COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A PROCESS FOR ADDRESSING

EDUCATORS' STRESS AND AWARENESS IN

21ST CENTURY PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

To the one God who answers my prayers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Little did I know that being admitted to the doctoral program would not only include the coursework, a comprehensive exam, and the writing of a dissertation, but would also include being deployed twice to Iraq and mobilized once to Fort Hood. Somehow, all the added events during the doctoral process ended up being added benefits on my research of the collaborative autobiography process.

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on two teachers, a school improvement facilitator, and two administrators' collaborative reflections on the causes of their stress, their reactions to stress, and the effects of stress. The study was conducted using a constructionist epistemology, an interpretivist theoretical perspective, a grounded theory methodology, and a case study method. The study lasted fourteen weeks and followed the four phases of the collaborative autobiography process. The research procedures consisted of collecting four reflective papers from each participant, each based on a phase of the collaborative autobiography process; two interviews; and field notes from observations of the five collaborative meetings. Throughout the study, the participants reflected on the causes, reactions, and effects of stress as well as personal histories and how these histories affected their reactions to stress. The study concluded with each participant creating a plan for a preferred future in which they would reduce and better cope with stress.

The findings from the collaborative autobiography process demonstrated an improved understanding of the group in the causes, reactions, and effects of stress, but more importantly, each participant gained more control of how they react to stress by better understanding the causes of stress and the common features of stress found on each campus. Although the participants had diverse backgrounds and worked in diverse settings, many of the causes of stress, reactions to stress, and effects of stress were

similar. Each participant reported feeling significant stress with work management and the effects of national, state, and local systems that inhibited what they perceived was student wellbeing and academic growth. The most common cause of stress cited among the group was other adults. Although all participants found teachers to be significant causes of their stress, the two teachers found administrators to be the greatest source of stress, while the school improvement facilitator and two administrators overwhelmingly found teachers were the greatest cause of their stress.

The five participants' plans for a preferred future included several common themes. Each participant borrowed from the reflections and insight gained in the collaborative autobiography process to create a plan that sought to control heavy workloads by being more discriminating regarding the acceptance of additional duties. Each participant also planned for improved communication with coworkers, planned more time with family and friends, and taking breaks from their hectic schedules to reduce their stress. Each participant reported benefiting from the collaborative autobiography process and considered the study a form of therapy. The group provided recommendations for teacher and administrator professional development, district offices, and policy makers on how educator stress could be reduced. Each participant recommended collaborative autobiography for other educators as a viable method of addressing educator stress. Four of the five members recommended reflective writing as a tool for self-analysis and problem solving, and each member reported feeling significant growth and awareness due to the study.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I can still recall my first faculty meeting as a new classroom teacher and the absence of collaboration among the teachers and administrators while the teachers passively listened to the principal discuss "our vision for the current school year." I was dismayed to see most of the teachers return to the isolation of their classrooms and continue to struggle with a multitude of responsibilities and stress in relative isolation. Eventually, some of these teachers left the profession dispirited while others clung on with increased desperation, enduring to the end of their careers. Many of those who stayed in education suffered physical problems as well as emotional and psychological frustration often leading to burnout.

To decrease educator isolation and stress, the dearth of collaboration among educators must be addressed. Although many schools demonstrate a strong focus on student academic achievement, this emphasis on student progress does not include a restorative environment to encounter the stress teachers endure within their profession (Guwaldi, 2006). It is the human cost to educators, and subsequently to students, which warrants a different approach to reducing educator stress; one that creates stronger collaboration among educators.

Collaboration promotes much needed dialogue among teachers and also serves as a means for reducing stress and promoting creativity (Kazempour, 2009; Servage, 2008). Collaborative autobiography provides for reflection leading to greater awareness and control of personal and professional growth. The self-efficacy that results can greatly aid

teachers in strengthening their collegiality, redirecting their professional development, and engaging in professional practices, manage stress, and better educate our children (Raymond, Butt, & Townsend, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

Teachers must navigate a daily context that includes heavy workloads that often must be addressed while placing their families in secondary or supporting roles (Clausen & Petruka, 2009; Garcia, Slate, & Delgado, 2009). State and district mandates continue to add to teachers' workloads and are not accompanied with reduced responsibilities or additional time to accomplish these tasks (Turley, 2005). Additionally, budget constraints have forced many school districts to cut teaching positions, increase class sizes, and do away with many school programs, which subsequently increases stress on teachers who remain in the workforce (Cavanagh, 2011; Gewertz & Reid, 2003). Compounding budgetary constraints is the lack of support from the public for providing teachers with significant pay raises (Howell & West, 2009).

One overarching factor in teacher stress is the treatment of organizations as machines rather than organisms that actively engage with the environment and continue to grow (Wheatley, 1994). Within this mechanical frame, organizations, including schools and school districts, are ruled by authoritarian rather than democratic leadership (Morgan, 2006), leading to feelings of detachment by the workers (Ingersoll, 2003), with many teachers having limited opportunities for meaningful dialogue with co-workers and administrators (Westling, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, Ray, & Herzog, 2005). Conversely, there is a strong correlation between teachers being empowered to make professional decisions and low stress levels (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Many teachers complain of a variety of mistreatments from their principal, including harassment, isolation, and alienation (Blase & Blase, 2006). Other differences between teachers and administrators occur with disagreement on discipline issues (MacNeil & Prater, 2010), and significant pressure from principals for teachers to emphasize high test results (Cruz & Brown, 2010). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) argue a lack of administrative support is linked to teachers' feelings of time pressure, emotional exhaustion, reduced accomplishment, and loss of autonomy. Decreased feelings of personal accomplishment and increased feelings of depersonalization lead to decreased motivation and lower self efficacy (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012). Fernet et al. (2012) state that "the effect of environmental demands is particularly detrimental to teachers' psychological well-being when they perceive that their self-determination and efficacy are threatened" (p. 522).

Some teachers experience alienation from other teachers (Tait, 2008), while others suffer from mobbing, or collective bullying, which severely affects teacher morale (Leymann, 1996). An additional aspect of teacher isolation is a distancing from parents who the teacher perceives as abandoning their children due to disinterest in their children's behavior or achievement (Adera & Bullock, 2010).

An added source of stress is cultural incompetence (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2014). Teachers' ethnocentric behaviors help create artificial class structures which diminish relationships with marginalized students (Delpit, 2006). By blaming marginalized students' culture for their low academic achievement, teachers unknowingly treat that culture as an obstacle rather than embracing students' culture as an asset that could be used in the classroom (Glickman et al., 2014).

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Problems with classroom management are another major source of teacher stress (Haberman, 2005). Poor classroom management includes the potential for violence (Wilson, Douglas, & Lyon, 2011), lost instructional time (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008), and discipline problems due to a lack of rapport established between the teacher and the students (Haberman, 2005). Special needs students also add an extra dimension of stress as teachers try to accommodate their needs while taking care of other classroom responsibilities (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Rowe, 2010).

One of the largest challenges to teacher autonomy is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. As a derivative of NCLB, state mandated testing has had a profound influence in public education, with critics reporting that the resulting teacher frustration and stress not only negatively impact teachers' relationships with students, peers, and administrators, but also adversely affect their attitude towards educational policy and curriculum change (Cross & Hong, 2012). Powell, Higgins, Aram, and Freed (2009) argue that standardized testing is often viewed as discouraging many teachers from staying in the profession. Kinsey (2006) concludes that poor morale occurs when teachers' concerns are not listened to and their feelings not supported as they face the expectations of standardized testing. In addition, the overemphasis and unrealistic expectations of mandated state achievement tests curtail teachers' creativity in lesson planning and loss of professional autonomy (McNiemey, 2004; Myers, 2007).

Not only are many teachers frustrated at having to teach to the test, but NCLB has linked high stakes testing to the assessment of teacher performance (Kinsey, 2006). The marriage of standardized testing and teacher evaluation has fostered competition which "creates a negative climate with unrealistic claims that all teachers should be

outstanding" (Bodman, Taylor, & Morris, 2012, p. 22). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) cite the coupling of standardized tests and teacher evaluations as a significant cause of teacher stress. Teacher evaluations could serve as mechanisms for self-improvement but in their present form are often reminders of the power struggles within schools and teacher subservience (Conley & Glasman, 2008).

School administrators also deal with considerable stress. Administrators continue to face additional roles and responsibilities in their daily duties and often experience a lack of control when faced with high intensity events (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). With the increase in responsibilities to an already heavy workload, many principals experience moderate to high levels of stress (Boyland, 2011; Hare, 2014). The extent of administrator stress varies, but some research studies have shown that up to 96 % of the respondents reported suffering with stress to the extent that they considered their physical and mental health to be negatively affected (Sogunro, 2012).

Like teachers, administrators cite several common causes of stress. Heavy workloads coupled with unpredictable events at school serve as a significant source of stress for many administrators (Allison, 1997). The stress derived from heavy workloads is compounded by the stress and frustration experienced by many principals when their school initiatives and focus on instructional leadership are diverted by other tasks, often unforeseen (Boyland, 2011). The stress experienced from heavy and often unmanageable workloads is often compounded with inadequate funding and school facilities (Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2007; Wong, Cheuk, & Rosen, 2000). An unwelcomed effect of heavy workloads of up to 60 hours a week is diminished time with family, decreased health, and a lowered sense of well-being (Lock & Lummis, 2014).

In addition to heavy workload, many principals cite dealing with people as a tremendous source of stress (Sogunro, 2012). Teachers serve as one of the most common sources of stress for principals (Allison, 1997; Day, 2000). Research on administrator stress demonstrates that principals are sensitive to reproaches from teachers and consequently not only experience frustration, anxiety, fear, and lowered self-esteem, but also isolate themselves from their staff and increase the likelihood of suffering with depression (Poirel & Yvon, 2014).

Many administrators report that demands from superintendents and district offices place substantial pressure on them to perform and consequently are considered primary sources of stress for administrators (Sogunro, 2012). Bureaucratic paperwork required of administrators serves as a pressure on administrators, draws their attention away from their primary focus on internal processes of schools, and leaves the principals feeling exasperated and stressed (Gill & Arnold, 2014). The constraints from superintendents and district offices serve as an external pressure that often denigrates the principals' ability to serve as a school leader and have effective oversight on school initiatives (Lock & Lummis, 2014). In addition to superintendents and school districts creating stress for principals, many principals are negatively affected by conflicts with parents, specifically when parents attempt to undermine the principals' authority and cause contention with teachers (Lareau & Munoz, 2012). In accord with Lareau and Munoz, Allison (1997) found that 90% of principals surveyed reported that parents were their second greatest source of stress.

A significant source of stress for principals is a lack of trust from teachers and parents. MacMillan, Meyer, and Northfield (2004) found that teachers who do not trust

principals have a significant effect on the principals' success as a school administrator.

Similarly, De Nobile (2013) found that trust between the principal and school staff is

critical in creating a positive school climate. Ozer (2013) found that the gap in trust

between administrators and other adults works both ways in that principals often trust

students more than parents. Although Ozer cites that the increased amount of time with

students likely leads to increased trust with principals, the limited trust in parents

negatively affects administrators and leads to increased depersonalization, emotional and

physical exhaustion, and diminished feelings of personal accomplishment.

Perhaps one of the greatest sources of stress for administrators is the pressure

placed on producing high results for student accountability centered on standardized

testing (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Normore (2004)

argues that the intensified focus on standardized tests has severely undermined the

principals' ability to lead the school, and in turn, has changed the role of principals from

school leaders to facilitators that must negotiate complex relationships and serve as a

buffer for multiple stakeholders. The pressure to produce high test results has even led

some principals in low SES schools to alter student answer sheets to reflect passing or

commended test results (Amreign & Berliner, 2002). Not surprising, many principals

feel helpless in countering the pressures of high stakes testing and often feel there is no

one they can turn to for help (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Compounded with

accountability pressures, an additional stress from some principals' is limited

understanding of culturally diverse students (Davila, 2009).

Given that principals are under tremendous pressure to produce results and

manage their schools, it is not surprising that the high levels of stress that accompany

these responsibilities have moderate to serious health repercussions. The effects of prolonged levels of high stress are well documented and include anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, heart disease, stroke, nerve disorders, and mental illnesses (Boyland, 2011; Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2007; Robert-Okah & Nyenwe, 2013; Sogunro, 2012). In addition to the physical and psychological effects of stress that administrators endure, the social-emotional effects of stress can lead to isolation, emotional exhaustion, role ambiguity, decreased self-efficacy, lower job satisfaction, diminished sense of well-being, and strained relationships with school staff (Celik, 2013; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Friedman, 2002; Lock & Lummis, 2014). Ultimately, chronic stress is detrimental to job performance and diminishes the administrators' ability to lead schools (Boyland, 2011; Davis, et al., 2005).

The continued additional responsibilities placed on principals add to the importance of principals in todays' schools (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). The problem examined, then, was the reality of teacher and administrator stress, or educator stress, and how educators can reduce that stress as well as cope with stress that cannot be eliminated. This study focused on collaborative autobiography as a process for addressing educator stress.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to document educators' use of collaborative autobiography to explore educator stress, their reactions to stress, the effects of stress, and ways of better dealing with stress. Some educators demonstrate resilience in the face of abundant challenges while others struggle with experiences like standardized testing, reduction in force, and isolation within the school community. The goal of this study was

to explore a mechanism not only better understanding educator stress, but also empowering educators to visualize and plan for a better future.

Collaborative autobiography was chosen as the process to be implemented and examined in this study because of its use of critical reflection on past and present events and responses to those events, and the potential empowerment resulting from educators better understanding their past, responses to stress, and alternatives for dealing with current issues. Collaborative autobiography has the potential to empower administrators and teachers, and in turn, strengthen schools, teaching, and learning (Raymond et al., 1992).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What does educator collaborative autobiography reveal about (a) the causes of educator stress, (b) educators' reactions to stress, and (c) the effects of educator stress?

2. In what ways, if any, does collaborative autobiography help educators to understand the causes of, their reactions to, and the effects of educator stress, and empower them to create a plan for better managing stress in the future?

3. Beyond a plan for better managing stress in the future, what benefits, if any, do educators perceive as resulting from collaborative autobiography?

Conceptual Framework

Educator stress and collaborative autobiography are the two major concepts that will drive this case study. Educator stress is a current crisis in schools and must be addressed for the well-being of all those involved in the education of our children.

Collaborative autobiography is the second major concept of this conceptual framework and is introduced as a viable resource in combating educator stress. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relationship between the theories and concepts that drive this study.

Teacher Stress

Due to the complexity of teacher stress, it can be defined in multiple ways. For the purpose of this study, teacher stress reflects an ineffective response to external influences and results in emotional exhaustion and diminutive feelings of job accomplishment (Kumar, 2010). Teacher stress can also produce severe physical problems and a diverse array of psychological reactions that further debilitate the teacher. A minimum of 70% of diseases and disorders suffered by teachers are the result of stress (Kumar, 2010; Sorenson, 2007; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

The effects of teacher stress vary in severity and can range from cynicism and fear to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to suicidal ideation (Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008). Teacher stress not only harms the teacher but significantly affects the psychological well-being of the students of the suffering teacher (Sava, 2002). Traumatized teachers often suffer from reduced mental alacrity, diminished ability to execute responsibilities, and less positive work relations with fellow peers (Saltzman, Weems, & Carrion, 2006).

Some of the physical illnesses caused by teacher stress include respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses as well as hypertension, sleep apnea, and sleep deprivation, causing impaired abilities in the face of teaching duties (Amschler & McKenzie, 2010; McGrath & Huntington, 2007).

COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Phase 1:
Professional
Context

Phase 2:
Reflections on
Personal and
Professional
Life

Educator Stress
- Causes
- Effects
- Traditional Ways of
  Dealing with
  Educator Stress

Phase 4:
Envisioning a
Preferred
Future

Phase 3:
Critical
Appraisal of
Current
Situation

An Alternative Way of Dealing with Educator Stress
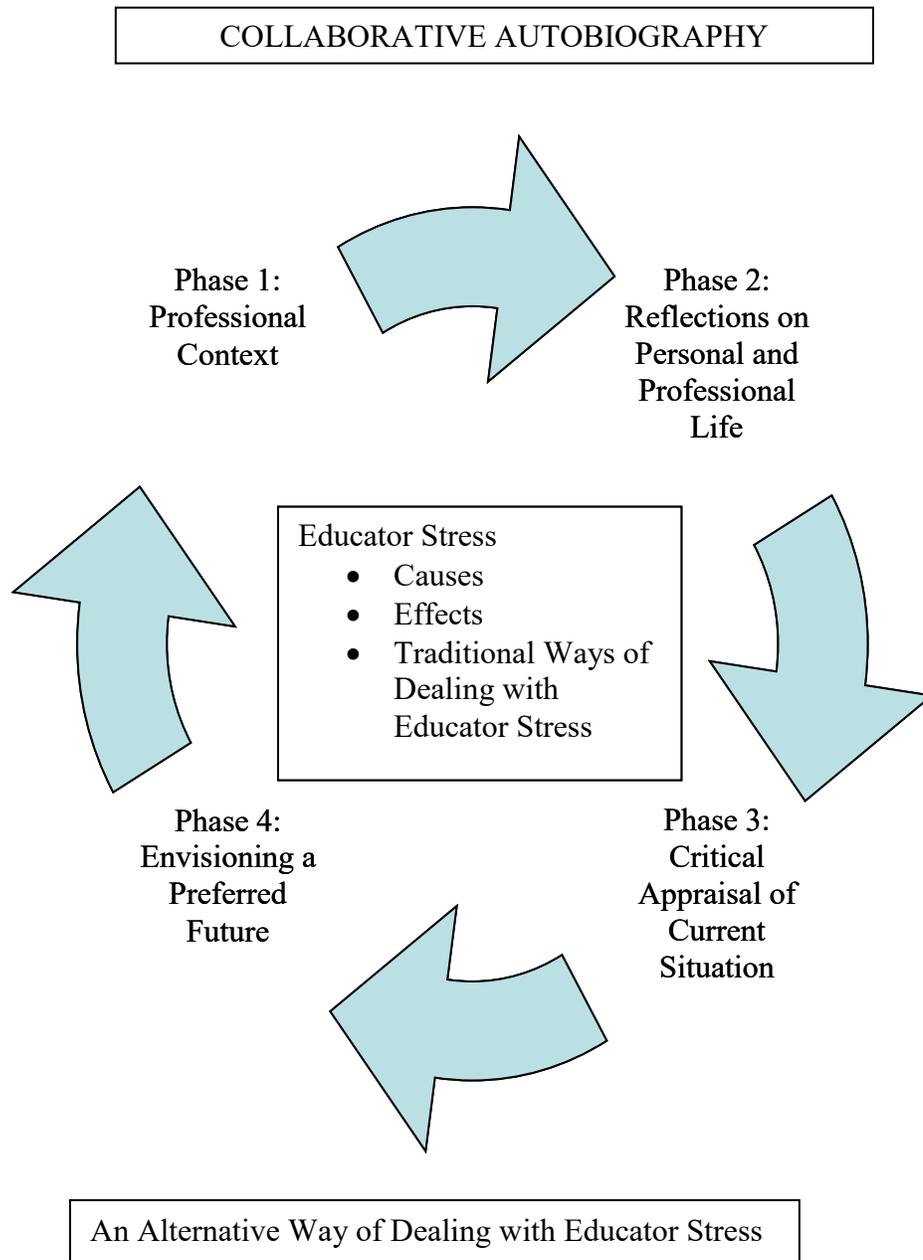
Figure 1. **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Other physical effects of teacher stress include ulcers, changes in appetite, anger, and exhaustion (Sorenson, 2007). These effects of teacher stress promote teacher absenteeism (Zindwer, 1953).

Teacher stress affects all people within the school. Stress adds to student disruption in the classroom as well as students developing apathy towards school or truancy (Geving, 2007). Stress can also alienate teachers from administrators, with teachers believing that administrators do not acknowledge the daily trials of teachers (Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

Other effects of teacher stress are prolonged feelings of anger, frustration, depersonalization, low job satisfaction, and emotional problems leading to burnout (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2005; Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986). Approximately 50% of teachers leave their profession within the first seven years; however, many teachers who suffer from burnout stay in teaching (Byrne, 1998). Teacher stress often results in teachers who stay in teaching having more negative perceptions of student behavior (Kokkinos et al., 2005) and higher teacher absenteeism (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Teacher absenteeism, in turn, has negative effects on standardized test scores, and adds to the already strained finances of schools (Bowers, 2001). Teachers who perform under enormous stress typically have a greater negative influence on student learning than those who leave the profession (Haberman, 2005).

There are multiple approaches to how teachers personally deal with stress. Regulating their diet, cultivating a sense of humor, or spending time with family and

friends can help teachers manage stress (Sorenson, 2007). Teachers may also choose

physical exercise, including swimming, jogging, dancing, or yoga to help improve

physical health as well as reduce work related stress (Botwinik, 2007). Some teachers

choose to practice meditation (Chang, 2009), while others develop outside interests by

joining professional organizations that provide professional recognition and a measure of

self-esteem not found in teaching (Botwinik, 2007). Other teachers may consider altering

their current use of time management strategies by adjusting their arrival and departure

times from school or utilizing more onsite personnel to assist with classroom duties and

responsibilities (Dearman & Alber, 2005).

Other traditional approaches to dealing with teacher stress involve techniques

sometimes employed by educational leaders (Botwinik, 2007; Roberson & Rich, 1993).

Shared decision-making with teachers can help build self-efficacy and strengthen

perceptions of support (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Administrators may also reduce

teacher stress by rethinking teacher evaluation, receiving training on how to give

constructive feedback, and assisting teachers on goal setting (Yariv, 2009). Teacher

stress could also be reduced by redesigning teacher roles and responsibilities and

allowing greater academic freedom (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010).

Each approach to dealing with teacher stress has its merits, but also only partially

contends with the current crisis of teacher stress in schools (Muller, Gorrow, & Fiala,

2011). Many of the strategies for managing teacher stress are limited by available

resources, with many schools not designed for restorative teacher needs (Guwaldi, 2006).

The current dilemma of teacher stress, and the absence of effective mechanisms to reduce

stress, support research for an alternative approach, namely, collaborative autobiography.

Administrator Stress

Next to the classroom teachers, principals have the strongest effect on student learning as well as a significant effect on the morale and well-being of schools (Davis et al., 2005). The importance of the principal's job in the overall performance of the school is magnified due to the multiple challenges and changes schools face (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Initially, the responsibilities of 19th century urban principals were largely based on anticipated routines that included tasks, observations, and routine meetings. Todays' principals have these same functions as well as additional responsibilities that are frequently disrupted by a lack of control of high intensity events (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Additional responsibilities have incrementally been added to the school administrator (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010) which resonates aptly with one researcher sharing "the job of school principal is almost as rewarding as it is impossible (Hare, 2014, pg. 7)."

Not surprising, the multiple demands placed on principals have encouraged many to leave the profession. At the national level, of the 114,330 principals employed in public and private schools during the 2011-12 school year, 12% left the profession the following year while an additional 6% transferred to another school. An additional 5% of principals left their schools, but their schools could not confirm if these principals had continued being administrators elsewhere. In essence, 23% of principals left the positions they had held during the 2011-12 school year (Goldring & Owens, 2014). Consistent with the national statistics on principal turnover rate, Clifford et al. (2012) conducted a descriptive analysis of the principal workforce in Wisconsin and reported

that approximately 45% of principals remained on the job after eight years of service with attrition rates ranging from 9% to 12.5% annually.

Multiple studies identified moderate to high levels of stress that todays' administrators endure. Boyland (2011) conducted a survey on job related stress of 193 principals from 79 counties in Indiana. The results of Boyland's study showed that the majority of the principals reported suffering with moderate to high levels of stress, with almost forty percent reporting high levels of stress, with urban principals reporting higher levels of job stress compared to their counterparts in rural schools.

In a survey of 67 special education principals in the northeastern United States, Wheeler and LaRocco (2009) reported that, although 91% of the administrators reported receiving emotional support to help cope with the demands of their jobs, 66% of the respondents frequently felt job-related stress, while the remaining 34% of principals in the group experienced stress periodically. Sources of support beyond emotional support included information support (85%), instrumental support (72%), and appraisal support (79%). Unlike many teachers, 79% of the respondents received appraisal support that helped the administrators handle stressful situations on the job.

In a study of 52 principals in Connecticut Sogunro (2012) reported that approximately 96% of the participants reported feeling job related stress to the extent that their mental and physical health were negatively affected. In addition, Sogunro reported that the continued stress and frustration led to many of the study's participants to consider early retirement or quitting their jobs. Sogunro (2012) linked the growing demands placed on principals as increasing the toll and stress principals endure.

Davis et al. (2005) reported a dearth of qualified principals in multiple school districts across the nation. Davis et al. stated "the processes and standards by which many principal preparation programs traditionally screen, select, and graduate candidates are often ill-defined, irregularly applied, and lacking in rigor (pg. 5)." Coupled with these deficiencies is the lack of evidence that reflects how these principals perform as administrators after graduating. While an estimated fifty percent of the nation's superintendents are projected to retire or leave their positions in school districts within the next five years, approximately three-fifths of the school districts in the United States reported an inability to find enough qualified candidates to fill vacant principals positions (Normore, 2004). Currently, increased demands on school administrators are likely to further complicate the role of principals with added complexity and stress (Boyland, 2011).

Comparable to the effects of teacher stress, the effects of administrator stress vary from feelings of anxiety and sleep disorders to depression, heart diseases, stroke, alcoholism, and mental illnesses (Boyland, 2011; Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2007; Sogunro, 2012). In conjunction with physical and psychological reactions to stress, Administrator stress negatively affects job performance (Celik, 2013), creates contention with superintendents, teachers, and parents, and places constraints on social relationships, classroom management, and quality of instruction (Griffith, 2004). Other effects of administrator stress include a diminished sense of wellbeing and a self-imposed isolation from family and friends (Lock & Lummis, 2014). A second order effect of isolation was protracted loneliness and subsequent depression (Izgar, 2009).

Similar to teachers, administrators have a variety of choices in how they deal with personal stress. Sogunro (2012) offered a litany of strategies for mitigating the effects of stress, including exercise, maintaining a nutritional diet, personal hobbies, using humor, changing routines, regulating sleep habits, and collaborating with others. In accord with Sogunro, Allison (1997) argued that administrators that utilized multiple coping strategies for dealing with stress produced lower stress scores and exhibited a higher level of well-being compared to their counterparts who used fewer coping strategies. Poirel and Yvon (2014) found that some administrators practiced a maladaptive coping mechanism by using emotional inhibition and self-blame to mask their feelings and control their anger and frustration.

Although there are a variety of mechanisms and practices administrators can adopt to mitigate the effects of stress, each method has its limitations and has not countered the severe occupational drift of principals leaving the profession or adequately dealing with job related stress (Allison, 1997; Davis et al., 2005; Sogunro, 2012). The current absence of effective means of mitigating administrator stress and departure from the profession must be addressed with alternative approaches in dealing with administrator stress. It is proposed that collaborative autobiography may be a mechanism that principals could adopt to gain a better understanding of the sources, reactions, and effects of stress, and consequently, plan for a preferred future that includes effective methods of mitigating job related stress.

Collaborative Autobiography

Collaboration can provide opportunities for educators to reduce stress by sharing multiple expressions of thoughts and feelings (Levine, 2010). Nelson and Slavit (2008)

endorse the use of collaboration as a means of diminishing isolation in schools as well as developing collegial trust and promoting professional development. Collaborative autobiography helps educators share common struggles within their profession and jointly reflect on potential courses of action (Raymond et al., 1992). For this study, collaborative autobiography consisted of four phases: professional context, reflections on past personal and professional life, critical appraisal of current situation, and reflective writing on preferred future.

In phase 1, *professional context,* participants describe their current professional environment. In phase 2, *reflections on past personal and professional life,* participants explore their personal and professional histories and how those histories have influenced their current situation. In phase 3, *critical appraisal of current situation,* participants critically analyze aspects of their professional lives and systems that impact their professional lives in relation to types and degrees of stress, causes of stress, and current ways of dealing with stress. In phase 4, *preferred future,* participants reflect on and describe their preferred future. Each phase of collaborative autobiography includes both individual written reflection and group dialogue on the written reflection.

Several studies demonstrate the applicability of collaborative autobiography in reducing stress in the workplace. Raymond et al. (1992) utilized collaborative autobiography as a means for teachers to gain understanding of their professional and cultural environment as well as the influences that shape decisions, values, and identities within teaching. Flaherty (1994) found collaborative autobiography to be an effective tool for both self-discovery and school improvement. Flaherty also found that

collaborative autobiography helped create staff cohesion, resolve conflicts, and elevate self esteem.

Diehl (2012) demonstrated that collaborative autobiography provided invaluable insight to administrators struggling with several types of accountability and resulting pressures. Diehl also reported that the collaborative process helped school administrators develop improved relationships with staff and better understand the mutual goals of school improvement that administrators and teachers share.

The literature provides an abundance of techniques and methods focused on building resiliency and reducing educator stress. Regretfully, the exodus of qualified educators from schools continues, and many educators who remain continue to suffer from the multiple sources of stress found in education. Collaborative autobiography may serve as a means for educators to understand the causes of their stress better and deal with that stress more effectively, leading to healthier learning environments for all members of their learning communities.

Overview of Research Design

A *constructionist epistemology* provided the foundation for this study. Constructionism holds that meaning is derived from social interaction and experiences (Walters, 2009). The constructionist epistemology is dynamic and allows for renovation of personal biographies and the questioning of external influences and cultural opinions (Smith, 1994). It is through the construction of meaning rather than its creation that the constructionist lens examines lived experiences and reflections, thus providing self awareness and better understanding of personal identity (Crotty, 1998; Null, 2004; Smith, 1994).

This study was guided by an *interpretivist theoretical perspective*, which embraces knowledge gained from prior experiences and seeks to evaluate social and historical meanings applied to specific events (Crotty, 1998). In conjunction with collaborative autobiography, the interpretivist theoretical perspective focuses on historical events from multiple perspectives and exposes previously held assumptions (Gustafsson, 2011). It is through these interpretations that social issues are explored, multiple meanings are provided and a person's self identity is defined more meaningfully (Tower, Rowe, & Wallis, 2012).

The *methodology* chosen for this study was grounded theory, which avoids *a priori* assumptions and creates new theory based on the particular study (Creswell, 1998). With grounded theory, theories may be developed on the cause and effect of educator stress as well as how educators deal with stress.

The *case study method* was chosen for the study because of its capacity to examine the depth and breadth of phenomena as well as multiple perspectives and meanings (Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012). The case study method is versatile in its approach to data collection and utilizes observations, journaling, interviews and document reviews (Pratama & Firman, 2010; Scheffner-Hammer, 2011). The case study method compliments collaborative autobiography by using multiple avenues of information from groups of people who share common experiences (Creswell, 1998).

The collaborative autobiography project was limited to a 14-week period. The project concluded with participants sharing what was learned in the project, the pertinence of collaborative autobiography in their lives, and the application of collaborative autobiography for other educators.

The analysis of data was based on Marshall and Rossman's (2011) six phases of analytic procedures. The organization of the data as well as multiple readings of the data, or immersion in the data, assisted with the eventual open and axial coding of the data. Analytic memos also were used as a means of recognizing and clarifying concepts and gaps that emerged from the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Following the coding of the data, categories and themes were generated. As a precaution against researcher bias, alternative meanings of the data were considered.

Triangulation was used to further decrease the likelihood of bias and strengthen the findings of the study (Green & McClintock, 1985; Patton, 2002). Triangulation involved comparing data gained from interviews, reflective writings, and field notes, and both provided multiple perspectives and helped to clarify the results (Anderson, Bachman, Perkins, & Cohen, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mathison, 1988). In conjunction with triangulation, member checking with the participants was used to strengthen the validity and credibility of the research analysis and findings (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). A more detailed discussion of the research framework, research procedures, and ethical considerations is discussed in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Burnout – The result of continued stress beyond the educator's resilience that leads to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, lowered job satisfaction, and increased negativity towards others (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Schwab et al., 1986).

Collaborative Autobiography – A cyclical four phase process that includes reflections on past, present, and future by the participants, shared in a collaborative setting, and used to help educators react positively to stress, build resilience, and gain self-efficacy in goal setting and professional autonomy.

Mobbing – The psychological harassment by school personnel directed at one teacher; manifested by gossiping, exclusion from events, and imposed isolation within school (Leymann, 1996).

Moonlighting – The act of working additional hours for pay outside of a teacher's full-time job of teaching.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001- A continuation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that mandates adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all public schools with an emphasis on high stakes standardized testing as the measurement tool for schools.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - An anxiety disorder triggered by a traumatic situation or event leading to an adverse psychological and physiological reaction in which the victim experiences horror, helplessness, or intense fear (The Mayo Clinic, 2011).

Reduction in Force (RIF) – The cutting of school personnel without replacements considered for filling vacancies. RIF is usually a result of budgetary constraints and results in additional workloads for remaining school staff.

Stress- An ineffective response to external influences which results in emotional exhaustion and diminutive feelings of job accomplishment (Kumar, 2010).

Significance of the Study

The findings from this case study of collaborative autobiography may serve as a basis for others to extend the research on collaborative autobiography as an alternate way of dealing with educator stress. Within schools, groups of teachers and administrators may utilize collaborative autobiography as a mechanism for school improvement. Wheatley (1994) reflects on the need for organizations to have flexibility to allow change, and that organizational change can start and occur with a small group of individuals. Collaborative autobiography may also support the argument made by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) that a sense of belonging can be strengthened when teachers express and feel that they are a part of shared values and goals with colleagues, and in turn, lessen the severity of emotional exhaustion and time pressure, and increase job satisfaction.

Beyond the school setting, the results from this study may help to encourage policy makers to make public education more holistic and less centralized on high stakes standardized tests. Research on collaborative autobiography may aid university professors in shaping educational leadership and teacher preparation programs to include the practice of collaborative autobiography for personal and professional development.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Stress Defined

The term stress evolved from fourteenth century usage denoting hardship and affliction, with limited psychological implications (Kennard, 2008). In 1914, Walter Cannon published "The emergency function of the adrenal medulla in pain and the major emotions" that emphasized the relationship between chronic stress and cardiovascular disease (Cannon, 1914). The first usage of the term stress with an emphasis as a psychological aspect was included in Walter Cannon's 1932 publication of "The Wisdom of the Body" where Cannon coined the term homeostasis and discussed the body's reaction to extreme external stressors (Cannon, 1932). In 1956, Hans Selye furthered the usage of stress as a psychological concept by introducing his three stage process, general adaptation syndrome (GAS), which suggested that our response to stress begins with a physical reaction, followed by techniques intended to cope with stressors, and exhaustion if the person is subjected to repetitive stressors without the ability to escape (Kennard, 2008).

