping teachers to better understand their students. “Our newer teachers...sometimes have a difficult time. . . . [I have to] coach or give them some strategies to be able to cope [with] those difficult behaviors or student backgrounds, so that they're able to understand and meet their needs.”

Principal Smith used the commitment to justice as a major strength and described how teachers need to better understand students. “I think they need to understand that our kids are no different from the kids from South Central L.A. or Compton or any of these other areas.” With an ability to appreciate the challenges and opportunities of the student population, Smith was able to guide the faculty. By developing a passionate vision, Principal Smith incorporated a constructive and caring style that was contrary to her/his prior experiences with a mentor. S/He recalled, “. . . her style, believe it or not. . . is much different from mine. She takes the heavy-handed approach.”

In working with other school leaders from the neighboring communities, Principal Jones respected the leadership style of others, but was confident and almost arrogant in her/his ability noting, “When I think of that group, everybody brings a little bit of a different style or approach to leadership. Because I think it shows differently at different campuses.” This leadership approach flourished in her/his commitment to justice while attempting to understand the needs of students. S/He described, “. . . hiring staff that is a reflection of our community and a reflection of our students. . . . They grew up in this community and understand it and understand what it is like to be a student on this campus.”

### **Resilience from Within the Trunk**

Enthralled with the strongest trees, I imagined the series of events that occurred in the environment while the tree grew from a seedling to a mammoth tree. Whether it was one altering event or a series of related and low tone episodes, some of the trees endured daily encounters with wandering tourists, severe wind gusts from some of the strongest hurricanes in recorded history, to extended droughts and pest infestation (see *Figure 36*.

Bamboo found in the village of Maina in the territory of Guam (San Nicolas-Perez, personal communication, 2011).). In our family garden, the strongest tree was not the tallest, the youngest, or the biggest. We used to run up and down its fallen trunk and pick the fruit that grew so close to the ground. Earlier, a strong typhoon decimated the garden and cracked the trunks and branches of many trees. One particular tree was uprooted and survived the winds that were saturated with seawater swept up from the ocean. Fallen branches and leaves from the other trees covered the fallen old growth and protected the tree from the moisture robbing sea spray. Many years later, the old tree laid on its side with roots oriented in a new direction down into the top soil and new trunk growth sloping up to the sky.

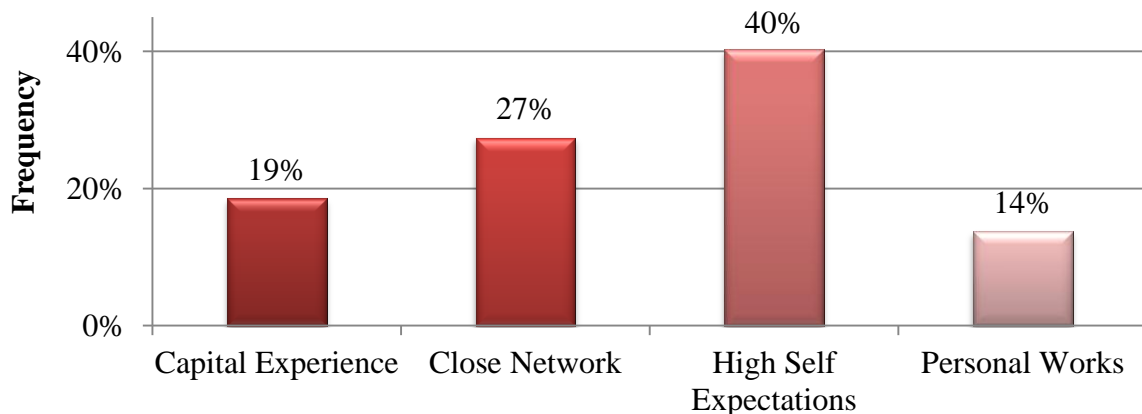


*Figure 36.* Bamboo found in the village of Maina in the territory of Guam (San Nicolas-Perez, personal communication, 2011).

With the most challenging events, resilient school leaders may interpret or handle

an ordeal with three possible outcomes. Patterson and his colleagues (2002) described how an individual can deal with a hardship and either carry on, maintain, or increase performance levels. Although a school leader may stumble, the resulting actions and lessons from the fall may develop either a person who is better prepared or more disconnected.

Bridging the core identity and the external resiliency were the building factors that personally affect self-expectations and efficacy. Of all four subthemes, high self-expectations and trusting a close professional and personal network emerged most often in this leadership group (see *Figure 37*). The most substantial understandings emerged in the pattern matching of high self-expectations. Expectations for a positive outcome will produce engagement, if paired with high principal self-efficacy, (Smith, Guarino, Strom, Adams, 2006).



*Figure 37.* Internal resilience factors coded cross case data.

Benefits of high self-expectations and self-efficacy can lead to the enhancement of collective efficacy that in turn is a component of academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). According to Hoy and his colleagues (2006), academic optimism is a positive environment with the properties of faculty trust, collective efficacy, and an

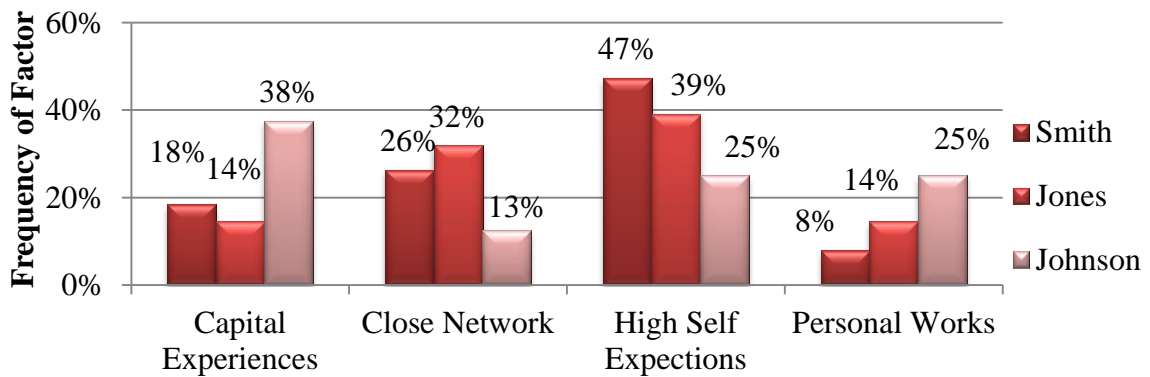
academic emphasis that collectively prevents educators and students to be trapped by poverty. In relation to the school leaders of this study, Casanova (2010) argued, “I don’t think there are any schools out there where academic optimism has emerged without the principal’s leadership or, at least, support” (p. 80). Lead by talented school leaders with high self-efficacy, each school was sure to find success through academic optimism. Casanova (2010) argued that school leaders are key components how “. . . academic optimism can be generated most forcefully across the school community” (p. 80).

The presence of high-self expectations and principal self-efficacy in the data were aligned with Smith and his colleagues’ (2006) findings that school leaders engaged in high poverty school possess high self-efficacy in instructional leadership. Smith et al. (2006) concluded that it would be advantageous for schools with high FRL participation be led by principals maintaining high self-efficacy. Another parallel in the data was the amount of time committed to instructional support in the classroom. High Self-efficacy principals of high poverty schools spent more time focused on instruction than those leaders serving schools with lower FRL participation (Smith et al., 2006).

The second key component for internal resilience was to trust and rely on a close personal and professional network. Of the three school leaders, Jones possessed the healthiest network of support and displayed a willingness to trust this network. Professionally, Jones participated in professional development with other school leaders who shared similar responsibilities. This year-long program included book reviews, summer workshops and goal setting, and discussion groups. Jones shared that two mentors provided continuous support and advice. One mentor was officially assigned to Jones while the other mentor, a previous supervisor, was informally guiding Jones. As

stated in the previous chapter, Jones maintained friendships with former teachers and friends who are involved in education. Finally, Principal Jones mentioned a family network that remains the center of attention in her/his life.

For Principal Johnson, learning and developing through capital experiences was a significant theme and reliance on a close professional and personal network was the least significant (see *Figure 38*). In comparison to the counterpart leaders, appraising Principal Johnson’s personal and professional network may broaden our understanding in the pattern inconsistency. Discussions about balancing familial and professional obligations were a great concern for this parent of young children and a child of aging parents. Scattered throughout this leader’s office were pictures of friends and family who were obviously of great importance.



*Figure 38.* Internal resilience factors coded in each case data set.

Absent from the conversations and observed activities was evidence of a strong and robust professional and personal network. There were some indications that Johnson’s immediate and extended family members interacted daily with her/his nuclear family which would be a substantial branch of the personal network. Reliance on a



strong professional network was or seemed to be lacking. Intentional or unintentional, this leader was isolated from other school leaders who would have provided companionship and opportunities for self-reflection, growth, and validation. Receiving positive praise about works and efforts from esteemed colleagues serves as a major motivation for engaging in the work of social justice (Theoharis, 2009).

Instead, Principal Johnson reverted to strength obtained from experiences that increased her/his cultural capital. By recognizing experiences as opportunities for increasing cultural wealth, this leader was able to strengthen the bridge between her/his core identity and actions for external resilience building. A key component of social capital rich experiences was found in the delivery of a democratic education. As an alternative to a program rich in deficit thinking, Johnson displayed major components of democracy outlined by Pearl (1997b). First, Johnson preserved the rights of expression by accepting conversations in languages other than English while communicating with parents or with students during critical incidents. By modeling the importance of using the home language for certain conversations and English for academic growth, Johnson encouraged students to “express identity and loyalty” and “become fluent in English without requiring them to surrender fluency in their mother tongue” (Pearl, 1997b, p.223). Details from observations included the reactions of surprise and joy when parents were met with a fluent greeting from Johnson. The frequent exchanges identified their respect for her/his position as a school leader and expression of identity.

Secondly, Principal Johnson addressed the students’ “right not to be a captive audience” (p. 225) by making certain that each “classroom be an acceptable place for all students” (Pearl, 1997b, p.226). In the delicate balance of structured lessons, student

achievement scores, and a need for a compelling curriculum, Johnson worked closely with teachers to deliver meaningful learning experiences where students help set interim learning goals. Observed in a teacher meeting for math data analysis, the principal and teachers shared their achievement goals for each class for a math unit spanning three weeks. Each teacher then shared the goals set by the students in the whole class and student-selected scores for those below proficiency levels.

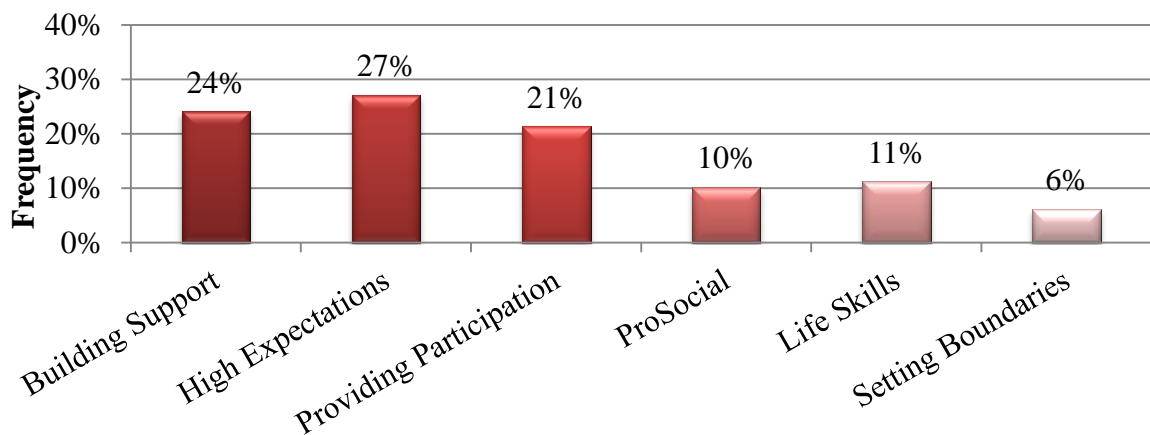
Finally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Principal Johnson gained valuable insights through experiences early in life. This principal gained a capacity for communities with economic challenges that surpass the counterpart leaders. Two leaders described the challenges and limited opportunities that their parents found in California and each set of parents developed a network of resources that encouraged them to raise a successful family. Although all three principals described childhoods with limited financial resources, Johnson's close family experiences with traditions and prideful experiences influenced her/his outlook on a limited professional network. Made obvious in descriptions of her/his parents' early life California, this principal was proud of the rich family history and specifically her/his parents' endurance to provide opportunities. Johnson proudly reported "they were not able to pursue... schooling or academics" as her/his parents escaped childhood communities of drugs and violence.

### **Resilience Branched Out in the Environment**

My brothers and I were taught at an early age how to prune branches, trim palms, and clear back growth with one single tool. We all wanted the responsibility of actually pruning the branches in order to get out of collecting and sorting the cut limbs. With this role came responsibility to not damage the tree or discourage growth. The mass cutting

took place about three times a year. During harvest time, banana trees were cut down to collect the fruit bunches. Following the harvest, larger trees needed to be pruned in order to encourage root growth for the next flowering season. At the start of the typhoon season, palms were trimmed, old bamboos were removed, and branches were cut away from house structures. Most exposed to the elements, the branches and leaves were the first to manage the effects of the environment.

Deep in their communities, each leader used similar approaches to build and mitigate the forces and influences found in the environment. Just as the leaves of a tree, the leaders stretched out to encourage growth and receive the warmth and relationships from stakeholders focused on assisting students. Throughout the cases, I found key factors frequently used by the school leaders in their description to encourage learner growth and foster strong associations. Of the six external subthemes, three building the environment factors emerged at least twice as often as factors for mitigating the environment (see *Figure 39*).



*Figure 39.* External resilience factors coded in cross case data.

A major finding common among all three school leaders was creating

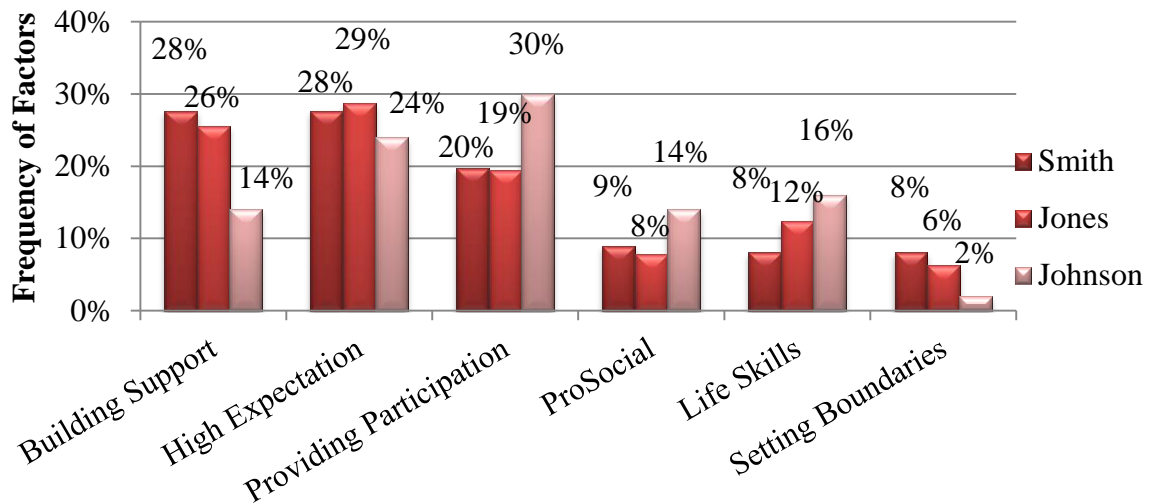
opportunities for meaningful participation as individual learners. As discussed in the literature review, engagement in personal professional development was required to obtain new skills in order to engage in challenges (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

All three school leaders wished there was more time to complete tasks and address personal and professional objectives. By prioritizing tasks, activities, and obligations, each school leader wanted to participate in more professional development. Ultimately, each leader would consider the opportunity to share their ideas with other leaders and aspiring administrators. Johnson shared, "...when my kids get older, I would like to work on my Ed.D. My [spouse] and I have talked about it..." At the completion of an observation day, Jones asked about balancing academics, work responsibilities, and family. Our informal conversation revealed that s/he would like an opportunity to pursue a doctorate degree as well.

In the end, all three leaders participated in conferences and workshops sponsored by their school districts, read online resources, and read leadership books recommended by their supervisors. Although all three aspire to teach other school leaders, they all find their school site responsibilities far more important and family life needing more attention. Jones shared that her/his spouse should be given an opportunity for graduate studies before returning and her/his current leadership team requires more coaching. Johnson discussed her/his internal conflict rushing through family time finding a balance with career goals, "my life is always a big rush. When my kids get older, I would like to work on my Ed.D." For Smith, her/his humility was a key factor, "I sometimes think that isn't it a little presumptuous for me to tell these other principals...I am not sure; I might be comfortable with, but it is a possibility." At that time in their life, these leaders decided

to put personal aspirations on the backburner.

For the most part, the three common factors were identified within the data (see *Figure 40*). Principal Johnson had a far higher affinity to providing opportunities for participation than her/his counterparts. At the same time, providing caring and support factor emerged far less in Johnson’s data than in the counterpart data. These two observations were difficult to understand and interpret, particularly the moderate use of caring and support as a resilience builder. As discussed, this specific factor was considered to be the most critical element in nurturing resiliency (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). As an environmental builder, Benard (2004) described supportive relationships as being a “sense of compassion - nonjudgmental love” (p.45) which was engaged by Johnson. So although it was not as prevalent, it was present and observed in the data. Another possible explanation might be Johnson’s focus on providing opportunities for participation rather than cultivating support and caring.



*Figure 40.* External resilience factors coded in each case data set.

Between the bamboo, coconut and breadfruit trees, there are similarities and

differences defined by science. Biologically, bamboo and a coconut tree have similar vascular system, while the coconut and breadfruit trees have similar fruiting components. The technical and empirical analysis between each type of plant is important, but experiencing our family's relationship with each plant was far more important.

As a major theme, providing and building supportive and caring relationships were a generally major consistency between the three leaders. As mentioned earlier, Johnson's rapport with students demonstrated the emotional investment and time dedicated in cultivating the relationships. Comments noted in field notes detailed how Johnson greeted and conversed with parents before and after school in multiple languages. Interchanges, gestures, and facial expressions indicated a strong commitment to each other. Questions and comments about other family members and young children revealed Johnson's discreet knowledge of home life and personal interest in students. During parent conferences, personal exchanges between the principal, parents, and grandparents, set the tone of the meeting and reinforced supportive relationships previously established.

With teachers, Johnson's colleague described a renewed spirit in their fairly new relationship, "I would do anything for [Johnson] and maybe I do more than I would somewhere else [other than the Pi'ao School]." This supportive relationship was cultivated through the principal's example of authentic work with learners as described by her/his colleague, "...because I believe [Johnson] is genuinely here for the children and the parents." The supportive connection encouraged this aspiring colleague, "[Johnson] saw my potential...allowed me to grow and develop..." The colleague concluded that Johnson's capacity for caring and supportive relationships was a critical

component for success, "...the biggest difference is the way that [Johnson] is able to communicate. . . . [Johnson] has a lot of compassion with the teachers."