The concept of stress has been researched extensively since the 1950s, but there is often confusion in defining stress as a cause or stimulus to an event, or as a response to an event that may cause discomfort or anxiety (Putwain, 2007). To help distinguish between cause and effect, Gold (2001) clarifies the terms stress and burnout and states that burnout is essentially an effect of stress. Gold further clarifies stress as the reaction to "an imbalance between demands of the environment and the individual's response

capabilities" (p. 272). Brey and Clark (2012) differentiate stressors from stress, defining a stressor as the cause of stress and stress as "the inability to handle or cope with circumstances that affect one's health and well-being in body, mind, or spirit" (p. 18).

There are multiple definitions of stress. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2014) defines stress as "a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor is disease causation." Dillenburger (2004) defines occupational stress as "the outcome of a mismatch (or imbalance) between a person's skill and abilities and the demands encountered by the job" (p. 215), while Hutri and Lindeman (2002) surmise that occupational stress is indicative of suppressed anger, anxiety, and innate depressive symptoms that are demonstrated through negative interpersonal relations and frustration as a result of an occupational crisis.

Due to much of the research on occupational stress being focused on comparing individual professions and levels of stress leading to coronary disease rather than environmental factors that create high stress, such as high workloads or limited control of one's job (Krantz, Contrada, Hill, & Friedler; 1988), Dillenburger addresses the need to look at the environment rather than the individual's personality or personal history for causes of stress. A cultural component of the environment that adds to the definition of occupational stress is race related stress where the level of identity development of the person is correlated to affects on career aspirations. This aspect of stress is defined as the subjects' reaction to being unable to reach occupational goals due to racism and inadequate strategies for resisting or coping with that racism (Tovar-Murray, Jenifer, Andrusyk, D'Angelo, & King, 2012).

Another type of stress is environmental stress due to repetitive media broadcasts or direct and intimate contact with a catastrophic event, such as the attacks on September 11, 2001. High anxiety can result from a person's fear of a potential terrorist attack and may lead to PTSD symptoms without the person actually having directly experienced the event (Marshall et al., 2007).

There are positive and negative aspects of stress. Positive stress, or eustress (Kennard, 2008), can counter bland aspects of life and provide variety and developmental growth while negative aspects of stress can lead to health issues and diminished quality of life (Franks, 1994). Franks defines stress as occurring when environmental and situational contexts

cause an increased physiological or psychological arousal above the relaxed resting state that is needed to maintain homeostasis in the new condition (not stressors) from the stressors that cause a physiological or psychological response beyond what is needed for homeostasis" (p. 3).

Franks further states that "stress reactions are a function of an individual's perceptions, expectations, experiences, moods, and appraisals of the stressors. (p. 3)

Educator Stress Defined

Many educators endure enormous stress while trying to juggle a myriad of responsibilities in providing our children a quality education. Partly due to an inability to deal with stress, some of these educators leave the profession while others stay in education and eventually exhibit a beaten persona, a lack of self-esteem, or a tremendous amount of frustration. In addition, many educators are susceptible to emotional exhaustion, negative feelings towards students as well as peers, and diminished feelings

of job accomplishment as a result of sustained stress (Boyland, 2011; Goldring & Owens, 2014; Kumar, 2010; Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2007; Sogunro, 2012).

Stress is common to all people, but differences exist between the effects of healthy stress and unhealthy stress. Prolonged unhealthy stress can diminish the teachers' physical and psychological wellbeing (Kumar, 2010). The absence of effective coping mechanisms results in stress levels that may eventually promote diverse negative psychological as well as physiological reactions including high blood pressure and coronary heart disease, and can be a contributing factor to death (Sorenson, 2007; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

The research on educator retention and departure from education is abundant. While 11% of teachers report job satisfaction, 22 to 33% of new teachers across the nation leave teaching within the first three years, and 33 to 50% of teachers leave the profession after five years (Bobek, 2002; Botwinik, 2007; Hanushek, 2007; Kitching, Morgan & O'Leary, 2009), with some districts reporting up to 70% of experienced teachers leaving the profession within two years (Botwinik, 2007). Similar to teachers, many administrators express low job satisfaction with an average of 12% nationally leaving the profession each year (Goldring & Owens, 2014). Of the administrators that stay in education, approximately forty percent report suffering with high levels of stress due to the demands of their jobs (Boyland, 2011).

Until relatively recently, little research had been conducted on stress in the workplace (Sorenson, 2007). Often, the actual person suffering from stress is the last person to recognize the source of stress or explore ways to reduce it (Clausen & Petruka, 2009). Approximately one-third of public school teachers report experiencing extreme

stress or burnout (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001), and the more time teachers devote to the profession of teaching the greater the likelihood of developing symptoms of emotional exhaustion and general feelings of burnout (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009).

The Causes of Teacher Stress

Heavy Workload

Clausen and Petruka (2009) report that the extensive responsibilities of teachers, including preparation of lesson plans, classroom management, and ongoing evaluations, often make their personal lives and families subordinate to their motivation to do well in school. Because of the high tempo of teaching, teachers are frequently exposed to sustained high tension environments, and as a result, suffer diminished happiness as well as low decision making authority. The demands placed on teachers can lead to a decrease in physical exercise, adoption of poor eating habits, fatigue and self imposed isolation within the campus; and even lead to hostility directed towards coworkers and administrators, intentional sabotage of school efforts, panic, paranoia, and clinical depression (Clausen & Petruka, 2009). The common view of the educator's role of not only guiding instruction but also serving as a primary source of emotional support for the students adds to the potential stress in the classroom and the likelihood of eventual teacher burnout (Sullivan, 2003).

Inadequate Salary

Although teacher salary and pay raises are popular topics in both public press and educational research, the public is wary of the costs of teachers' wages, especially with the downturn in the public economy (Rubinstein, 2005; Young, Delli, Miller-Smith, &

Buster, 2004). Howell and West (2009) provided a glimpse of public distrust with

increasing teacher pay with their finding that members of the public are less likely to

support teacher pay raises when supplied with information on what teachers make. Even

though teacher pay is traditionally based on level of education, years of experience, and

special certifications or credentials, compared with physicians who typically achieve

peak earnings at age 40 and lawyers at age 35, teachers typically do not reach peak

earning power until age 55 (Vigdor, 2008). Teacher awareness of the disparity in earning

power is exemplified in a three year study of Texas districts by Garcia et al. (2009), who

found a strong correlation between teacher turnover rates and salary; with lower income

teachers more likely to leave teaching than their higher paid counterparts. In accord with

Garcia et al. (2009), Taylor (2008) reported that teachers, on average, earn less than other

college graduates with comparable degrees.

To offset low teacher pay, many teachers choose to moonlight, or work outside of

their full time jobs (Parham & Gordon, 2011; Smith & Cooper, 1967). Data derived from

one study on teacher moonlighting revealed that 41% of Texas teachers moonlight an

average of 15 hours a week, and of those who moonlight, 67% reported that moonlighting

was detrimental to their effectiveness in the classroom (Maninger, Edgington, Johnson,

Sullivan, & Rice, 2011). Maninger et al. (2011) further report that 76% of the

participants would discontinue moonlighting if their teaching income was higher.

However, other studies have shown that the majority of teachers who moonlight would

continue to do so even if their teaching salary was increased (Raffel & Groff, 1990).

Some negative aspects of moonlighting are additional stress in responding to student

interaction, degraded collaboration with peers, limited opportunities for leadership roles

in school, decreased recreational time, and low energy, sometimes to the point of physical exhaustion (Parham & Gordon, 2011).

Some school districts have adopted various forms of merit pay to encourage and reward effective teaching and student learning. Unfortunately, a side effect of merit pay is to encourage those not rewarded to leave teaching (Hanushek, 2007). The practice of merit pay to reward effective teachers and encourage them to stay in teaching has faced multiple obstacles since its first attempt in the 1920s. One of the primary obstacles to its success was the failure of evaluators to use accurate standards to evaluate teacher competence (Podgursky, 2007).

Lack of Cultural Competence

Teachers bring a wide variety of background experiences and biases to the classroom, and while attempting to create classroom structure and common expectations, they often unwittingly fall into ethnocentric approaches and unrealized prejudices that lead to lower standards for minority children as well as a view of communities and parents as problems rather than resources in the education of children (Delpit, 1992). Regretfully, some teachers are not beyond stereotyping students, and at times go as far as to typecast Asian students as gifted, Hispanic students as submissive, African-American students as persons to be feared, and Middle Eastern students as little terrorists in the making (Delpit, 2006; Sturz & Kleiner, 2005; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Not surprisingly, many minority students are made to feel inferior, especially when teachers denigrate their cultures by intentional disregard, artificial class structures, or perceptions of inferiority (Delpit, 2006). It is not surprising that many teachers, in turn, experience extreme stress and anguish in the classroom as a result of the cultural

clashes caused by their lack of cultural competence (Delpit, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997; Weinstein et al., 2003).

Through both intentional and unintentional bias, cultural clashes occur between the dominant culture and lower-socioeconomic and minority students (Glickman et al., 2014). Within these clashes, misunderstandings occur with differences in expected behavior, communication styles, and a "Eurocentric, middle-class curriculum" (p. 440) that is not representative of the student population in the classroom. To further aggravate the schism between cultures, "the dominant culture views the cultures of lower-socioeconomic and racial/ethnic minority students as deficits to be overcome, rather than assets to build on" (p. 373).

Problems with Classroom Management

Issues with classroom management and student discipline are reported to be the leading cause of teacher burnout (Haberman, 2005; Rubinstein, 2005). Approximately 80% of teachers report having experienced violence in the classroom, while one-third of teachers report having been insulted, called inappropriate names, offended by obscene gestures, a victim of personal property damaged, or a witness to or recipient of sexual harassment (Wilson et al., 2011). The effects of student threats towards teachers are especially significant with new teachers, who have an additional 8% probability of leaving teaching when threatened by students (Gilpin, 2011). Interestingly, although the aforementioned classroom management problems exist in schools serving poor students, the issue of limited community and parental involvement was more often attributed to stress, burnout, and poor health (Day, 2008). Sometimes, the intentional use of stereotypes and deficit thinking on behalf of school officials defines the low-

socioeconomic and racial/ethnic minority students as academically inferior with uncaring parents, thus increasing rather than eliminating cultural gulfs and misunderstandings (Glickman et al., 2014).

Minor infractions in classroom management result in significant time taken away from actual instruction and student learning, adding an additional dimension to the stress experienced by the teacher. Approximately half of teachers report that at least five student misbehaviors that require attention and remediation occur on a daily basis. In response, many teachers use classroom management techniques that are time consuming, unproductive, and further alienate students from engagement in the learning process (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008).

Adera and Bullock (2010) found that teachers in their study felt stress at the lost instructional time resulting from flare-ups in the classroom. These flare-ups included emotional meltdowns, outbursts, and conflicts with peers. Compounding the issue of classroom management is the fact that teachers who are under stress may have technical expertise in the subjects being taught, but experience discipline problems because they have not developed positive relationships with their students (Haberman, 2005).

Change

Effectively dealing with school improvement initiatives can be a substantial challenge for educators, especially when such initiatives are centered on high stakes standardized tests (Sorenson, 2007). As a result of mandated and polarizing educational initiatives, many teachers feel a loss of involvement in decision making and lack the authority to engage in curriculum development. Teachers complain that NCLB

hamstrings flexibility and spontaneity in instruction, and forces teachers to implement a prescribed curriculum that robs them of professional autonomy (Myers, 2007).

Day (2008) reflects on reforms in education and the change in the common interpretation of what it means to be a professional teacher, concluding that many teachers are conflicted with balancing efficacy, agency, knowledge, and instructional strategies with teaching to a test. Sorenson (2007) critiques the environment of teaching and argues that school systems produce stress. Much of this stress not only comes from emphasis on high stakes testing and unrealistic expectations but also micro management to implement a continual stream of school improvement measures and reforms perceived to be linked to high expectations and student achievement (McNierney, 2004).

Poor Relationships

With school administrator(s). Poor administrative support is cited as a primary reason for teachers leaving the field (Bobek, 2002; Haberman, 2005; Rubinstein, 2005). Blase and Blase (2006) describe different types of long-term principal abuse/mistreatment, including harassment, spying on teachers, isolation and alienation. Some of the negative affects of these actions on teachers include severe emotional and psychological trauma, lowered self-esteem, fear, isolation, and in some cases, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Physical responses to stress include chronic sleep disorders and fatigue, migraines, nausea, fluctuations in weight, diarrhea, blurred vision, and heart palpitations. Many teachers report that poor relationships with administrators result in damaged relations with coworkers, poorer collective decision making and diminished quality of instruction (Blase & Blase, 2006).

Studies drawing on data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) concluded that the majority of teachers

and principals significantly disagreed on the seriousness of verbal abuse from students,

with that disagreement leading to teacher stress (MacNeil & Prater, 2010). Cruz and

Brown (2010) found that the primary source of pressure for teachers to improve test

results came from the principal. Gaziel (2004) reported that a stressful school

environment in which the principal's behavior was considered restrictive and

unsupportive correlated with voluntary teacher absenteeism. Gaziel found that, on

average, 35% of teachers were absent at least once a month, and teacher absenteeism

resulted in approximately 21% of lesson plans being abandoned, leading to a negative

impact on the quality of education in schools.

Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, and Olorunda (2009) reported that, for special

education teachers, professional relationship and level of support with administrators had

a significant impact on whether the teacher stayed in teaching or left the profession.

Haberman (2005) concluded that schools administered in a rigid, bureaucratic manner

typically experienced lower teacher job satisfaction, morale, and commitment compared

to schools administered with flexibility, collaborative problem solving, and the notion

that teachers can contribute to a positive school culture.

With colleagues. Tait (2008) acknowledged that many teachers struggle their

first year with isolation, lack of support, and depersonalization, defined as "a school

climate in which teachers perceive that their individual voices have no impact and that

even their existence is unnoticed" (Haberman, 2005, p. 157). An example of

depersonalization cited by Haberman was a teacher being absent and the peers either not knowing or not caring about the absence.

To describe darker aspects of isolation and alienation in organizations more vividly, Leymann (1996) introduced the concept of mobbing, which he defined as "harassing, ganging up on someone, or psychologically terrorizing others at work" (p. 165). Mobbing, as described by Leymann, consists of anti social actions occurring at least once a week for at least six months which, because of its frequency and duration, "results in considerable psychological, psychosomatic, and social misery" (p. 168). As found in Van Dick and Wagner's (2001) research, other aspects of mobbing included alienation of teachers (acting as though they are invisible), teachers not being included in social events, and the usage of gossip or rumors about individual teachers. Van Dick and Wagner demonstrated that "workload and mobbing lead to more physical symptoms, an operationalisation of the general stress reaction" (p. 255).

With parents. O'Connell-Rust (2010) concluded that creative communities with a local knowledge base can greatly assist teachers in becoming dynamic in the classroom. Parent-teacher collaboration can result in the creation of new ideas and organizations within the community. Conversely, Adera and Bullock's (2010) survey found teacher frustration with disagreements between parents and staff regarding student behavior resulted in some teachers feeling that parents had abandoned the students to the teachers, expecting them to serve as counselors, teachers, and caregivers. Due to their frustration, over half of the respondents in Adera and Bullock's study believed they would leave their current position in teaching within the next five years.

Inadequate Facilities and Resources

Schools in the United States and other countries are experiencing severe shortages in public school resources (Stamatios-Antoniou & Kotroni, 2009). Although many caring teachers seek to assist students by using their own assets or income to ensure that children have adequate resources and materials, teacher generosity is not sufficient to overcome the long standing budget constraints and cutbacks common in public education (Weingarten, 2011). For years, many urban districts in the United States faced budget constraints that have led to furloughing teachers, cutting summer programs, and increasing class sizes (Gewertz & Reid, 2003). In addition, the current recession and budgetary constraints have prompted some states to cut subsidies and bonuses for teachers wanting to become national board certified (Sawchuk, 2010).

Budget cuts have swept across the United States leaving few areas unaffected (Rose, 2003). The extreme budget deficit and declining economy in California, for example, have produced an increase in teacher layoffs, and in some cases, teachers receiving "IOUs" instead of paychecks. Perhaps one of the most severe aspects of the decline in California was a 13% decrease of 19-year olds attending college between 1996 and 2004. With over 60,000 school employees being terminated, California schools are now ranked 47th in the United States (Clarke, 2010).

With over 40 billion dollars cut in 2008 from the States' education budgets, many school services have experienced decreased bus services for students, severe cuts in extracurricular activities, increased class sizes, and cuts in school counselor positions (McNeil, 2008). The severity of cuts in school budgets has been so far reaching as to create the necessity to reduce funding for tobacco awareness programs in some schools,

resulting in a reversal of a previous decline of student tobacco usage (Gingiss & Boerm, 2009). Although there is substantial research denoting a significant loss of student academic skills during the summer, many summer school programs across the country have been cut or completely eliminated due to school district cutbacks (Robelen, 2010).

Recently, severe state budget deficits have forced many school districts to implement a reduction in force (RIF) of school personnel or elect not to fill positions left vacant by retiring teachers (Cavanagh, 2011). This RIF has only added more tension to the already abundant stresses many educators endure on a daily basis. Resources and work climate for many teachers will continue to deteriorate unless sincere efforts are undertaken to increase school budgets. It is proposed that many schools already suffer from *institutional depression*, defined as "a pattern of anxiety, hopelessness, demoralization, isolation, and disharmony" (Bochner, 2008, p. 2).

With more budget cuts on the horizon, many schools are expecting more layoffs, larger class sizes, and fewer academic programs and after school activities. To complicate things further, fuel prices as well as teacher health care costs have gone up, and legislated property tax caps on already devalued homes have further increased budget deficits. It is projected that further cuts in staffing will occur in the near future unless the country experiences an economic turnaround (Donlevy, 2011).

Special Needs Students

It is estimated that 10% of school age children have psychiatric illnesses with a majority of these frequently manifested in the classroom. These disorders include Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2011), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD),

and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Of the two types of PTSD, type 1 is a result of a singular traumatic event like a car accident or hurricane. Type 2 PTSD comes from repeated negative events like sexual assault, physical abuse, or continual abuse in the home or at school (Rowe, 2010). Each of these psychological disorders places a great strain on the teacher to react appropriately and avoid exacerbating the disorder. The complexity of disorders with similar symptoms and the required accommodations increase teachers' workload and stress (Rowe, 2010).

Providing quality instruction in the wake of diverse emotional, social, and cognitive needs in the same classroom is a near impossible feat for the teacher to accomplish (Adera & Bullock, 2010). To add to the complexity within the classroom, from 2005 to 2006, almost 9% of students enrolled in public schools in the United States were identified as disabled (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Adera and Bullock (2010) reported on the perceptions of teachers with students with emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD) to determine stressors that lead to low job satisfaction. Stressors reported included over-crowded classrooms due to large caseload, incongruence of program components, lack of appropriate therapeutic placement options for students with severe E/BD, and occasional use of E/BD programs as dumping grounds for students with delinquent behaviors.

Male (2003) surveyed teachers on their reactions to the challenging behavior of students and found that almost half of the teachers felt frustrated, one-third reported a feeling of being lost, and approximately one-fourth of the respondents reported feeling upset, angry or exhausted. Of the various types of challenging behavior, the respondents found the aggressive behavior of special needs students the most challenging. In

addition, Male (2003) found that the majority of teachers exercised diffusion of challenging behavior rather than prevention strategies.

Albrecht et al. (2009) found that of 84.8% of teachers with at least 10 years experience planned to stay with teaching, compared with 70.7 % of teachers with 2-5 years of experience. Interestingly, Albrecht et al. also reported a significant difference concerning plans to stay in teaching between teachers who responded that they had been injured by students and other teachers. Approximately 20% of the respondents said they intended to leave teaching within the next two years for a variety of reasons, including stress, burn-out, a lack of support, better job opportunities, retirement, and further academic progression.

NCLB and Accountability Pressures

Enormous pressure is placed on teachers and students alike to produce high scores on state mandated standardized achievement tests. Potential repercussions for not making adequate yearly progress (AYP), as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 include labeling schools low performing, dismissing school staff, placing low performing schools on probation, or reconstituting schools (Kruger, Wandle, & Struzziero, 2007). In addition to state sanctions and pressures, an abundance of judgment and blame for low student performance often is directed at teachers by parents, administrators, and policy makers (McKnight, 2004). Low test scores often create rifts between teachers and the school administrators (Howells, 2000), and between schools and the general public (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009).

In a study by Cruz and Brown (2010), teachers expressed frustration that pressure to teach to the test altered pedagogical approaches to the extent that the curriculum

became merely test preparation. Myers (2007) found teacher frustration because of the overemphasis on standardized tests eliminated discussions on current social issues such as the events on 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or Supreme Court nominees, primarily because these critical social issues do not contain content typically found on standardized tests.

Berryhill et al. (2009) reported that every teacher they interviewed made at least one reference to limitations on self-efficacy being imposed by pressures for improved academic performance. In addition, 80% of the teachers interviewed felt that they had limited time to complete the tasks placed before them.   Half of the teachers reported not being able to fulfill classroom goals like more personalized instruction or teaching subjects more thoroughly. Thirty percent of the teachers reported that the objectives were so numerous that they were unable to cover all of them prior to the administration of the standardized tests.

Pope, Green, Johnson, and Mitchell (2009) found that 62% of the teachers in their study voiced concern over score pollution with regards to the administration of standardized tests (teachers being unethical in helping students on the tests).   Many of the teachers felt that institutional requirements for assessment created an ethical dilemma for them in that these tests did not meet the needs or accurately measure what the students know. Some of the conflict came from in having to test students on material the teachers knew the students had not mastered.

The issue of linking student achievement to teacher evaluations is highly emotional and controversial. Haberman (2005), for example, discusses the negative aspects of teacher accountability being linked to high stakes testing and the pressure

placed on teachers to ensure their students perform well on the tests. The prescribed curriculum of repetition and teaching to the test, along with increased pressure for student performance, places enormous stress on teachers and is one of the primary causes of teacher stress (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Teacher Evaluation

The primary purpose of the teacher evaluation, according to legislators and other policy makers, is quality assurance (Danielson, 2001). According to Weems & Rogers (2010), "teacher evaluations are often designed to serve two purposes: to measure teacher competence and to foster professional development and growth" (p. 19). Regardless of the reasons for teacher evaluation, it is well documented that many teachers experience fear as a result of being evaluated and are discouraged and reluctant to be forthcoming on performance shortcomings due to the fear of a poor evaluation and eventual loss of job (Conley & Glasman, 2008). Given that standardized tests alone do not adequately reflect one year of instruction, many experts maintain that one measurement tool should not be used exclusively to determine the quality of a teacher (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Many believe that teacher quality is the single most important factor regarding student achievement (Ballard & Bates, 2008). Unfortunately, the research is unable to conclusively demonstrate evaluative tools that determine what makes a highly effective teacher (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2009; Borman & Kimball, 2005; Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Podgursky, 2007). There are some who argue that observing teachers is not an effective method in holding teachers accountable, but rather forming teams who work for common goals and are held mutually accountable is far

more effective in establishing and maintaining individual and collective accountability in student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2009).

The field of education is in desperate need of identifying an effective measurement tool of teacher effectiveness (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Borko et al., 2009). Some educators are in favor of eliminating teacher evaluations altogether, partly due to a lack of adequate evaluation tools, administrator time and ability to identify effective teachers, and the inability to hold all contributing parties accountable (DuFour & Marzano, 2009).

Apathy and the unlikelihood of listening to constructive feedback are often the end results of negative evaluations with little being done to actually improve the quality of teaching or student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2009). Accountability must be shared among all participants, including the community, for effective accountability and student learning to take place (Ballard & Bates, 2008).

Inadequate Moral/Psychological Support

Many teachers seek support from administrators, fellow teachers, and district personnel but feel that opportunities to participate in meaningful dialogue with co-workers and administrators are limited (Westling et al., 2005). This lack of support experienced by teachers can lead to feelings of isolation and depersonalization, and weaken teachers' problem solving abilities and coping skills (Haberman, 2005). Yost (2006) argues that a positive and supporting school environment is not enough to adequately support teachers, and that support for critical reflection on one's teaching practice also is essential.

Myers (2007) laments the loss of sense of community in schools, and predicts the trend of teachers leaving the classroom will continue if teachers are treated as blue collar workers without substantial input concerning the teaching-learning process in their own classrooms. Douglas (2010) concurs with Myers' findings and reflects on the humility of teaching and its lack of star power, high pay, or prestige, and acknowledges that teachers are typically the targets of those disappointed with low student achievement after being assigned the mind numbing job of teaching to a test.

<h3 style="text-align:center">The Causes of Administrator Stress</h3>

Heavy Workload

Principals contend with multiple responsibilities accentuated with highly unpredictable events that serve as additional sources of stress (Allison, 1997). Multiple research studies have demonstrated that todays' principals have heavy workloads. Day (2000) found that principals sacrificing their personal time for increased professional time was a source of stress. In a study on job related stress on principals in public schools in Indiana, Boyland (2011) found that increased demands placed on principals over the years had significantly increased the amount of job related stress on school administrators. Boyland reported that the most frequent source of stress for principals was task overload and insufficient time to complete tasks. In addition, Boyland reported that many of the research participants felt overwhelmed by managerial duties at their schools and felt frustrated that their workload negatively affected the amount of time they could devote to instructional leadership.

In a separate study, Hare (2014) cited heavy workloads as a significant source of stress for principals while Stephenson and Bauer (2010) found that role overload and lack

of social support directly correlated to new principals' likelihood of experiencing isolation and subsequent physical and emotional burnout. Okoroma and Robert-Okah (2007) conducted a study on stress experienced by secondary school principals and reported that the primary causes of administrative stress were work overload, poor conditions of service, inadequate school facilities, and inadequate funding.

Davis et al. (2005) recognized the complexity of the role of principals in having to deal with complex situations, multiple stakeholders, teachers, students and parents, each of which had conflicting needs and interests. Day (2000) reported that significant stress was created by substantial demands being placed on a principal's time being divided between school development and school maintenance. Similar to Day, Sogunro (2012) cited time constraints as a major source of stress for principals, with multiple daily demands vying for the attention of the principal.

In a study on administrative stress with 298 secondary school principals, Robert-Okah and Nyenwe (2013) reported that poor organizational climate, societal problems, and a lack of facilities were major sources of stress for administrators. Considered equally important, system maintenance and staff development competed with each other and consequently took the principal's time and caused stress. Compounding heavy workloads, many principals experienced stress at what they perceived as inadequate budgets to properly maintain their schools and provide optimum education for their students (Wong et al., 2000). In accord with Wong et al., Sogunro (2012) shared that 85% of the respondents on a survey on administrative stress considered budgetary constraints a source of stress.

Poor Relationships

With superintendents and district offices. In a research study that included twenty principals from twelve schools, Lock and Lummis (2014) found that the increased external demands that principals faced denigrated the principals' role of school leader and primary driver of education initiatives in school. Lock and Lummis (2014) reported that external pressures on schools negatively affected principals' leadership effectiveness, lessened the school's independent nature, and increased the emphasis placed on compliance. The time spent on compliance not only created a financial burden to the school, but also jeopardized the principals' ability to strengthen teaching and learning in the schools. Some of the research participants in Lock and Lummis's study expressed feeling exhausted with the amount of compliance and paperwork they had to deal with. Similar to Lock and Lummis, Gill and Arnold (2014) reported that many principals expressed stress over the excessive paperwork resulting from bureaucratic forces and the time taken away from the students and teachers.

In a study of emotional coping of principals, Poirel and Yvon (2014) found that staff and district reproaches to principals resulted in the administrators experiencing anger, with anxiety following when the situation was perceived to worsen. According to Poirel and Yvon (2014), principals often reacted with fear and anxiety when presented with time constraints on paperwork, poor work from staff, unforeseen meetings, budgetary concerns, and pressures to suspend students. Day (2000) shared that stress was felt by principals who dealt with internal change in school while simultaneously negotiating external changes directed at the school. In a study on sources of administrator stress, Sogunro (2012) cited superintendents as a source of stress for

principals and reported that over 70% of the principals surveyed felt substantial stress over unrealistic deadlines imposed on them from their central offices or superintendents.

Robert-Okah and Nyenwe (2013) reported high expectations from superintendents as a source of stress which invariably resulted in frustration and anxiety in principals. West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) found that the principals in their research study reacted with varying levels of ambivalence and anger when asked how effective their central office was in responding to calls for help in dealing with problems. The majority of the principals felt that requests for help from district offices often resulted in the district making additional demands on their time. West et al. expressed concern about the psychological and physical effects that arise from being a principal in urban schools and the limited avenues of support available to them.

With teachers. Allison (1997) found that teachers served as a significant source of stress for administrators. Day (2000) reported that principals were stressed when forced to develop, and at times dismiss, low performing teachers. Day also found that many principals experienced stress with attempting to include teachers in power sharing and collaboration but found it difficult to achieve a balance between involving the staff in the decision making process and making decisions that would move the school forward.

Okoroma and Robert-Okah (2007) reported that teacher discontent was a source of stress for principals. Sogunro (2012) found that unpleasant relationships and conflicts with school staff, parents, students, superintendents, and community organizations were the greatest sources of stress for principals. Sogunro found that 92% of the principals surveyed considered conflicts among teachers and between teachers and the principals their biggest source of stress.

Poirel and Yvon (2014) reported that principals felt stress and humiliation at staff reproaches, which in turn, created frustration and had a negative impact on the principals' self-esteem. Robert-Okah and Nyenwe (2013) cited underqualified teachers as a source of stress for principals, while Wong et al. (2000) reported principals experiencing stress at needing to convey the importance of education to teachers (Wong et al., 2000).

With parents. In a five-month case study on the interaction between an upper middle class community and an elementary school, Lareau and Munoz (2012) found that a high level of parental involvement resulted in multiple conflicts. The sources of these conflicts were identified as differences in priorities between parents and administrators, contention over authority of school events, and a high turnover rate within the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Lareau and Munoz cited weak communication between the PTO and administrators, with the PTO questioning the authority of the principal and making demands for change. The contentious relationship with the PTO was the primary cause of stress for the principal. Lareau and Munoz reported that some parents volunteered to observe school staff and report back to the rest of the PTO. Lareau and Munoz concluded that class differences between communities and school administrators created cultural differences that affected how each side interacted with the other. Allison (1997) found that parents serve as a significant source of stress for administrators. Sogunro (2012) reported that more than 90% of the respondents cited conflicts and interactions with parents as their second greatest source of stress.

Emotional Response and Confusion

Gill and Arnold (2014) researched gender-related sources of stress for male principals and found that emotional issues were common in the running of schools. Gill

and Arnold reported that the principals interviewed were typically the focal point of a wide variety of emotional issues that occurred at school including family bereavement, student issues, vandalism, and management of the school. In turn, many of the participants considered the emotional aspect of their job challenging, often felt lonely on the job, and felt that they were performers constantly being watched. Gill and Arnold (2014) found that some administrators felt awkward in expressing feelings, and felt that they had to conduct themselves as "men," maintaining distance, not being emotional, always being in control, and fearful of being perceived as weak and not in control.

In a study of 108 kindergarten principals linking job stress with job satisfaction and social support from supervisors to job stress, Wong, Cheuk, and Rosen (2000) reported that principals found their jobs moderately stressful and felt moderately satisfied with their jobs. Wong et al. concluded that a correlation between an increase in stress at work and a subsequent decrease in job satisfaction was evident, and the administrators who expressed feeling stress reported that emotional support from their supervisors had a minimal effect on their ability to deal with their problems.

Gill and Arnold (2014) found that principals missed the comradery and collaboration with teachers prior to becoming principals, with several principals commenting that they felt uncertainty of what was expected from them. Celik (2013) discussed the effects of role ambiguity and role conflict with 135 vice principals as a source of stress that correlated to increased likelihood of burnout. Role ambiguity and role conflict were seen to negatively affect job performance. A study by Davila (2009) found that limited understanding of culturally diverse students complicated principals' role ambiguity and served as an additional source of principal stress.

Johnson (2007) notes that today's principals are often tasked with elevating troubled schools, and Sogunro (2012) argues that crises in school are a significant source of stress for administrators. Johnson (2007) maintains that because the role of the principal is constantly evolving, certification programs do little to prepare principals for the jobs they are entering into and do not meet the requirements necessary to develop successful principals.

Diminished Trust

MacMillan, Meyer, and Northfield (2004) reported that trust was an identifying factor in teachers' expectations of new administrators, affected the new principals' success in schools, and was considered critical to teacher-administrator relationships during the succession. MacMillan et al. also found that "in the absence of a belief that actions would…conform to legal mandates, trust between principals and teachers was nonexistent (pg. 286)." MacMillan et al. concluded that teachers' perceptions of whether principals could be trusted was based on the evidence the teachers had, not the confidential information the principal used to shape and make his decisions.

In a study focused on administrators' trust of students and parents, and the relationship of trust level with principal burnout, Ozer (2013) determined that trust was essential in sustaining effective schools, and that principals typically trusted students more than parents. Ozer (2013) found that the administrators' trust in parents and students was not different in smaller schools because smaller schools offered more opportunities for the principal and parents to collaborate and develop relationships that affected the schools' organizational practices. Ozer also identified a positive correlation between low trust in students and parents and the principals experiencing

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depersonalization, exhaustion, and professional accomplishment. Sogunro (2012) reported that negative publicity and dealing with the media was a source of stress for approximately 60% of the principals. West et al. (2010) felt that principals could benefit from being able to discuss their work, but the principals did not trust their own district counselors.

NCLB and Accountability Pressures

Many educators considered the current accountability found in today's schools originating in the early 1990s with *A Nation at Risk,* that propelled the adoption of high goals and expectations for learners and introduced widespread standards based assessments (Normore, 2004). This change in assessments was accompanied by dramatic changes in the roles and responsibilities of principals, with educational accountability taking center stage. Standards based assessments changed the roles of district central offices from initiating and regulating activities to a role of facilitation, service, and responsiveness (Normore, 2004). Part of the stress associated with accountability pressures involved the principal's changing role, from the head of a school to a facilitator of multiple complex relationships that rely less on positional authority and more on ability to influence others (Normore, 2004).