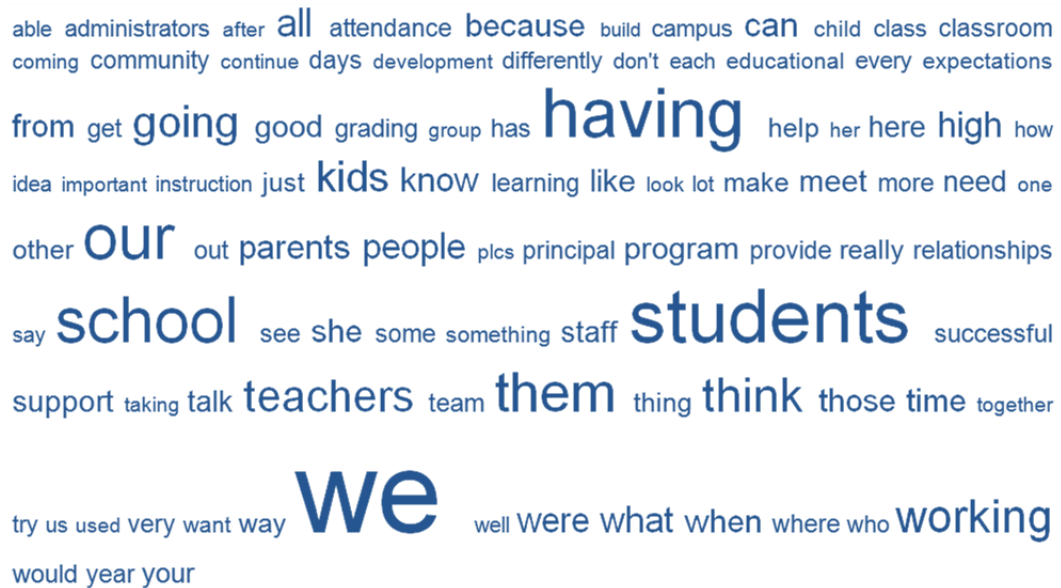
Relationships were particularly important to Smith and Jones. As a long term resident within the community, Jones developed strong bonds with key persons of influence. These relationships encouraged politicians and city officials to engage in school support programs, which made resources and talents accessible to stakeholders. Within the school, Jones promoted caring relationships with all stakeholder groups. Developing an aptitude for relationships was a major coaching point with new members of the leadership team. Jones shared an exchange with a team member, "Your work is the conversation that...may just seem like small talk at times. That time we spend with people is also very important to our work." The ability to develop genuinely supportive and caring relationships was such an important aspect, Jones confided that it would be the most important talent sought if choosing a successor or recruiting team members if asked to open a new school.

For Principal Smith, relationship building was a new realization for success. At a previous assignment, this renewed principal believed that the authoritarian and detached approach to students and teachers was required. Smith reluctantly admitted that "...if the kids are running amuck, I will have to have that iron-fisted approach in the beginning. Then...start building relations with the kids...but they need to know, they need structure." In the end, Smith conceded, "I would shift slightly, not completely, but maybe slightly toward the middle. I would still build the relationships, [because] in the end that is all you have."

Finally, the demonstrated high expectations for students, parents, and teachers

were a common themed builder of resiliency among the three leaders. Aligned with effective school research and characteristics of successful schools, high expectations promote accomplishment through encouragement and support. Working hand in hand with participation and support, high expectations were verbalized and demonstrated by these school leaders. The word frequency cloud tags for the high expectation theme highlighted the words academic, believe, change, connect, effect, increase, new, and right are unique to the top 100 word frequency analysis of all external factors (see *Table 3*).

*Table 3.* Cloud tag of word frequency for cross case external resilience factors coded.

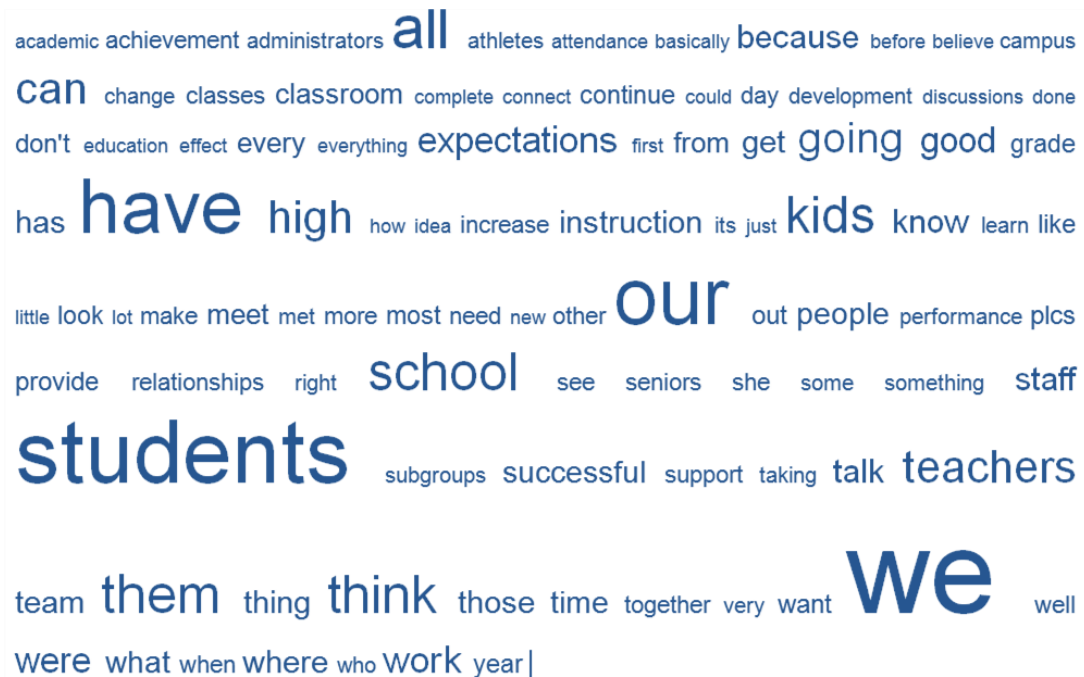


I found the terms effect, new, believe, and change particularly interesting in the word tag (see *Table 4*). While describing the need to change the hearts of some teachers who had displayed discriminatory behaviors, Principal Smith recalled how teachers at a previous assignment, “. . . realize the effects of poverty, because they [are] exposed to it .



. .” and there was a need for change at [her/his] current site. Principal Johnson shared how “my expectations are really high and I expect . . . every teacher to believe in their children and hold them to the highest expectations.” Principal Jones who risked high expectations of learners over traditional approaches to data analysis accentuated this authentic approach in the commitment of teachers and motivation of students. Jones affirmed that “. . . leaving out the statistics and [using] . . . a lot of the trust and belief that we're doing the right things here, faith in the school leadership, or faith in the classroom, structures and faith in everything may change.”

*Table 4.* Cloud tag of word frequency for cross case data for external resilience factor high expectation.



**Summary**

In our mind’s eye, trees are healthy when the roots run deep, the trunk is hardy,

and its branches spread out evenly with leaves that lean toward the sun and flourish with abundant fruit. With the perfect picture in mind, our lens highlights perfections and deficiencies to describe success and failures. For anyone who has planted a tree, matched trees to survive a region's climate and geography, cared for trees against pests, pruned trees to encourage growth, one understands that our interpretation of the perfect root system, trunk, and leaf canopy is a cumbersome system to predict future growth and fruit production. The environment and climate are sure to bring frost, windstorms, drought, scorching heat, pests, chemical impurities, human activity abuse, and curator neglect. Treatment for diseased or fruitless trees including elimination, replacement, or branch lopping should never be the only choice of action. Tree care takes time, persistence, problem recognition and remediation. I have spent time in some of the best gardens that had home and purpose for new, old, odd-shaped, straight, toppled, short, and tall trees. Personal experience led to the realization that it is more important to address growth needs than succumbing to traditional gardening practices or environmental elements. Ultimately, uprooting or poisoning a tree is usually not beneficial for the families that need the tree for lumber, fruit, and shade.

For our school leaders, there were significant lessons learned from their expertise and daily life within communities with economic challenges. First, the strongest factors of these successful school leaders were found among the external resilience characteristics and actions. These actions were not only used to develop a more manageable environment, but actions described calculated steps that increased the resilience of others in direct contact with the school leader. With a more resilient faculty and student body, the school leaders were able to concentrate on specific needs of

stakeholders and manage the traditional influences that remained in flux. This concept became more and more concrete while conversations and interviews revealed each school leader's inclination to include counterparts when discussing successes and celebrations. On the reverse side, the school leaders almost consistently separated stakeholders when addressing challenges and concerns from the environmental forces. Intentional or not, this behavior appeared to be instinctive and protective in nature.

Secondly, relying on internal, core identity and external resiliency factors was fluid and emphasizes changes continuously. Specifically, developing caring and support factor emerged less often in Johnson's data than her/his counterparts. In review of Johnson's data, there were obvious points that encouraged and supported loving relationships and encouragement described by Benard (2004). In fact, a survey of this investigator's field notes suggested that Johnson had stronger and more personalized interactions with students. On the reverse side, Johnson's environment of community and professional influences required special attention and efforts on providing meaningful opportunities of participation.

Additionally, there was significant evidence that the functionality and potency of the school leaders' external resilience factors were influenced by the internal resilience factors of high self-expectations, a strong reliance on personal and professional relationships, and improving from capital building experiences. Of the three builders of resiliency the connection of high self-expectations and self-efficacy were prevalent among the leaders. Casanova (2010) described a school with academic optimism to be the converse of schools with fatalistic staff members who "... who look for something or someone else, never themselves, to blame for the students' lack of achievement" (p. 79).