Based on interviews with 17 principals in urban schools, West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) found that principals experienced extensive responsibilities and accountability stress as a result of A Nation at Risk, which subsequently helped introduce the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 that publicly held principals accountable for student academic achievement. The respondents in West and associates' study expressed great frustration

with accountability pressures and the resulting stress, and felt that there was not anyone they could talk to and trust with their concerns.

Davis et al. (2005) argued that increased expectations from policy makers have substantially increased the pressure principals felt concerning student achievement. In accord with Davis et al., Boyland (2011) reported in a study on accountability pressures of administrators that a majority of the respondents attributed the increase in stress to additional duties and greater emphasis on standards-based accountability.   Consistent with the findings of Davis et al. and Boyland, Sogunro (2012) found that annual yearly progress, a requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, was a source of stress for 73% of the principals in his study.

In a study on principals' perceptions of accountability programs in North Carolina, Lyons and Algozzine (2006) reported that elementary, junior high, and high school administrators felt No child Left Behind adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements, with the potential sanctions for low performing schools, had a negative impact on schools, and led administrators to enter into damage control. Lyons and Algozzine concluded that the most troubling aspect of AYP requirements was that "the arbitrary, unyielding nature of the index and its reliance on simplistic, single-measure notions of performance with varying technical adequacy create disillusionment, discomfort, and dilemmas that are difficult to overcome (pg. 11)."

Effects of Teacher Stress

Effects on Teachers

Psychological effects. There is an abundance of research on the negative effects of abusive workplace practices, including cynicism, chronic fear, panic attacks, suicidal

thoughts, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Blase et al., 2008).

According to the Mayo Clinic (2011), PTSD is an anxiety disorder triggered by a

traumatic situation or event leading to an adverse psychological and physiological

reaction where the victim experiences horror, helplessness, or intense fear. One key

symptom of PTSD is *intrusion* in which the sufferer relives the traumatic event through

flashback, hallucinations, or nightmares triggered by any action, including smells, noises,

visual reminders, or anything that reminds the sufferer of the traumatic experience.

Another symptom is *avoidance* when the individual closes down emotionally as well as

socially to avoid situations or events mindful of the traumatic event (Kean, Kelsay,

Wamboldt, & Wamboldt, 2006). The sufferer of PTSD may also experience

hyperarousal, or emotional or behavioral difficulties including suicidal feelings,

depression, violence, antisocial behavior, aggression and anger, self-harm, phobias,

anxiety attacks, or disturbed sleep.

Although often linked to the military, PTSD, in varying levels, is estimated to be

experienced by 56% of the U.S. population, primarily due to traumatic events such as

natural disasters, accidents, and physical or sexual abuse (Cusack, Grubaugh, Knapp, &

Frueh, 2006; Guy & Guy, 2004). Blase et al. (2008) reported that a substantial number of

teachers who had been victims of long term principal mistreatment suffered from PTSD.

In addition to teachers, Kean et al. (2006), found that children suffering with asthma as

well as parents witnessing that trauma experienced PTSD symptoms. Kassam-Adams &

Winston (2004) reported that a high number of PTSD symptoms frequently occur in

adults as well as children in the days and weeks following a traumatic injury. Sava

(2002) found that psychological maltreatment, including the use of fear and intimidation

that occurs in schools settings, often results in an adverse affect on the students'

psychological wellbeing, inhibiting student learning, as well as the manifestation of

PTSD symptoms in children.

Some traumatized adults experienced "deficits in sustained attention, mental

manipulation, and strategic and declarative memory abilities" (Saltzman et al., 2006, p.

262). Often, mild to moderate levels of PTSD encourage the sufferer to leave her

profession prematurely, with the likelihood of treatment substantially minimized. Those

who suffer with PTSD and remain in their profession often experience a diminished

ability to execute their responsibilities, further complicating the maintenance of a positive

work environment for their fellow employees. In addition, trauma exposure and PTSD

symptoms often go unnoticed in public mental health clinics, indicating a need for

research that will improve the recognition and treatment of PTSD within public sector

settings (Cusack et al., 2006).

With the onset of PTSD, early treatment plays a critical role in combating its

severity. Unfortunately, PTSD is a psychological condition that is often misdiagnosed

and consequently not effectively treated by health professionals. Instead, sufferers are

often treated for depression, anxiety, or personality disorders and are prescribed

medication (Cusack et al., 2006). Some individuals resort to self medication and become

addicted to alcohol or drugs in an attempt to cope with the disturbing effects of PTSD

(Cusack et al., 2006; Guy & Guy, 2004).

Physical effects. Teachers' health has been a concern for many years, dating back

to 1938 when the National Education Association reported that two million days of

instruction were lost annually due to teacher illness (Zindwer, 1953). McGrath and

Huntington (2007) found that over the last 50 years one quarter of childhood workers reported respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses related to work. In addition, McGrath and Huntington found that 92% of the teachers reported working while ill at some point and felt pressured to return to work early after an illness.

Concerned with illnesses attributed to sleep deprivation, including hypertension, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and sleep apnea, Amschler and McKenzie (2010) researched perceived sleepiness in educators and found that 70% of the study's respondents felt extreme sleepiness during the day and 43% slept less than six hours each evening. Utilizing the Epworth Sleepiness Scale (ESS), Amschler and McKenzie further determined that one-fourth of the respondents were impaired in their daily activities due to their severe sleepiness, resulting in higher stress levels and irritability with coworkers.

Sorenson (2007) researched the physical side-effects of stress, including ulcers, high blood pressure, changes in appetite, and shifts from eating healthy to unhealthy diets, as well as the emotional side-effects such as irritability, anger, and frustration, subsequently leading to health disorders, and in some cases, death.

Negative effects on relationships with others. In a study of teacher-experienced stress and its effects on student behavior, Geving (2007) found that teachers suffering with stress had a detrimental effect on student behavior; most specifically, students not being attentive in class, breaking school rules, being disrespectful or talking back to the teacher, and demonstrating an apathetic attitude in the class as well as demonstrating contention towards fellow classmates. In a separate study focused on teacher-administrator relations during school change, Margolis and Nagel (2006) reported that significant contention arose between teachers and administrators, primarily due to teacher

perceived lack of administrative support. Margolis and Nagel added that, due to the physical and mental exhaustion experienced by the unrelenting pace of school initiatives, teachers felt that there was little time for reflection, rest, or recovery while teaching, and that the administrator did not acknowledge their suffering.

Eventual burnout and/or exit from the profession. Although teacher burnout is common, and occurs due to a myriad of sources, several definitions of burnout are included here to illustrate the depth of this malady. The most common definition of teacher burnout describes chronic feelings of depersonalization and negativity towards students coupled with emotional exhaustion and depleted feelings of job satisfaction (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Schwab et al., 1986). Other definitions of burnout include burnout as "a condition in which teachers remain as paid employees but stop functioning as professionals" (Haberman, 2005, p. 153), and "a pattern of negative symptoms directly related to all areas of functioning" (Savicki & Cooley, 1982, p. 415).

One-third of teachers report stress-related problems and symptoms of burnout (Byrne, 1998). Wilkerson (2009) demonstrated through the use of the Stress-Strain Coping Theory that without adequate coping mechanisms, stress accumulates and creates a greater likelihood of burnout. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) found that people who work in the human service professions are most prone to burnout and connected teacher burnout with increased teacher absenteeism. Gatto (2003) concludes that many teachers experience lethargy and disillusionment while teaching, mostly due to regimented school cultures that produce a docile, mediocre, and manageable populace. Administrators may arbitrarily place teachers in teaching positions without concern for the level of experience

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of the teacher.   The mismatch of teacher and position, compounded with a lack of support, contributes to teacher burnout and subsequently high teacher turn over (Muller et al., 2011).

Grayson and Alvarez (2008) suggest that burnout is comprised of separate dimensions related to school climate, specifically teacher-student relations, student academic orientation, and level of administrative support. Grayson and Alvarez found that teachers frequently serve as a buffer between parents and the school, and that this mediator role serves to increase teacher stress, especially if the community is viewed as unsupportive and the teacher feels overwhelmed. To compound the interpersonal stress, limited support from peers and administrators encourages many teachers to seek isolation when confronted with the daily stresses of teaching. This isolation diminishes the teachers' sense of belonging and is a significant contributor to teacher burnout and teacher turnover in schools (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005).

Effects on School, Teaching, and Learning

According to Haberman (2005), "the evidence indicates that higher teacher retention and greater student achievement is based on positive teacher-student relationships" (p. 169). Not surprisingly, Kokkinos et al. (2005) found that teachers who suffered from high stress or burnout were more likely to have negative perceptions of student behavior. Kokkinos et al. focused on the role teachers play in reporting student misbehavior and found teachers who suffered from emotional exhaustion significantly differed in intensity of reports of student anti-social behavior, opposition, and in general, oppositional/defiant behaviors. "Burnout was found to negatively inflate perceptions of antisocial and oppositional/defiant student behaviors, suggesting that the more stressed

teachers are, the less tolerant they become of such challenging and probably aversive behaviors" (p. 87).

Increases in stress tend to lead to higher teacher absenteeism (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Bowers (2001) reported on the correlation between teacher absenteeism and lower student scores on standardized tests as well as additional financial burdens on schools. According to Bowers, not only did teacher absenteeism cost U.S. schools between 500 million and two billion dollars annually, but teacher absenteeism affected school routines by serving as a disruption to learning, since substitutes often do not complete the lesson plans left from the regular teacher. Interestingly, teachers who do take time off from teaching often self-report lower stress, but are more apt to be satisfied teachers than committed teachers (Bowers, 2001; Hackett & Bycio, 1996).

One of the ramifications of early teacher departure due to stress is the detrimental effect on students and the decreased likelihood that students will have high-quality teachers. Still, teachers who leave the profession have a less negative impact on students compared to those who are burned out and remain teachers (Haberman, 2005). Grayson and Alvarez (2008) report that teachers under stress are less likely to take constructive approaches to classroom management, have less patience with minor infractions, and are far more heavy handed in dealing with off-task behavior. In essence, stressed-out teachers are less tolerant with challenging students and have a greater likelihood of burnout when faced with the stress of unmet goals, lack of professional accomplishment, and unrealistic expectations.

Effects of Administrator Stress

Physical and Psychological Effects

In a study on the effects of administrator stress, Sogunro (2012) reported that more than 96% of the respondents said they experienced unhealthy levels of stress to the extent that they felt their work habits were affected, their physical and emotional health was damaged, and their social life was strained. Similar to Sogunro's findings, Boyland (2011) reported that 69 % of the research respondents felt that their job stress negatively affected their health and well-being, with some principals reporting negative health effects due to stress that included high blood pressure, fatigue, sleep disorders, anxiety or depression and headaches. An unintended side effect of the job stress was the inability of many of the participants to find time to exercise or spend adequate time with family or recreational events (Boyland, 2011).

According to Okoroma and Robert-Okah (2007), "stress refers to the internal condition of an individual which can experience failure because of tension, anxiety, producing a condition that could endanger the health of a normal person (pg. 8)." Okoroma and Robert-Okah reported that administrator stress may lead to hyper-tension, heart diseases, digestive issues, and mental illnesses. Robert-Okah and Nyenwe (2013) described severe effects of administrator stress, including coronary heart diseases and stroke. Sogunro (2012) reported that

>unabated high stress levels had been known to predispose [stress victims] to
>serious psychological, physiological, physical, and socioemotional problems,
>including nerve disorders, depression, cardiovascular diseases (e.g. high blood
>pressure and stroke), fatigue, migraine headaches, backaches, muscle pains,

physical wear and tear, weight gain or loss, ulcers, upset stomach, insomnia or

sleep deprivation, sleep apnea, frustration, outbursts of anger and panic attacks,

unremitting tension and anxiety, high rates of alcoholism, confusion, helplessness,

and lingering feelings of inadequacy (pg. 665)."

Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Celik (2013) found that emotional exhaustion was an effect of role ambiguity and

role conflict in administrators. Celik (2013) defined role conflict as a disconnect between

expectations and demands of the job. According to Celik, "determining the mission,

authority, and responsibilities of vice principals might increase their performance (pg.

196)."

West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) found that principals in their research group felt

that they had limited power to implement their roles as instructional leaders due to high

intensity events creating stress for them as well as their school. The principals often

considered a single episode at school significant enough to be stressful and emotionally

draining. Part of the loss of control stemmed from feeling subservient to central office

expectations and demands, including mandatory meetings that took place outside of

school and removed the principals from their connection with the school. West et al.

reported that principals felt stress over the weight of decision making and the knowledge

that the entire school was affected by their decisions.

Decreased Self-Efficacy and Low Job Satisfaction

Principals' attitudes have a significant effect on school structure and student

learning (Davis et al, 2005). Stress can not only lead to diminished health, but may also

contribute to lessened work performance and diminished functionality (Okoroma &

Robert-Okah, 2007). Likewise, Boyland (2011) argued that chronic stress could negatively affect principals' job performance and their ability to effectively lead their schools.

In a study examining the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout, Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found a positive correlation between decreased self-efficacy and increased burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and willingness to quit. Conversely, Federici and Skaalvik found a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and job satisfaction. In part, Federici and Skaalvik argued that the decrease in self-efficacy could partly be attributed to feelings of uncertainty, and that "the persistent feeling of job dissatisfaction may, in addition to low self-efficacy, constitute a very stressful working situation, leading to burnout (pg. 311)." Another finding of the study was that a principal's low self-efficacy and low job satisfaction both led to eventual burnout and an increased willingness to leave the position.

Griffith (2004) countered the definition of effectiveness as a school's ability to meet pre-established academic standards for students, arguing that low accountability did not make schools ineffective, but rather organizational reactions to stress perpetuated ineffectiveness in schools and likely contributed to low accountability. Griffith elaborated that schools that experienced high levels of stress tended to have less permeable boundaries with parents, and underscored that schools with significant populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged and non-English speaking students were more likely to create stress due to the strains on quality of instruction, social relationships, and classroom management.

Loss of Family Time and Isolation

In a research study of 232 school principals focused on determining if loneliness was a predictor of depression in principals, Izgar (2009) found a strong correlation between prolonged loneliness and subsequent depression in administrators. Izgar (2009) stated that loneliness could lead to depression as well as severe diseases. Izgar determined that male principals, on average, suffered a higher rate of depression compared to female principals and the general population.

In a study on the impact of isolation on new principals, Stephenson and Bauer (2010) determined that isolation occurred with new principals and found that isolation predicted emotional and physical burnout in administrators. To accentuate the problem of administrative isolation, West et al. (2010) reported that the demands placed on the research group created less time with their spouses and children. West et al. also reported that new technology allowed the principal access to his job-24-hours a day, and made separation from the job more difficult. Constant emails were mentioned as a problem as well as students having portable electronic devices that could record school incidents and post them online.

Day (2000) noted that the increased responsibilities of many administrators added hours to the work day, leading to up to a 60-hour work week, and took time away from their family. Lock and Lummis (2014) reported that common findings in their research group were principals' complaining about loss of family time, increased stress, poorer health, and a decreased sense of well-being. The amount of stress they experienced led many participants to share that they would not recommend being a principal to others. Poirel and Yvon (2014) noted that emotional inhibition that masks anger and anxiety are

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serious sources of psychological discomfort for the principals. The principals endured

emotional inhibition for the sake on maintaining a positive school environment but also

imposed a form of isolation by not collaborating and not sharing feelings and concerns.

<div align="center">**Ways of Dealing with Teacher Stress**</div>

Personal Ways of Dealing with Teacher Stress

Although there is no single cure-all for managing stress, educators may combat

the ill effects of stress by cultivating a sense of humor, controlling their intake of caffeine

or alcohol, exercising on a regular basis, finding time for relaxation, and developing

social networks of support to include friends, family, and co-workers (Sorenson, 2007).

Van Dick and Wagner (2001) suggest that coping strategies are integral mechanisms for

mediating teacher workload and teacher burnout, and that more adaptive strategies

predict a lower degree of teacher burnout than strategies based on avoidance of work

stress environments.

The Henderson Resiliency Wheel Model (HRWM) was created to gain a better

understanding of how people undergoing stress can adapt, rebound from difficult events,

and gain resilience (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Muller et al. (2011) considered the six

protective factors of the HRWM, "purpose and expectations (PE), nurture and support

(NS), positive connections (PC), meaningful participation (MP), life guiding skills

(LGS), and clear and consistent boundaries (CCB)" (p. 546) as tools for teacher

resiliency and for administrators supporting teachers in gaining resilience and staying

with teaching. The six protective factors for resiliency allow teachers to better

understand the roles, responsibilities, and social interactions within a school setting. In

conjunction with support gained by family and social networks, the six factors are

considered critical components in assisting teachers through adversity (Muller et al., 2011).

Physical exercise. Physical exercise produces positive psychological and physiological benefits for stress management and leads to improved self-concept, short term mood enhancement, self esteem, and better coping with stress (Berger, 1994). In addition, physical exercise programs spanning one to three months in length reveal increased positive cognitive effects in the participants as well as better physical health (Walsh, 2011). Botwinik (2007) suggests physical exercise such as walking, yoga, dancing, and swimming as forms of stress relief. Although exercise has been shown to significantly decrease stress in varying levels, the motivation and physical health of the individual are integral in the teacher's likelihood of staying with an exercise regimen and demonstrating the necessary perseverance in setting obtainable goals, finding suitable exercise environments, avoiding injuries, and maintaining a system of self-monitoring that supports continued physical exercise (Wilfley & Kunce, 1986).

Meditation. Although depersonalization is an aspect of burnout, it also may serve as a psychological mechanism for teachers to cope with stressful events throughout their careers (Chang, 2009). Many participants in meditation perceive it as helpful to physical and mental healing, with many commenting on increased enlightenment gained (Walsh, 2011). Guwaldi (2006) conducted a study on how teachers seek to alleviate stress by finding and using places with restorative properties. Guwaldi found that teachers who suffer from stress typically choose different restorative places, and these choices correlated to whether the teacher was experiencing low, medium, or high levels of stress. Guwaldi suggested that "the perceived supportiveness of environmental

conditions is dependent on the individual's awareness of the environment as a potential

coping resource and the ways in which he or she uses environmental conditions in

achieving one for more restorative outcomes" (p. 504). Guwaldi noted that the structure

of schools allows limited exposure to nature, and the amount of hours teachers spend in

schools severely limits access to restorative places.

Development of outside interests. Some teachers choose inactive strategies

rather than active cognitive strategies as a mechanism for escaping their stressful

environment (Arikewuyo, 2004). With inactive strategies, teachers typically feel that

there is little that can be done to change their situation and seek an escape from people

and situations that cause stress. Developing outside interests, such as joining professional

organizations, writing, or attending professional conferences, may help bring professional

recognition outside of the workplace and may serve to reduce stress and simultaneously

increase self-esteem (Botwinik, 2007).

Other outside interests may be motivated by a desire to escape the artificiality of

enclosed buildings or noise pollution. There is considerable research that demonstrates

the therapeutic benefits of positive social interaction (Walsh, 2011). Developing healthy

lifestyles including stress management and positive social interaction, taken together, can

significantly improve one's physical and emotional health (Mo & Winnie, 2009).

Use of time management strategies. Dearman and Alber (2005) suggest that

teachers need to collaborate in the form of shared discussions, reflections, and teaching

strategies to better serve the students. Of the variety of suggestions offered by Dearman

and Alber, teachers could alter their arrival and departure times at school to have more

time to meet as teams. With additional funding from federal, state, or local coffers,

schools could buy time for faculties to train together, conduct weekly reading camps, or utilize trained teacher assistants or substitute teachers in classrooms freeing up the classroom teachers to meet in groups. Dearman and Alber (2005) reflected that by collaborating, teachers can reduce workloads and better bridge the research to practice gap often found in teaching.

Ways That Educational Leaders Can Help Teachers Deal With Stress

Share decision making with teachers. Van Dick and Wagner (2001) agree that "the negative impact of stress on strain can be buffered through factors like beliefs of self-efficacy, perceptions of support, and use of appropriate coping strategies" (p.256). In accord with Van Dick and Wagner, Sorenson (2007) encourages educational leaders to allow avenues of formal and informal communication as well as participatory decision making.   DuFour & Marzano (2009) advocate a shift from instructional leaders to learning leaders and suggest that the emphasis on the content and manner of what is taught be transitioned to what is learned and how we can utilize evidence of learning to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Rethinking teacher evaluation. Koppich (2005) advocates an evaluation system with the principle goal to improve teaching, as opposed to the deficit thinking approach of what went wrong in the classroom. In addition, Yariv (2009) supports the need for evaluators to be trained in how to give constructive feedback to teachers, to include teachers in goal setting, and include these goals in future teacher evaluations. An alternative to the highly polarizing practice of linking standardized tests to teacher evaluations is joint policy making by teachers and administrators. Unfortunately, the current hostility from public policy makers and the media makes it less likely that

principals will hear teachers' voices and solicit their input on evaluations and standardized tests (Borko et al., 2009). Other alternatives to current evaluative practices include involving experienced teachers in multiple observations of teachers each year to gain a better idea of teacher effectiveness and provide more effective support (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Chiang, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007; Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Redesign teacher roles and responsibilities. Many teachers work in self-contained classrooms with limited exposure to peer collaboration and co-teaching (Washburn-Moses, 2007). Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) draw reference to the isolation many teachers experience and argue that to effectively teach the tenets of democracy, teachers' roles must be restructured to allow academic freedom to go beyond current themes in teaching and discuss controversial themes and social justice within society. This role change and professional autonomy could lead teachers to take a more active role in influencing their communities.

Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) argue that, due to changes in demographics, cultural, economic, and linguistic differences have widened the gap between teachers and parents. To compound this gap, many teachers have hidden agendas, coupled with bias, while many parents reflect on the negative experiences of their own education. To counter this, Ratcliff and Hunt suggest pre-service training that better prepares teachers for the necessary role change, with emphasis on including parents and their children's education as well as community development and societal change.

Harrison and Killion (2007) explore the breadth of informal and formal role change for teachers and recommend empowerment by sharing in instructional resources,

or becoming an instructional specialist, mentor, or school leader. In response, Chew and Andrews (2010) provided a glimpse of the effect of teachers being empowered to seek out pedagogical resources for classroom instruction accompanied by a departure of top down guidance from the administrators. In a three year study of two schools that participated in Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in School (IDEAS), teachers and administrators utilized a parallel structure of decision making that was based on IDEAS' three tenets of (a) an allowance of individual expression, (b) a sense of shared purpose, and (c) mutualism. According to Chew and Andrews (2010), the role change of teachers and administrators allowed for a re-culturing of the school through collaboration that occurred within and outside the school. Reculturing enabled the teachers to re-image themselves, change their perception of the workplace, and become pedagogical leaders in their schools.

On a broader scale, redesigning teacher roles is necessary due to the continued globalization and interconnectivity of national policies and control of educational practices (Bottery, 2006). Bottery explores cultural globalization and argues that the multiple approaches that lead to academic truths are culturally biased, often complex and fragmented, and must be understood by teachers if they are to work for democratic instruction, increased intellectual capital, and an enlightened school community. Bottery urges the use of self-reflection coupled with autobiography as a means of enabling teachers to understand the global issues and participate in more purposeful interaction with the school community.

In conjunction with changing teachers' roles, Rayner and Gunter (2005) consider a transformation of school leadership critical to meet the challenges of engaging school

communities, gaining motivation and inspiration in teaching, and fostering understanding that lends to more effective teaching. Rayner and Gunter support a delegation of traditional duties to administrators and teacher's aides, freeing teachers to be more actively involved in a democratic decision making process and activism in schools that occurs bi-directionally; bottom-up as well as top-down. Consistent with Rayner and Gunter's suggestions, Cornu (2010) argues that the roles of university mentors should be modified to adapt to the changes teachers face in today's classrooms.

An obstacle to necessary role change of teachers is the rigid accountability movement that creates control over teachers and administrators while estranging the communities that should be a part of the education of our children (Angus, 2009). Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) argue that the accountability movement has minimized the professionalism of teachers and has had a detrimental effect to the quality of education for the children. Angus (2009) argues that teacher roles must be changed to address the disadvantaged members of the community by making education socially equitable and responsible for positive changes in the lives of the students.

Institute wellness programs. In a study of the effects of a stress management class, Somerville, Allen, Noble and Sedgwick (1984) found that individuals often must experiment with various coping strategies before finding suitable techniques to manage stress. Somerville and associates found that breathing exercises, physical exercises and meditation were the most commonly selected coping strategies, but more than half of the study's participants only used these coping techniques occasionally.

Another type of wellness program with positive results in managing teacher stress is the counselor-led workshop designed by Roberson and Rich (1993) that addresses the

stress felt by teachers who fear classroom observations. The workshop is focused on the teacher's self-awareness or sense of identity as linked to the emotional context of their work. The workshop also helps teachers identify symptoms of anxiety, reduce anxiety, and gain confidence.

Botwinik (2007) argues that, although some schools have stress reduction workshops that serve teachers, such workshops are frequently not found in rural schools with limited funding resources. A variety of web-based stress management programs offer convenience and flexibility, but such programs typically have greater success with participants who already possess high motivation, healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes (Hasson, Brown, & Hasson, 2010).

Establish structures for collegial support. School reform is likely to create disequilibrium within the organization, and schools must be flexible in the creation and sustenance of collaborative groups of teachers if such disequilibrium is to lead to successful organizational change. Zost (2010) contends that collegial support is instrumental in building teacher resilience, commitment, and retention. Martinez, Frick, Kim, and Fried (2010) conducted a survey of teachers who were provided classroom assistance by retired teachers. The teachers reported that due to the volunteers' collegial support, the classroom environment was enhanced, behavior issues were made more manageable, and teacher stress was reduced. Martinez et al. (2010) concluded, "volunteers had an important impact on a commonly noted cause of dissatisfaction among teachers: being asked to also fill other roles such as mother, nurse, and counselor" (p. 270).

Reduce leader-induced stress. Sorenson (2007) argues that administrators can cause stressful situations. For example, an administrator that severely limits the teacher's ability to respond, adequately express frustration, or seek recourse may make an already stressful situation worse. Berryhill et al. (2009) reflected on the necessity for policymakers to make room for stress-reduction interventions for individual teachers, but viewed this change as unlikely, since many principals would perceive stress reduction in conflict with the current high demand for increased student academic achievement.

Ways of Dealing with Administrator Stress

Multiple studies have been conducted with the goal of determining why some administrators effectively deal with stress while others suffer considerable negative effects from job responsibilities. Day (2000) found that principals who managed tensions well typically balanced leadership and management skills, maintained personal values, successfully stayed focused on improved learning, and positively shaped school culture. Allison (1997) reported a correlation between level of formal education and successful coping strategies with stress management, with higher formal education equating to more effective use of coping strategies.

Griffith (2004) argued that schools under duress tended to be more outwardly than inwardly focused, and had decreased levels of parental involvement, lower morale, and principals who tended to serve in missionary roles seeking support from the community while not having strong control over the internal processes. Griffith (2004) noted that schools under stress exercised more control of internal processes, experienced high levels of dissension among the staff, and had principals who felt they served as bridges or buffers regarding control of the staff.

The research has offered a variety of coping mechanisms to assist principals in dealing with job related stress. Sogunro (2012) recommended healthy stress-coping tips for school administrators that included regulating sleep habits, learning to say no to additional tasks, maintaining a healthy nutritional balance, nurturing a passion, pursuing hobbies, self-monitoring, strengthening collaboration among staff and community, using humor, practicing positive thinking, changing routines, changing leadership style, enhancing self-building leadership capacities, and seeking transfers or reassignments.

Allison (1997) found that coping strategies that dealt with time management, organization, withdrawal, and recharging were the least common among the research participants. Allison also found that two coping strategies, talking to other school administrators and working harder, actually had a negative effect on stress management and resulted in an increase in the stress score of the participants in the study. Allison (1997) concluded, "not only do principals with higher stress scores have a more limited repertoire of coping techniques, they also make less frequent use of coping techniques overall (pg. 6)."

Conversely, Allison (1997) found that those participants who demonstrated lower job-related stress typically used coping strategies that dealt with their personal health and well-being. Contrary to Allison (1997), Wheeler and LaRocco (2009) found that respondents to their survey overwhelmingly looked to peers for emotional and informational support in job related stressful events, due to their supervisors providing instrumental and appraisal support to help them on their jobs.

Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) elaborated on the complexity of the principals' role and the sparse methods of preparing and developing

highly qualified principals. Davis et al. (2005) argued that the current methods of preparing principals for the rigors of their positions are insufficient. In addition, Allison (1997) acknowledged that since stress is common place, effective coping strategies need to be identified for administrators to assist principals in effectively dealing with environmental sources of stress as well as mitigate the effects of stress.

Emotional Inhibition and Isolation

Poirel and Yvon (2014) found that principals used emotional inhibition when faced with contention from staff and related anxiety.   Poirel and Yvon elaborated that principals felt anger due to multiple unforeseen constraints and interruptions, reproaches from staff the principals felt were unjustified, and self-blame when principals felt they made bad decisions. Poirel and Yvon reported that principals chose to confront issues but still felt preoccupied with the school climate and were aware that conflicts could arise instantaneously. At times, the principals felt anger but maintained an appearance of one of self-control. This inhibited emotion was an attempt of principals to maintain self-control in lieu of expressing their frustration and potentially diminishing their leadership qualities.   The principals found that it was often difficult to deal with their emotions and to stay in control, partly due to the expression of negative emotions not being acceptable in the work place. Poirel and Yvon (2014) found that many of the principals felt powerless, felt they were forced to make compromises, and consequently exercised emotional inhibition to mask their feelings.

Poirel and Yvon (2014) considered self-blame as a maladaptive coping mechanism, with the emotional labor attached to inhibition and self-blame serving as a physical and mental drain on the principals. In accord with Poirel and Yvon, West et al.

(2010) reported that some principals in the study intentionally distanced themselves from the frustration of their jobs to cope with the stress better.

In a survey of principals and teachers, Voltz (1998) found that although only 40% of teachers and 30% of principals surveyed believed that school staff had the ability to favorably influence their urban students' academic achievement, 90% of principals and 85% of teachers believed that holding high expectations for students had a significant impact on student learning. Teachers and principals felt that they possessed the capacity to make positive change, but neither group believed that action was being taken to create such change.

Need for Alternate Methods in Dealing with Stress

Although a variety of individual and institutional stress coping strategies are found in public education, the reality of high rates of educator burnout, stress, and exit from the profession testify that current personal and institutional strategies are not sufficient in dealing with teacher stress (Muller et al., 2011). Many of the strategies to assist teachers are undermined by limited resources, insufficient time for teachers to engage in exercise regimens, participate in social activities, or pursue other interests in life. Even though the literature calls for creating learning environments (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Guwaldi, 2006), school environments are not designed to meet the restorative needs of the teachers (Guwaldi, 2006). Likewise, insufficient coping outlets leave administrators facing high stress levels without effective means of dealing with this stress (Davis, et al., 2005).

As a coping mechanism for stress, physical exercise alone may not adequately address the causes of stress; rather, it limits the effects of stress (Meier, 1994). Other

aspects that may hinder the positive stress reducing effects of exercise include a lack of enjoyment associated with the particular exercise. Activities that are not pleasant or enjoyable are less likely to have positive results in stress reduction compared with exercises that allow the participant to exclude the external environment and focus less on the concerns and stresses of the day (Berger, 1994). Professional development programs for teachers have mixed results in reducing stress, often failing to help teachers deal with challenging behavior in the classroom or reduce the stress they are experiencing (Male, 2003). With high stress levels and limited recourses available for effective stress management, many teachers turn to self-treatment of stress, including drinking or irritable behavior at school (Kumar, 2010). The human cost of stress on teachers, administrators, and their students, as well as the limited and ineffective remedies for stress currently available, warrant research on an alternative approach for reducing educator stress. The alternative examined in this study was collaborative autobiography.

Collaborative Autobiography

The Purpose and Process of Collaborative Autobiography

Gregson and Sturko (2007) commiserate with the lack of respect and influence many teachers experience and reflect on the need for teachers to find a respectful environment in which to collaborate, reflect on practices, receive feedback from fellow practitioners, jointly construct knowledge, and reconsider and modify current belief systems and practices in the schools and classroom.

Collaboration is endorsed as a means of assisting teachers' participation in creative and meaningful dialogues that not only reduce teacher stress but also promote transformational changes in our schools (Kazempour, 2009; Servage, 2008). Levine

(2010) concludes that collaboration among teachers provides a forum for exploration of thoughts and feelings, and also improves learning and teaching by providing a "joint process of moving from tacit to explicit knowledge, and from unexamined to conscious assumptions and beliefs, (thus allowing) for more explicit choices" (p. 113).   Nelson and Slavit (2008) consider collaboration as essential in assisting teachers to develop a network of trust, alleviate professional isolation, become empowered, engage in professional growth, improve teaching, and assist with improvement of the school environment. Florio-Ruane and Williams (2008) found that collaboration helped with "cross-checking our interpretations with one another as we composed lives" (p.10), and cited the importance of autobiography in bringing out cultural identities, challenging stereotypes, and gaining better understanding of one's self and others. Raymond et al. (1992) acknowledge the isolation of many teachers and discuss shared collaborative autobiography as a method of bringing to the surface the personal struggles and philosophies of teachers in a collegial atmosphere, and helping teachers to better understand the influences that shaped their philosophies and practices and the factors that helped to develop current practices.

Regarding school administrators, Voltz (1998) argues that being a reflective practitioner is critical for administrators to successfully negotiate and deal with the complexities of urban schools. Wheeler and LaRocco (2009) reported that some administrators considered collaboration and support with colleagues their strongest source of social support primarily due to the positive interaction, trust, and having someone listen to their concerns and frustrations.

The Phases of Collaborative Autobiography

      Phase 1: Professional context.   The first phase of collaborative autobiography is identify the educator's current professional context. Florio-Ruane and Williams (2008) state that "identity as a teacher is related to many social, political, and economic factors that we can see at play in the narrative life compositions as well as in accumulated social research" (p. 20). Day and Gu (2009) found that "teachers' capacities to sustain their commitment and resilience were influenced by their professional life phases and their identities, and that these were mediated by the contexts in which they lived and worked" (p. 444). Similarly, Day (2000) found that administrators who maintained their personal values while juggling multiple administrative responsibilities typically managed stress well while successfully focusing on the varying context of school culture and working towards improved student learning.

      Phase 2: Reflections on past personal and professional life. The second phase of collaborative autobiography is reflection on the educator's past personal and professional life, which is designed to understand personal perspectives and decision making better, and to build resilience for dealing with future events (Bobek, 2002). Collaborative reflection on past experiences provides opportunities to build resilience and social competence by learning from these experiences (Tait, 2008).