With high self-expectations and principal-efficacy, these three leaders were able to cultivate academic optimism that should synergize long after their departure as principals. Found in similar findings in her case study, Casanova (2010) reported “. . . once it [academic optimism] emerged, and was brought into by the faculty and staff, that core value became self-perpetuating and continues to guide Cibola today” (p. 80).

Finally, as coded in Johnson’s data, another internal factor such as growing from capital experiences may be more influential. In some aspects, Principal Johnson was a much stronger and resilient individual than her/his counterparts. By appreciating and recognizing the potential for personal growth from childhood and ongoing experiences, her/his social and cultural capital increased. Thus, it may be beneficial for all school leaders to seek growth opportunities that provide experiences that increase capital. In the end, our garden of education has relatively few effective leaders with a focus on democracy and social justice. Contrary to “transformational” practices, it may be more logical to (re)purpose our new, old, odd-shaped, straight, toppled, short, and tall trees that still provide fruit and shade.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study closes during a developing time of trial and reformulation. Perceptions of adequacy and acceptable outcomes have reshaped the education system and its beneficiaries, the children seeking educational opportunities. This study on resilience fittingly benefitted me as an educational leader as I now reflect on the conclusions in order to redirect my identity like a fallen tree that now grows and slopes up toward the sun.

At the start of my doctoral program, friends and colleagues asked if I wanted to become an administrator. My response then is the same today, “I am an educational leader.” I feel that most of my colleagues in schools are no longer receptive to my ideas in educational leadership; my mentor described this lasting experience as the outsider-within. Reflecting on these series of isolating events, I think about their experiences and why so many turn away from this capacity for leadership. I have experiences with principals who led with a passion and commitment for learners; I wonder if my colleagues had such privileges. I hope this study will afford my learners the opportunities of a socially just and democratic school.

I have prepared and now call for others to share a few self-reflections, conclusions, study limitations, suggestions for practice, ideas for further study, and rival interpretations. After a brief recap of the study, I list major conclusions that emerged from the research: 1) external resilience builders continue to be the strongest factors; 2) leaders must easily navigate between each internal resilience factor; 3) high self-expectations and principal efficacy are prerequisites for school resilience and academic

optimism; 4) strong leader personal and professional relationships lead to the development of critical relationships among stakeholders; and 5) a core identity with a social justice lens comes from the life experiences that develop social and cultural capital.

### **Summary of the Research Study**

In this multiple case study, I studied principals serving urban schools with high poverty populations. I concentrated my research efforts on describing the actions and characteristics of the principal leaders who successfully led this particular student population to success, as defined by the general public. Leadership resiliency was the unit of analysis for all data collected on the principals.

### **Resiliency Variables**

In previous resiliency studies, researchers collected data on fortifying environmental factors for resiliency. I identified common External Resilience Factors that were the first line of defense against professional and community forces. In this study, I looked at the six components described by Henderson and Milstein (2003). The researchers listed the competencies as increasing prosocial bonding, setting consistent boundaries, teaching life skills, providing caring and support, setting high expectations, and providing opportunities for participation (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Additionally, I looked for Internal Resilience Factors that influenced the personal decisions and works of the resilient school principal. These resilience factors included internalized emotions, motivations, and strengths that have been developed through experience. They served as a bridge between the leader's core values and the drive to mitigate the environment. Such strengths helped the leader to continue their passion to

assist impoverished students while professional and community forces place counteractions and influences. The Internal Resilience Factors included: high self-expectations as a leader; reliance on a close personal and professional network; appreciating and learning from capital-building experiences; and remaining true in personal works.

Finally, I identified Core Values that performed as the fundamental resilience factors for the leaders. These were identifiable ideals and personal principles gained and enhanced through key experiences and influential persons in their lives. Core Values not only influenced actions and the worldview of each principal, but also preserved an inseparable attitude that social justice must be delivered to all. Theoharis (2009) described many characteristics, but pointed to three common leadership traits as “arrogant humility” (p.143), a “tenacious commitment to justice” (p. 147), and “passionate vision” (p.146).

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study offer powerful insights into school leaders who effectively traversed the challenging educational community and environments suffering from concentrated poverty. The data gathered in the study strongly suggest some very important findings. First, resilient leaders possess strong external resilience factors that help develop stakeholder resilience in the school environment. Second, these resilient leaders seamlessly switch among each internal resilience factor in order to meet the influences and forces from the community. Third, resilient leaders display high self-expectations and principal efficacy, which begin within the leader and extend to academic optimism throughout the staff. Forth, a resilient leader builds and trusts their

strong personal and professional relationships, which fundamentally develops relationships of a supportive environment. Finally, a resilient leader develops and maintains a core identity with a social justice lens that allows the leader to appreciate the growth potential in the most difficult events. To explore these and other findings, I review the research questions formulated during the review of related literature and discussions with the most influential people in my life.

**Research Question #1: Why do successful principals in high poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite the odds stacked against success?**

First, school organizations displayed different levels of invincibility, an observation that was true for both research questions. The collective efficacy of educators fostered through sense of developing academic optimism, encouraged individual students and teachers to reach higher. I agree with Casanova's (2010) conclusion that the root of this optimism came from the leader and their high self-expectations.

Principal efficacy was also a key factor. High self-expectations started within the individual leader, which then allowed the principal to develop and utilize her/his, principal efficacy. In contrast to other researchers' perspectives (Henderson and Milstein, 2003; Milstein & Henry, 2000; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005; Patterson et al., 2003), these findings propose that the development of organizational resilience is dependent on developing and sustaining a school leader's resilience. Resilience then supported more effectively the development and utilization of a principal's efficacy.

Additionally, these school leaders relied heavily on personal and professional



relationships to improve their own social capital. Of the three builders of resiliency, high self-expectations and self-efficacy were prevalent among all leaders. The strong reliance on personal and professional relationships, in turn, led to higher collective efficacy and a development of a supportive environment in the school. With neighboring schools failing proficiency tests, each leader protected the students and teachers from looming fears of failure and mandated state consequences. Finally, all three leader earned more resilience by appreciating the social and cultural capital of their stakeholders and themselves. Protected by their arrogant humility, the leaders were very aware of the experiences that developed social and cultural capital within themselves and those close to them.

Prominent examples of the actions of resilient leaders included how budget constraints and looming staff layoffs were reorganized emotionally so that they could find opportunities and connections to other organizations. They looked at the availability of closed office space, cost sharing of staff with other school sites, and the flexibility of assigning specialists positions. Two most impressive observations included the strong relationship with previously a laid-off and a “force of retired” educators who provided the school with focused volunteer and paid work.

**Research Question #2: Why do successful school leaders in high poverty schools persist to promote social justice and educational equality to students despite the environmental barriers commonly found in high poverty communities?**

Stakeholder resilience in the school environment was most dependent on the external resilience factors of the leader. First, these school leaders possessed resilience

developed from their strongest factors, which were the external resilience characteristics and actions. The leaders developed more manageable environment with calculated actions to increase the resilience of others in their immediate contact.

Secondly, these resilient leaders seamlessly switched among their internal resilience factor to address community and environment forces. Through their social justice lens, some found more opportunities for personal commitments and a reliance on robust personal and professional relationships. There was evidence that each leader utilized all internal resilience builders, but it was particularly interesting to find that each leader utilized one specific factor over the others. To overcome so-called adversities and challenges commonly found in high poverty neighborhoods, resilient leaders must be able to recognize their tendency to use one particular resilience factor and actively manage the use of all four.

Finally, one particular leader earned more resilience through strong cultural capital through an appreciation of capital building experiences that span of her/his lifetime. The counterparts were not able to find as many experiences that increased their cultural capital that paralleled the communities. Although their experiences were rich, they relied on others to help build that connection with their communities' ethnic culture.

At the start of this study, I hypothesized that resilient school leaders possessed three exclusive layers of resilience factors (see *Figure 41*), which allowed them to successful deliver educational opportunities and promote social justice in high poverty communities.

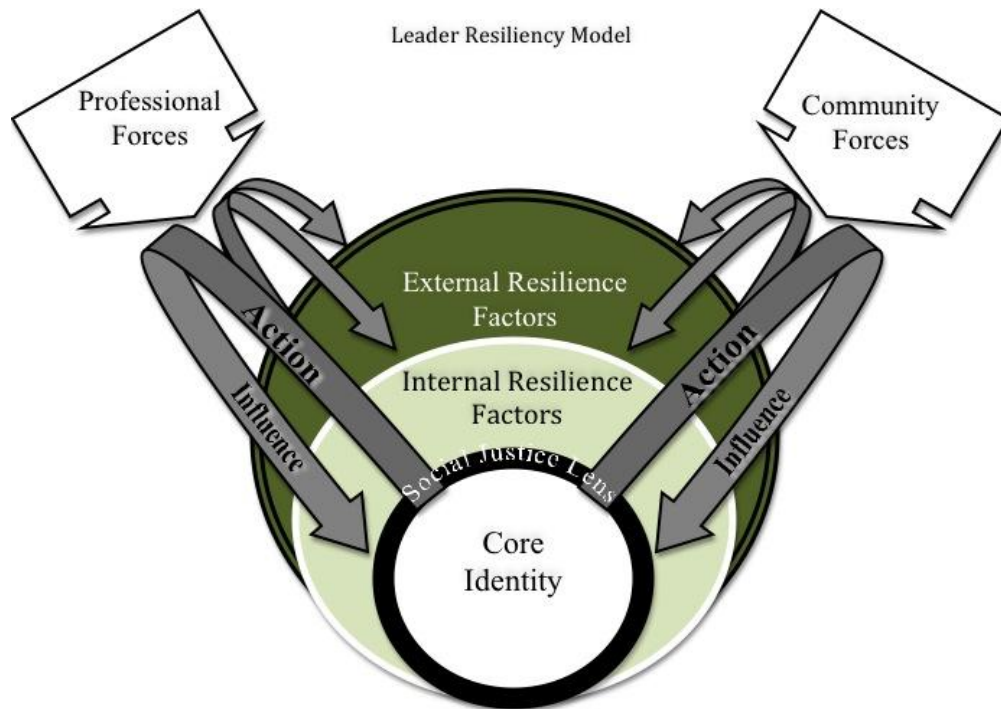


Figure 41. Leadership Resiliency Model, San Nicolas hypothesis.