      The reflective aspect of collaborative autobiography helps teachers better appreciate that growth and progression do not take place in isolation (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Collaboration allows teachers to express ideas, share experiences, overcome feelings of isolation, and build camaraderie with their peer group (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Collaboration demonstrates similar positive benefits for administrators by

strengthening their rapport with teachers and the school community, and decreasing the high levels of stress they often experience (Sogunro, 2012).

Phase 3: Critical appraisal of current situation. In the third phase of collaborative autobiography, a critical appraisal of the educator's current situation, educators explore the routine events within their professional lives and attempt to link these apparently commonplace things with aspects of motivation and resilience, and to analyze the severity of stress as it is directly related to the frequency of stressful events (Kitching et al., 2009). Kitching et al. (2009) and Christianakis (2010) provide analyses of collaborative research as a mechanism for honest and sincere reflection on self, community, and environment.

In support of collaborative autobiography and the constructionist approach of reflecting on experiences to create meaning, Chang (2009) recognizes that questioning the judgments that underlie our emotions may help to create clues for dealing with stress as well as regulating our emotions in a more productive manner. This aspect of reflection allows for a reframing and expression of inner dialogue, leading to better understanding and resolution of personal biases toward and relationships with co-workers (Lin & Lucey, 2010). A critical appraisal of the educator's current situation may foster significant adult relationships, improve problem solving skills, and develop a sense of personal responsibility-all key ingredients in building resilience (Bobek, 2002).

Phase 4: Reflective writing on preferred future. In the fourth phase of collaborative autobiography, through reflective writing and dialogue on their preferred future, educators explore people and social norms within their school community, with implications of what feasibly can or cannot be done in the future (Levine, 2010).

Reflective writing and collaborative dialogue are mechanisms for professional learning through which the educator gains both enlightenment and increased professional identity (Aharonian, 2008).

Examples of Collaborative Autobiography

Raymond et al. (1992) provided the framework for collaborative autobiography as a process for collecting teachers' biographies and enriching their professional development. The exploration of collaborative autobiography helped the participants gain cultural understanding of self, the diverse cultures found in the classroom, and their philosophy of teaching, and helped focus professional commitment and redirection. Collaborative biography served as a mechanism for exploration of teacher development, personal and professional dispositions, influences on processes, collegiality, and personal trials and experiences as participating teachers shaped current practices and reactions in the current context of teaching. The participants gained an enriched sense of self as well as a refined focus of where they wanted to be professionally and personally.

Flaherty (1994) conducted research utilizing the collaborative autobiography model as a means of promoting participants' self-discovery. In her study, Flaherty explored the lives of four public school administrators and found that collaborative autobiography was an effective tool in school improvement efforts. In addition, Flaherty found that the participants gained a better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses through collaboration and reflection, with some feeling that they had gained enlightenment and a sense of tranquility. This, in turn, helped to create a more cohesive school staff, aided in conflict resolution, allowed some to be courageous and share vulnerable aspects of their lives with others, provided a different frame for participants

viewing their own lives, elevated self-esteem, strengthened patience in stressful

situations, and assisted in forming a collaborative network of colleagues.

Diehl (2012) conducted five case studies of administrators engaged in

collaborative autobiography. Through reflection and collaboration, the five participants

gained meaningful insight in how to assess and address the various pressures

administrators face, including accountability pressure and funding issues as well as

teacher issues. Diehl further explored the collaborative process as a mechanism for

administrators to assess their own professional development more effectively, improve

their relationships with teachers, and better understand the blended nature of many

pressures found in today's schools. Perhaps one of the most poignant aspects of Diehl's

research was the realization among the administrators that many of their peers also

desired positive change, thus they were not alone.

Gaps in the Literature on Reducing Educator Stress

There are myriad strategies for reducing educator stress in the literature.

Unfortunately, these strategies, for the most part, are ineffective in reducing educator

stress, the associated negative emotional, physical, and professional effects, and the high

rate of educator turnover due to stress.

Patterson, Collins, & Abbott (2004) provide an in-depth study of nine aspects of

resiliency, but perhaps the aspect most related to my research is the idea that resilient

teachers take charge of the situation and do not see themselves as victims. In other

words, they are proactive and courageous. Patterson et al. also concluded that resilient

teachers found teaching as a call for social action. This study sought to determine

whether collaborative autobiography can spark a call for social action in the area of educator stress, and provide educators with the resiliency to pursue that call.

The lack of viable programs to assist educators to deal with the intense stress and pressure of their profession point to the need for exploration of alternative practices. In this study, I investigated collaborative autobiography as a potential vehicle for educator self-empowerment, with the ultimate outcome of a more meaningful education for our children.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The design of the study is framed by a constructionist epistemology, an interpretive theoretical perspective, a grounded theory methodology, and the case study method. Following a discussion of this framework, I discuss the collaborative autobiography project, including each of the four phases of the collaborative autobiography cycle. Next, I describe the research procedures, which included data collection, data analysis, triangulation, member checking, and ethical considerations.

Research Framework

Constructionist Epistemology

The purpose of my study was to explore collaborative autobiography as a tool for educators to reflect, collaborate, resolve, and seek avenues of progress and meaning in their professional and personal lives. Constructionism is an epistemological lens that fosters creativity by exercising collaboration, shared understanding, alternative ideas and perspectives, and active engagement in the experiential process (Daskolia & Kynigos, 2012). Crotty (1998) states that within the premise of constructionism "the basic generation of meaning is always social, for the meanings with which we are endowed arise in and out of interactive human community" (p. 55). Constructionism helps us to understand "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Walters (2009) values constructionist epistemology as meaning constructed socially and varied by macro social structures such as political climate, geography, cultural conditions and stresses. McLeod (1999) states that

constructionism is an approach to human inquiry that encompasses a critical

stance in relation to taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world, which

are seen as reinforcing the interests of dominant social groups and a belief that the

way we understand the world is a product of a historical process of interaction and

negotiation between groups of people (p. 378).

Regarding the individual, throughout the process of self-construction and self-

reconstruction, our personal biographies are constantly updated and modified, and

although our personal narratives of events may be contradictory, the dynamic external

influences that help shape our self-opinion and personal identity are exposed, which lead

to a better understanding of our personal biographies (Smith, 1994).

Franklin (1995) argues that constructionists emphasize "an interactional view of

human behavior that assumes that intricate connections exist between persons and social

environments and that the interpersonal, social, and psychological are intertwined" (p.

396). Franklin (1995) further reflects that constructionists can "hold a range of views

concerning the acceptance of how our constructions may interface with structured

realities to produce meaningful feedback regarding the viability of perceptions" (p. 396).

As a constructionist, I seek to understand the experiences we accumulate in life,

the meaning we construct from these experiences, and the guidance gained from

reflection, experimentation, and collaboration that help us create new knowledge with

cultural enlightenment and empowerment in our schools and communities (Null, 2004;

Richardson, 2003; Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999). Because we construct meaning

through human interactions and experiences rather than create it (Crotty, 1998), the

uniqueness of individuals and their interpretations of reality prompt the use of a

constructionist lens to guide this study and be open to the construction of meaning through the use of the collaborative autobiographical process. Walters (2009) commends the constructionist approach, stating "almost all qualitative research appeals to a set of contexts beyond the one in which it is actually produced" (p. 312), appealing to reinterpretation and utilization of primary research data in the context of future social change, wider context, and more sophisticated research methods.

Interpretivist Theoretical Perspective

Given the constructionist view that meaning is derived from human interaction with our world, "and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42), the logical and supporting theoretical perspective for this research study is interpretivism. The interpretivist perspective flows naturally from the constructionist stance that prior knowledge based on life experiences and context is critical in the construction of new knowledge, and that learning is not necessarily linear but occurs at various paces and in increments as prior knowledge is evaluated and restructured (Anderson, Lucas, & Ginns, 2003).

One of the underlying strengths of the interpretivist approach is that it "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The interpretive perspective supports collaborative autobiography by exploring the use of narrative stories to bring forth peoples' experiences within social context (Boydell, Volpe & Pignatiello, 2009). Gustafsson (2011) values the interpretivist perspective because recounting historical events provides different perspectives and accounts; it is through these differences that the challenging of assumed knowledge brings forth meaning.

Utilizing the interpretivist perspective in my research on collaborative autobiography allowed for the consideration of multiple perspectives and the making of meaning from the interaction among ethics, morals, emotions, and voluntary professional choices (McRae, 2010). In addition, the interpretivist perspective fosters exploration of current social structures, the access people have to these structures, and how these structures are shaped and formed (Dotts, 2013).

Tower et al. (2012) discuss the merits of interpretive interactionism as a means of exploring personal and social problems with an emphasis on varied perspectives on the experiences of the subject, and how these experiences create multiple meanings and define the person's self identity as well as their interaction with others. Tower et al. (2012) further argue that the interpretivist perspective explores the meaning people place on phenomena. Similar to Tower et al., Johnson (2008) argues that "our beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge of the world influence how we interpret our experiences with it" (p. 304). Therefore, there are varied interpretations of the events within the world, and knowledge is created from individual subjective interpretations of these events rather than universal objective truths (Johnson, 2008).

Kogler (2005) provides insight on the usefulness of the interpretivist perspective in valuing the self-understanding of others. Kogler emphasizes "the interpretive process of 'making sense of the other' must be understood as guided by an (however implicit) orientation at the other's self-understanding" (p. 248). Regarding collaborative autobiography, the interpretivist perspective assisted me to understand experiences, perspectives, and contexts of participants' meaning. As stated by Kogler (2005), "in order to grasp the meaning, then, we have to understand the meaning of those self-

interpretations" (p. 264), and "the fact that interpreters are not situated within the other's meaning perspective forces them to make sense of that perspective, and allows them to see what constraints are involved in it" (p. 266).

Grounded Theory Methodology

The United States experienced many transformational events during the 1960s. From our involvement in the polarizing war in Vietnam to the civil rights protests in many of our major cities, our interpretation of the U.S. constitution and our understanding of social issues came under critical scrutiny. It was during this same period that two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, developed a unique method of conducting qualitative research called Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory is based on the purposeful gathering of data and developing of new theory grounded in the data and not based on preconceived hypotheses and theories. As Creswell (1998) states, the purpose of grounded theory is to allow the data to produce theory and bring to light "an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation" (p. 56). Glaser & Strauss (1967) provided a concise snapshot of grounded theory by sharing that "in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories on their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 23).

My proposed methodology is a qualitative study using grounded theory to develop theories on what causes educators' stress, how they are affected by stress, and how they deal with stress. Conducting qualitative research will allow me to dig deeper and bring forth the passions, experiences, and reflections of a few practitioners who are

currently immersed in the ongoing struggle of public education (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). My research will utilize grounded theory as a means of exploring the perceptions and feelings of educators in their dealings with stressful environments, and draw from the data a theoretical basis for additional research.

Case Study Method

The case study method was used to examine the collaborative autobiography that is the focus of this research. Lauckner et al. (2012) note that case studies provide for enriched depth and breadth, and allow varied perspectives, multiple contexts, and multiple meanings to be derived from the same phenomenon. Scheffner-Hammer (2011) as well as Pratama and Firman (2010) explain that case studies involve deliberate and systematic data collection that includes interviews, observations, journaling, and document reviews. Another benefit of the case study method is that it provides for on-going data collection and analysis over time, allowing the researcher to record and analyze changes in participants' feelings, beliefs, and behaviors (Pratama & Firman, 2010).

The case study method utilizes multiple sources of information from a group of people who have an event in common over a period of time, and in conjunction with the context of that event provides "layers of analysis in the study and broader interpretations of the meaning of the case" (Creswell, 1998, p. 36). Furthermore, case studies can provide depth and breadth to data analysis and utilize triangulation as a mechanism for gaining multiple checks on data and validation of the findings (Creswell, 1998). Specific procedures for the case study will be discussed later in this chapter.

Participants

The participants for this study were K-12 educators with at least two years of experience teaching in central Texas public schools, and were graduate students enrolled in an independent study focused on collaborative autobiography. Snowball or chain sampling was used as a purposeful sampling technique to gain five participants for this study. The primary benefit of using snowball sampling was to gain participants who were information rich in the area of this research study (Patton, 2002). Three teachers and two school administrators volunteered to participate in the study. The five participants are described in detail in chapter 4.

The Collaborative Autobiography Project

The Collaborative Autobiography Cycle took place over a 14-week period and included four phases. Each phase commenced with a reflective writing assignment that was due two to three weeks later, at the next group meeting. At each group meeting, the participants shared their written reflections and engaged in reflective dialogue on the shared writings. Each group meeting concluded with a clarification of the next reflective writing assignment.

Orientation

Prior to initiating the collaborative autobiography, the educators selected for this study were provided an outline of the project, information on specific activities in which they engaged, and meeting times and locations. Each participant was encouraged to attend each group discussion, and consideration was made to accommodate the group on mutually agreeable meeting times.

Phase 1: Professional Context

The first part of Phase 1 consisted of educators writing individual reflections on their professional context, including their school or district administration, colleagues, school staff, communities served by the school, school climate, students, and the relationship the educator has with each of these groups. In addition, the educators were asked to include in their written reflections the various forms of job-related stress they were experiencing, their perception of the causes of that stress, how they attempted to cope with the stress, and the effects of the stress on them and their work.

The second part of Phase 1 consisted of a group meeting. Each participant first shared his or her reflective writing with the group. After each participant shared her or his writing, the group engaged in a reflective discussion on that writing. Following sharing and discussing individual writings, the group engaged in additional dialogue on commonalities and differences in reflections, insights, reactions to stress, and coping strategies. The sharing of reflections led to a discussion of the reflective writing for Phase II, on past personal and professional life.

Phase 2: Reflection on Past Personal and Professional Life

Phase 2 continued with reflective writing and collaborative dialogue, but this reflection and dialogue emphasized a personal historical reflection on the critical phases of one's life back to childhood. Each educator was asked to share life experiences and influences that had affected personal and career decisions as well as typical experiences of and responses to stress. After the written reflections were completed, the educators met to share their reflections; responded to each other's writings; and exchanged views, perceptions, commonalities, and differences in the reflections, as they did in the

collaborative reflective process in Phase I.   Following the group discussion, the agenda for Phase III was discussed, and the educators were given their next reflective assignment.

Phase 3: Critical Appraisal

In Phase 3, the educators were asked to engage in reflective writing on how social systems in their school, community, school district, the state, and the federal government contributed to various forms of stress in their professional lives. As with the previous two phases of the collaborative autobiography project, the educators were asked to individually share their written reflections, responded to each other's reflections, and discussed similarities and differences in their experiences as well as coping mechanisms exercised when confronted with stress. Phase 3 concluded with a discussion of the reflective writing assignment for Phase 4.

Phase 4: Reflection on a Preferred Future

Phase 4 commenced with each educator doing reflective writing on a preferred professional future. Each educator wrote about her or his plans for the future, including changes in processes and behaviors that he or she would incorporate to reduce or deal with stress. The educators considered not only what actions needed to take place to bring about change, but also who might be able to assist in creating change, and how they would assess the progress of their change effort. As with the previous three phases of the collaborative autobiography project, the educators shared their reflective pieces orally in a collaborative setting and discussed each other's reflections. The group dialogue included discussion of similarities and differences in reflections and a collaborative sharing of preferred futures. Following the collaborative discussion on preferred futures,

the group discussed what they had learned during the project, the value of the collaborative autobiography for them, and the potential use of collaborative autobiography by other educators.

Research Procedures

While the educators were engaged in the collaborative autobiography project, I conducted a case study of the teachers' participation. The data collected included educator written reflections, field notes on the group meetings, and two interviews with each participant. Data analysis, in general, was based on Marshall and Rossman's (2011) analytic procedures, while coding and interpretation were based on Corbin and Strauss' (2008) coding techniques for grounded theory. Following a detailed discussion of data collection and data analysis below, an overview of ethical considerations for the research project is provided.

Data Collection

The educators' written reflections consisted of the four reflective pieces completed by the educators in the corresponding four phases of the collaborative autobiography project. I took field notes throughout the five sessions that the educators met. The first interview was conducted midway through the project, and the second interview was conducted upon completion of Phase IV of the project.

The goal of the collaborative autobiography project was to explore the experiences and perceptions of educators in a collaborative and reflective manner as well as aid in participant realization of enlightenment and autonomous change. The qualitative interview was instrumental in aiding the case study by exploring the perspectives of educators and discovering aspects of educators' experiences that we

would not otherwise be able to observe (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the qualitative interview allowed the researcher to observe the emotions of the interviewee and hear in her or his own words the life stories being shared (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These life stories, in conjunction with open ended questions and unstructured interview techniques, can yield a dense data source for the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

According to Patton (2002), there are three open-ended interview approaches to data collection. The first approach, the informal conversational interview, offers optimum flexibility and spontaneity in interview questions. The interviewer prepares few questions in advance, has few if any pre-agreed upon themes, and allows for a free flow of information that creates significant variance in the data collected. Although the interviewer is granted latitude to redirect the interview based on the accumulated data, one of the drawbacks of this type of interview is the complexity of the data gained and the time required to extract common themes from the data (Patton, 2002).

The second qualitative open-ended interview approach is the interview guide. In this approach, a basic guideline for data gathering is created prior to the interview and is constructed to ensure consistency in types and contents of questions for each participant. Although systematic, the interview guide allows the interviewer to explore concepts and engage in conversation while gaining data in a less time-consuming manner as compared to the informal conversational interview (Patton, 2002).

The third approach to open-ended interview data gathering is the standardized open-ended interview, which is far more structured and specific than the two approaches previously discussed. Although the standard open-ended interview is specific and narrows the focus of the data collection effort, one of the drawbacks is "that it does not

permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written" (Patton, 2002, p. 347).

This study is best served by interview questions that are structured around the research questions but also elicit open-ended responses from the participants. Therefore, of the three methods explored for open-ended interviews, the interview guide approach was used for both sets of individual interviews.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the participants chose a location free from distractions, I ensured that my recording equipment was reliable, and I went over the interview outline in advance (Creswell, 1998). Each interview was 45-60 minutes in length. Although I used a recorder during the interviews, I also took notes and turned the recorder off at any point the participants made that request. Turning the recorder off may seem counterproductive if the goal is acquiring data, but some respondents become more informative if they are not being recorded while they confide and share their perceptions of personal or emotional experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The questions that guided the first interview were: (1) How do you feel about reflective writing? (2) Do you feel that you are benefitting from the reflective writing in this project? (3) How do you feel about the group meetings? Are they helpful? (4) Do you feel that collaborating with other educators specifically is helpful? The participants' reflective writings, group sessions, and first interview informed the second interview questions. As mentioned earlier, grounded theory allowed for the reexamination of data and the morphing of questions throughout the interview process. Corbin & Strauss (2008) elaborated on the need for the researcher to be sensitive to the views of the participants during the interview process, and also acknowledged the importance of

reflexivity, or the ability to ascertain the emotions shared by the participants while conceptualizing what was being shared.

The third method of data collection was taking field notes during group meetings using the detached open-ended narrative approach (Glickman et al., 2014). Detached open narrative allowed the researcher to enter into a group meeting as a detached observer without preconceived questions and record all events and conversations that take place. I first described the meeting's context, and then recorded all events and commentaries that were of interest, including sidebar conversations, distractions, and body language (Glickman et al., 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on a modified version of Marshall and Rossman's (2011) analytic procedures, and consisted of: (a) organizing the data, (b) immersion in the data, (c) coding the data, (d) writing analytic memos, (e) generating categories and themes, (f) searching for alternative understandings, (g) triangulation of data, and (h) member checking.

Organizing the data. The organization of the data was ongoing throughout the research process. The data were categorized on my personal computer by type, date, event, subject, and location. These files were saved in multiple, secure locations.

Immersion in the data. Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommended an immersion in the data so the researcher may develop a thorough understanding of the material as well as encounter "serendipitous findings" (p. 211) that could eventually bring forth codes, themes, and relationships among themes. I read participants' reflective

essays, narratives of group meetings, and interview transcripts several times prior to coding in order to become intimately familiar with the data.

Coding the data. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), "coding the data is the formal representation of analytic thinking" (p. 212). Codes were used to label concepts and identify categories and themes, and eventually led to clustering of patterns or sentiments in the data. In open coding, I determined the properties and dimensions of the data by "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). The process of open coding requires brainstorming, the realization that multiple possibilities existed in the formulation and naming of concepts, and understanding that the naming of concepts and eventual categories required rereads of the data with the distinct possibility of concepts being renamed. The second step of the coding of data was axial coding, or examining relationships between related concepts found in the data in order to identify broader concepts (Creswell, 1998).

Writing analytic memos. To capture more of the emotional and reflexive aspects of the emerging concepts, Corbin & Strauss (2008) suggested the use of memos to accentuate the written record of analysis. Analytic memos were useful as a reflective tool for me to record thoughts as clusters and themes emerged from the data. These thoughts represented insights that clarified concepts and helped me focus the research as well as identify gaps in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Memos also provided an ongoing written record of the analysis. As the research progressed, the memos became more focused and lengthier, due to the emergence of an increasing number of concepts, and related reflections and questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As stated by Corbin &

Strauss (2008), "one of the reasons researchers have difficulty formulating theory is that they fail to write long thoughtful memos throughout the research process" (p. 105).

Generating categories and themes. After axial coding was performed on the data, the concepts defined in the data were separated into either higher level or lower level concepts (Creswell, 1998). The higher-level concepts gave rise to categories and themes, and this conceptual ordering led to the creation of data-based explanations of the participants' experiences and meanings. I strove to be faithful to grounded theory by letting the concepts, categories, and themes emerge from the data and not try to force the data to fit a desired result. As Glaser & Strauss (1967) state, "it must be emphasized that integration of the theory is best when it emerges; like the concepts, the theory should never just be put together" (p. 41).

Searching for alternative understandings. As part of the data analysis, I considered alternative understandings of the data in relationship to the research questions, in order to protect against potential researcher bias. As an additional safeguard against personal bias, I compared the emerging themes to the literature.

Triangulation of data. The practice of triangulating multiple data collection sources and/or methods strengthens the credibility of the findings and lessens the possibility of bias (Green & McClintock, 1985; Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), "the logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations" (p. 555). Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006) argue that triangulation validates the data by providing multiple data collection methods that illustrate meaning and issues not found in singular data collection methods as well as minimize "misrepresentation of the results" (p. 46).

Creswell (1998) argues that Triangulation involves gathering data from multiple sources to bring out and verify themes and perspectives. Although different data sources may yield different results, triangulation of the data seeks to establish consistency, and the inconsistencies found in the data add "deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 248). Although effective triangulation may result in convergent, contradictory, or inconsistent evidence, it is instrumental in providing multiple perspectives that assist the researcher to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied with added credibility (Anderson et al., 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mathison, 1988).

In this study I carried out triangulation by gathering data through multiple research methods. The field notes, educators' reflective writings, and interviews were compared to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in the data as well as help me to understand any variance in findings.

Member checking. Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommend that, as a strategy for strengthening credibility and complimenting triangulation, participants should be provided the opportunity to review the data collection and analysis and offer clarifications and insights. Throughout the collaborative autobiography project, field notes, my analyses of educators' reflective writings, and interview transcripts were shared with the study's participants for member checking and validation. The practice of member checking increased accuracy, validity, and completeness in the data analysis (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Patton, 2002). Carroll (2008) argue that member checking helps the researcher gain candid responses from the

subjects on the data collection and analysis, while Saffold (2006) promotes member checking as necessary to minimize subjectivity in the data.

Kemp and Reupert (2012) argue that member checks helped the researcher validate interviews as well as assist with "the researcher-identified themes" (p. 118). Reilly (2013) asserts that member checks not only add credibility to the research and provided an opportunity for subjects to correct misconceptions or inaccuracies, but also allow a better understanding of the emotional life of the participants through analysis of the expressions and feelings of the participants during the member-checking process.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were instructed that they were free to leave the study at any time. No deceptive practices were undertaken while gathering data for this study. All participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential in all published reports on the study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was placed on all forms of data throughout the research. Data gathered for the study was kept in a secure location, to be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation and any additional publications based on the dissertation.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATORS' AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The Collaborative Autobiography research group consisted of five educators; two teachers, one high school improvement facilitator, one program director for a Charter school, and one middle school principal. This chapter reviews the autobiography process for each participant. The information provided by the participants in their autobiographies includes educational platforms, causes and effects of stress, significant personal past events, systems that cause stress, a plan for a preferred future, and a reflection on the collaborative autobiography process and its benefits.

Kathy

Kathy is a Hispanic female in her early thirties, and is in her third year serving as a Kindergarten teacher at Plymouth Charter school. Prior to teaching, Kathy worked in a child learning center for three years, and before entering public education, worked with a company focused on the preservation of the Arts. After completing her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, Kathy entered teaching and is currently working on completing her Master's degree in Elementary Education.

Plymouth Charter School is located in a medium sized city in Central Texas. The school serves a Spanish speaking community that predominantly lives in low SES neighborhoods near the school. Kathy describes the surrounding community as having "a strong bond deeply rooted in family sense," but also notes that the community has limited involvement in the school due to language barriers.

There is little power sharing at Plymouth Charter School between the teachers and the leadership team, which consists of the principal, vice principal, and business manager. This leadership team, in Kathy's opinion, has the ability to shift the school climate on almost a daily basis. The administration, according to Kathy, uses its influence to hire friends rather than consider outside sources for teachers. With a small student population, Plymouth has 16 teachers who cover pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. The annual teacher turnover rate at Plymouth is approximately 25 percent. The teachers, like the student population, are mostly Hispanic. As a teacher in a small school, Kathy places great value on the teaching staff and defines her co-workers as "an amazing group of educators." Kathy is thankful that the teachers pull together, which includes lightening the load of new teachers at her school. Because Plymouth is a public charter school, resources are limited, which places the burden on teachers to finance many of their own supplies.

As an ESL Kindergarten teacher, Kathy feels fortunate to teach her students, who for the most part are at-risk children. The students come to her with varying skill sets, even to the point that she has students "that do not even know how to hold a pencil properly and cannot even form the letters in their name, much less recognize the letters in their name." An additional challenge is that Kathy does not speak Spanish, nor does her school have a bilingual program. Consequently, Kathy must utilize her bilingual students, teachers' aides, or a translator application on her phone when conducting parent conferences.

Part of Kathy's typical day consists of sitting with her students on a rug in her classroom and having morning meetings. This routine provides predictability for the

students and allows Kathy to go "over the calendar, days of the week, [the] months of the year, the alphabet march, the vowel song, and reviewing our primer work list." The remainder of her day consists of special areas (Music, PE, or Art), language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Throughout the day, Kathy uses the class rug for groups of children to sit down and explore the concepts Kathy provides. There are varying ability groups in Kathy's class who receive modified instruction and exercises. At the end of the day, Kathy leaves feedback in the form of notes that are included with the students' take-home folders.

According to Kathy, "The purpose of education should be to expand students' horizons and introduce them to everyday living essentials that are needed to become a successful person in society." Kathy struggles with the curriculum that the school adopts, and if given the choice, would choose curriculum that contains "content that is relevant to today's society and help[s] students become forward thinkers." Kathy expresses a very caring attitude towards her students, but does not feel fully in control of her classroom learning environment. Kathy reflects, "Both, the teacher and the students should control the learning environment." Equally important, Kathy emphasizes that she and her students trust and care for each other, which is critical to her concept of a good learning environment.

Kathy describes hands-on opportunities as the most effective means of teaching her at-risk students. Kathy feels that students should receive praise for their efforts and be encouraged to believe "they can achieve anything they want to achieve." To help evaluate learning, Kathy endorses the use of "major projects that combine several components to be assessed at the same time." The use of project based learning provides

opportunities for students to explore concepts and be creative in their understanding of the targeted concepts. Unfortunately, Kathy's preferred methods of instruction and evaluation of student learning conflict with the school leadership's guidance, creating stress for Kathy.

Kathy describes an ideal school as an institution that has good leadership, good communication, and teachers "who will go above and beyond for their students to make sure they are successful." Beyond this call to serve, Kathy recommends professional development that is tailored to the school community and invites more parental involvement. Although thankful for devoted teachers, Kathy expresses frustration with school leadership and student performance expectations.

Autobiography, Phase I: Kathy Reflects on Work Stress and its Effects

Because of limited resources, Plymouth's inability to maintain its dilapidated computer lab had led to many classes not being able to use the computer lab. In addition to limited technology for the students, the lack of resources included some manipulatives and other materials, Kathy felt that she had to use her own resources to meet the academic needs of her students: "there are still certain materials that I need to purchase on my own because they are considered 'perishables' and the school does not want to keep replacing them on a yearly basis." Kathy said she felt her administrators knew she had to spend her own money but did not care.

Due to a deep care for her students' well-being, Kathy cited some of her students' personal lives as a source of stress for her. Some of her kindergarten students came to her with heart conditions, family problems, or incarcerated parents. "Even though I'm not a parent to these students…. I feel that I do take on the stress of the parent." Having

witnessed three cheerful students at the start of the last school year, Kathy suffered as she watched these same students withdraw, wet themselves, and cry as news surfaced that their fathers had been sent to prison. This sense of locus parentis inspired Kathy to seek help for these children and initiate "extensive communication with the families and ... anyone who had access to these students." Kathy continued to be a comforting presence in these children's lives, but often returned home after her day's work concerned about her students.

Kathy shared that going to graduate school served as a source of stress, partly due to the academic workload, but also due to her heavy workload at school and her problems with work management. In addition, her graduate studies conflicted with her school principal's wishes. After Kathy organized her schedule around the weekly staff meetings, her principal changed the scheduled staff meetings and told Kathy that it was her responsibility to find out what she missed. Kathy cited the absence of one of her greatest sources of joy as a source of stress: Because of her limited free time, Kathy missed key family events and the quality time she was accustomed to with her nephews. She reasoned that her school students were her top priority, but her own family fell victim to her current work management.

Perhaps equally stressful, Kathy's principal placed great emphasis on the TPRI scores and was not always constructive in how she conveyed her message. Kathy shared,

> I am a firm believer that it is not what you say, it is how you say it. The manner that it is delivered in is so important, and I feel that my principal could use some work in this area. There are certain times when I conference with the principal that, when I walk out of the office, I feel like I'm not cut out for this type of work.

I would never question if I was good enough for this career, but because I have a

principal that does not know how to respectfully address certain areas that may

need some work, I do have days that I question how long I want to be in the

classroom.

Indeed, Kathy's biggest source of stress came from her school principal. Kathy felt that

her principal placed unrealistic expectations on student performance and did not take into

account that students progress at different rates. Kathy felt that this stress was passed

down to the students by adding additional frustration in the classroom. Although Kathy

voiced her concerns, she believed that her principal was unwilling to listen to her and did

not acknowledge the mounting frustration in the classroom. When asked by her principal

to skip steps in the curriculum, Kathy knew the end result would be kids missing

connections and becoming more discouraged. As Kathy noted, "The students feel the

effects of the stress that's being put on me at a professional level."

Kathy shared that her worst day in education occurred after her principal

conducted a walk-through and told Kathy that, unless changes were made, she would not

have a job the next school year. Kathy lamented that the principal's comments had "set

the tone for the whole school year … I felt like I was walking on eggshells with her…. it

kind of shook me to my core." Kathy later stated that her principal was inconsistent with

her feedback, but Kathy felt the threat of termination was real, and "that comment, it was

in the back of my mind every time I met with her."

Due to the extra time constraints attributed to graduate school, the effects of stress

started to take their toll on Kathy. Kathy found that her attempt to balance teaching and

graduate school lengthened her workday and lessened her sleep. To counteract her stress,

Kathy attempted to "squeeze in some free time just to clear my head, even if just for a few minutes." This free time included time spent with her nephews and participation on a volley ball team. Still, Kathy felt overwhelmed by her workload and faced uncertainty about whether her students were receiving enough of her time and attention. Kathy continued to react to this stress by disconnecting "from everything for a little while and be alone with my thoughts." Although needed, this disconnection from her stressors was short lived as she felt compelled to return to her many responsibilities.

Autobiography, Phase II: Kathy Reflects on Her Past and its Influence on the Present

Kathy came from a loving family "and got along well with her parents and brother and sister." However, Kathy acknowledged that she struggled with articulating feelings, and dealt with stress by "avoiding stressful situations … and going the other direction." Kathy avoided confrontations because they made her feel "very uncomfortable … and very emotional." In an effort to avoid additional conflict, Kathy would "fade into the background … and always go with the flow, even if I don't agree with it." Her abstinence from conflict endeared her to family members and co-workers, but also contributed to her stress.

Prior to teaching, Kathy was fortunate to have positive role models that encouraged her to become a teacher. Her elementary years were considered her most formative, and to this day, Kathy models much of her teaching style after her kindergarten teacher, especially the aspects that make "learning fun, colorful, and interesting." Her fourth grade teacher took a special interest in Kathy and explained many aspects of teaching that helped clarify Kathy's ambition to become a teacher. This

teacher provided an early insight into the intricacies of teaching, and had a lasting effect on Kathy. To this day, Kathy remains in contact with her former teacher and mentor, and is still guided by her mentor's advice on teaching.

Later, in college, self-doubt crept in when a professor told Kathy her level of work was not at university standard. Although offended, Kathy learned not to emulate this negative example and recounted that "He taught me how important it is to have positive teaching practices." Kathy again was fortunate to have a very positive mentor when she did her student teaching for a fourth grade class. Kathy recalled that her student teaching experience "cemented my decision in choosing to become an educator and gave me a good idea of what my life would be like once I had my own classroom."

Once hired as a new teacher, Kathy experienced the stress of inadequate time for lesson preparation and the frustration of not feeling in synch with conventional classroom routines. Kathy endorsed positive affirmation; she shared her best moment in teaching. After she taught a child in kindergarten, the child and his family moved. Later that year, Kathy received a phone call from her former student's parents. The parents were ecstatic and shared that their child tested GT (Gifted and Talented) and was considered "the most well-prepared first-grader at that school…. it was a huge achievement for me."