After reviewing the evidence and discussing the findings of this study, I reformulated my previous position and postulated a new Leadership Resiliency Model (see *Figure 42. Leadership Resiliency Model (revised)*). This model reflects the findings that the external resilience factors are the most critical protection against antagonist events. Secondly, a leaders social justice lens promotes an appreciation challenging events to find growth opportunities for the leader and stakeholders. The school leader’s core values through the social justice lens heavily inform the external and internal factors yet vigorously resist contrary persuasions. Finally, school leader’s internal resilience factors are key components to informing the external resilience of the leader and stakeholders in the school organization.

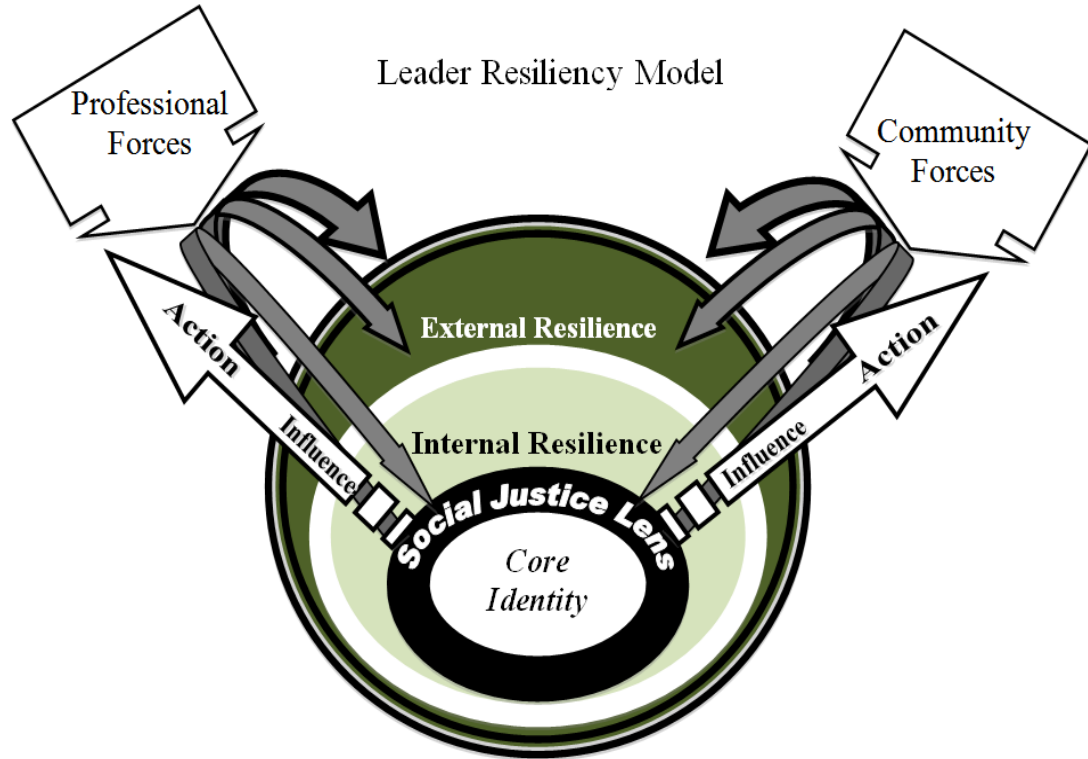


Figure 42. Leadership Resiliency Model (revised).

### On the Other Hand

Review of literature, discussions with researchers, and practitioner-colleague conversations led to rival or alternative perspectives of a few key findings. With “arrogant humility,” I tried to address them. First, extraneous concern about faculty staffing, dwindling school budgets, and the reformulation of student achievement through testing and assessment reform was a rival explanation for each leader’s reliance of external resilience. Some of the very best schools were designated as inadequate by standards defined through NCLB. Schools of children are able to read and comprehend above grade literature material in the most impoverished urban and rural neighborhoods. Casanova (2010) described a rural high school that boasted impressive statistics of career

and college ready students who transitioned from their public high school to post-secondary institutions or training programs. Yet Casanova's (2010) inspirational description was clouded by the school's AYP designation of failing its goals. In fact, this school that has been able to meet the graduation target rates and had an impressive number of students advance to post-secondary programs had been classified as a failing school since 2004-2005 according the Arizona State Department of Education statistics.

By no means should the success of a school be limited to a snapshot of student performance. Yet the current political climate and public opinion demand more from less. Although the traditional measurement of education success was still in existence, constituents and stakeholders do not want to wait 12 years for an assessment if a student is a productive citizen. Rather, the AYP and proficiency statistics acted as a window of this future success. Casanova (2010) concluded that this "unintentional consequence" (p. 82) of NCLB ". . . will be only a pebble on Cibola's road and that the enjoyment and determination that has been a part of the school's development will overcome any bumps along the way" (p. 84). In the end, Casanova (2010) described a lineage of school leaders who have developed a culture of success and educational opportunity for their students.

Like the school leaders described in this study, the pressures and obstacles from traditional forces have been a constant variable. Although the Pi'ao, Lemmai, and Niyok leaders dealt with historical economic and school budget restrictions, the level of concern from students and the demand for excellence from politicians has ceased to let up. Hence, the use of external resilience was not unique to this time of economic insecurity or threat of state takeover.

Another alternate perspective of the data included the popular use of the "culture

of poverty” described by Ruby Payne (Bomer et al., 2008). Found in many school districts, the movement and popularity of Payne’s perspective has proposed a new interpretation of multicultural education. This new understanding includes the complexity of addressing not only the ethnic influences of a learner, but the more pervasive influences of a culture of situational poverty and intergenerational poverty (Payne, 2005a). With a thorough understanding of their culture, educators will be able to counter the intentional or unintentional actions of poor students and their choice to remain in poverty (Payne, 2005a).

Readers may suggest that each case demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of this poor people culture, with educators implementing the recommended steps to teach students that they have a better choice. Admirers of Payne’s (2005) *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, may argue that educators can view relationships as the means to student success and achievement. Payne (2005) described how “deposits” must be made into students in order for relationships to succeed which is parallel to Principal Jones’ statement of deposits and withdrawals.

Deposits and withdrawals described by Principal Jones in The Niyok School were also a reference to her/his understanding of Interpersonal Equity which is found in Business and Marketing field of sales satisfaction. Jones was attempting to describe how the leadership team must be the catalyst for fostering relationships, “I think it is conscious, it is not something that will happen on a large scale by chance.” When asked if it was important to pay special attention to impoverished students, Jones’ colleague was skeptical. This colleague reminded me, “I don’t think that the kids are that different.” Students within their school are just as sophisticated and can sense insincerity

and a "...person with low expectations for them."

The most revealing passion for social justice was Johnson's response to protecting "poor students." Aside from the devastated look on this principal's face when asked the question, Johnson stated, "I definitely wouldn't say it is because they're poor that I talk to them differently." To clarify her/his point of view, Johnson was asked if poor students were more vulnerable than affluent counterparts. The principal replied, "I would say that their experiences are different. I wouldn't say that they are vulnerable. I would say that their experiences are different obviously." With passionate vision and a commitment to social justice, these school leaders link to the high expectations of parents and the developing academic optimism of the faculty. These are fundamental components of providing a relevant and compelling curriculum that produces a democratic education experience and not deficit thinking practices perpetuated in Payne's classism approach.

### **Critique of Methodology**

With a great need for method diversity and an emphasis on quantitative data sets, there was a need for information extracted from large populations. With an emphasis on "the why?" and "the how?" in this study, the use of qualitative measures in these case studies was most appropriate. Additionally, the meeting AYP or API requirements for at least three years within a specified amount of time created natural limitations that narrowed the participant sample.

A major challenge in reporting the findings was maintaining the identity of participants. Although one principal was not concerned about anonymity, the counterparts insisted that the results and descriptions not lend to their identity. With an odd number of participants, supervisors and stakeholders may easily identify participants

if the gender and school levels were revealed. Although the purpose of the study was geared to describe successful leaders in any school level, some valuable information may have been lost in the details related to gender and grade level.

A major example was the detailed description of home life and family routines. Two participants described concerns and priorities that effected their personal relationships and personal works at home and school. Both leaders described concerns and joy of maintaining a young family through traditional gender roles at home. At the same time, the principals discussed frustrations in their gender roles as care providers and responsibilities for their children and spouses. This in turn had some effect on choices and the amount of time divided between home and the school site. Whether or not the gender and school level descriptions and understandings leads to a better multiple case study was left to the reader. To assume that the importance and challenges between males and females or between secondary school and elementary schools are insignificant would be naïve of this researcher. To remedy this concern, another gender counterpart and school level counterpart would make for a study to include such nuances.

Next, the measurement of the “why?” and the “how” questions remain an elusive skill for novice researchers, especially this researcher (Yin, 2009). With extensive training and experience, recognizing additional opportunities for data collection may have produced additional data to describe the core and internal resilience factors. Common responses regarding a commitment to justice or passionate vision with the participants remained an unresolved question for this researcher. Although the “how” question has some significant findings, the “why” questions remain. Although there were valuable knowledge gained from this explanatory study, it would still be difficult to



describe some key characteristics for a reader to consider the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, the participants had difficulty verbalizing or describing their motivation and self-sacrifice in order to deliver an educational program that was true to their vision or commitment to justice. It would be important to obtain a more robust description of this vital leadership characteristic that often informs the actions of social justice leaders.

Finally, as a novice researcher, I paid special attention to Yin's (2009) characteristics of an "exemplary case study" (p. 185). With a limited repertoire as a case study investigator, I relied on these suggestions in the hopes that this study will "be a lasting contribution of research" (Yin, 2009, p. 185). Well-intentioned or not, it would be contrary to my own "arrogant humility" to state that there are no flaws and or room for improvement. So the following is a self-reflection on my path to case study expertise. As I think out loud, I bear out how this multiple case study is significant, complete, presents alternate perspectives, data sufficient, and engaging (Yin, 2009).

An exemplary study is significant (Yin, 2009). As the global economy stabilizes and the expectation to do more with less is emphasized, the study presents cases that have been difficult to find and are of public interest. The characteristics, actions, and resilience of these school leaders in economically disadvantaged communities provide a deeper understanding for leadership preparation and selection. Most would agree that practicality of recruiting prepared leaders is of national interest. This is aligned with Yin's (2009) suggestion that an exemplary case is ". . . unusual and of general public interest" and "the underlying issues are nationally important . . ." (p. 185).

An exemplary study is complete (Yin, 2009). This is the most difficult

characteristic for me to demonstrate. As a researcher, I understand that interchange between the school environment, community forces, and school leadership is in constant flux. I understand that the next few months are critical in terms of economic challenges and available resources for our most impoverished communities. Yin (2009) proposed that time should not be a factor for determining the end of the study because it ran out for me. Instead, I propose that this study is complete because “the analytic periphery is reached, the information is of decreasing relevance to the case study” (Yin, 2009, p. 186). Any additional data gathered will only reiterate the findings of this study.

An exemplary study considers alternate perspectives (Yin, 2009). In the preceding sections of this chapter, I outlined and addressed different theories and popular variations of the discussion listed in this study. Contemplating these ideas was extremely important, especially since many current educational systems subscribe to them as truths. With ideas stemming while addressing the rival arguments, I developed additional ideas for follow-up studies with previously collected and new data in the future.

An exemplary study displays sufficient data (Yin, 2009). From the start of data collection up to seven paragraphs ago, I felt overwhelmed with an avalanche of information. Multiple sources of data were collected and additional documents were requested from each school principal. Although a teacher was recruited to participate in a snowball interview, only one participated. Additional attempts were made to arrange alternate meetings, but to no avail. Instead, conversations from two administrator colleagues of the two other sites were noted. From the sources, data were carefully selected to describe the each case.

An exemplary study is engaging (Yin, 2009). Without a connection to my

personal experiences, it would be hard to make a connection to the rest of the world, especially to those living on the fringes (E. A. Rusch, personal communication, May 2011). I centered my references of childhood and adult experiences to my family's connection to the land of my grandparents' grandparents. I tried to illustrate a fundamental platform that school leaders have with stakeholders and the responsibility to those relationships, realized or unrealized.

As a parent, a neighbor, and a taxpayer, we all have major concerns about the delivery of education and how can students compete in a global society. Falling behind in national expectations, many are often consumed with predictions of a global shift in power and economics unless education improves. The findings of this study re-establish the focal point of growth in all schools, especially those in our economically challenged neighborhoods. Found in the administrative offices and in front of the classrooms, educational leaders must be prepared to lead through the one of the most difficult times in our combined history.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

With school turnaround models in place to address chronically failing schools in the most economically challenged neighborhoods of the United States, the need for resilient leadership in the main office and the classroom have become paramount. Adding to the challenges of schools and districts, budgetary constraints may prevent innovative programs from being implemented without challenging traditional programs and stakeholder groups. Instead of promoting union-busting legislation, dismantling extracurricular programs, dismissing 50% of teachers, and selecting poorly prepared school leaders, resilient teacher leaders and principals may successfully address the

educational experience of all learners in impoverished communities. To better understand the actions and characteristics of leaders assigned to impoverished neighborhoods during this hostile economic climate the following areas are in need of further research and study:

1. How do successful teacher leaders and principals, continue to promote social justice and educational opportunities with declining education budgets and demands for increased student and educator performances?
2. How do success school leaders maintain educational equality while the implementation of student growth models for measuring student achievement may require more resources while operating within a diminishing economic climate?
3. Why do social justice leaders continue their responsibility of mentoring and aspiring school leaders while performing their own personal and professional responsibilities for students in high poverty educational environments?
4. Why do resilient leaders engaged in social justice leadership continue to engage all students in equitable educational opportunities with the type of school district support provided?
5. How do resilient school leaders focused on social justice leadership persevere in isolation developed by deficit theory proponents?

### **Conclusions**

As a long term teacher, I had the opportunity to work with different types of school leaders in urban and rural public high schools. From each relationship, I was able to take away valuable knowledge and experiences which inspire me to be an effective teacher. Although each school leader was licensed, very few were prepared to lead the

school site. Earlier in my career, I was swept out of the classroom and asked to serve as a building administrator. Supervisors told me to pay close attention to details and prepare to be principal at a moment's notice. At the same time, mentors and research professors reminded me to pay attention to the bigger picture and learn the tools of a leader with a focus lens.

I tried to describe the environment and the school leaders for those interested in developing lasting democratic schools. The most important message that I wish to convey is that the path to success does not require reconstitution. Each of these cases did not start their tenure with a newly recruited faculty. Each leader found key classroom leaders within the existing staff and built success. I know, not hope or believe; I know that people want to improve. One will be hard-pressed to find an educator who awakes in the morning and is determined to be the worst person in the field. On the other hand, students should not suffer the consequences of leaders refusing to improve all learners in their school community. I am hardly convinced that the threat of reconstitution for all schools is a lasting motivator for the improvement of our educational system. The cause for ineffective schools starts from within; through this difficult path, we will succeed.

Just today, I had the privilege of showing my second oldest son how to prune a tree with broken branches. A look of dismay on his face developed as I told him that we will lose close to 15-pounds of fruit. I reminded him that we will harvest close to 50-pounds of fruit over the next 3 years. Teaching in an environment where reform has developed into faculty replacement, previous experiences taught me to focus on details and pay attention to the bigger picture. Looking for opportunities to develop leadership for social justice throughout my school, I now look at resilience of administrators and

teacher leaders.

As a father with children spanning 18 years in age, I worry about the educational experiences for each of my children. I wonder if they are forced to be classroom captives, compromising their loyalty, and surrendering their identity as a people. I think about my future grandchildren; will they have school experiences where democracy is a verb? With these ideas burning in my mind, I remain passionately committed to promoting resilient leadership, social justice, and democracy. I hope to (re)tool leaders in administrative offices and classrooms, instead of waiting for the education pendulum to swing back this way.

For I too stand tall like a tronkon niyok, the tree of life (see *Figure 43*).



*Figure 43.* Coconut tree in Tumon, Guam. (San Nicolas-Perez, personal communication, 2011).

*Manma achåka hit ni' [na tåotao hiyong siha] na mañatsaga, manaitiningo' yan manggago' hit. Låo yanggen manmiche' hit, håfa ma aliligåo guini?*

“...reproach us because of our poverty, ignorance, and lack of industry. But if we are poor, as they claim, then what do they search for here...” (Huråo, 1671)

**APPENDIX A ALIGNING RESILIENCY RESEARCH WITH HENDERSON AND MILSTEIN'S (2003) RESILIENCY**

**WHEEL**

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Milstein & Henderson	Milstein & Henderson protocol	Patterson, Patterson & Collins	Carnes Interview Questions	Theoharis interview and ideas reworded
Increase Prosocial Bonding: addressing learning style;	When faced with challenges, I enjoy figuring out how to respond to them.	What strategies do you, person-ally, use to stay positive during difficult times?	28. Describe your school’s culture. 29. Does your principal have an understanding of your school culture 30. What role do you have in shaping the culture? 31. In what ways have other people shaped the culture? 32. Without your influence, describe how the culture of your school may or may not be affected.	Could you share a major event that helps explain the type of person you are today?
Set Clear consistent Boundaries: clarify expectations of behavior; address risk behaviors	Regarding leisure time, I enjoy reading, learning, exploring, physical activity, or a hobby.		1. Describe how the progress of students is monitored. 2. In what ways do people monitor students’ progress? 3. Describe the programs in place at your school that assess students’ progress. 17. How do you feel about the classroom instruction? 18. In what ways have staff members contributed to the quality of instruction at your school? 19. Describe how you may or may not contribute to the quality of instruction at your school. 20. Without your influence, would the quality still be the same?	What consequences of resisting pressures exist? What impact does your resistance have on your mission and vision? Have there been any changes to your mission and vision? What are the barriers to your work in social justice? What are your school barriers?
Teach “Life Skills:	I believe that I am capable of meeting	Give me an example when		Is there a single event or person that helped define your commitment to