Autobiography, Phase III: Kathy Reflects on Systems that Cause or Contribute to Her Stress

Kathy described the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) as a source of stress. Kathy felt that too much emphasis on accountability was placed on the classroom teacher if a student did not perform well on standardized tests. Kathy believed the designers of NCLB approached student achievement with a perfect world scenario and

did not consider that "teachers have to deal with some [of the] most outrageous situations today, and it starts at the beginning of the school year." The mere prospect of teaching a "testing grade" bothered Kathy as she felt she would lose her ability to be creative in the classroom and would be required to teach to the test. "When the day comes when I am teaching a testing grade, I fear that I will be one of those teachers who just teaches the test and nothing else…. I am beginning to believe that that is what all testing grade teachers do." State systems, more specifically, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test, did not directly affect Kathy as a Kindergarten teacher, but her preparation of students for academic success on the TPRI did cause stress.

The TRPI is used as a diagnostic tool to help teachers assess students' reading skills and alert teachers to modify instruction to aid the student's reading skills. Kathy experienced stress when one of her students did not perform well on the TPRI. Her stress was compounded by her principal's perception that Kathy had not performed her job as a teacher adequately. Kathy felt additional anxiety in identifying and implementing instructional strategies for students "who were not considered developed by TPRI standards." Kathy shared, "Even though I have taken all the necessary steps to try and give extra help, I have failed because I am accountable for that student."

Kathy was concerned with TPRI results not always being indicative of student ability. One aspect of testing that bothered Kathy was the removal of students from a comfortable and safe classroom environment to an alternate location for testing. Understanding that students do not always test well, Kathy felt stress over poor test takers

not demonstrating mastered skills and subsequently "being placed in a group that sometimes the student does not belong in."

Although Kathy reported NCLB and standardized tests as a source of stress, she did perceive some positive aspects of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Kathy felt that the TEKS served as a guideline for the structure of her lessons, but did express concern "when the state decides to do a major overhaul of a portion of the TEKS." This type of stress was caused by Kathy's aversion to changes in the curriculum and testing that would parallel changes in the TEKS.

An additional system stress was the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS), which included two teacher evaluations for Kathy each school year. Kathy reported that the part of the evaluation that dealt with student engagement was especially stressful for her. Because of her small class size, Kathy expressed stress over being evaluated while one or two students were not engaged: "This puts a stress on me that is sometimes out of my control." Falling below the minimum required percentage for student engagement could result in a redo of her PDAS evaluation, resulting in increased stress.

Autobiography, Phase IV: Kathy Reflects on Her Preferred Future Regarding Dealing with Stress

Kathy realized that she felt trepidation at approaching leadership with her concerns, but this restraint was "a problem I have always faced with any job I have been in." Kathy remarked that the biggest stress on her campus dealt with the administrators and poor communication. Kathy described what some would consider a hostile work environment and reflected, "as a professional, it is necessary to have that open line of

communication and I should not feel intimidated to approach any of the administrators if I see a concern in my classroom." Thus, part of Kathy's plan for a preferred future was to improve her communication with her administrators. Kathy stated, "I know I would greatly benefit if I work on being able to help open that line of communication, not only in the stress level department, but on becoming a valuable team player for my campus."

Kathy further understood that students' personal lives affected their school performance. As part of her preferred future, Kathy planned to work to improve her relationship with parents, "if both parties show concern for the student, the situation will improve for everyone involved." Much of Kathy's plan for a preferred future required change at the personal level, especially her need for more open communication, "because I do tend to shy away whenever it comes to speaking about problems that I have."

To successfully implement her preferred future, Kathy chose to go back to her original sources of strength and support, namely, her family and co-workers. By creating more time with family, Kathy would reintroduce part of her long practiced reward system, and use her family "to help keep me grounded." Kathy valued her family as integral in helping her "see things from another perspective which helps me a lot."

Kathy also planned to rely on a co-worker to help articulate her feelings and establish a better rapport with her administrators. Part of Kathy's plan was to continue to seek guidance on school issues from her friend, and find the "evidence" and phraseology prior to initiating a conversation with her principal. With help from her family and co-worker, Kathy believed she could better manage her professional responsibilities while not neglecting to spend time with her family, the one resource that has consistently helped her find her footing in life.

Kathy Reflects on the Collaborative Autobiography Process

Kathy felt she benefited from the collaborative autobiography process. As the member of the group with the least number of years of education experience, Kathy valued the opportunity to collaborate with more seasoned educators. Through these reflective meetings, Kathy realized that most of her "stress is caused by outside forces, that most of the time are out of our control." Kathy also realized that her strategy of "disconnecting from the stress" was a common reaction to stress within the group. Kathy reflected, "Whatever it is that we choose to do to disconnect from the stress that comes with our profession, that disconnection is a very much well-deserved break." From working with the group, Kathy realized that her stressors from teaching were common to the other group participants. "I learned that my problems I have to deal with, most of the people in our group have already dealt with something similar to it and are able to offer some great advice to me."

Kathy found that reflective writing forced her to step back and analyze her sources of stress as well as her reactions to stress. This reevaluation allowed her to consider what factors she would allow herself to be stressed over, and the extent of stress she was willing to undergo. "Listing the stressful factors I encounter throughout the school year has made me reevaluate what I should let affect me and how much I allow it to affect me." Kathy also found that comparing stressors with other group members made her realize that "there are always going to be bigger problems than the ones I think I have…. hearing some of the different stressful situations that others in the group have to go through make my stressful situations almost sound as if they were a piece of cake."

Kathy recommended the collaborative autobiography project for other educators as a means for teachers' voices to be heard. Her participation in the project helped her understand the multiple dimensions of the stress she endured, and that many others face the same or similar trials. Regarding reflective writing, Kathy noted "there is something soothing about just being able to write it down on paper." Concerning the collaboration Kathy experienced as part of the group, she concluded, "the best way to get through any of these problems is to help each other out in our teacher community."

Thomas

Thomas is a Hispanic male in his late fifties, and serves as a teacher at Arturo Rios High School. Prior to teaching, Thomas served twenty-five years in the military. His formal education consists of an Associate's degree in Network Administration, a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, a Masters of Art in Personnel Management, and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. Thomas is currently enrolled as a doctoral student in an educational leadership program at a university in the Southwestern United States.

Arturo Rios High School is located in a medium sized city in Central Texas, is rated academically acceptable by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and serves approximately 2,500 students. Approximately 80% of the student population is Hispanic, with Whites comprising 11 %, African Americans 5 %, and students of other races the remaining 4% of the school's students. Approximately 65% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Arturo Rios is unique in that the high school is divided into four campuses with each campus representing a particular academic discipline. Each campus has its own leadership team that reports to the school principal. The racial

breakdown of teachers at Arturo is 60% White, 34% Hispanic, and 6% Other. Almost 40% of the teachers are male, and approximately 20% of the teachers have over twenty years of teaching experience. Arturo High School has an approximate 20% annual teacher turnover rate.

Thomas describes his school climate as positive, but shares that there are complaints within the school environment that are race-based. According to Thomas, "The primary cause of these complaints come from the fact that one of the schools … is overwhelmingly made up of White students who come from the northern part of the district." This racial disparity among campuses causes some resentment from students, but "some staff members are oblivious to this undercurrent [while] others are sensitive to the students' concerns…. Seeing some [faculty] that are not affected is sometimes stressful."

Thomas teaches two courses to approximately sixty Hispanic students and rarely has any discipline issues in the classroom. Although his teaching schedule is less strenuous than in previous years, Thomas' additional duty as an academics coach consumes much of his time. While thankful to be a teacher, Thomas recently obtained his principal's certification and is actively pursuing an administrative position at his school. Even though he has sought leadership opportunities at his high school, the "more meaningful and challenging duties and leadership position" have evaded Thomas, and this absence of meaningful leadership duties has caused him stress.

Thomas describes his educational platform as embedded in a chaotic educational environment with negotiated budget cuts, diverse communities of varying socio-economic status, and legislative changes that add uncertainty to education. Reflecting on

the exhausting and complex circumstances within education, Thomas finds it "amazing [that] more young teachers don't leave the profession within their first few years."

Thomas models high expectations for his students, and also believes "that while you are a teacher, you should also be a student." According to Thomas, listening to students is critical to successful teaching, and students who do not pass their exams may blame the teacher for not making those critical connections in class. Thomas realizes that modern classrooms are very complex, but the crux of teaching is to face reality and not be a Pollyanna. Thomas approaches each day with dedication and sincerity in wanting the best for his students. At the end of the day, Thomas often reflects and asks himself, "Have I really done everything I was supposed to do at school for my students?"

Autobiography, Phase I: Thomas Reflects on Work Stress and its Effects

Thomas was unrelenting in placing high standards on himself and his peers. These standards resulted in significant stress for Thomas. In recent years, Thomas had experienced a tremendous workload that caused "unmanageable stress." Although his workload was significantly decreased the year of his participation in the study, Thomas still suffered from tremendous job related stress. One source of his stress was what Thomas described as "non-committed teachers." Thomas shared frustration at teachers arriving late to work on a daily basis, not teaching in the classroom, and at times, taking students to lunch with them. Although Thomas reported this behavior to one of his assistant principals, the AP seemed disinterested.

Aside from what Thomas considered the minutia that surrounds teaching, "all the extra requirements and uncaring or incompetent and lazy teachers cause me to have

stress." Thomas continuously returned to a discussion of what he perceived as unethical

behavior in his fellow teachers.

> If they have to go home early, let them go home early. If they have to come in
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> late … let them do that, there's nothing wrong with that…. when they ask for
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> permission and everyone knows what's going on, I think that's ok. But it's like
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> when [they're] sneaking out or coming in late, or trying to not let you know
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> they're late or leaving early, that's the part I don't like…. Be open about it.

Thomas reflected that many of the teachers were a discredit to the students, "they're not

teaching, they're not serving their students, they're cheating their students out of an

education." Thomas was especially frustrated with one teacher he felt provided minimal

effort in the classroom: "she takes a week's worth of material and squeezes it into nine

months…. yeah, the only person getting hurt is the student."

Another source of stress was some of the behavior of the predominantly White

students from a neighboring campus. "Of all the students on campus, they seem to me to

be the most rude." Part of the problem stemmed from two teachers who claim "that they

are non-traditional teachers" and were comfortable with their students being outside the

classroom the entire period. These students were allowed to block entryways to

buildings, and one of the classes was a voice class where the students "like to practice

their shrill singing just outside my classroom door." Thomas talked to the students, but

to no avail, and after complaining to an AP was told, "there is nothing we can do."

Frustrated, Thomas recalled, "That is so unfair and is indicative of a double standard. It

is that double standard that my students see on a daily basis."

A third source of stress for Thomas was some types of administrative behavior, including what he perceived as unfair promotions. Thomas explained that administrative interns were given preference for assignment of leadership roles at his school. According to Thomas, "if someone has graduated from a certain local private university, that person is immediately fit for a leadership position." Thomas felt stress that those individuals, who could not handle important tasks and made "many typographical errors in their presentations[s]" were selected over him for consideration of administrative positions. Thomas also expressed disbelief at the apparent lack of accountability for student behavior on campus. Thomas reported that students were smoking marijuana in the back of the school, and that "between 100 to 150 students leave for lunch" each day without permission. After Thomas reported this, an administrator responded "Don't you have something better to do than go over and be checking up on these kids?"

A related stress for Thomas was that he felt undervalued at work. In his career in the military, Thomas felt valued because of the many responsibilities that he was assigned and carried out successfully. Now as an educator, Thomas felt marginalized because he had not been chosen to fill a recent opening for an assistant principal. According to Thomas, the new AP received an abundance of praise from the principal, because "the principal apparently equated busy work with competent work, but nothing could be further from the truth."

Although Thomas felt isolated and marginalized at his school, he still requested leadership responsibilities. In response to his requests, Thomas was approached on several occasions and asked to perform mundane duties for others. Thomas wanted to be a leader with responsibilities, but reflected "I do not think it is fair that I am treated as

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though I am a delivery boy or even a maintenance man, yet I am called to do just that." Thomas was aware that others were not asked to perform the menial jobs:

> It really upsets me and causes me to go home burning with anger when I am treated as a common laborer who will jump up when asked to haul equipment around campus…. I experience stress because I feel as though I am not valued as a full-fledged member of my own school.

> Another stress for Thomas was writing daily lesson plans that are used by teachers who do not put out the effort to write their own lesson plans. On one occasion, Thomas' director asked him to assist a new teacher with lesson plans. Although willing to assist another teacher, Thomas became incensed and stressed for several days when the new teacher played with his phone, and then told Thomas that he would just download Thomas' lessons from Google docs. Thomas felt used, and reflected, "So, I have to provide lesson plans to someone who does not have the courtesy to attend to one simple conversation from start to finish…. That experience just blew me away."

The effects of stress were overwhelming at times and caused Thomas to wake up in the middle of the night and question why he was still in education. As a relief from stress, Thomas would frequently turn to prayer as a source of comfort, remembering, "This too shall pass." Thomas previously found gardening and carpentry work an effective means of dealing with stress, and considered returning to these activities. Although Thomas tried hard to control his stress, the effects of stress included physical reactions: "sometimes I've had so much stress that, it feels funny, my heart will pound like I just drank a lot of coffee." When this happened, Thomas would go out for a walk and "get some fresh air."

When Thomas returned home from work, he typically needed time to decompress from the day's activities and stress, but faced a concerned wife that "wants to discuss what in my opinion can wait a few hours or days, but she insists and then claims that I do not listen to her or value her opinion." These conversations further added to the already substantial stress Thomas was feeling: "I have tried to reason with her and tell her that when I get home from school is not the time to hit me with everything that is wrong with our house or family."

Unwilling to take his stress out on his family, Thomas isolated himself from his family to decompress from the day's events. "Sometimes, the stress is so bad, that I have to work out in my garage, or go jogging." Thomas added "I don't let stress dictate my behavior…. internally it's eating at me, and it's killing me, but I don't let it affect my relationship with people." Thomas' internalization of stress resulted in him suffering a stroke while in the classroom in 2012. After being taken to the hospital, Thomas' doctor told him that most strokes were caused by stress at work, and gave him a reprimand: "Whatever you're going through, you're going to have to learn to do something to help yourself because if you have another one, you may not be so lucky."

Autobiography, Phase II: Thomas Reflects on His Past and its Influences on the Present

Thomas' past set the foundation for his approach as a teacher. Raised in a low SES neighborhood, Thomas and his siblings grew up with minimal material comforts. Thomas shared, "In the winter we snuggled close to each other and my mother would drop an extra blanket on us. During the summer, it was so hot inside that my brother and I slept outside on the dirt and covered ourselves with a thin blanket to help ward off the

mosquitos." As a teacher, Thomas drew frequently from his past experiences and referenced his first home, which he described to his students as a small shed without running water, air conditioning, or heating. The scarcity of resources in his childhood thus not only resonated as a foundational aspect of his growth, but served as a motivational tool for his students to value education: "my hard work in school has earned me a decent living."

Thomas rarely felt a close proximity to academics until he attended high school in one of the most financially constrained school districts in Texas. It was after Thomas' parents met his teachers that Thomas' perception of his future changed. After returning home from their meeting, Thomas' father shared that he was proud of Thomas based on the feedback he had received from some of his teachers. Thomas recalled his father telling him that his teachers "mentioned that it was obvious that I had what it took to stay in school, keep up my good grades, and even attend college one day." This event coupled with positive feedback from an eleventh grade biology teacher gave Thomas the much required reaffirmation he needed to consider college. Thomas reflected, "The feeling I had at that moment was one of gratitude because I felt as though he appreciated the possibility that I might just have what it takes to succeed in school." Thomas was also influenced by an uncle who was a teacher: "I just knew that he was a teacher, and my family … respected him tremendously…. So, I wanted a little bit of that respect, maybe that's what drove me to become a teacher." This emulation of an uncle would later revisit Thomas when former students complimented Thomas, "I get so emotional when someone comes to me and says that they want to be a teacher because of the way I treat them…. in some cases, I teared-up."

High School provided other powerful teacher role models for Thomas. He reflected on a former geography teacher "who was always immaculately dressed…. [and] was kind, and she was just a sweet a person as you could get … there was nothing fake about her…. she influenced me as well." Unfortunately, not all of Thomas' teachers served as positive role models. Thomas endured a blue-eyed, blonde haired professor his freshman year in college who would tell her students "it's been proven, that blue-eyed people are more intelligent than any other color of eyes." Thomas and his friends found this incredible, but as a freshman he felt powerless, "what can you say, you're a freshman in college, and … she's a professor … we weren't going to say anything to her."

After graduating from college and obtaining a teaching certificate, Thomas briefly worked in real-estate and then entered teaching. On his first day of teaching, a student spit in Thomas' coffee. Thomas quit after that semester, primarily due to his class being the depository for "all the students that would not behave or do their work." Later, Thomas reflected that his stress "came mostly from a feeling of anger from being dumped on…. [and] the fact that no one ever came to my room." Thomas lamented, "had they supported me, at least once, I might have had the strength to stay in teaching." Thomas went on to join the military, and after retiring from the military, returned to teaching. After three and a half years teaching in middle school, Thomas moved up to high school where he had taught for seven years.

Although Thomas' father was not an overall positive influence in Thomas' upbringing, he did instill insight that helped shape Thomas' outlook on work and humility: "My dad didn't teach me a lot, but he did teach me don't put on airs, because at the end of the day, you're going to die just like everybody else, and when you cut

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yourself, it's red just like everybody else." Although his success as a teacher was accompanied by tremendous stress, Thomas expressed thankfulness for the times he motivated his students to excel. As Thomas recalled, "I love to see these kids succeed like that because they are poor kids…. I just love putting in their grades; it's very satisfying when my students make the effort to pass and do the work."

Autobiography, Phase III: Thomas Reflects on Systems that Cause or Contribute to His Stress

There were multiple systems at work that caused Thomas stress. The underling causes of these systems were a lack of accountability for teachers, and the disparate treatment of individuals within the school social system. Thomas stated that he believed the majority of systems his school had in place "benefit our students in great way," but other systems, such as "toothless policies," misinterpretation of "additional duties as required" in the teacher's contract, unrealistic policies, and policies that pertain to teacher attendance caused stress for Thomas.

One of the requirements for teachers at Thomas' campus was to participate in at least one school committee. Thomas considered this requirement a "toothless policy" since teachers could choose to skip attending these committees and not fear reprimand. Thomas stated, "a larger problem with the system we have in place [is that] some of our administrators try harder to be liked than to do the right thing." Thomas felt stress when these teachers were not held accountable for failing to fulfill their responsibilities on the committee. Discussing the attendance committee, Thomas stated "The fact that only four or five teachers attend this meeting tells me that teachers are not interested in our attendance issues…. The worst part of it is the empty threat that someone will receive a

write-up in PDAS." Thomas' stress was increased when he did not receive personal recognition for attending the committee meetings, but received school emails about "how great and wonderful it is to see everyone doing their part and fulfilling all their duties."

Serving as an academic coach outside of his regular workday was an example of the misinterpretation of additional duties that stressed Thomas. Rather than the interpretation of additional duties being left to the administrators, Thomas believed the contractual clause "should read additional duties as agreed by both parties." Rather than his assigned duty as coach, Thomas interpreted "additional duties as required" as "showing up at early morning or after-school meeting[s] once in a while, not every day for seven months." Thomas felt conflicted about how to approach this, and did not want to jeopardize the likelihood of finding an administrative position at his school. "I went through a period of a few weeks with a lot of stress over this situation, and decided to do as I was asked, but continue to look for opportunities elsewhere."

Thomas also experienced stress over what he considered the unrealistic and unfair policy of being required to submit daily lesson plans. Part of Thomas' frustration resided in uncertainty of the format the district required for lesson plans, but also the low likelihood of the two reviewers actually being able to review over 400 lesson plans a day. Thomas summed up the systemic sources of stress by stating "The systems I have issues with are the ones that have been in place so long no one questions their legitimacy."

At the state level, Thomas found an additional source of stress relative to the amount of money spent to create and implement annual assessments. Thomas researched the Texas Education Agency's five year contract with London-based Pearson Education, a company hired to assist in the writing, distribution, and grading of the STAAR exams.

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According to Thomas, the financing of the STAAR test would cost "Texas taxpayers almost half a billion dollars over five years." Part of Thomas' stress was related to bonuses paid to teachers whose students performed well on state mandated tests. According to Thomas, "only core teachers are eligible for bonuses, but I do not believe that is fair, especially if I tutor kids and help them pass the assessment." After spending the same amount of time as the core teacher tutoring students, Thomas was paid $480, while the core teacher "might earn a bonus of $5,000 or more…. That is abjectly not fair."

Perhaps the most personal source of stress for Thomas was the educator hiring and placement practices in his school district. When first interviewed for a teaching position, Thomas recognized that most Hispanic teachers were sent to one part of the district, while non-Hispanic teachers were selected for schools in other parts of the district with higher SES student families. Thomas stated, "I do not know if there is a system in place to place Hispanic people in the schools with predominantly Hispanic students, but a cursory review of our demographic data … shows a larger percentage of Hispanic teachers in the southern schools in our district." Thomas also expressed stress and dismay when he interviewed for an administrative position in his school: "every single person on my interview team was White…. I did not get picked for an administrative intern position, and I still do not know why." Thomas reflected, "thinking negative thoughts at night led me to feel despair, and that led to stress, or the feeling of not being worthy of being selected."

A significant part of Thomas' identity revolved around the concept of servant leadership. According to Thomas, "I was born to serve, but not to be subservient and be

somebody's pion or mule." Part of the systemic problem Thomas saw in education was the abundance of management and the absence of leadership. "They (administrators) never rolled up their sleeves and got in there with you." Thomas placed great value in serving, but also acknowledged that positive affirmation was important to him, "at the end of a day when the kids tell me … that they appreciate that I am with them, it's very satisfying."

Autobiography, Phase IV: Thomas Reflects on His Preferred Future Regarding Dealing with Stress

Thomas realized that most of his stress "comes from paying too much attention to what other teachers are doing or not doing." Understanding that he could not control the behavior of other people, Thomas chose to make modifications within his own life. Thomas reflected that the collaborative autobiography process reminded him that regardless of position, school employees are human. Thomas planned to change the way he viewed people: "[I have to] simply face the fact that I have no control over others…. I need to stop comparing what teachers are doing or not doing with what I am doing or not doing." To accomplish this change in perspective, Thomas considered assuming that teachers had viable reasons unaware to him for the behavior he found distasteful. Thomas also planned to improve his relationships with fellow educators. Thomas stated, "Maybe if I tried to be more open and friendly, people might decide to open up to me and share things with me that might further strengthen my resolve to not allow things like people arriving late bother me."

Thomas understood that his efforts to normalize relations with fellow educators might not succeed. Understanding that change in his environment might be necessary,

Thomas concluded that a viable alternative was to leave his school and pursue his career in a different venue, possibly pursuing his ambition to become an administrator. Thomas reflected that if he were selected for an administrative position, he would do his "utmost to continue to approach things the way I decided to as a teacher–not let things that I cannot control dictate my behavior and feelings." This change in approach to stress also hit home with Thomas' understanding that he needed to deal with stress prior to returning home each day rather than decompressing at home and putting his family off.

Thomas Reflects on the Collaborative Autobiography Process

Thomas felt a kindred spirit with the group, enhanced by what he perceived were common causes and effects of stress among group members. Thomas felt there was a unanimous desire to serve the students, as evidenced by "people who have made great efforts, sacrificed time with family and loved ones, and spent years studying to obtain the credentials to transfer that knowledge." Thomas also expressed a commonality within the group of multiple responsibilities, limited resources, and conflict with fellow educators. On a personal level, Thomas felt a sense of team camaraderie in that each participant in the study was willing "to take a course such as this one, knowing that we were going to be asked to reveal some of our most intimate secrets concerning our personal lives and our professional lives."

Even though the group had much in common, Thomas pointed out unique aspects of his life as well as unique causes and effects of work related stress. Initially, Thomas believed he was "unique in that my stress is mostly self-caused." Thomas also cited being married for almost forty years and having grandchildren as unique to the group. Having grandchildren helped Thomas gain a unique perspective on himself. He

commented, "How that grandchild is raised helps tell me if I did a decent job in raising my own children." Other unique aspects of Thomas were being raised in a low SES home, and the experiences gained from his service in the military. Thomas's accomplishments and life lessons were often used as a motivator for his students to do well in school. Reflecting on his childhood, Thomas shared "I saw first-hand how not having [a high school diploma] forced my father into menial, low-paying jobs all of his life."

Going through the collaborative autobiography process allowed Thomas to "realize that there are other teachers or professionals in education that are not as strong as they portray themselves in public." Thomas realized that although the group shared common stressors, he reacted to these same stressors "quickly and decisively," which "allowed me to see that I am much stronger than I think I am." Thomas also appreciated learning how the different backgrounds of the group indicated how they would react to stress. This realization caused a change in Thomas as he began to "listen without judging, or comparing, when someone wants to talk about what causes them stress." The collaborative autobiography process allowed Thomas to look at his school director differently and to conclude "I can see that she is trying to be fair to us, and I respect her for that, and having realized her intentions, my stress and anger are way down."

Thomas felt the collaborative autobiography process was similar to therapy and shared, "Knowing intimate details of someone's past allows people like me … to meet them and talk to them, and listen to them, and I enjoy that." Thomas benefitted from working with all the participants, but mentioned that because his goal was to become a principal, he especially benefitted from listening to the principal in the group share his

life story and stresses. Thomas reflected, "The only way I can learn about the stress they're going through is to listen to people like him."

Thomas appreciated reflective writing as a venue of releasing stress:

I enjoyed [the written reflection;] for me, they are a way to let out, vent some steam, in a way that's very useful for me, and also allows me to tell my story, and the way I look at things and the way I interpret things…. So, reflective writing allows me to vent in a safe mode, and it makes me feel better.

Thomas acknowledged that, although he shared many stressful events throughout the reflective process, there were other life events that he did not share with the group. One such event, brought out in an interview, was his regret that he feared job interviews and consequently, may have cheated himself out of potential career opportunities. Thomas shared, "Sometimes I would tell my wife that I wish I could go back and somehow find the courage to face an interview…. What would have been the worst thing that could have happened?" Although unable to change his personal history, Thomas reflected that those past experiences could aid him in assisting the "roughly 36 percent of … teachers [who] feel the effects of stress all of the time."

Cindy

Cindy is a Caucasian female in her early forties, and serves as the School Improvement Facilitator at Atticus Parks High School. Prior to teaching, Cindy traveled overseas and participated in archaeological digs, and served two years as an English teacher in the Peace Corps. Cindy's formal education consists of a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology, and a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Cindy is currently

enrolled as a doctoral student in an educational leadership program at a university in the Southwestern United States.

Atticus Parks High School is located in a medium sized city in Central Texas, and serves almost 2,500 students. Nearly 75% of the student population is Hispanic, with Whites comprising 10%, African Americans 10%, and other races 5% of the school's students. Approximately 78% of the students receive some form of assistance, including free or reduced lunch. Similar to many modern high schools, Atticus Parks is departmentalized and consists of six learning academies, with each led by a triad of leadership that consists of an Assistant Principal, an academy counselor, and an academy coordinator. The racial breakdown of teachers at Atticus Parks is predominantly White, with a smaller Hispanic representation, and "a few African-American faculty members." Atticus Parks averages a 20% annual teacher turnover rate.

Cindy describes the school climate as a dichotomy of two camps, with one camp practicing innovative classroom techniques, while the other camp relies on traditional direct teaching methods. According to Cindy, advocates of the innovative class approach use instructional "techniques that turns the learning over to the students … [which leads to] the inevitable erosion of the teacher centered classroom." Cindy reports that "Student achievement is soaring…. More students are graduating, more students are passing state assessments on the first try, [and] many students are completing dual credit and AP credit courses." Cindy also believes that a less positive aspect of the school's climate is "teachers realizing that we must bear the stress of our students' failures [and] not only their successes."

As the school improvement facilitator, Cindy does not have the archetypal school day of other teachers. Cindy "step[s] in as needed for Biology classes … tutor[s] students, and participate[s] in curriculum development." She also focuses on "leading teaching for teachers" and reacts to the various needs of the campus on a daily basis. Because she has multiple duties and is frequently asked to assume administrative duties, Cindy reflects, "I think my job title should be 'putting out fires facilitator'…. I really need to put a sign up on my door that says 'official fire put-er-outer.'"

Cindy's educational platform is based on the premise that "education is a tool to give people the most assets to be successful," but is not necessarily the great equalizer. Cindy does believe a good education helps people gain better insight into the structure of their world, and provides "benefits of seeing the whole picture." The learning environment at Atticus Parks resonates with Cindy's educational platform: "Classes are open to visitors, students are verbal and active participants in their learning, and most teachers strive to have student choice in the work that they do."

With a high value on collegiality, Cindy believes that personalities are important, but it is adamant that passion must reside in education. Cindy argues that "A teacher who does not have a passion for their subject and their students shortchanges the students." Cindy realizes that, in addition to passion, an understanding of one's subject and instructional skills are critical for success. Cindy has a familial relationship with her students, even to the point of skyping her mother in the classroom, "The kids, my students, are a part of my life." Recalling a former ninth grade teacher who inspired her, "I'll be like Mr. [Ashmore]; I'm not going to remember all their names, but at least they know that I care."

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Cindy is quick to share stories of her "kids" successes. From a Middle Eastern student befriending a local student and helping him with calculus, to pictures of a multi-cultural conglomerate of students proudly posing for a picture in front of a display they just made. Cindy proudly looks on and cherishes the better part of what our schools can do.

Autobiography, Phase I: Cindy Reflects on Work Stress and its Effects

Cindy was quick to acknowledge that her approach to education resulted in high levels of stress. Cindy believed that the required passion in education should be coupled with an unwavering sense of responsibility for the students' progress. As a source of stress, Cindy cited "adults who don't meet the minimum expectation of the profession," including teachers not reading and responding to emails or submitting grades in a timely manner. Because of her position at Atticus Parks, Cindy felt she had to cover for the low performing teachers. Cindy stated, "I should not have to do more because you do less…. That's been my stress in the past; I have expectations that others don't meet or won't meet." This lack of conformity to do what is expected within the staff created stress for Cindy and led to the conclusion that the students were getting cheated out of what they needed.

A second source of stress was what Cindy referred to as the educational equivalent of "the helpless husband", the person doing a poor job washing the laundry so he would not have to do laundry again. The wife now does the laundry "because it's just easier than having to show him how again." In the educational setting, Cindy was the "wife" who was doing the work for some of her colleagues. Cindy felt stress that the "helpless husband" in education was not required to learn the necessary skills.

An additional source of stress for Cindy was a lack of money, which caused her to moonlight to make ends meet. According to Cindy, for each pay raise she received from the school district, a corresponding hike in insurance and taxes resulted in her making less money each month. Cindy lamented, "I have to work a second job…. and I'm still taking home $300 less than when I first started working here [seven years ago]."

A tremendous source of stress for Cindy was witnessing students suffer from parental decisions to take them off of needed medication, not monitoring the results of injuries sustained in sports, and most tragically, the death of a student. Cindy shared her darkest moment that occurred soon after one of her students opened up in class and had a wonderful informal conversation with five other students. Cindy recalled, "We had a great day." Tragically, that student committed suicide over the weekend, on his eighteenth birthday. Although the school had a tribute for the deceased student, Cindy was shocked that the death of an "African American boy…. didn't even make the news…. he wasn't a big enough story…. God dang that was a bad day…. he was such a valuable kid, but it did not make a big enough ripple for the community." Cindy continued that "we lose someone every year," and felt conflicted with how some students dealt with the passing of fellow students. Aside from t-shirts made to commemorate the passing of a student, Cindy was deeply disturbed at what she witnessed at a rosary for a student who had committed suicide.

> The kid … took his own life, put a gun in his mouth, and shot himself, and they
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> had an open casket…. the kids were taking pictures [of the casket] with their
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> cellphones…. and the kids are taking verses from the suicide note…. they have

become so desensitized…. they were acting inappropriate…. That's what really told me something is wrong.

It was not surprising that Cindy was annoyed when teachers would tell the students that school was not the real world, "These kids live in the real world."

Cindy expressed some stress over her desire to perform well for her Principal: "I really admire and respect him, and I want to do a good job for him; that's the stress I feel." Cindy reported a very strong rapport with her principal and half-jokingly shared a conversation she had with him and one of his favorite "taglines" to her, "Did you go to sleep last night knowing that you did everything you could for that student?" Cindy appreciated being able to discuss issues with her principal, but the question about doing everything possible reflected her deep concern for students, and she internalized on a daily basis the issue of whether she really had done all she could for the students. Cindy shared, "We all take that question so seriously that we are now all stressed out…. Oh my God, did I do enough for Bill?.... Is Bill ok?.... Now, Bill circles your head."

The effects of stress led Cindy to adopt unhealthy work habits, overeat, and smoke. Because she was busy putting out fires, she had little time to do anything other than work. Similar to Thomas, Cindy did not want to take her stress out on others. Instead, Cindy took a different approach and reflected that "I use humor to mask annoyances or things that make me sad…. I typically deal with stress through eating and smoking…. It's easy to eat your feelings rather than blow up." Although Cindy tried to quit smoking, the pressures and stresses of her current environment caused her to retreat back to her original methods of dealing with stress. The passion that Cindy found desirable in teaching often led her to take ownership for things beyond her control.

Cindy shared, "Every single thing at school feels to be top importance and demands the highest attention." Upon reflecting, Cindy knew "I am not handling my stress well…. I am still overeating and still smoking."

A previous response to stress was drinking, but after suffering negative physical reactions to alcohol, Cindy was forced to abstain from drinking. Although Cindy liked the high intensity of her job, she also understood that many aspects of her job created stress. "I like that quick decision making where it will work itself out. And it's sometimes better than what was originally planned. Or sometimes it's more effective and useful in people's lives." Cindy reflected, "It's an addiction to the stress itself…. I like quickly putting out the fire, being the go to person…. It's a little bit of an ego boost."

Autobiography, Phase II: Cindy Reflects on Her Past and its Influence on the Present

Cindy was the youngest of six children in a merged family, and became determined to continue her education after her older sister became pregnant and stayed at home. Self-described as "the anomaly in my family," Cindy was the first to graduate from college. Her ninth-grade Earth Science teacher served as an inspiration for Cindy to consider teaching. Cindy described him as "engaging, charismatic, intelligent, and [he] fascinated us with science…. he was awesome." This positive experience shifted Cindy's focus from meteorology to earth science. With a strong need to interact with others Cindy took education courses and majored in anthropology.

Cindy's love of science inspired her to move to Mexico and participate on an archaeological dig. While in Mexico, Cindy "loved being in a foreign culture … loved learning every day … [and] having a distinct knowledge about something and applying

it." After returning to the United States, Cindy experienced a culture shock and made a two year commitment to the Peace Corps and served in Armenia and Russia. Upon her return to the States, Cindy "was having a difficult time readjusting to the American culture," and followed the advice of two childhood friends who were educators and started to substitute teach. After subbing for a high school earth science class, Cindy decided to pursue a career in teaching.