<p>cooperation, conflict resolution, problem solving skills, decision making skills,</p>	<p>my goals through hard work and dedication.          When going through life's inevitable transitions, I feel at ease with them and welcome the challenge.          I believe that good things are most likely to happen to me.          I believe that the best years of my life are yet to come.          I have a sense of purpose.</p>	<p>you had to face a tough professional challenge and had to be resilient.          What did you do?          Have you ever felt "burn out?"</p>		<p>your high poverty students?          What formal and informal strategies do you use to cope with external pressures?</p>
<p>Provide Caring &amp; Support</p>	<p>I find support and sources of energy from professionals at my school site.          I find my home and family life to be supportive and rejuvenating.</p>		<p>4. Describe your school's environment.          5. Describe why you may or may not think it is safe.          6. Describe why this may or may not be important.          7. Define an orderly school environment.          8. In what ways, if any, do people contribute to a safe and orderly environment at your school?          33. Who do teachers go to for support in your school?          34. In what ways, if any, do you support them?          35. Do you think that supporting teachers should be a priority of the principal?          36. Without your support, would teachers still receive the support they need to be at their best as a teacher?          37. Describe how that may be enough support for them.</p>	<p>Is there an event or person that has helped shape your commitment to social justice?          What familial support do you have in your life?</p>



			<p>41. How do people at your school feel about issues of trust?</p> <p>43. How may you play a role in creating an environment where people feel trusted?</p>	
<p>Set and communicate High Expectations</p>	<p>I am proud of my accomplishments and abilities. I usually welcome a challenging situation.</p>	<p>Tell me your personal beliefs about teaching in a school that faces what some would call tough conditions?</p>	<p>38. Describe how information is communicated.</p> <p>39. In what ways do people communicate in your school?</p> <p>40. What is your role in the communication process?</p> <p>21. Describe your school's vision?</p> <p>22. How is it articulated?</p> <p>23. What is your role in articulating the school's mission?</p> <p>9. How would you define student expectations?</p> <p>10. With all the obstacles facing children, such as lack of positive role models, lack of parent support, poverty, etc., some educators feel that you can't have the same level of expectations for our students today as we once did.</p> <p>11. Do you think the teachers' expectations play a role in how successful children are in your school?</p> <p>12. How do you feel about the level of expectations for students at your school?</p> <p>13. In what ways have people contributed to a climate of high expectations?</p>	<p>Could you describe your commitment to providing opportunities to the impoverished students in your school?</p> <p>Compared to all other leadership responsibilities, how important is this commitment?</p> <p>What is the source of your commitment?</p> <p>Where are you in this agenda? What goals have been met? What goals have evolved? What evidence or data do you look for to support your agenda?</p> <p>What steps do you take in order to facilitate social justice?</p>
<p>Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation</p>	<p>When I have difficulties I am more likely to confront them by taking the initiative.</p>	<p>Where do you draw support and strength?</p>	<p>44. Describe the level of parent involvement at your school?</p> <p>45. In what ways, if any, do people in your school create opportunities for parents to become involved?</p> <p>46. What programs are in place at your school to create opportunities for the parents and community to become involved at your school?</p>	<p>What are the steps you take in order to provide educational opportunities for your poor students?</p> <p>Where are you in this agenda? What goals have been met? What goals have evolved? What evidence or data do you look for to support your agenda?</p>

			<p>47. What, if any, is your role in the process of promoting parent/community involvement at your school?</p> <p>14. What, if any, programs are offered at your school to increase student learning?</p> <p>15. If they are present, describe the role people have in creating these programs or opportunities to learn.</p> <p>16. In the absence of these programs or opportunities, would students at your school still be able to reach their full potential? Why or Why not?</p>	<p>In your leadership preparation, what courses have prepared you to deal with external resistance to your social justice dedication?</p> <p>What courses in your leadership prep was most helpful? What is helpful now? What types of courses would you suggest for future leaders?</p>
Other		<p>How long have you been teaching here?</p> <p>Why do you stay at this school?</p> <p>On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you describe your personal resilience</p>	<p>24. Describe what, if any, change has occurred at your school within the last year?</p> <p>25. What, if any, has your role been in contributing to change at your school?</p> <p>26. If you were not involved in the change process, would change still take place at your school?</p> <p>27. Describe how the change initiatives may as effective.</p>	<p>How long have you been in education? As a teacher? As an administrator?</p> <p>Describe your teaching experiences and assignments.</p> <p>How long have you been a school principal? How long at this school site?</p> <p>Could you share your education experience and certification?</p> <p>What was your childhood like?</p> <p>Where did you grow up? If there is any major childhood event, what is it and why is it important to you?</p> <p>What is your current family life like?</p>

**APPENDIX B ALIGNING RESEARCH PROTOCOL WITH RESILIENCY RESEARCH.**

Interview Questions	Milstein and Henderson Resiliency Wheel (1996)	Theoharis' Leadership's Key 7: Sustain Oneself Professionally and Personally (2009)	Patterson, Collins, & Abbot (2003)	Patterson & Kelleher: Strengths of Resilient Leaders (2005)	Yosso' Community Cultural Wealth through the Communities of Color (2005)
How would you describe your relationship with students?  Does your relationship differ with your poor students? If so, how?  Describe your relationship with cooperative teachers and teachers whose priorities differ from yours.	Increase Prosocial Bonding:	Professional Strategies (2009): - Develop a Supportive administrative network - Work Together for Change - Build relationships Personal Strategies - Accept outside validation - Provide for others	Strategy 3. Resilient educators are willing to mentor other educators. Strategy 7. Resilient educators maintain a supportive network of friends and professionals.		Social capital: through a network of resources and people, the participant is provided emotional and practical support to handle the dominant culture (2005, p. 79)
What personal guidelines and beliefs have you developed to help you handle issues regarding student needs?  Do you ever find yourself having to compromise your personal beliefs in your current assignment? Why do you find it necessary? How do you cope with the opposing influence?	Set Clear Consistent Boundaries	Professional Strategies (2009): - Communicate Purposefully and Authentically  Personal Strategies (2009) - Prioritize Life Outside School - Provide for Others	Strategy 6. Resilient educators focus on student success and are not detracted by obstacles. Strategy 9. Resilient educators strategically prioritize their battles.	Strength 3: Remain True to Personal Values Strength 6: Act on the courage of personal convictions	Resistance Capital: with the knowledge of the mechanisms of racism, the participant works to changes such structures (2005, p. 80).
Describe what a typical day is like for you. As a young person in high school and college, did you ever experience	Teach "Life Skills	Professional Strategies (2009): - Prioritize Your Work Personal Strategies (2009)	Strategy 1. Resilient educators have values and knowledge that	Strength 1: Accurately Assess Past and Current	Resistance Capital: with the knowledge of the mechanisms of racism, the participant works to

<p>difficult times? Could you describe these experiences?</p> <p>As a young student, what one single experience helped shape the type of person you are today?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritize Life Outside School</li> <li>- Use Mindful Diversions</li> <li>- Engage in Regular Physical Activity</li> <li>- Employ Potentially Harmful Behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>influence their decisions.</p> <p>Strategy 3. Resilient educators are willing to mentor other educators.</p> <p>Strategy 4. Resilient educators seek solutions.</p>	Reality	changes such structures (2005, p. 80).
<p>What is your source of strength to deal with the pressure associated with your assignment?</p> <p>Do you have a professional support or familial networks?</p> <p>Do you have a mentor?</p> <p>Throughout your life, who influenced you the most in your work with serving impoverished students?</p> <p>Any important experiences in your family history or family traditions that encouraged you to become an educator? An educator who serves high risk kids?</p>	Provide Caring & Support	<p>Professional Strategies (2009):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a Supportive Administrative Network;</li> <li>- Work Together for Change</li> <li>- Build Relationships</li> </ul> <p>Personal Strategies (2009)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritize Life Outside School</li> <li>- Provide for Others</li> </ul>	<p>Strategy 3. Resilient educators are willing to mentor other educators.</p> <p>Strategy 6. Resilient educators focus on student success and are not detracted by obstacles.</p> <p>Strategy 7. Resilient educators maintain a supportive network of friends and professional</p>	<p>Strength 3: Remain True to Personal Values</p> <p>Strength 1: Accurately assess past and current</p>	<p>Social capital: through a network of resources and people, the participant is provided emotional and practical support to handle the dominant culture (2005, p. 79).</p> <p>Familial Capital: knowledge, community ties, and wealth transmitted through immediate and expanded definitions of family</p>
<p>Have you ever publicly compromised your beliefs to serve the underprivileged?</p> <p>How have you communicated your dedication to justice?</p> <p>How do you influence educators in your building to help the poor?</p> <p>How do you influence other stakeholder groups to help the</p>	Set and communicate high expectations	<p>Professional Strategies (2009):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate Purposefully and Authentically</li> <li>- Work Together for Change</li> <li>- Keep Your Eye on the Prize</li> </ul>	Strategy 9. Resilient educators strategically prioritize their battles.	Strength 3: Remain True to Personal Values	Linguistic Capital provides the participant with the intelligence and social skills to preserve history and relations through learned language and styles (p.78).

impoverished? (region, parents, fellow principals, assistant principals)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritize Your Work</li> <li>Personal Strategies (2009)</li> <li>- Accept Outside Validation</li> <li>- Employ potentially harmful behaviors</li> </ul>			Navigational Capital provides skills and knowledge for the participant to operate social constructs and barriers (p. 80).
<p>What new challenges would you like to face?</p> <p>Where do you see yourself going in the future?</p> <p>Do you seek opportunities to learn new ideas or research?</p> <p>What type of professional development do you engage in and how often?</p> <p>What benefits do you find in your personal professional development?</p>	Provide opportunities for meaning-full participation	<p>Professional Strategies (2009):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Engage in Professional Learning</li> </ul> <p>Personal Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accept Outside Validation</li> <li>- Provide for Others</li> </ul>	<p>Strategy 2. Resilient educators seek valuable professional development.</p> <p>Strategy 5. Resilient educators focus on students and learning.</p> <p>Strategy 8. Resilient educators are creative and explore new innovations.</p>	Strength 2: Be positive about future possibilities	<p>Navigational Capital provides skills and knowledge for the participant to operate social constructs and barriers (2005, p. 80).</p> <p>Aspirational Capital provides the participant with the knowledge and ability to break from the current condition to a future of dreams and possibilities (2005)</p>
<p>As a teacher or counselor, what experiences kept you in this line of work?</p> <p>Could you share one of the most important experiences as a teacher/counselor that influenced you to become a school administrator with zeal to protect our most vulnerable?</p>	Other	<p>Professional Strategies (2009):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Prioritize your work</li> <li>-Engage in professional learning</li> </ul> <p>Personal Strategies (2009)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Engage in regular physical activity</li> </ul>	Strategy 1. Resilient educators have values and knowledge that influence their decisions.	<p>Strength 1: Accurately Assess Past and Current Reality</p> <p>Strength 3: Remain True to Personal Values</p>	Resistance Capital: with the knowledge of the mechanisms of racism, the participant works to changes such structures (2005, p. 80).