After teaching Earth Science and Oceanography for seven years, Cindy accepted the position of science department chair. This change in responsibilities provided Cindy with an in-depth understanding of "the bigger picture, the stress of accountability, growth of students, the needs of teachers, the demands of the community, and how to balance that with high professional expectations." Cindy had become an "other," and this change in roles resulted in "fewer invites to happy hours, fewer opportunities to just vent, even fewer opportunities to celebrate what was going right." Cindy experienced an exponential growth in stress while she served as chair; she felt responsible for the teachers' failures but not their successes. Cindy stated, "I was not able to balance what my influence was with what my responsibilities were."

After serving as the science chair for two years, Cindy moved to a different school and became the "fifth department chair for science in five years." Cindy again felt ownership for the actions of "teachers who were okay with the minimum." After one year, Cindy became an academy coordinator, and although still stressed, felt more control in her ability to support and influence students and teachers in their responsibilities. Cindy eventually became the school improvement facilitator at her school. Reflecting on

this role, Cindy lamented, "I now have the stress of the school…. my stress now lies in relying on others."

In her position as improvement facilitator, Cindy was called on to address varied and complex issues as they arose. Cindy recounted, "I've been called as early as four in the morning; 'can you be here in twenty minutes?'" When asked about her work routine, Cindy responded "No, I have ordered chaos, and I like that…. I don't like to work to the wire, but I do like to work in a high intensity kind of area."

Autobiography, Phase III: Cindy Reflects on Systems that Cause or Contribute to Her Stress

In prior years as a content or core teacher, Cindy experienced stress with standardized tests, and reflected on the disparity of stress between core and non-core teachers. If students did not perform well on exams, punitive measures were implemented. Cindy stated, "It's a very unique stress. If you don't teach content or don't teach core, you don't understand the stress you get with that; where if your kids fail, we lose art; if your kids fail, we lose PE; if we fail this, we're going to be taken over."

Cindy was not opposed to testing, but felt that standardized tests did not provide a complete evaluation of student achievement. Cindy shared,

> I think that accountability is helpful, it's a baseline, but it's not the only data point
> that we should look at…. I want to make sure we are … mining data from the
> school, mining data from systems, technology systems, and finding ways to
> ensure that every kid is seen…. I don't think it's fair that we have one test that
> determines a student's life.

It was the gaps and flaws in systems rather than the systems per se that caused Cindy stress. Cindy emphasized the importance of gaining a holistic understanding of students' needs and implementing procedures to ensure their success in school, but cited examples of student data disappearing in the system to the detriment of the student. One system issue cited was the inability of her school to receive End of Course (EOC) exam information on new students. Cindy recalled, "There's a kid that came in here, and she has no tests listed in her transcripts…. so, we're getting ready to do four weeks of remediation for the core." Upon further investigation, Cindy found that the required student data from the district office had not been transferred to her school. Cindy added, "We're finding this for thirty to forty kids…. That's kids' lives, and the district downtown is like, oh yeah, we forgot to push a button." The ramification for "forgetting to push a button" was students forced to take remedial classes unnecessarily.

People within the systems who did not do their part for the success of the students continued to serve as a source of stress for Cindy. Cindy argued, "Each person is responsible for their work to make the systems in a school run." Regarding systems designed to monitor student credits, results of exams, applications for college, and financial aid, Cindy shared, "My frustration level is through the roof." Part of the system required school counselors to review graduation requirements and submit reports ensuring that students were enrolled in the right courses. However, half of the school counselors did not update student records in a timely manner, resulting in some students placed in erroneous classes.

Cindy shared an example of a counselor taking seven weeks to change a student's schedule, "Seven weeks, that's an act of pure laziness…. That's not an act of oversight."

The flaw in the system forced Cindy to "unravel the stack of excuses to get to the work, and then do additional work that they did not complete…. this causes me stress." Cindy stated, "My stress lies in the system that allows them to push blame away from themselves." Cindy also cited counselor training programs in Texas as being deficient, based on the quality of counselors she worked with at her school.

An additional source of stress for Cindy was what she perceived as the gaps in teacher preparation reflecting a swing of the pendulum from being too student centered and neglecting the curriculum to being overly focused on the curriculum and forgetting that students were human. Cindy reflected, "They may have suffered loss…. They may die on us…. A teacher may die on them…. We wait to talk about horrible things until after they've happened. Cindy further pointed out the necessity of these conversations occurring in the classroom rather than after a traumatic event, sending students to "emergency counselors [who] have no idea who your kids are."

Autobiography, Phase IV: Cindy Reflects on Her Preferred Future Regarding Dealing with Stress

Cindy expressed some uncertainty at how she would address her current stress levels and considered the possibility that what she shared with the group could have been just venting on methods of dealing with stress, or her way of expressing that she did not want to confront the stress. Cindy acknowledged,

> I take ownership of things that I sometimes cannot change…. I believe that is where my stress lies…. I cannot control the actions of others, and must realize that allowing them to create stress for me is not beneficial to my work…. It's nice to be the go to person, and I don't mind being Wikipedia and having some

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knowledge, but not being wikiworks…. I want to be available to assist with what

you're doing, but I don't want to do your work…. I've got to figure out that

bridge.

Cindy did not express any desire to become an administrator, but enjoyed the grey

area she occupied between teachers and administrators. Cindy stated,

I like having a role that students can count on you, and teachers can count on you

… And you show up, even if you're sick, you show up…. Like having that

satisfying moment that they know that you can be counted on.

Cindy concluded that part of her preferred future needed to include better eating

habits. One measure initiated was replacing sodas with water in the morning. Cindy

reflected that this change was "such a small thing, but I have found that I am not as

ramped up in the morning after drinking a twenty ounce coke…. I am more even in my

dealings in the morning and not as frenetic." Other changes included quitting smoking,

placing limits on her interruptions throughout the day, and changing the context of her

environment by clarifying "for others, what is expected of them, and how it benefits our

common work." Better work management and "identifying clear time lines and limits of

my accessibility" could limit the number of interruptions each day, and decrease the

likelihood of feeling compelled to take smoke breaks. Because her free time was so

limited, Cindy planned "to be more discriminate of how my free time is used" and take

vacations over the winter break rather than working as she would customarily do.

Cindy stated that the collaborative autobiography process helped her better

understand that people did not always understand her unstated expectations: "I'm going

to tell them exactly what I mean…. Don't sugarcoat it, it's not going to hurt anybody's feelings…. So, [this] helps me be more aligned with what needs to be done for our kids."

Prior to participating in the collaborative autobiography process, Cindy was aware that her reactions to stress were not healthy, but the process served as an outlet for her stress and helped her conclude, "I'm choosing to be overwhelmed…. I work for rewards, but I don't always reward myself appropriately…. So, I don't need someone to tell me how to manage my stress, I need others to help me reward myself." Cindy placed great value on the people she worked with, but having these people help her with her preferred future was questionable

> I do have people … but it's not always worked for maintenance … you know,
> social related…. But, I don't trust, and I think that's just in general…. People are
> very protective, and I think because of the systems public education deals with….
> I don't trust a lot of people at work.

Still, Cindy reflected that she had friends at work who would read her papers and comment on what she could add to them. These friends knew her history, and Cindy considered asking this select group of confidants to assist her with her preferred future.

Cindy Reflects on the Collaborative Autobiography Process

Cindy shared that "Beginning the process of collaborative autobiography was uncomfortable." Although assured of confidentiality, Cindy still wished to "protect the anonymity of my campus." In addition, Cindy found that "it was difficult discussing feelings, stress, and its effects on my health." Although Cindy found the collaborative meetings helpful, she found more common ground with the study group's administrators, "I truly found that I have more in common with those who have begun taking a

leadership role in education." Cindy realized that she could not take on all the extra duties and projects in her school and stated, "Hearing that others feel that they can sometimes walk away from the work gives me realization that I can as well."

Cindy stated, "I really loved meeting the other participants." She enjoyed sharing the process with the group and realized that she would enjoy working with them in the future: "Hey, you want to open a Charter school? Let's open a Charter school." Cindy shared positive feedback on the other participants, and regarding one participant, she stated "He's got the eye on the prize" (referring to the possibility of a fellow student opening a charter school in the future). She found value in each participant, and believed all participants had benefitted from the process. "You can tell everybody grew this semester." Cindy recommended the collaborative autobiography process for

> people who are teachers right now…. It has to be somebody working in some
> capacity of education…. Whether that capacity is an administrator, a teacher, or
> … even a janitor…. I would love to hear a janitor's perspective…. Anybody's
> perspective on students and what they see."

Cindy shared her thoughts on reflective writing and said "I like it, and I don't like it." This mixed emotion was based in balancing achievements with humility and thankfulness. Cindy stated,

> So, I like reflective writing because it's making me think … I had forgot that I
> did that…. And then the other parts are like, oh my God, it makes you look, oh
> look how great you are … it's hard to develop that balance.

Cindy reflected on the group meetings and stated "I like the meetings…. It's nice to see people from different groups, and it's nice to hear their stories." Cindy added that the

group members asked probing questions of each other that went beyond the surface. By discussing the reflective writings in a collaborative setting, "People are getting a chance to … think about stuff deeper than what they wrote…. I think that's … helpful in learning about their stresses."

Cindy stressed the importance of teacher reflection and stated, "If we're choosing not to reflect, how can we ask the kids to reflect? .... Everyone has something to fix." Cindy concluded that one outcome of the study that the group shared in common was developing the ability to say "no" to additional duties and tasks.

Cindy found that the collaborative autobiography strengthened her understanding that her stress was not caused by the students, but by her interaction with and expectations of other adults. Cindy argued, "I have to be more upfront with people when I say 'this is what I need from you, and if you're not giving me this, this is where our stress will come'…. So, the adults need to have clear communication." Cindy was also able to differentiate the varying sources of her stress, most particularly educators not doing their job. "[If] they choose not to [do their work], it's not my fault; it is not my stress."

Upon reflecting on the collaborative autobiography, Cindy mentioned that "It's nice to see that other adults were [upset] at other adults [at their schools]." Cindy reflected that the process helped her understand that "you can be a reflective practitioner, you can be a reflective person…. It helped me see, well, I'm doing that to myself." Cindy also reflected on how the group dynamics and variance of work roles within the group allowed her to see both similarities and differences among educators at different career stages.

Adam

Adam is a Caucasian male in his mid-thirties, and serves as the Academic

Program Director at the Carolyn Chen residential treatment facility for troubled youth.

Prior to this position, Adam served as an assistant principal and teacher. Adam's formal

education consists of a Bachelor's degree in Science and a Master's degree in

Educational Leadership. Adam is currently enrolled as a doctoral student in an

educational leadership program at a university in the Southwestern United States.

Carolyn Chen treatment facility serves almost 200 national and international

students. The school not only focuses on the psychiatric and emotional needs of its

students, but also strives to provide a rigorous academic education. The entire student

population is considered at risk, with many of the students "abruptly taken from their

familiar surroundings and placed into a group living situation with other special needs

adolescents." Not surprising, tremendous pressure is placed on the staff of forty, and

with such pressure, teacher turnover rate is considered extremely high.

Adam reacts quickly to teacher and student issues, and typically works sixty hours

a week. Many of Adam's administrative duties pertain to "putting out fires," and

providing mentoring and training to teachers who may lose focus and forget that "kids are

placed at our school for treatment purposes first, and have a plethora of problems and

symptoms to overcome." Because of the diverse student needs, the "group living

situation can be very difficult as each student is usually diagnosed with an unrelated

condition." Learning gaps are common, and many of Carolyn Chen's teachers must

teach multiple lesson plans daily for the varied skill groups. Along with learning gaps

and psychiatric issues, classroom management is a tremendous issue that often results in corrective actions.

Adam is quick to describe his leadership style as "a very top down approach, with power coercive efforts to stifle teachers." As abrupt as this may sound, Adam's philosophy is grounded in the well-being of the students, and Adam is quick to note that although he is very direct, he strives to be very professional and deliver his input "grounded at the very basic level of dignity and respect." Not surprising, tremendous stress is placed on the teachers "because they can't teach critical skills that the demanding population really needs…. There is a high turnover rate for teachers due to the inflexible and non-creative approaches that teachers are allowed to teach."

Adam's educational platform recognizes that each student is unique and has individual needs. There is not a "one size fits all model," but rather, each student receives an individualized learning plan that is reviewed and updated as the child progresses. Adam oversees a school with small classes and a blend of cooperative group work, direct teach, and online learning that is modified to enable students "to progress at a rate that is comfortable for their learning style." Central to Adam's educational platform is the goal that all students gain self-worth, develop intrinsic motivation to be their best, reach their potential, and successfully reintegrate into society and be productive members of their communities. Mindful that not all students are destined for college, Adam has created a modular system where the older students are afforded the opportunity to earn certifications in food handling or cosmetology that may lead to employment once they leave Carolyn Chen. To help motivate students and instill a sense of self-worth, Adam encourages the teachers to "celebrate every success for these kids….

like the first passing grade they ever made…. good behavior…. celebrate everything." In addition, Adam believes that teachers need positive reinforcement and uses handwritten notes to show appreciation.

Adam urges his teaching staff to exercise a resilient commitment and dedication in serving the students and discerning their needs. He strives to create a level playing field because he believes each student is "entitled to a quality education no matter what circumstances brought him or her to this unique environment." And without an educational approach that values the individuality of the each student, Adam has observed that "many students just give up." His platform does not just rest on his personal ideals, but requires parental and community support as well as a student-centric focus from the staff. Adam states his ultimate goal as reducing "recidivism by providing students with social and emotional supports, work place skills, and the ability to achieve their highest potential." A primary focus for achieving this goal is for teachers to remember to "stop the class…. have a little group with them and check in…. develop the human connection" Adam reflects, "You're really not going to have good classroom management skills unless you connect with those kids on a personal level."

Autobiography, Phase I: Adam Reflects on Work Stress and its Effects

Adam described himself as "a very direct person [who] is sometimes blunt." Adam also understood the necessity of empathy "to see other peoples' perspective and not just [your] own." Because of high expectations and being tasked oriented, Adam often placed high expectations on co-workers to match his drive and work ethic. The end result was often a lot of stress because "I took on everything because I wanted to get things done right." Adam reflected that although there were many things that he was not

responsible for in his school, he still felt accountable for these responsibilities. "So, my accountability level is to perfection." Aside from the added stress and "many sleepless nights," Adam lamented that his relationship with colleagues suffered due "to the fact that I did not respect them for not always placing 100% in their craft." Adam acknowledged that the effects of stress at his school resulted in "friction [and] condescending tones and voices [and] no collaboration within the team if the team is stressed."

Due to the psychiatric and emotional needs of the students at Carolyn Chen, it was not surprising that teachers were a source of stress for Adam. Adam stated, "the drama that teachers bring to what I portrayed to be a safe learning community … was extremely stressful to me." Adam confided that some teachers brought their personal problems to the classroom and exacerbated the learning environment by taking their frustrations out on the students. Thus, the "staff not interacting appropriately with the patients" was a primary source of conflict at his school, and in turn, Adam felt forced "to counsel teachers on their role in a professional workplace."

Due to the frequency of these events, tremendous stress was created for Adam as well as other school administrators, with one assistant principal quitting prior to annual state testing. Adam was forced to assume the responsibilities of the absent administrator, and as he recalled, "this was by far the most stressful week of being an administrator."

Much of Adam's stress derived from concentric circles of influence, with the corporate circle mandating results due to Carolyn Chen being a "hospital" as well as "a profit business." Adam felt another circle of influence that caused stress was the parental reaction to conflicts between teachers and students. Adam reported a third circle of

influence was his hectic schedule, made particularly difficult by his need to retain and supervise teachers who were involved in conflicts with students. Following these conflicts, Adam was required to "explain to the treatment team [doctors, nurses, managers, and diagnosticians] what happened and why it happened." At the conclusion of these meetings, Adam faced concerned parents and had to explain that the parents were correct in their concerns, and that issues would be addressed immediately. Adam shared,

> There's a lot of pressure from parents because you're constantly on the phone
> with them, trying to reassure them that everything is ok…. I feel strongly in that
> customer service is my number one priority, and our kids and their respective
> guardians are the customers…. This stress can be detrimental to the hospital and
> its operation.

With multiple customers to please, Adams' work management was a source of stress: "I was trying too much, and that would stress me out to the max." To compound his stress, Adam's administrative demands occasionally interrupted his workout schedule, which served as a primary stress relief. In Adam's words, "When I exercise, everything's Kosher…. If I don't exercise, I'll be stressed that day."

Autobiography, Phase II: Adam Reflects on His Past and its Influence on the Present

Adam reflected that his life history was a mosaic of various "phases and pieces to a mysterious puzzle." Perhaps the first internal stressor of Adam's life was the father he never knew. Born overseas, Adam immigrated to the United States at the age of five and learned English in public schools. His mother remarried, and as Adam recalled,

I have a peculiar memory growing up; something strange…. I did not know the

meaning of "step-dad" until I was in high school…. I always thought that the

person who raised me my entire young life was my real dad.

Adam reflected that he had no desire to contact his biological father, but noted that this

aspect of his early life led him to work with students with insufficient support in their

lives. After fifteen years of working with at-risk students, Adam recalled, "It is a stressor

in itself, but the pure joy of seeing these students better themselves is truly rewarding."

As Adam grew up, he realized the "impeccable study skills and educational clout"

of his immediate family, most particularly, his mother. Adam attributed his approach to

life to his mother and grandmother's commitment to education, as well as the strong

value he also placed on education and success. Appreciative of the organizational skills

that were instilled in him, Adam eventually sought "to do something for myself without

parental support."

Shortly after graduating from high school, Adam enlisted in the Army. After

completing a series of very strenuous training regimens, Adam became a non-

commissioned officer and a qualified combat medic. Adam reflected that while in the

military he had little choice on where he would go or who he would work with.

Reflecting on his role as a combat medic, Adam stated, "I did not like it at all…. it was

non-routine [and] I'm a routine person." Adam reflected on the importance of routines in

his life and connected the need for routine with the students at his school. According to

Adam,

I see what they went through in their struggles…. When I was younger, my

parents were poor…. I went to bed hungry, so I can relate to these kids and how

they are…. The only constant in their life is being here and being on a routine…. there is little to no family influence.

Adam valued his military service as well as the diversity within the ranks, "You don't have to like everybody, but you … need to be able to respect people and learn to work together." Adam acknowledged that even though the military shaped his leadership style, a key event in our country's history solidified Adam's decision to leave the military and pursue education. As Adam recalled, "Many people say that September 11, 2001 changed their lives…. It was the most pivotal day in my life to this point." The prospect of going to war put his "life in perspective…. it was a wake-up call to me … I was living my life with no future plans." Adam received an honorable discharge from the Army and pursued education with the goal of "serving underprivileged students." Adam's departure from the military demonstrated an evolution of self that forced him to question his professional future as well as his religious beliefs.

As Adam pursued his formal education, he became inactive in the religion of his youth. Adam reflected that being forced to attend religious activities in his childhood and adolescence played a key role in his decision to become inactive in religion. Though this inactivity proved to be a source of stress between Adam and his family, it "[made] my job enjoyable due to not meshing religion with education."

Adam's history provided multiple perspectives that allowed him to identify with students who came from broken homes or were raised by single parents. Although Adam's parents divorced while he was in the military, he borrowed from the love of his step-father and the strength of his mother to understand that his professional trajectory was toward "students [who] experienced some of their same family dynamics."

Adam's history and the adoption of key attributes of his role models helped shape how he interacted with others, what served as sources of stress for him, and how he reacted to stress. Although Adam expressed deep respect for his mother, he also noted that she lacked empathy. This absence of empathy may have provided Adam a strengthened resolve to be task oriented, and put family as a second priority after professional and educational success. Adam noted the importance of empathy early in the collaborative autobiography process, but expressed an enhanced empathy for teachers after the collaborative autobiography was completed. Seeking to understand his world with varying perspectives led Adam to reflect, "I strive to look through different lenses to see the big picture, and not just the way that others want me to see things…. The aspect that causes me the most stress is being uncomfortable."

Autobiography, Phase III: Adam Reflects on Systems that Cause or Contribute to His Stress

Adam was sensitive to national, state, and local systems that "let kids slip through the cracks…. There's a huge school to prison pipeline." Adam cited one of the flaws in many systems was "we tend to not let things marinate." Adam further stated that part of the problem was that people succumb to the systems; "they themselves…are part of a system…. you can be an effective part of the system, or you can start your own system." Adam reflected on "hyper accountability" and high stakes testing as sources of stress for school leaders. In his work environment, Adam reflected that high stakes testing was "geared at test taking and not community asset building, or developing critical thinkers in our schools."

Another source of stress for Adam was the understanding that the much needed community support and community response efforts necessary to build a healthy learning community for the students was not happening. Adam considered student-community relationship building critical for student preparation for an entry into the workforce. Adam lamented that "Student accountability is often presented in performance measure data and achievement scores, with little weight measured through rapport or quality-of-life learning."

As a unique learning environment housed in a residential treatment center, the students at Carolyn Chen were grouped by diagnosis rather than grade level. The multiple skill levels of the students added tremendous stress to the teachers who focused on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and "[taught] classes with four or five lesson plans every hour." With a seventy-seven percent special education population, teachers and administrators were challenged to provide and execute individualized educational plans (IEPs) for each special education student. Due to the work load and need for widely differentiated instruction, many of the teachers at Carolyn Chen endured substantial stress, exacerbated by classroom management issues. Adam needed to devote significant time and energy to train and re-train teachers in classroom management techniques, and this was another source of stress. Adam noted that teachers often failed to understand that students at Carolyn Chen were grouped by diagnosis, not grade level, which provided additional stress for Adam as he taught teachers how to address this reality. Adam acknowledged that the system was flawed, but he felt powerless to change it.

Adam further stated that students with learning disabilities or behavior issues were placed in self-contained classrooms, and were still required to pass standardized tests. Adam reflected, "We are teaching to the test," but many of the students did not receive equal TAKS tutoring and learning opportunities. The result of this disparity of opportunities was the effect that students not in self-contained classrooms lagged behind their counterparts which further added stress to the staff at Carolyn Chen.

Autobiography, Phase IV: Adam Reflects on His Preferred Future Regarding Dealing with Stress

Adam stressed the importance of the ethical treatment of others as a central component of his plan for a preferred future. Adam stated, "Once I know about something, I can't unknow about something." This statement reflected Adam's realization of the stress his teachers were undergoing and his reluctance to delegate duties.

Adam's preferred future centered on his realization that he needed to "change the way I think about the process of stress and its causes and effects." After evaluating his job description, Adam determined that he needed to differentiate between required tasks and additional duties: "Often times, doing the extra in conjunction with completing the necessary, is when I really get stressed." According to Adam,

> I am in control of myself, and only myself…. I can't control others, and I can't place the burden of all stressors directly on my shoulders…. This is not healthy nor conducive to a healthy learning and working environment…. It is not healthy for my own personal self and growth…. How I choose to react to the stress is really the main issue.

The multiple customers that relied on Adam created the feeling of being overloaded and the accompanying stress. To combat this stress, Adam's plan called for a "triage of priorities and tasks." Understanding that he had developed a professional work ethic that did not include lunch breaks or disconnection from work during the day, Adam planned to implement short, frequent breaks to better negotiate the high stress environment he worked in. Another idea Adam discovered through reflective writing was the basic concept "that no matter how much I get done that day, there will always be more to do the following day." Adam planned to establish daily goals incorporated with the aforementioned frequent breaks from work to increase his efficiency while also experiencing "a little freedom." Adam believed that incorporating these few changes would reduce his stress while creating a healthier and more efficient self. Adam concluded that "slowly changing my thought processes will enable me to reduce my stress levels."

Adam understood that other people would need to help him for his preferred future to succeed. Including other people in his plan was a challenge for Adam due to his past practice of not delegating duties out of a fear of inferior results. Adam reflected that, prior to collaborative autobiography, many of his conversations with school staff centered on him "talking about directions, supervising them … it's never just like conversation.… I feel like it's to improve things, giving direction, or to supervise." Adam shared, "honestly, I didn't even [realize] that people are stressed out.… it's just a whole new lens for me.… [Now] I do look at how stressed people are, and what demands we are putting on them."

As a part of the change process, Adam planned to better utilize his resources and "begin to ask for assistance instead of taking the brunt of the workload." After determining what his required tasks were, Adam planned to better exercise the word "no" when additional duties were offered to him. Understanding the importance of exercise, Adam planned to create an exercise and sleep schedule around his workload. To measure the progress of his plan for a preferred future, Adam planned to run a continuous evaluation of his plan by gauging his stress levels.

Aside from personal change and the inclusion of others, Adam sought to change the school's work environment. Based on intrinsic motivation, Adam intended to create an equitable approach to worker management: "In creating a less stressful environment, and choosing to take breaks and reflecting, I must let others do the same." Understanding how his school's teachers suffered with stress, Adam reflected "I don't want people to be unsuccessful because I'm being overbearing or putting too much weight on them." Adam planned to model this change, and with the support of the school's CEO, implement reflective writing as a part of his personal and professional development. Given the personal nature of reflections, Adam planned to implement a voluntary sharing of reflective writing to "promote the welfare of all workers [and] to change the learning and working environment."

Adam Reflects on the Collaborative Autobiography Process

Adam appreciated each participant's unique journey in life, but also found similarities within the group. Adam reflected that "everyone in this space has ambition and drive." Furthermore, he noted that juggling full time jobs and going to school was a common stress. Adam also observed that, for all members of the group, adults rather

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than students were the source of stress.   Adam noted that he was unique in that, although he was a former teacher and administrator, his current position "as an administrator [and] liaison to the school that I used to work in" was unique to the group. The type of school, student population, and level of daily stress at his school, as well as his prior military training were additional factors Adam described as unique to the group.

Adam valued the group's input and stated "it allows me to hear other people's journeys … it allows me to see through other people's lenses…. it also lets me see their different paradigms."   Adam appreciated the various obstacles the other group members had to overcome, and "that everyone has some sort of hurdles." Adam respected the different lenses, and liked the idea that the group consisted of "different educational stature, hierarchy, teachers, [and] administrators."

Adam reflected, "this course helped me gain the understanding of dealing with issues before they become problematic and stressful for all," and described the collaborative autobiography process as "pretty invigorating and liberating…. I really enjoyed the class … it's almost like counseling…. It's good counseling." In addition, Adam stated that he enjoyed the guiding questions used by the group's facilitator, "they're probing, and they're de-probes that make you think, reflect, put a mirror in front of you and tell the truth…. It also allows me to be open in a safe environment."

The collaborative autobiography process allowed Adam to reconstruct his past in relation to his mother's past. Adam stated that his mother was "pretty hard, but she was ethically and morally sound." Adam recalled that his mother had left a job due to the unethical behavior of others at her job. Adam reflected that he too had left a job based on

ethics, and this life event "allowed me to connect my life story … it seem[ed] that I learned from the past."

Although Adam had a strong history of using reflective writing and thinking, the collaborative autobiography process allowed him to reframe his reflection with a focus on stress. Adam reported, "I also gained the perspective of each participant and they showed and explained [to] me [the] different ways that people exhibit and handle stress." More specifically, "I never thought to incorporate, hone in on, or evaluate stress levels of teachers, workers, or even myself." Adam realized that he had not witnessed school employees discussing stress, and stated "It really opened my eyes to the fact that stress needs to be communicated [and addressed] as it creates friction amongst all if not addressed properly." Adam understood that addressing stress might lower the high turnover rate at his school. Adam concluded that the collaborative autobiography process "opened up my eyes…. It incorporated writing and feeling, emotions, [and] understanding myself in order to understand others."

Charles

Charles is a Caucasian male, in his thirties, and serves as the principal at Malcolm Finn Middle School. Prior to this position, Charles served as an assistant principal and teacher. Charles' formal education consists of a Bachelor's degree in Speech Communication, a Master's degree in Speech Communication, and a Master's degree in Educational Administration. Charles is currently enrolled as a doctoral student in an educational leadership program at a university in the Southwestern United States.

Malcolm Finn Middle School is located in a metropolitan area of Central Texas and serves approximately 1,500 students. Nestled in a blended community of low,

middle, and high SES residential neighborhoods, Malcolm Finn's student ethnicity is White (50%), Hispanic (30%), African American (10%), Asian (5%), and mixed or other races (5%). Students considered economically disadvantaged comprise 20% of the student population with an equal percentage of students considered at risk. Approximately 66% of the teaching staff at Malcolm Finn has more than five years of teaching experience, while 8% percent of the teacher population is in its first year of teaching. Malcolm Finn Middle School currently has a 17% annual teacher turnover rate.

As a first-year principal, Charles serves in a changing school with low teacher morale resulting in part from poor relationships between the teachers and the former principal. With district initiatives that focus on child-centered education focused on student growth, excellence in teaching, use of technology, and creativity and innovation in schools, Charles faces the daunting challenge of developing a collegial staff while abiding to district initiatives. According to a recent school climate survey, Charles shares,

> Teachers did not feel supported, and the overall atmosphere was one of distrust and grumbling…. There was a lack of pride evident in the school, and [60% of the teachers] said they would not recommend for a friend to come work at the school.

Aside from the contention between teachers and their former principal, Charles recognizes that his students are very similar to students from other schools and primarily want to be respected and have their voices heard.

There is a distinct difference between Charles' ideal and typical day at school. His ideal day centers on visiting all classrooms, interacting with students, and attending

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department and planning meetings. Charles believes that a principal should be visible, circulate among the people, and participate in meetings to "help answer questions, review assessments, ask questions, and provide assistance to teachers based on data from common assessments." Charles' typical day includes visiting many classrooms and meetings, but is also subject to an abundance of administrative duties that include paperwork, budgeting, answering parent phone calls and emails, and planning for professional development. With an ever-increasing demand on his time, Charles reports that most of his workdays last eleven hours with additional time spent at school for evening events about once a week.

Charles' educational platform is based on the premise that "education should be about giving students tools for survival." These tools consist of allowing discovery in education and realizing that "if schools are to be student-centered, then students should have control of the learning environment" with the school curriculum focused on the whole child. Charles' responded to the question of what this curriculum should look like by commenting tongue in cheek, "The easy answer is that the government has already decided that for you, so there is no need to think about it." Still, Charles' educational platform calls for not getting "bogged down with tested areas and forgetting that other areas of interest are just as important to a well-rounded education."

To accomplish his platform, Charles feels that teachers should serve as facilitators in the creation of knowledge rather than dispersing agents of information. Charles believes that students should have individual education plans consistent with their "quest for knowledge" and progress towards content mastery with the aid of appropriate technology. Accompanying this vision is an emphasis on successful motivation of

students, which can best be served by arousing the curiosity to learn in students and abandoning "the antiquated system of bells and rooms [that] does not allow for extended exploration during the school day." In addition, a safe environment that meets the basic needs of the students is essential for the students to gain confidence, become risk takers, and "leap to new understandings."

Central to Charles' educational platform is the belief that the classroom teacher must exercise the cycle of "curriculum, instruction, and assessment" that captures the students' desire to learn more. To capture this qualitative aspect of student learning, the teachers must connect with the students, and not only inspire students, but also to "never limit what a student is capable of." Also essential to Charles' platform is the belief that students and parents must be able to gauge the learner's progress primarily through cooperative planning, reflection, and feedback. With emphasis on feedback, Charles reflects, "Without accurate data and data analysis, teachers cannot inform their instruction for individual students."

Autobiography, Phase I: Charles Reflects on Work Stress and its Effects

As a middle school principal, Charles negotiated many of the traditional stressors of administrators. Time management served as one of the greatest sources of stress for Charles. Although Charles routinely worked eleven or more hours a day, he rarely felt that he was able to accomplish all the tasks set before him. Charles noted that what he found most helpful regarding work management was "having someone competent on my staff that comes in my office and makes me do the tasks that need to get done." With the help of an efficient assistant principal and strong administrative assistant, Charles was

better able to focus on priorities and accomplish the "host of other items that need my time and attention."

A second source of stress for Charles was the school processes he inherited as a new principal. Charles reflected, "There are so many processes in the school…. much of my summer was consumed with just trying to get the building blocks in place so that we could begin the year." After the first half of the school year, Charles felt that he had made substantial progress, but saw no end to the processes he had to tackle. Hiring new teachers, staff development, and serving as the instructional leader on campus competed with his limited time for setting up the myriad assortment of academic, personnel, and safety procedures for his school.

Charles considered teachers as the greatest source of stress. Charles shared that "something I've been stressing to my teachers is … there's a certain level of accountability that we need to hold each other to." With clear expectations of the professional conduct teachers should emulate, Charles expressed great frustration with pointless conflict caused by poor decision making by some teachers. Charles cited unnecessary conflicts that arose between teachers, students, and parents as well as teachers late or absent for duty, teachers misrepresenting the school grading policy, or teachers using sarcasm in the classroom. Although Charles considered only a few of the teachers inflexible, he reflected, "a few can feel like many…. teachers are creatures of habit and have to constantly be supervised and reminded of new expectations before … a new culture is established of the way things are done."

Although most of Charles' interactions with parents were positive, he did experience stress on occasion when parents disagreed with school policy or "bypass the

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chain of command without even trying to work things out with me at the campus level [and]…. automatically take an issue to the superintendent." Most of the parental stress was avoided due to Charles' proactive approach of making "it a priority to contact parents promptly [to] get to the root of the issue." Still, occasional parent conflict resulted in significant stress for Charles. Charles shared a parent disagreement that resulted in a complaint filed with LULAC and the NAACP. Although this complaint added to Charles' litany of things to do, he devoted additional time to meet with the parent and felt progress was made.

At work, Charles felt stress when placed in a situation in which he had to make quick decisions without taking the desired time to fully reflect upon a situation. Charles noted that he felt that he had strong decision-making skills, but as an administrator, his decisions affected the entire school population and the surrounding community. Charles stated "I take that responsibility serious in that I really want to take time to make sure I'm making a good decision because it's going to affect many people."

This sense of ownership of school and community provided the darkest moment in Charles' career as an educator. Charles blamed himself for not being more present in the life of a former student who committed suicide. Although the student's family thanked Charles for being a great role model and asked him to speak at the funeral, Charles reflected,

I hadn't seen him in two years, and I felt guilt…. The guilt that this kid jumped, and I wasn't there for two years like I had been before, just maybe he just needed somebody to talk to…. So, it took me a while to get over that guilt that I placed on myself…. It's my personality and the ownership that I take with the kids.

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Charles lamented that the brunt of his stress was taken out on his family after a long day at work. Charles reflected that he chastised his wife for not having a clean house or having food ready on the table. According to Charles, "That was reality for me, and it took some self-reflection [to realize] that it wasn't fair to my wife; it wasn't fair to my kids, to be taking out my frustration and … stress on them."

To manage his stress, Charles used "meditation and a positive outlook on life" and listened to religious music on his drive to work. Charles shared that listening to religious music "[set the] tone for me before I even walk through the door." Charles also shared that, although his school experienced some student issues, "When I am with students, I can actually relax…. When I am in the classrooms asking questions and seeing what students are learning, it is a highlight for me." Although Charles expressed great love for his family and relished the time they were together, he also faced "the dilemma of who will I be a dad to today, my own two children at home, or the 100, 400, or 1,300 students at school that need a dad as well." Charles expressed thankfulness for being a doctoral student, but was quick to recognize that this additional responsibility added more stress to him and his family. Charles reflected, "Now I have to wear three hats: that of principal, father, and student…. There is never enough time in the day to do all three."

Autobiography, Phase II: Charles Reflects on His Past and its Influence on the Present

Raised in a small rural town, Charles was influenced by both of his parents "to live a certain way, act a certain way, [and] not disappoint the family." Charles' father was a former coach who emphasized physical fitness and competition to both of his sons.

As the younger son, Charles admired his brother's athletic abilities and considered him "a phenomenal athlete." Charles, on the other hand, "struggled at sports, not for lack of effort or lack of knowledge, but from lack of size." Fortunately, key positive moments in his early education helped Charles maintain his motivation to learn. Charles reflected "there were several key times that I felt like my education was the best I could get." One of these critical moments was in fifth-grade where his teacher allowed him to "pretty much let me do what I wanted." Charles embraced this self-directed learning and became a voracious reader. Hungry for knowledge, Charles learned how to write computer codes for video games, taught some of his school's teachers how to program in Basic, initiated a school newspaper, and was allowed to read approximately five novels to his fifth-grade class over the course of the year. Not surprising, Charles "blew the lid off the standardized test," but more than anything, Charles "was happy to go to school every day."

High school was a dynamic time for Charles. As a member of the band, Charles excelled in competitions and broadened his interests in multiple school activities. With oratory skills, Charles "entered debate, poetry, informative/persuasive speaking, and One Act play…. advancing to the regional and state level multiple years in various events." Looking back on his senior year, Charles reflected "I don't think I ever wanted to stop reading…. I would read a novel every other week." Charles recalled that his mother quit college due to the birth of his brother, but pushed Charles to excel with academics. Charles maintained his focus and thirst for education and graduated valedictorian of his class.

Charles' enthusiasm for learning carried over to college where he did well in his studies, worked full time in the restaurant industry, and excelled at baseball. Borrowing from his early childhood value of service to others, Charles joined multiple organizations and participated in many community activities including "working with boy scouts and girl scouts or events on campus…. blood drives and safety walks from the library, roadside cleanup, and service to the university when needed."

After graduating from college, Charles excelled in every aspect of the restaurant business. Similar to his approach to learning in school, Charles approached learning in the restaurant business with an intensity to do his best and improve the current situation. While a restaurant manager, Charles implemented his own computer software to assist with inventories, increase efficiency, assist training, and even provide tests for restaurant staff that would enable pay raises. Charles stated, "I attended training around the state to become the best in my profession…. Whether it was the menu, cleaning procedures, or scheduling, I went over every inch of the business and knew it like the back of my hand." At the age of 25, Charles was offered part-ownership in a restaurant. Charles declined the offer because he saw the "warning signs that the business would fail, because the current owners would not pay attention to the customer base." Also, the stress was enormous and "weighed on me and my recent marriage…. the day that I resigned, a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders."

While unemployed, Charles recalled seeing the televised attack on 9/11. His inspiration to join the Army was met with a different type of enthusiasm from his wife who "refused to turn over her birth certificate and our marriage certificate" and told him "stay or divorce." Charles elected to stay married and entered into teaching as another

method of serving the country. After subbing one year in an autism unit, Charles "fell in love with the profession" and became a teacher the following year. Charles reflected that his past "experiences have led me to my current position as a principal."

Charles believed that, although his past experiences fortified his desire to learn and be the best at what he did, there were negative side-effects to this drive. Charles stated that "when I was younger, I dealt with stress by taking it out on others…. I would have sudden bursts of rage." For relaxation, Charles turned to the outdoors and would "pray for peace." In college, Charles recalled an altercation with a guy who was bothering a girl at a fraternity party. What initiated as a conversation resulted in Charles "putting [the other guy's] head through a sheetrock wall…. About an hour later I was at home and just broke down…. I knew that I couldn't live my life like that any longer." Charles quit the party scene, lowered his alcohol consumption, and got married.

Charles reflected that while in the restaurant business "I was stressed 90% of the time." His compulsion to give 100% resulted in Charles suffering from "waiter nightmares…. a recurring dream that customers never stop coming." In addition to nightmares, Charles sleep-walked in the evening, "waiting tables, going in and out of the bathroom like it was the kitchen." Charles considered that he may have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and at the age of 24 was diagnosed with a stomach ulcer.

Charles summed up his life philosophy with one brief motto, "Live a life that begs a question." Charles understood that his desire to always win and do his best created a lot of stress. As a coach, Charles "hated to lose … [and] would replay every loss similar to a waiter nightmare." After becoming an assistant principal, Charles reflected that "there

were times that my stomach would churn…. mainly when dealing with upset parents that were unreasonable." As a principal, Charles reflected that although there was stress, "the stress is much different…. I have had relatively few sleepless nights." Charles recognized that his career "has taken center stage," and that his family suffered because of his absence and workload. But the things Charles worked hardest for were his sources of support and relaxation. Those sources were "spending time with my family, spending time in classrooms and with kids, and spending time talking with friends."

Autobiography, Phase III: Charles Reflects on Systems that Cause or Contribute to His Stress

Charles reflected that the root cause of his stress was "a little of all the systems that contribute to education…. to include the national, state, community, district, and campus levels." Charles found,

> the biggest obstacle in education is the mold that's been set for the last 100
>
> years…. Getting educators and parents out of that mold…. It's not the kids, the
>
> kids are flexible, and amenable, and want to do things different…. trying to beat
>
> out an antiquated system that [has] been rooted into them for … years, they just
>
> can't see out of the box of how different education can be…. Once we can break
>
> out of that mold, good things will happen in education.

Charles acknowledged that the systems in which education operated competed with class systems that traced back to the founding of our country.

Charles cited adults as his greatest source of stress and attributed several systems as root causes of this behavior. Charles stated,

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Adult stress comes in different roles…. some of it comes from government

institutions, whether it be federal, state or local level policies that put undue

burden on administrators…. to make our job more complicated…. Teachers are

by far my biggest stressor because I don't feel that we've organized the profession

to be professionals.

Charles further stated his frustration with the systems utilized for teacher preparation and

certification. Charles cited an example of a billboard on the side of the road that read:

"Want to be a teacher? When can you start?'" Charles expressed that the current system

of teacher preparation allowed people to "jump into a profession" without being "crafted

in a profession through your studies, your mentoring, and your completion of rigorous

assessments." Charles concluded that teachers entering the profession were ill-prepared

to lead classrooms.

Charles cited the ramifications of ill-prepared teachers:

Teachers are so blinded by status-quo that they do not see the harmful effects of

bad teaching…. they do not see the inherent "losers" that are recipients of bad

teaching because of a broken system of putting people in positions that they are

incapable of being successful in…. it should not come as a surprise that the

minority, low SES population is, across the board, behind in just about every

category.

Charles believed that better teacher preparation could improve race relations and cultural

awareness on his campus. Charles reflected,

Seeing groups of African-American students, and [teachers] automatically

jumping to conclusions that, oh, those kids must be up to something because

they're loud, or they seem to be a little animated, so something is fixing to

happen…. Why don't you go talk to them?

Charles shared "I think when I can get my school or my district to do something that is

against the status quo, then I think I will have accomplished something significant."

Charles identified teacher evaluations as a source of stress and lamented that

evaluations and walk-throughs "cut off communication more than they open lines of

communication…. the best way for me to move teachers on my campus in the right

direction is just open conversation…. [teachers] are very defensive about just being

judged in general." Charles felt that the teacher and student assessments that result from

standardized tests were not a good representation of either group. Charles shared, "One

test is so critical, and you stifle kids, and you raise their anxieties; and I don't want to say

you force kids into cheating, but kids are more likely to look at cheating because so much

is riding on it, and the parents' expectations, and everything else." Charles cited

standardized tests as frustrating rather than stressful and explained, "I wouldn't take it to

the extent of being stressful because there's not a lot I can do about standardized testing."

Autobiography, Phase IV: Charles Reflects on His Preferred Future Regarding Dealing with Stress

Charles recognized his fundamental causes of stress and devised a plan for his

preferred future regarding dealing with stress. Considering poor time management a

significant cause of stress, Charles stated "sometimes time is my worst enemy, and

knowing that, then you try to do better with the time that you have, you try to be better

with your calendar and your scheduling." Charles planned to become better organized by

using a Google calendar to map his school and academic responsibilities. Charles

intended to restructure his work calendar to capture the "important work," such as "observing classrooms and completing reports."

To aid in this reorganization of tasks and provide more classroom time, Charles planned to delegate more duties to his administrative team and office staff. Acknowledging that he had a tendency to take on too much, Charles planned to communicate better with the people in his life and let them know "in advance that I have a busy schedule and which dates are off the table because of various events." Some of the reserved dates were for matters closest to his heart, including time for family.

Another aspect of his preferred future was addressing school processes. Charles planned to exercise the creation of processes at his school from the ground up, and planned to cut his forty member leadership team in half. Charles argued that "With less than twenty members, I feel that we will be able to have rich conversations and I will be able to turn over more of the decision-making and power to the teachers." His new approach to process would require the administrative team "to record, publish, and communicate what decisions and processes are being made rather than relying on the teachers present at leadership meetings to disseminate information."

Charles planned to "prioritize the conversations that need to take place" with his staff members with an emphasis on personalized conversations with each individual. Charles stated "I think the more that somebody can hear your story and see your vision, the more they get on board with where you want to go." Charles' plan was to identify and focus on his core group of "superstars" as he moved forward with his motto, "professional coach." Charles understood that some push-back would occur on his campus but he surmised, "I think that teachers can appreciate someone that will tell them

an honest opinion about where you see strengths and weaknesses, and what role they fill on the campus."

Charles' preferred future also included more time with parents, but his full schedule served as an obstacle. To gain more parental time, Charles planned to coordinate with his administrative team and devise an ideal weekly schedule that would accommodate his department meetings and classroom observations. Charles also envisioned a process that his administrative team could use to create their own calendars. Charles would consider his plan a success if these changes provided more time with his students, and he planned to incorporate bi-weekly advisory meetings as means of feedback and student inclusion.

Charles Reflects on the Collaborative Autobiography Process

Charles found that he shared much in common with the research group, including the perception that "Co-workers are a source of stress…. this usually occurs when co-workers do not take the job as serious as we do or do not perform at a certain level of professionalism." Charles added that the extra work created by fellow staff members created stress for him as well as his family and caused "a negative attitude towards co-workers" as well as unhealthy or unprofessional reactions to stress, including (depending on the group member) "drinking, smoking, swearing, and closing yourself off from others." Charles felt unique among the group by being a principal and "making campus decisions that impact others."

On reflective writing, Charles shared,

I love it…. I think that it's a form of therapy for me because you can get out what you want to say … and you have an audience, but it's an audience of your choosing with who you want to share.

Charles stated that the practice of reflective writing "reduced stress…. I definitely felt stress relief by doing the writing, coming together with others and sharing." Pondering reflective writing and collaborating with educators, Charles shared,

sometimes your decisions cause direct stress on teachers, and you need to take those into account before you make decisions…. but, you really need to follow up afterwards and be reflective on what kind of chaos or what kind of stress … those decisions caused, and do those decisions need to be revisited?

Charles stated that the collaborative autobiography process helped him understand his behavior and reaction to stress, especially at home with his family. Regarding the collaborative group, Charles shared,

I think it's very interesting in hearing and learning from other peoples' vulnerabilities…. There's a lot of similarities in stories amongst the group…. I think it's good affirmation…. When you hear from others that have been through similar events or … similar situations, that you're not the only one, and it's not weird to have those feelings, [and] that other people are dealing with the same kind of stress.

Charles valued the collaborative autobiography process so much that he planned to use a similar process for the new teachers at his school. Charles contended that "writing, reflecting, listening to others, and reflecting some more, is just as important as

speaking." Charles planned deep meaningful conversations with his staff as a means of getting "a better idea of solutions to help with stress." Charles also considered implementing a form of collaborative autobiography with a new "principal advisory councils for each grade level," but was still considering his role in the group. Charles concluded, "at least now I know that there is a working model for how to engage teachers and educators in a process for dealing with stress," and he added, "I try to be as collaborative as possible…. I do value others' input."

Charles stated that the collaborative autobiography process "made me slow down and take time to reflect…. you're writing … you're thinking and reflecting on it, and it just comes out, like wow, that's really where it's stemming from…. that's what's causing this…. these are my areas of stress, and we can start coming up with solutions for how to deal with each one of those individual areas of stress." Charles also noticed that,

> stress came from different areas…. [and] you can react differently in each of those
> different situations…. Just being aware of those different categories that cause
> you stress so that you can come up with an action plan…. I think that it's very
> empowering.

Summary of Educators' Collaborative Autobiographies

Kathy was a third year ESL kindergarten teacher at a public charter school in a low SES neighborhood. Kathy entered into teaching with a holistic approach to education and centered her educational platform on project-based learning with a focus on strong academic preparation for her students. Kathy's primary sources of stress were lack of resources, standardized assessments, teacher evaluations, and administrator conflict. Kathy was strongly influenced by two elementary school teachers who took the

time to share the art of teaching, and inspired Kathy to become a teacher. The collaborative autobiography process helped Kathy articulate her primary stressors and create a plan for a preferred future that included better work management, improved communication with her administrators and school parents, and more time with her rewards in life, namely family and time to decompress. Although reflective writing was difficult for Kathy, she appreciated the opportunity to express her stress and frustration, and found reflective writing helped her identify the causes and effects of stress. Kathy found the collaborative autobiography process valuable for personal insight as well as the input and reflections on causes and effects of stress from the other members of the group. Listening to participants' stories allowed Kathy to reexamine the stresses she experienced at school.

Thomas, a high school teacher in a predominantly low SES neighborhood had over ten years of teaching experience. Thomas celebrated student achievement, and centered his educational platform on providing the best quality education possible for the students. Thomas' primary sources of stress were non-committed teachers, toothless policies, and racial disparity in job selection and placement, as well as the history of racial disparity in his professional life. The effects of stress were serious for Thomas. Due to his desire not to take his stress out on others, Thomas internalized his stress and suffered a stroke prior to the research project. Thomas placed great value on his upbringing and twenty-five years military service. Thomas found the collaborative autobiography process similar to therapy, and planned a preferred future that placed less emphasis on the actions of others, improved communication with fellow teachers, and relieving stress prior to going home for the day. Thomas found the collaborative

autobiography process powerful, and considered reflective writing a very effective form of stress release that allowed him to vent and question the emphasis he placed on sources of stress. Thomas enjoyed the collaborative autobiography process and found that many of the participants shared common sources and effects of stress.

Cindy had sixteen years of educational experience and served as the school improvement facilitator at a low SES high school. Borrowing heavily from her love of culture and science, Cindy immersed herself in the multiple tasks of assisting students, teachers, and administrators. Cindy believed the purpose of education was to help kids gain an insight into the structure of their world. Cindy identified low staff accountability, work management, and poor health habits as primary sources of stress. The effects of stress included poor dietary habits and smoking. Although Cindy embraced the high paced position she occupied at school, she also acknowledged that change must take place. As a part of her preferred future, Cindy planned to modify her ownership of things she had no control over, create better health habits, limit interruptions, and improve communicating expectations with fellow staff members. Although initially uneasy with reflective writing, Cindy said the collaborative autobiography process helped her connect aspects of her life to her current stress. Cindy regarded the collaborative autobiography process as rewarding for all group members, and expressed an appreciation for the group diversity. She reflected that she identified more with the administrators due to their leadership roles in school, but also found the life stories and similarities and differences in the varying career stages meaningful.

Adam, with ten years in education experience, was a program director at a charter treatment center for troubled youth. His educational platform centered on students

developing self-worth, intrinsic motivation, and becoming productive members in society. His major sources of stress included the parents of students, teachers who created unnecessary conflict in the classroom, a heavy workload, and systems that allow students to fail. The effects of stress created a sixty hour work week for Adam and undermined his current exercise regimen. Adam utilized lessons from his childhood including his immigration to the United States, the absence of his father, and the strength of his mother as integral in the development of this educational philosophy and desire to work with troubled youth. Much of Adam's leadership style was learned while serving in the military. Adam planned a preferred future that included better work management, improved delegation of duties, occasional breaks at work, and a reflective writing program to aid in communication at his school. Adam found reflective writing and the collaborative autobiography process invigorating, and valued the understanding of how the group identified and related to the causes and effects of stress. Adam planned to incorporate a reflective writing program with the staff at his school as a means of establishing collaboration and reducing stress.

Charles was a first year middle school principal with ten years of prior educational experience. His educational platform focused on the visibility of students' needs, and the acquisition of tools necessary for survival. Charles' primary sources of stress were ill-prepared teachers, heavy workload, and antiquated and inflexible systems that undermined student success. The effects of stress were occasional verbal outbursts and the eventual creation of an ulcer. Charles was heavily influenced by the academic freedom and discovery learning he enjoyed as a child, and desired these same opportunities for the students at his school. Charles provided a plan for a preferred future

that included better scheduling of tasks, delegation of duties, and dedicated time for his family. Charles valued the collaborative autobiography process as a mechanism for understanding sources of stress and people's vulnerabilities. Charles felt that he shared much in common with the group with regards to sources and effects of stress, and considered reflective writing a form of therapy that allowed him to slow down and reflect. He intended to use the collaborative autobiography process for new teachers at his school as well as with fellow principals in his district as a means of determining sources of stress and collaborating on ways of dealing with stress.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FOR THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The collaborative autobiography process focused on six research questions that dealt with causes, reactions, and effects of stress as well as reflections of personal histories, the creation of a plan for a preferred future in dealing with stress, and potential benefits resulting from the collaborative autobiography process. The research questions that guided this study are:

1) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the causes of the educators' stress?

2) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the educators' reactions to stress?

3) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the effects of the educators' stress?

4) In what ways, if any, does collaborative autobiography help the educators understand the causes of, their reactions to, and the effects of their stress?

5) In what ways, if any, does collaborative autobiography empower the educators to create a plan for better managing stress in the future?

6) Beyond a plan for better managing stress in the future, what benefits, if any, do the educators perceive as resulting from collaborative autobiography?

This chapter provides the common themes shared by the participants of this study. Emerging themes are coupled with corresponding research questions. Following educator recommendations is a summary of the findings.

Causes of Educator Stress

The group members identified multiple causes of stress that conflicted with their goal of providing a well-rounded education for their students. Not surprising, the greatest sources of stress were directly related to other people and their expectations on performance. Compounding the causes of stress was an accompanying feeling of not having control of external and internal forces in the execution of their duties. This frustration magnified the independent causes of stress, and when combined, produced a negative synergistic effect on the group participants.

Work Management

Work management was a common source of frustration and perplexity among all members of the group, and was described as one of the greatest causes of stress. Kathy considered work management a significant source of stress, and acknowledged that her struggle with balancing her daily duties intensified due to added measures undertaken during standardized testing at her school. Thomas shared that historically his workload had been unmanageable, but currently had fewer classes to teach. Still, he received extra duties as an academic coach that added many hours to his schedule and served as a significant emotional drain. Cindy faced multiple tasks on a daily basis, that when left incomplete, forced her to devote her free time to address school responsibilities.

Cindy shared that finishing the job was more important than getting enough sleep, while Adam argued that work management was his greatest source of stress, often sacrificing his free time to ensure things were completed to his specifications. Charles stated that finding a balance between work, family, and school was the area he needed the most improvement in. Similar to the rest of the group, Charles placed a high priority on

completing his responsibilities at school and often worked eleven hours a day tackling paperwork and responding to approximately 120 emails.

Adults

Other adults were reported as the greatest source of stress for the group. With the exception of Kathy, the entire group considered teachers as a significant source of stress. Several themes emerged in the research that specified the aspects of teachers creating stress for others. Teacher behavior, or non-committed teachers, exasperated most of the group. Thomas felt tremendous stress at what he witnessed as absent teachers, teachers arriving late, or teachers who did not teach. Thomas shared, "The teacher just shows one slide, and that's it, the teacher does not teach." Thomas' frustration was increased by teachers who did not support school policies. Thomas argued, "The kids don't stress me out. It's the system, it's the way the teachers are not teaching kids, or they're cutting corners, or stealing and getting caught and nothing happens to them. That causes me stress."

Cindy expressed frustration with teachers who did not meet the minimum expectations, and consequently, required her to take more of her time to ensure tasks were completed and students were taken care of. Cindy argued,

> That is where the stress is…. Having to decide the dance you have to do to get
> people to do the work they're supposed to do…. They don't see the value in what
> the district wants or the national education wants…. But, it doesn't mean the work
> goes away because you're choosing not to do it, and making the choice that
> someone else will have to do your work…. That's where my frustration lies

because you have made a choice, and you have caused this second choice because

I tend to be the one that has to do the clean-up work.

Cindy believed that many of these teachers did not recognize the end effect of their

actions, and consequently, jeopardized the likelihood of students graduating from high

school and being successful in life.

Similar to Cindy, Adam found it difficult to respect teachers who did not give one

hundred percent in the classroom. As the program director for a school that taught

students with emotional and psychiatric needs, Adam felt tremendous stress at what he

perceived as teachers who brought unnecessary drama to the classroom and ignored his

input on classroom management techniques and student care. The conflicts that occurred

between teachers and students often resulted in Adam using additional time to calm

students, retrain teachers, and answer to the school administration and health care

workers about student well-being. In addition, Adam was forced to explain to parents

that, although the teacher was wrong, changes would be made, and modifications in the

classroom would take place.

Charles noted that some of the teachers at his school had outlasted five previous

principals and viewed him with doubt as he commenced his first year as a principal.

Although he noted that many of his teachers worked hard and sincerely cared for the

students, a group of teachers provided tremendous stress for Charles. Similar to the other

group participants, Charles felt some teachers made poor decisions, created unnecessary

tension, and were negligent in their duties and required others to cover for them. The

teachers' use of sarcasm in the classroom and misinterpreting the school's grading policy

created stress for Charles as well as consumed more of his limited available time dealing with upset parents.

Administrators as a source of stress was a common theme among the teachers in the group. Kathy cited her principal as a significant source of stress due to her interpretation of what she considered unrealistic goals for her students. Kathy shared that her worst day in education occurred when her principal observed her room for a couple of minutes and later threatened to fire Kathy if she did not change the way she instructed her class. Kathy shared,

> Our principal, again doing her morning walk-through, popped her head in for a couple of minutes … and basically said I wouldn't have a job the next school year if I didn't make some major changes…. That was my darkest day…. It was at the beginning of the school year and it set the tone for all of the last school year.

Thomas expressed stress with his school administrators for not wanting to listen to his concerns about students' well-being. Thomas was also incensed that the principal chose a low performing teacher for Teacher of the Week, and felt the principal provided false praise to the campus and was clueless to what was actually going on. Unlike Kathy and Thomas, Cindy had a strong working relationship with her principal and respected the work he was trying to accomplish for the good of the school. Still, her principal served as a source of stress due to Cindy's desire to perform well and not disappoint him. Cindy did, however, find school counselors to be a tremendous source of stress due to what she perceived was sloppy work and not meeting the needs of the students. Dismayed with the school counselors, Cindy shared,

I never met a group of people, especially in my building, who are more likely to push work away than to help a student…. I have literally seen someone cost [a student] a scholarship because they didn't feel like filling out the paperwork…. They'll skip meetings; they'll not attend meetings for a student.

Four of the five group participants considered parents as a source of stress. Kathy found communicating with mono-lingual Spanish language parents stressful due to her not speaking Spanish and her school not having a bilingual program. Cindy identified parents as a cause of stress when they undermined her in her attempts to provide the best possible education for the students. Cindy stated,

I don't want to circumvent parents, but I can only control [my students] from 9:00 am to 4:15 p.m.…. That's the time I get upset, if you're going to undermine me, do it at home…. I'm bringing you in here [the parent] to be aware of what's going on…. If you are here, participate; don't hinder our work because your son or daughter deserves an education … your son and daughter deserves the right to learn.

Adam also identified parents as one of the most difficult causes of stress. Adam experienced stress when "dealing with parents that complain about our teachers and having to justify or explain to the parents that they are correct, and we will address the issue right away." Adam explained that much of the parental stress derived from the parents being from out of state and having to send their kids to his school and, "they haven't seen the school before, [therefore], they're very worried."

Charles shared that although he had a good rapport with most of the school's parents, a few caused him stress and consumed much of his time. Charles described two events that caused significant stress,

> One was a mediation agreement between the district and a parent that involved lawyers and a host of conditions. The mediation agreement is binding and does not allow much flexibility for doing what is best for the student, unfortunately…. Another parent has written a letter [to national organizations] along with a host of others that said the school is denying her child basic rights because of a refusal to test for special education and because of the grading policy.

In addition to parent complaints, Charles experienced stress from parents not allowing their kids to learn from their own mistakes. Charles felt that kids should be allowed "to fix their own mistakes," and build resilience for future problem solving situations.

Conflict Between Educational Platform and Educator Behavior

With the exception of Cindy, the research group reported occasional inconsistencies between their educational platforms and personal behavior as a source of stress. Kathy focused on the constraints from her principal on project-based learning as a source of stress and expressed frustration when not allowed to exercise her preferred methods of instruction and assessment. Thomas reported that occasionally his platform and behavior were inconsistent, specifically, when he expressed frustration with his complaints to administrators about teacher and student behavior falling on deaf ears.

Adam felt most comfortable with routines and cited non-routine behaviors or events in his school as a source of stress. Consequently, Adam reported having to work additional hours when his educational platform and behavior were not synchronized.

Charles reported feeling stressed by the influence of outside forces that affected the balance between his educational platform and personal behavior at school. Charles shared the example of an inconsistency in his platform when he was forced to hire teachers that only partially filled the requirements of the vacant position. Although he determined that his behavior in having to hire underqualified teachers conflicted with his educational platform, he felt he had no recourse. In addition, although Charles' platform was based on a student-centric curriculum, he felt stress due to his students not having control of their learning environment. Adam and Charles felt stress as the result of their educational platforms and behaviors being in conflict because they did not have enough time for what they considered effective decision making.

Ineffective Communication in School

A common theme among the group was stress created due to poor communication. Kathy felt that good leadership listened and considered teachers' input, but regretted that her principal seemed unwilling to listen. Kathy stated, "I know where [my students] should be [in achievement], and it's not being heard…. It's falling on deaf ears." Similar to Kathy, Thomas felt isolated on his campus due to the apparent lack of interest his principal had in his classroom. Thomas reflected that he was unable to show off his students' performance due to his administrator not visiting his classroom and stated,

> My director called me in once and informed me that the staff had told her that I pretty much keep to myself in my classroom…. I then told her that the reason for that was that I was in the back of the campus by myself, and that no one had ever visited me back there…. I don't know if it's the distance or if it's the course, but it

does feel like what I do doesn't matter.... I don't receive any feedback except my

annual teacher assessment.

Similar to Thomas, Cindy felt a sense of isolation due to not being with the

students as much as she desired, and considered adults failing to communicate with each

other the primary source of conflict at her school. Cindy described the gap in

communication as "it's the adults having expectations of each other that they never

vocalize." Adam noted that effective communication diminished at his campus when his

team experienced stress. Similar to Cindy, Charles considered some teachers

unprofessional by circumventing him when they had issues or concerns, and was

bothered that he learned of issues through grape-vine communication. Charles shared, "I

think one thing missing in education is that there is not enough time to just sit and talk

shop, and talk about the issues that are really pressing.... there's never the time to …

have conversations about creativity, innovation, and change."

Compromised Student Well-Being

The concern for student well-being was a common cause of stress among the

participants that often led them to adopt parental roles with the students.   Kathy

reflected on external forces that negatively affected her students' families and led her to

adopt a parental approach when comforting her students. Consistent with her educational

approach, Kathy often felt stress at the end of the school day and questioned if she had

given enough of her attention to her students. Similar to Kathy, Thomas felt empathy for

students who were ill or suffered emotional problems. Thomas placed emphasis on the

dilemma of student drop outs, and was stressed at what he considered students as the

victims of teachers who had given up the fight to keep students in school. Like Kathy,

Thomas reflected at the end of the day and questioned if he had done enough for the students.

Cindy felt stress and remorse for tragedies that occurred at her school. Cindy reflected on the suicide of an eighteen year old student, and subsequently felt outrage when the death of this minority student did not make the local news. Cindy's concern for students was often found in her description of her students as "her babies," and she felt enormous stress when she believed these students were marginalized or neglected. Along with other members of the group, Cindy often reflected on the sentiment, "Have you done your best for the students?" Fully committed and consistently giving of herself for the well-being of the students, Cindy carried the weight of concern every day.

Adam considered student well-being the focal point of his responsibilities and suffered with stress when teacher behavior inhibited student progression. Adam often contributed additional time and energy to ensure the well-being of his students. Adam's concern and non-negotiable approach to student well-being helped to explain his top-down approach to leadership. In essence, Adam believed that the stakes were too high to allow the teachers to do their own thing and get it wrong at the price of the students.

Similar to Cindy, Charles adopted a parental role with his students and shared that his darkest moment in education occurred when a former student committed suicide. Charles spoke at his student's funeral, and recalled,

> I hadn't seen him in two years, and I felt guilt…. The guilt that this kid jumped, and I wasn't there for two years like I had been before…. Just maybe he needed somebody to talk to…. So, it took me a while to get over the guilt that I placed on myself…. It's my personality and the ownership that I take with the kids.

Philosophical Differences with Co-workers

A common theme across the group was the presence of stress due to philosophical differences with co-workers. Kathy shared that her campus had very good teachers, but felt stress when she and her fellow teachers did not see eye to eye. Kathy reflected, "Last year, we were supposed to be working together, but we're really not…. Of course, you're going to have your moments where you don't see eye to eye all the time." Thomas expressed frustration with co-workers for not addressing student misconduct or adhering to school dress policies. This apparent lack of concern of his coworkers led Thomas to comment, "Too many people wear rose colored glasses [and] don't see the elephants in the room." Thomas felt additional stress over the negative effects of the apathetic approach of his peers not pulling together in a unified effort and holding students accountable and commented, "Part of the blame for the high dropout rate is that those in charge have given up the fight."

Cindy reflected that the resistance of traditional teachers to adopt more innovative approaches to learning caused her stress. As an innovative teacher, Cindy mentioned that it was difficult to work with overly conventional teachers. Much of Cindy's stress resulted in the effects of staff members who did not do enough for the students. Cindy reflected,

> I want teachers to lose sleep over how students are doing, and if they are being
> successful…. I don't want to work with people who can leave the classroom door
> and leave the student behind…. [The students] need advocates all day, every
> day…. They need to know that I tried my best, and if it wasn't good enough, that

tomorrow I will try again…. I don't want to work with people who don't feel the same way, and I don't want them to taint my view of the work.

Adam differentiated between task-based and process-based approaches in education and expressed stress with those that emphasized the importance of task-based criteria over process-based thinking. Adam felt that an overemphasis on task completion abdicated his preferred method of process based thinking that allowed him and his staff to "step outside your paradigm or box and look at the journey of what you have completed and … teach, mentor, or lead others through the same respective process." Adam felt that the knee-jerk reaction of task based approaches created an ontological blind spot "of not knowing the unknown," which in turn, caused him stress.

Charles expounded on the effect of philosophical differences with co-workers and shared, "I realize that philosophical differences on education annoy me more than I thought." Charles considered the frustration and anger he felt during what evolved into a gripe-session at his school. Charles reflected,

One of my assistant principals pulled me aside and called me on my body language…. She said that it was evident that I was annoyed, but [I] did not say anything…. I told her that I felt it was necessary for everyone to get it out of their system…. It was directed at me, but if I modeled being defensive, what purpose would it serve?

Although Charles felt frustration and stress from the concerted attacks from his staff, he considered their need to voice disagreement important. However, he also reflected on effective means of dissent and criticism that would not leave him feeling offended.

Ineffective Systems and Processes

A common source of stress within the group was ineffective systems and processes. These systems and processes varied from national, to state, to local levels, and when interconnected, served as a significant source of stress that resulted in the participants feeling reactive to restrictive processes rather than proactive to positive change. The lack of local resources served as a source of stress for Kathy; using personal finances to purchase school supplies increased her stress, especially when she was forced to buy materials to modify lessons designed to help students with standardized testing. Kathy shared,

> These systems, at the end of the day, cause stress, not only for me, but to anyone who has a part of them…. I go home at the end of the day questioning if I have done all that I possible could do…. I wonder what is going to happen to particular students once they are out of my classroom, including the ones that I tutor…. for most of the systems … I personally feel that the teachers' interests are being ignored.

Thomas felt stress over his school's hiring processes and wondered if racial bias was involved when selecting teachers for low SES schools in his school district. Another local process that caused Thomas stress was mandated lesson plans being turned in on a daily basis with a minimal likelihood of anyone reviewing them. Thomas described this as a toothless policy that did not hold non-compliant teachers accountable. Thomas abided with the policies, but expressed stress that others were getting a free ride on poor behavior.

Cindy expressed disbelief that local systems did not address low performing teachers and counselors who successfully collected paychecks for minimal work output. Cindy also felt stress over the reliance on district personnel and systems who routinely failed to provide data to the schools. The resulting effect was the misplacement of students in classes, thus undermining the best education possible for the students. Perhaps closest to her heart, Cindy expressed feeling stressed that local policies did not adequately address tragedies in students' lives. Cindy felt it was an injustice to wait for the tragedy to occur and then have students go to counselors they did not know nor had established a rapport with.