**APPENDIX C ALIGNING RESEARCH PROTOCOL WITH RESILIENCY**

**WHEEL FACTORS.**

Milstein and Henderson (1996)	Leading questions for this research
Increase ProSocial Bonding:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your relationship with students? Does your relationship differ with your poor students? If so, how?</li> <li>• Describe your relationship with cooperative teachers and teachers whose priorities differ from yours.</li> </ul>
Set Clear Consistent Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What personal guidelines and beliefs have you developed to help you handle issues regarding student needs?</li> <li>• Do you ever find yourself having to compromise your personal beliefs in your current assignment? If so, why do you find it necessary? If not, how do you cope with the opposing influence?</li> </ul>
Teach “Life Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what a typical day is like for you.</li> <li>• As a young person in high school and college, did you ever experience difficult times? Could you describe these experiences?</li> <li>• As a young student, what one single experience helped shape the type of person you are today?</li> </ul>
Provide Caring & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your source of strength to deal with the pressure associated with your assignment?</li> <li>• Do you have a professional support network? Familial network?</li> <li>• Do you have a mentor?</li> <li>• Throughout your life, who influenced you the most in your work with serving impoverished students?</li> <li>• Any important experiences in your family history or family traditions that encouraged you to become an educator? An educator who serves high risk populations?</li> </ul>
Set and Communicate High Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever publicly compromised your beliefs to serve the underprivileged?</li> <li>• How have you communicated your dedication to justice?</li> <li>• How do you influence educators in your building to help the poor?</li> <li>• How do you influence other stakeholder groups to help the impoverished? (region, parents, fellow principals, assistant principals)</li> </ul>
Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What new challenges would you like to face?</li> <li>• Where do you see yourself going in the future?</li> <li>• Do you seek opportunities to learn new ideas or research? What type of professional development do you engage in and how often?</li> <li>• What benefits do you find in your personal professional development?</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a teacher or counselor, what experiences kept you in this line of work? Could you share one of the most important experiences as a teacher/counselor that influenced you to become a school administrator?</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part I: Reconstruct their experience and discuss:

1. most influential experience as high school and/or college student;
2. most influential experience as a young educator;
3. influences to become an educator;
4. who influenced you the most;
5. any important experiences in your family history or family traditions that encouraged you to become an educator;
6. as a teacher/counselor, what experiences kept you in this line of work;
7. most influential teacher/counselor experience as a teacher/counselor to become a school administrator.

Part II: Describe the Work of:

1. What a typical day is like for you;
2. relationship with your students;
3. relationship with your teachers;
4. mentoring;
5. support network;
6. What is your source of strength?

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your relationship with students?
2. Does your relationship differ with your poor students? If so, how?
3. Describe your relationship with cooperative teachers and teachers whose priorities differ from yours?

4. What personal guidelines and beliefs have you developed to help you handle issues regarding student needs?
5. Do you ever find yourself having to compromise your personal beliefs in your current assignment? If so, why do you find it necessary? If not, how do you cope with the opposing influence?
6. Describe what a typical day is like for you.
7. As a young person in high school and college, did you ever experience difficult times? Could you describe these experiences?
8. As a young student, what one single experience helped shape the type of person you are today?
9. What is your source of strength to deal with the pressure associated with your assignment?
10. Do you have a professional support network? Familial network?
11. Do you have a mentor?
12. Throughout your life, who influenced you the most in your work with serving impoverished students?
13. Do you have any important experiences in your family history or family traditions that encouraged you to become an educator? An educator who serves high risk populations?
14. Have you ever publicly compromised your beliefs to serve the underprivileged?
15. How have you communicated your dedication to justice?
16. How do you influence educators in your building to help the poor?
17. How do you influence other stakeholder groups to help the impoverished?



18. What new challenges would you like to face?
19. Where do you see yourself going in the future?
20. Do you seek opportunities to learn new ideas or research? What type of professional development do you engage in and how often?
21. What benefits do you find in your personal professional development?
22. As a teacher or counselor, what experiences kept you in this line of work?
23. Could you share one of the most important experiences as a teacher/counselor that influenced you to become a school administrator with zeal to protect our most vulnerable?

## APPENDIX E INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



### Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review Approval Notice

**NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:**

*Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.*

**DATE:** December 16, 2010

**TO:** Dr. Edith Rusch, Educational Leadership

**FROM:** Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

**RE:** Notification of IRB Action by /Charles Rasmussen/ Dr. Charles Rasmussen, Co-Chair  
Protocol Title: **Resilient Leadership in High Poverty Schools**  
Protocol #: 1010-3614M  
Expiration Date: December 15, 2011

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This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.110 - Cat. 7 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures. Please be advised that data collection cannot begin until facility authorization is received from a site. Please submit a Modification Request and facility authorization letter to add a research site to the protocol.

The protocol is approved for a period of 12 months and expires December 15, 2011. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu) or call 895-2794.

Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects  
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451047 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047  
(702) 895-2794 • FAX: (702) 895-0805

## APPENDIX F INFORMED CONSENT FOR TEACHERS

17 7010



### INFORMED CONSENT FOR TEACHERS Department of Educational Leadership

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**TITLE OF STUDY: Resilient Leadership in High Poverty Schools**  
**INVESTIGATOR(S): Edward San Nicolas (Student Researcher);**  
**Dr. Edith Rusch (Principal Investigator)**  
**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2891 (Dr. Edith Rusch)**

---

The purpose of this study is to identify the actions and qualities of successful leaders in schools with concentrated poverty. The identification of these characteristics and actions would help guide professional development for administrators and leaders as well as identifying potential candidates for schools with high-poverty.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criterion:

You are a school teacher leader identified by the principal of a school with a minimum of 50% participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch program and a track record for student achievement. You have discreet knowledge of the community and the principal's work and efforts to assist children in high poverty.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in one-on-one interviews, facilitated by the researcher. You will be asked your opinions and perspective on leadership required to successfully guide a school in high poverty communities. The interview will be audio recorded and should take approximately 1 hour to complete. You will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview or telephone conversation with the researcher to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview.

This study includes only minimal risks. The study will take no more than 1 day of your time. To compensate you for part of your time, you will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate to purchase items for your classroom upon completion of the process. Since your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, you will not be compensated for your time.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol 1010-3614M  
Received: 12-07-10 Approved: 12-16-10 Expiration: 12-15-11

## APPENDIX G INFORMED CONSENT FOR PRINCIPALS



### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PRINCIPALS Department of Educational Leadership

---

**TITLE OF STUDY: Resilient Leadership in High Poverty Schools**  
**INVESTIGATOR(S): Edward San Nicolas (Student Researcher);**  
**Dr. Edith Rusch (Principal Investigator)**  
**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2891 (Dr. Edith Rusch)**

---

The purpose of this study is to identify the actions and qualities of successful leaders in schools with concentrated poverty. The identification of these characteristics and actions would help guide professional development for administrators and leaders as well as identifying potential candidates for schools with high-poverty.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you meet the following criteria: You are a principal of public school with a minimum 50% student participation in the Free-Reduced School Lunch program, a track record of student achievement, and assigned to the same school for at least 3 years.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in one-on-one interviews, facilitated by the researcher. You will be asked your opinions and perspectives on leadership required to successfully guide a high poverty school. The interview will be audio recorded and should take approximately 1 hour to complete. You will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview or telephone conversation with the researcher to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview. You will be asked to allow the researcher to observe or shadow you for one school day, a minimum of 7 hours.

This study includes only minimal risks. The study will take no more than 2 days of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

APPENDIX H COPYRIGHT PERMISSION



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June 1, 2011

Glenn E. Richardson, Ph.D.  
University of Utah, College of Health  
1901 East South Campus Drive #2120  
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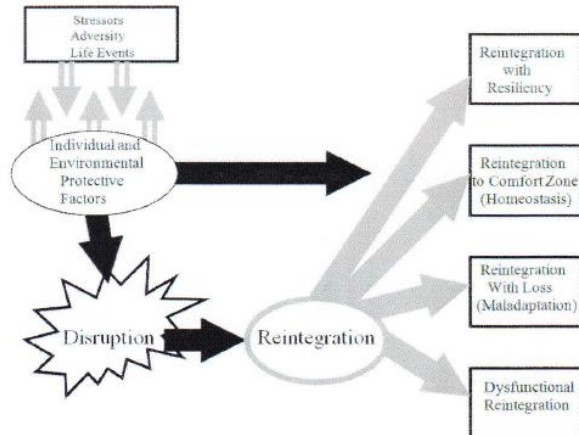
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1901 East South Campus Drive #2120  
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