Adam referenced a trickledown effect of national, state, and local systems that cluttered the learning environment with unnecessary bureaucracy and ultimately cheated students. Adam felt that many systems impeded the much-needed social support for students. Another significant source of stress in his school environment was the necessity of teachers to write multiple hourly lessons plans for the diverse needs of his students. Although differentiated instruction was an authentic need, because teachers were forced to teach multiple lesson plans each hour, their stress increased resulting in more classroom management issues. As program director, Adam was forced to respond to this teacher stress. Adam summed up his frustration with this process,

> It is flawed, and I am not able to fix it, therefore it creates a huge burden on me
> because I directly see the effects it causes with teachers' mood and emotional
> levels, linked with their teaching…. this affects the students as well as me…. I
> feel that this adds added and unneeded stress in my work.

Charles ultimately attributed much of his stress to antiquated and broken systems. Many of the local processes he inherited as a new principal caused stress. In particular, the hiring process for new teachers included up to seven co-workers present for interviews, each with varying opinions and concerns. Charles stated that his stress was "a by-product of a broken system; a system that can point the finger in many directions, up and down the scale, macro to micro…. In the end, it is the individual level that success is accomplished."

Another theme that cut across the group was the negative effects of standardized tests. Perhaps one of the most common agreements among the group was Adam's understanding that many teachers were forced to teach to the test. Although Kathy taught a grade level that was not subjected to State mandated testing, she suffered stress at the mandatory TPRI assessments she was required to administer to her Kindergarten students. Kathy expressed that it was stressful,

> making sure all my students are developed according to TPRI standards…. I get
>
> stressed when certain students do not show as much improvement as the rest of
>
> the class, and the principal automatically assumes that I am not doing my job,
>
> even though the rest of the class showed improvement.

Kathy emphasized the stress associated with finding resources to modify instruction for those not considered "'developed' by TPRI standards." Even after doing all she could to educate her students, Kathy was concerned "with the fact that, even at such an early age of five or six, some students display signs of not being very good test takers." The resulting frustration with test results that did not equate to authentic student achievement placed an additional burden on Kathy. Kathy shared,

So, as the teacher, the one who knows their students the best, the stress lies with

the decision to go based off what the TPRI report is telling you, or should I go off

what I see the student can do in the classroom where they are most comfortable?

The decision ultimately rested with Kathy's administrator, who placed emphasis

on accelerated lessons for the students. The exasperation with standardized testing led

Kathy to share, "[It] makes me want to pull my hair out."

Thomas was troubled by the understanding that the STAAR exam was written and

prepared by a London-based company rather than a company within the United States.

Thomas shared, "So, the source of stress … would not be the assessment themselves; it

would be the idea that there are companies out there that are making lots, and lots, and

lots, and lots of money off of this." In addition to the outsourcing of the STAAR exam,

Thomas expressed frustration with being forced to attend yearly training for mandatory

tests. Thomas stated, "They give you the same training year end and year out…. And,

year after year, same typos on the slides…. they don't even bother correcting slides."

Thomas also expressed frustration during test times with hall monitors who

disappeared, thus prohibiting Thomas from taking breaks during testing. Thomas

reflected on the lost instructional time due to testing, as well as the uneven application of

test scores. Thomas stated,

> [the] state law mandates that STAAR EOC (End of Course) scores account for 15
>
> percent of a student's final course grade, but does not provide a consistent policy
>
> for converting STAAR scores to grades…. Because the scores ultimately affect a
>
> student's GPA and class rank, an uneven application of scores ultimately results
>
> in an uneven playing field for students.

Cindy acknowledged the need for students to be evaluated, but felt stress due to the over emphasis on test results. Cindy disagreed with special area classes being cut for students who failed a core area, and believed that an inordinate amount of stress was placed on teachers who taught core classes. Cindy stated, "You have this unique stress that maybe somebody else doesn't have that works in the same system."

Similar to the rest of the group, Adam felt stress that standardized tests did not acknowledge quality of life or rapport in the classroom. With a special population of students, Adam placed great emphasis on students establishing connections with the community, an aspect of education that standardized tests did not measure. Adam also noticed that a disparity existed between students who belonged to self-contained classes and those who changed classes. The school system favored the self-contained classes by allowing self-contained students more time and resources to prepare for the exam. Adam argued, "All students should have the same merit for TAKS tutoring and learning opportunities."

Charles felt that an overemphasis on standardized tests severely limited the likelihood of students receiving a well-rounded education. Due to the emphasis placed on test results, Charles believed the enormous pressure to pass the tests led some students to cheat. Charles stated,

> One test is so critical, and you stifle kids … you raise their anxieties, and I don't want to say you force kids into cheating, but kids are more likely to look at cheating because so much is riding on it, and the parents' expectations, and everything else…. You know, it's more about the grade than it is about the learning…. It should be about the learning.

Teacher evaluation served as a source of stress for three of the five participants in the group. Kathy focused on the selective snap-shot of teacher evaluation as limited in assessing what truly transpired in the classroom and reported feeling stressed by the invariable act of all students not being fully engaged while her principal observed her lesson. Thomas reported feeling anxious during observations but also felt slighted at the tangible financial gains attached to teacher evaluations and standardized test scores and stated, "I do not have a problem with assessments, but there is so much money being spent on assessments." Thomas further argued that bonuses paid to core teachers neglected the other teachers who supported student tutoring and education.

From the administrative perspective, Charles recognized that teacher evaluations did more harm than good and questioned the purpose of evaluations. Charles shared,

I said [to my superintendent] I can have those conversations [with teachers] without the documentation on a piece of paper…. I get the documenting if you're moving a teacher out, but if you're really just trying to grow teachers, then it's really doing more hindering than helping.

Three of the five participants cited the effects of inadequate educator certification programs as a cause of stress. Thomas questioned the relevance of some educator certification programs and shared, "As a teacher, before I started my masters, I honestly didn't know much about the processes [affecting public education]…. My perspective has completely changed [by attending graduate school] … and learning about what I should have known ten years ago."

As a former teacher and assistant principal, Charles expressed frustration with the product of teacher certification programs and considered these programs partly culpable

for teachers being his greatest source of stress. Charles questioned the validity of certification programs and argued,

> I see teachers that have not been prepared to teach all students that walk through the doors…. It's not just their training, but their ability to relate…. There is no training on the social-emotional side of being a teacher; there's only academic training…. My frustration and stress comes from knowing that teachers are not prepared and knowing that students will struggle, and I'm not able to do a damn thing about it.

> Similar to Thomas and Charles, Cindy questioned educator preparation programs

and considered counselor preparation programs as ineffective in consistently producing high quality school counselors. Cindy concluded,

> I really think it's the counselor training in Texas … they're like little crabs that pull each other down versus pulling each other up to do better…. I just don't have a lot of expectations of them….They just have this horrible little attitude…. Nice people, just not workers.

Adam, in turn, did not specifically cite educator certification programs as being deficient. This was partly due to his school having a unique environment that did not have an official preparation program to rely on.

Educators' Reactions to Stress

Some group members' reactions to stress led to additional stress in what could be called a self-perpetuating cycle of stress. Although some participants' reactions to stress temporarily relieved the effects of that stress, the reactions typically treated symptoms

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rather than the root causes of the stress. The ineffective reactions to stress appeared to incrementally intensify the negative effects of stress on the participants.

Seek Physical and Spiritual Well-being

A common theme shared by four of the five group participants was the use of exercise as a response to stress. Kathy commented that her participation on a volley ball team helped her tremendously as a form of stress relief. Thomas considered exercise as one of his most positive reactions to stress. Once home from work, Thomas would often go to the garage and workout, or go for a jog. Combined with exercise, Thomas listened to music to relieve stress, and also turned to prayer as a source of comfort. Thomas shared,

> I still believe in the power of prayer…. My wife and I will light candles in the
>
> middle of the night when I wake-up…. When something has gone wrong in
>
> school, or with a family member, I'll wake up, and I'll just pray and pray until I
>
> fall asleep…. But, I need to do a better job with it.

Similar to Thomas, Adam enjoyed listening to music as a source of stress relief. Adam relied heavily on his workout regimen as a good stress stabilizer, but also noticed that when his workout schedule was interrupted due to the demands of work, his stress level and frustration increased. Like Thomas and Adam, Charles enjoyed listening to music as a source of stress relief, and similar to Thomas, considered himself deeply religious and found comfort in prayer.

Time with Family and Friends

Four of the five participants placed great value on spending time with family or friends as a preferred method of reacting to stress. Kathy placed significant value on

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spending time with her nephews and family while Thomas considered his family his greatest success and often looked to his wife for counsel and support. Cindy placed a strong value on two childhood friends and traveled with them when the opportunity arose. Similar to Thomas, Charles considered his family a primary source of stress release, but at times used his family to vent frustration with his job. Charles shared,

> I think I've become better at it, but I know that in the past, unfortunately, my family felt the brunt of it…. My stress relief was coming home … unfortunately, I would take it out on my wife and kids…. If the house wasn't cleaned when I got home, "How come the house isn't clean?'…. 'clean the house, clean the living room.'…'where's some food?'…. It's all I ask, I come home from a long day of work, and have a clean house and some food on the table."

Celebration of Student Achievement

Celebration of student achievement was a common way group members dealt with stress. Kathy reflected, "I have to admit that it's a satisfying feeling to know that they [students] progressed … just checking off the skills that they mastered throughout the school year." Part of this positive affirmation came from parents who typically provided positive feedback and served as a source of stress release for Kathy.

Thomas celebrated his students' success and felt relief from stress knowing that he had served them well. Thomas stated, "Knowing that you've done good by somebody…. To me, there's always a semi-celebration inside my mind." Similar to Kathy, Thomas placed substantial importance on positive feedback from student success and considered reflecting on that success a positive reaction to stress. Thomas shared the effect of positive feedback he received from a student, "I was truly honored when a

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student told me once that she wanted to be a teacher, and that I was partly responsible for her decision because of the way I treated her and my other students." Thomas also shared, "I've had kids call me six years later and say that I'm the best teacher they ever had…. It's just amazing the feeling you have when you walk away when they tell me that … It's an amazing feeling."

Cindy demonstrated an extraordinary devotion to fostering student success. Her stress dramatically decreased when good things happened to students, or initial reports of negative student issues resulted in positive resolution. Cindy often used endearing terms to describe her students and shared, "My students are amazing…. I push them; I push their box…. and they still want to be around you…. I love that." Cindy recounted her reaction to a student who had suffered a sport's injury. Concerned with his recovery, Cindy provided the opportunity for the student to make frequent visits to her office during the day. Cindy shared, "They're our kids…. we gotta give them this armor and teach them…. And, there are some bad decisions, but at least we can get them out of some of these now."

Cindy epitomized the concept of giving everything for the good of the children. When the researcher commented that Cindy appeared the most satisfied when being counted on, but the workload sounded like she was taking a beating, Cindy responded, "Yes, I am taking a beating…. I don't mind taking the beating if somebody learns…. [If] the lessons are getting tighter, and the kids are doing better, and we have more kids graduating, that makes every bit of stress worth it."

Adam found student success rewarding and commented that he celebrated every student success. Adam shared, "I actually see kids here, and their success levels, and I

see each kid as a human being, a person…. I could have been in that situation…. So, I think that's what drives me." Adam reflected that "I'm emotional, but I'm not too emotional…. I think I've always wanted to see other people happy before myself…. I learned a lot of empathy from these kids."

Similar to the rest of the group, Charles felt the benefits of student success and shared, "I celebrate making a difference in kids' lives…. In a positive way…. Hopefully, I'm making it a place where they can get the tools to be a better person and make the world a better place." Concerned with student well-being, Charles confided that staff celebration of student success had a positive effect on him. Charles stated,

> When I hear teachers talking to each other about the excitement from a lesson that went well…. when they're excited about something they learned, and something they're doing in the classroom…. That good things are happening, that's when I'm most proud…. When I hear from parents that their kid came home and said that they love this school, that they're happy at school…. That's when I feel most satisfied…. [It's] funny how knowing you make a difference can change a bad day into a good one in the blink of an eye.

Avoidance of Aggression

The avoidance of aggression as a reaction to stress was a common theme among the research group. Each member considered unprofessional approaches to stressful situations inappropriate. Charles reflected that when he was younger he would have outbursts as a result of stress. Charles grew to understand the need for others' input and tried to create a learning environment that was safe for all to express their views. Kathy felt timid when exposed to conflict and found it difficult to express her views and

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opinions when faced with contentious events. Thomas frequently mentioned how he internalized his stress at work and avoided taking his frustration out on others. Thomas contained his stress at work and after arriving home, where he committed himself to a form of isolation out of fear of taking his stress out on his family. Thomas shared, "I don't let stress dictate my behavior, although internally it's eating at me, and it's killing me, but I don't let it affect my relationship with people."

Cindy reflected on aspects of her upbringing, including a violent father, and chose the use of humor, and sometimes sarcasm, to mask frustration and sadness. Cindy shared,

> I had a very violent dad…. I [have known] others that were violent…. I take the opposite approach…. It takes a while for me to be violent; not like hitting anything, but you will know, and I will make you cry…. I don't feel bad about it; I don't feel remorse, but a ton of guilt.

Cindy also chose unhealthy responses to stress rather than treating others unprofessionally. Cindy turned to alcohol to relieve stress but discontinued its usage due to severe physical side effects. Cindy also reported reacting to stress by overeating and unhealthy work habits. Cindy shared,

> I am a smoker, and each Monday I say, not today…. Within three hours, I have purchased a pack and am smoking, and the same with eating the wrong things…. I find schools to be places to binge eat all day…. I find that it is difficult to have will power when you want the chocolate or soda, and enjoy the couple of minutes with friends over lunch.

Adam argued the importance of every written communication to his coworkers being professional, as though the President of the United States was the intended recipient. In addition to avoiding contention, Adam used "I feel" statements to react to stressful situations. Adam shared an event that occurred with a co-worker who was experiencing job related stress:

"Listen, I'm here to talk, let's talk through this together," because I could have just fired back at him…. That really stressed me out…. "Let's talk through this together, I'm here for your input…. I'm not making a decision, so let's talk this through"…. When you use *I feel statements,* you're not attacking anyone…. You're getting your point across because you're stressing how you feel and not how they feel.

The Effects of Educator Stress

The effects of stress on the group members did not reveal any personal positive effects, as would be found with eustress. The participants acknowledged that the general effects of stress had negative effects on their physical and emotional well-being as well as negative effects on co-workers and family members. Even though some strategies were exercised by the group to mitigate the effects of stress, the effects of stress deteriorated their overall health.

Negative Health Issues

Health issues resulting from stress were reported by four of the five group participants. Kathy concluded that she suffered from high blood pressure, partly due to the stress she felt at school. Thomas reported suffering from a stroke due to

unmanageable stress at work. Thomas also described symptoms of anxiety attacks while
in stressful situations,

> Sometimes, I've had so much stress that it feels funny, my heart will pound like I
> just drank a lot of coffee…. I'm like wired, and man, I realized that [I need to] get
> out of the situation, go outside, walk, [and] get some fresh air.

Thomas reflected that occasionally his reactions to stress were ineffective and disclosed,
"I sometimes allow those feelings to overcome me, and as a result, I lose sleep at night….
I cannot seem to be able to contain my frustration and have often voiced my displeasure
at what I feel is unfair." In addition to negative effects of stress at work, Thomas carried
his stress home and continued to suffer. Thomas reflected on his loss of sleep due to
stress,

> All the types and amount of stress that I experience causes me to sometimes wake
> up at three o'clock in the morning, and I ask myself why I am still in education,
> after being treated like an outsider or peon.

Cindy also suffered from deteriorated health due to stress. When asked what the
effects of stress were, Cindy responded, "For me, it's overeating, smoking, and bad
health habits." Cindy acknowledged that her reaction to stress was the desire "to eat all
day and then binge all day, like it's Christmas time and can't walk three feet into school
without there being a cookie tray, and so you binge all day at that."

Charles recounted a history of enduring high levels of stress that partially
attributed to him suffering a stomach ulcer at the age of 24. Charles also had a history of
suffering from sleep walking and reoccurring dreams while employed in the restaurant
business. Charles recognized the need to address the effects of stress, and through

reflection, successfully mitigated many of the negative effects of stress he had previously suffered from.

Of all the group participants, Adam appeared to show the mildest effects of stress. This may be attributed to a very structured approach to his daily responsibilities, adherence to regular workouts, and a diet many would consider strict (abstained from alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, and sugar). Still, the effects of stress caused a lengthened work day which undermined his workout and sleep schedule. The absence of workouts also diminished his sense of well-being, allowed frustration to seep into his workday, and reduced his typical sense of calm and well-being.

Feelings of Inadequacy and Marginalization

Four of the participants reported that stress negatively affected their feelings of self-worth and professional growth. Kathy reflected on her relationship with her principal and disclosed, "[The] effect this stress has on me is that sometimes it makes me feel like I am not good enough to be a teacher." Thomas felt marginalized at what he perceived was age discrimination in the hiring process. Thomas revealed, "Seemingly insignificant tasks that earn people accolades beyond what they purportedly do causes me to think that I am not valued at work, and I sometimes think it is because of my age." Thomas felt despondent for not being hired for an assistant principal position at his school and shared,

> Of course, thinking negative thoughts at night led me to feel despair and that led
>
> to stress, or the feeling of not being worthy of being selected…. I am beginning to
>
> wonder if anyone knows how committed I am, or worse, if they even see my
>
> commitment?

Adam and Charles shared historical accounts in their careers when they felt their professional growth was stifled. Adam reflected on submitting a needs assessment to a superintendent,

> My former superintendent shot me down in a blink of an eye…. This was the
> most stressful point in my career because my professional growth was
> instantaneously stifled, and I was not able to [implement] the change that I wanted
> to place in the system…. This placed a stressor in my personal life.

Charles reflected on an event that transpired while he was an assistant principal. "[My principal] did not trust me and made me feel worthless on many occasions…. She would undermine me, and I just felt like I could do nothing right, even though I had been very successful at my previous schools."

Diminished Communication with Co-workers or Family

As an additional effect of stress, the group shared a common theme of suffering from diminished communication with coworkers and family. Kathy affirmed,

> The biggest effect that this stress has caused in my own personal life is the time
> that it takes away from my family…. I may not be married or have any children of
> my own, but I still have a family I enjoy spending time with…. I miss out on
> family functions because I know I have work that needs to be done, and that is a
> top priority to me; to make sure I am planning successful lessons for all my
> students in my classroom.

Kathy added that she would disconnect from others at work to deal with stress. The practice of disconnecting negatively affected Kathy's confidence to speak out about work

related issues; however, Kathy also maintained that disconnecting from the causes of stress was beneficial and allowed time to decompress.

Similar to Kathy, one of the major effects of stress for Thomas was to disconnect from coworkers and family members. Thomas shared that he needed alone time after work to decompress and deal with the tremendous stress from the day. Thomas shared that having to distance himself from family to decompress actually had mixed results, relieving one cause of stress while creating an additional source of stress with his wife. A second order effect of Thomas' disconnection from his wife was her interpretation that he did not listen to her concerning family or household issues that needed his attention. This, in turn, created more stress for Thomas. Thomas recalled, "I realize that my long day has caused me to just want to sit and calm down, but then I feel threatened and it lengthens an already long day."

Although Cindy valued many of the social aspects of her school, her office often became a gathering point for co-workers. Cindy rarely had time for herself, and would occasionally sneak outside to have a smoke-break and some time alone. Cindy found that spending time alone not only helped her address stress, but also provided her most productive work time at school or home.

Adam noted a distancing effect among his staff when tension was high and communication was low. A side-effect of working long hours at his school was diminished communication with others. Charles struggled with balancing his time between job, school, and family, and lamented the limited time he could spend with his family.

Educators' Past and its Influence on the Present

Each participant reflected on specific examples of people serving as advocates and inspiring them to pursue education. These role models often exhibited the same attributes that the members of the group valued. Some of the members were affected by national events, but all felt a need to serve. The group reflected on the need to be recognized as having potential to succeed as well as being brought face-to-face with others' life lessons not to emulate.

Role Models

Not surprising, a common theme shared by group members was the effect of role models on their professional lives. Several teachers created strong impressions that guided Kathy to become a teacher. What started as a stressful event by changing schools in the fourth-grade developed into a bond between Kathy and her new fourth-grade teacher. Kathy's teacher served as a mother figure and mentor and continued to stay in contact with Kathy. Thomas had several educators in his childhood that influenced him to enter into education and influenced his approach to teaching. The first influence was that of his uncle. Thomas reflected,

> I was intrigued by the fact that he was a teacher…. As a boy, I thought teachers were amazing people, and the idea of me becoming one was a thought that never crossed my mind…. The influence that he gave, and also the respect he was shown by almost every single person in my family…. They held him really high…. I don't know how much money he was making, but it didn't matter, he was a teacher.

Other teachers provided a strong influence on Thomas' self-image by sharing positive feedback with Thomas' parents, which bolstered his confidence that he could do well in school. Thomas described receiving special attention from a teacher:

> And, then there was a man who was my biology teacher…. He called me up [to the front of the class], and it's the first time in my life that a teacher had noticed me, and it took good grades to get noticed…. Just the way it felt, that somebody had finally noticed that I was making good grades.

Cindy shared that she had a remarkable Earth Science teacher who made a deep impression on her. Cindy felt her teacher was amazing, and although she entered into his course with a deep love of science, she left "enthralled with his course…. I always loved science, but he made it more fun…. He made rocks exciting; it's hard to make geology exciting." After serving two years with the Peace Corps, Cindy rediscovered two role models in two childhood friends. Cindy reflected, "My best friends have been with me since I was six and eleven…. One is a director of school counseling, and the other is a primary school educator." Both friends encouraged Cindy to try substitute teaching. After subbing for a high school earth science class, Cindy recalled, "I found it…. Teaching high school…. That is what I'm meant to do."

Although Adam noted that women had been a source of stress in his life, he recognized the example of his mother as his most influential role model. Adam recognized that he had adopted his mother's sequential approach to problem solving, and that his commitment to success was a trait he had learned from his grandmother and mother. Perhaps one of the strongest influences Adam's mother provided was her struggle to raise a family and go to school. Adam reflected,

I vowed that I would finish school before starting a family…. This was a difficult decision that was selfish in motive and made by seeing my mother struggle with balancing her life for so many years…. I saw this as an unneeded stress…. this was one of my biggest motivators as I never wanted to stay stagnant in my education…. I wanted to become a lifelong learner, in my pursuit of my doctoral degree.

In addition to his mother, Adam attributed the influence of a fifth-grade teacher on his eventual enlistment into the United States Army. Adam stated,

When I was in the fifth-grade, several teachers helped me…. I was really hyper, and they said I needed Ritalin…. My mother and another teacher told them absolutely not…. And thank God, because I wouldn't have gone into the military if I was on Ritalin…. At that time in 1998, they weren't accepting people who were on Ritalin.

Charles also considered his mother the most influential role model in his life. Although not a failure in sports, Charles struggled to excel in athletics. Charles recalled,

My Mom … took my weakness in sports and encouraged me with my strengths…. I was a percussionist in the band, and she pushed me to go to contests…. I did well in the competitions and eventually went to band camp at [a local university]…. I was also talented in speaking events.

Like Adam, Charles observed his mother's attempt to raise a family and attend school simultaneously. Charles reflected, "How brave she must have been to take me and my brother along to the community college." Similar to the rest of the group, Charles was further inspired to learn from several school teachers. Charles remembered a fifth-

grade substitute teacher giving him full reign with self-directed learning. Charles became

a voracious reader and adept at computer programming. Later, in high school, Charles

had two teachers who provided the context for him to flourish academically and take

advanced courses, thus solidifying his approach to life-long learning.

Critical Life Events

A common theme that emerged from the data for the research group was the

relevance of critical moments that served as transformational learning events that helped

shape their professional aspirations and behavior. Kathy's reaction to negative

counseling was affected by a college professor who criticized Kathy's writing skills and

told Kathy she was not good enough to be a student at her university. Thomas reflected

on his low SES upbringing and shared,

> When I was young, I was extremely poor…. This experience molded me into
>
> what I am today…. I feel that even though I am not rich in money, I am rich in
>
> experience, and that experience translates into how I do my job and treat people.
>
> Thomas considered the student population of his school and shared, "I am more

happy, more comfortable being around people that are more demographically, socially

economically situated where I was when I was their age, because now I can relate with

that."

Cindy shared that she was raised with a violent father. The sensitivity gained

from her upbringing convinced her that she would not replicate the pain she endured on

others. Cindy recognized that her internalization of stress and health choices were overall

detrimental to her well-being, but also recognized that abusing others would only

increase negative influences in life. Like the others in the group, Cindy observed the

decision making that surrounded her upbringing and focused on a family event that convinced her to be the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. Cindy reflected,

> Towards the end of my senior year, my older sister discovered that she was pregnant. I was undecided on applying to college, but once the baby news broke in the family, I applied. I realized that I did not want to stay home and become another teen mom with my sisters and not extend my education.

> Adam considered two critical events that significantly shaped his life. Labeled as an internal stressor, Adam was deeply affected by his biological father's abandonment of his family. Adam shared,

> He left when I was five years old, and my brother was four…. I do not have a single recollection or a memory of him…. I have never wanted to meet my real dad…. I don't have any questions for him, and his leaving brought a great man [stepfather] into my life.

Adam later recalled that this influence, as well as the eventual divorce of his parents, helped him identify with children who had special needs or came from broken homes. Adam reflected, "My reality of family, or lack of family, allowed me to [see and understand] through different lenses when viewing and working with at risk students." The second event influencing Adam's career progression was the attacks on September 11, 2001. While serving in the military, Adam reflected on the relationship between the attacks and his personal life and recalled, "I wanted to get out of the [military] and pursue an education to help people…. I prayed, and then and there vowed to always be a decent

human being, by acting kind, and by offering whatever I could to people around me."
Adam fulfilled his vow and entered the field of education.

Similar to Adam, Charles remembered being dramatically affected by the attacks on September 11, 2001. Shortly after the attacks, Charles recalled sitting in his car and listening to President Bush's call to serve on the radio, and heard teaching being referenced as a form of service. Charles took the call to serve to heart and entered into teaching. Charles shared, "I really fell in love with it (teaching) through the substituting…. I got on as an assistant for an autism unit, and that really changed my life." A second critical event that occurred in Charles' life was his reaction to a young man who was bothering a young woman at a college party. Charles was afraid after he put the man's head through a sheetrock wall and remembered,

> I honestly thought that I was going to jail, and by all accounts, probably should have…. I stopped the party scene and slowed down on the alcohol…. I also found the perfect companion, and we have been together ever since."

Educators' Reflections on Causes, Reactions, and Effects of Stress

The participants gained additional insight and a sense of control by reflecting on the causes, reactions, and effects of stress. By better understanding the causes of stress, each member reported experiencing more control of their reactions to stress as well as empowerment in restructuring and mitigating the effects of stress. A sense of familiarity in their reactions to stress and the effects of personal histories allowed some to experience greater empathy towards others.

Reflection on The Causes of Stress

A common theme shared among the research group resulting from the collaborative autobiography process was a heightened understanding of causes of stress. Kathy remarked that the reflective process enabled her to consider "stresses that I didn't even consider first hand…. it made me appreciate my causes of stress a little more because I felt my causes of stress weren't as bad as others in the group." Kathy added that the collaborative autobiography process provided "the opportunity to directly pinpoint where the stress begins and has made me think of solutions to diminish the amount of stress these problems cause." Thomas realized that *he* was the primary source of his, and shared,

> I began to look at what is causing me stress, and then I realized…that it's actually me that causes myself stress. So, had I not been asked to write about this stuff, I would have never realized that it was me.

Cindy acknowledged that the collaborative autobiography process helped accentuate her understanding of the causes of her stress. She discovered that a primary source of her stress resided in an ineffective expression of her expectations to coworkers. This realization of needing to be more forthright and upfront with coworkers not only aided her in understanding a significant cause of her stress, but also in formulating a plan for a preferred future that included how she would better communicate with coworkers.

Adam gained a deeper understanding of the causes of his stress, including historical aspects of his upbringing as well as the value he placed on empathy and professionalism. Perhaps the most significant understanding achieved by Adam was not what caused him stress, but the potential of him being a source of stress for others.

Charles also gained in his understanding of the causes of stress. Although he previously understood that other adults were his primary source of stress, the collaborative autobiography process provided an opportunity for him to pinpoint underlying principles of behavior and beliefs that were stressful for him. Charles cited coworkers not taking their jobs as seriously as they should, or performing at low standards, and through the use of reflective writing was able to explore focal points of stress and improve his understanding of the causes of his stress. Charles shared, "It's so much easier once you start writing…. I can group it into different categories. [Before the collaborative autobiography] I don't think I could have grouped [the causes of stress] into categories like we did in the first assignment."

Reflection on Reactions to Stress

Each group participant gained an improved understanding of their reactions to stress. Kathy gained an understanding that her reactions to stress were not unique, and that others reacted to stress in similar ways. Kathy shared, "[The process] made me understand that I'm not alone whenever I feel that something is stressing me out…. it made me feel kind of normal to react that way, to feel ok, this is causing stress." Thomas shared that by better understanding his sources of stress his reaction to stress was modified. He understood that his initial reactions to stress were based on what he perceived to be the low standards of coworkers and the limited accountability of systems. Thomas shared that the process "helped me realize that I was causing my own stress … it also affected my reaction to the source [of stress], and my reaction was just to decide to begin to ignore a lot of the stuff I see."

Cindy commented on the importance of reflective practitioners following thru on their realizations and putting thoughts into action. Her reactions to stress focused on verbal interactions with coworkers, and the true intent of the message sometimes being lost due to sugarcoated discourse. Cindy realized that how she was reacting verbally to stress needed modification, and that she and her coworkers should not assume the other understands, but rather, tell the person directly the intended understanding. Cindy commented, "You can look in the mirror, but if you're not looking at what you're looking at, you're not really seeing."

Adam commented that he learned his reactions to stress meant that he should not take on more tasks than he can do in a day. Adam learned that his reaction to stress was the result of a series of variables he experienced at school, but that he was empowered to not react to or be stressed out by those variables. Adam shared, "Stress is only created by your reaction to the entity or variable coming towards you. So, for me, it's very simple. I'm not going to react to that, and I'm not going to get stressed out.

Charles also felt he better understood his reactions to stress by first understanding its causes. By knowing that stress was derived from different areas of his life, Charles felt he achieved better control over his reactions to stress by better understanding the context within which the stress originated.

Reflection on How Personal History Affected Reactions to Stress

As the participants shared critical moments in their lives that influenced their decisions to become educators, they also realized that their personal histories directly affected their reactions to stress. Kathy shared that throughout her personal history it had been difficult for her to register opinions or have her voice heard when she disagreed

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with someone. In turn, she found it easier not to be contentious and publicly disagree, but rather, go along with the decisions she disagreed with. This lack of voice, or self-efficacy, affected her reactions to stress as a teacher, especially when working in a non-nurturing environment and faced with criticism.

Thomas realized that his reactions to stress were more formidable than previously understood. His background, including military training, allowed him to deal with situations quickly and decisively, but did not eradicate the stress attached to the situations. Thomas endured what appeared to be a disconnect between his past achievements in the military and education, and his school administration not accepting him as an educational leader. Thomas believed that what he considered significant proof of his leadership ability did not translate as such to the administrators who hired school leaders. This served as a substantial source of stress and confusion for Thomas.

Cindy limited her discussion on her reactions to stress. Cindy witnessed and endured a variety of dysfunctional events at previous jobs and learned that trust was a dangerous commodity when misplaced. Her personal history demonstrated strong resilience and a glimpse of independence in her reaction to stress. Although very social, Cindy found it difficult to trust others as a source of helping her with stress. The result of her strong independence led her to own her feelings, but at the expense of dealing with her stress without the support of others.

Adam found it difficult to allow people into his inner circle of trust and assist with his reactions to stress. Adam's history had a strong effect on his reactions to stress. Cited for her strength, but lack of empathy, Adam adopted aspects of his mother's philosophical approach to life and channeled his efforts towards personal progression

prior to allowing others to become a personal part of his life. Adam adopted many leadership characteristics from his service in the military. The sense of control and situational awareness gained from his military service translated to his direct approach as an educational leader.

Charles' personal history, like the others in the group, had a profound effect on his reactions to stress. His early indoctrination to please others helped lead him down a path of educational excellence. Dynamic throughout his childhood and early adulthood, Charles developed into a perfectionist who sought excellence in any task undertaken. Charles' negative reaction to stress was the strongest when he perceived others as not measuring up to his understanding of standards and expectations. Charles practiced many moments of frustration and impatience growing up, but he reflected on more appropriate responses to stress, and adopted reflective writing as an essential tool in modifying his reaction to stress and his treatment of other people.

Reflection on The Effects of Stress

Four of the five participants expressed an improved understanding of the effects of stress due to reflecting on these effects during the collaborative autobiography process. Thomas stated that the effects of stress diminished with his increased understanding of the causes of stress and his reactions to stress. Cindy reflected that although she knew her reactions to stress were not ideal, she found comfort in knowing she had an additional outlet for her stress. By understanding the effects of her stress, Cindy felt more empowered to choose her reactions to stress, and consequently, reduce the negative effects of stress. Cindy acknowledged that being overwhelmed was a personal choice of accepting additional stress, a behavior that she could begin to better regulate.

Adam benefitted from the collaborative autobiography process by gaining an empathetic lens that allowed him to understand that many of the teachers and coworkers at his school were suffering with stress. Adam shared,

It just really allowed me to visualize and open up a lens to the fact that other people have stress. I don't always see that. Sometimes, I'm in my own bubble, but it allowed me to see [that] sometimes people are underperforming because of [stress]; they are absent because of it, [or] they are sick because of it.

Similar to Adam, Charles gained a greater concern about being a source of stress for the people that relied on him for his leadership. Charles also reflected that stress had a tendency to lead to unhealthy lifestyles and reflected on the effects of stress and how he behaved at home. Charles understood that the amount of responsibilities that he had at work and his reaction to these tasks served as a catalyst for the effects of his stress being shared with his family. Charles recalled being abrupt with his wife on the phone, and recalled, "I got upset with her for interrupting me while I'm trying to finish up a meeting [at school] … That wasn't fair to her…. I had to eat crow and apologize when I got home."

A Plan for Better Managing Stress in the Future

The group members considered multiple approaches to mitigating the effects of stress. A common theme that cut across the group was an incorporation of rewards that were previously abandoned due to work management and work related stress. Central to managing stress, each member considered improvements in balancing work management, improving communication with coworkers, and practicing better discrimination in accepting additional duties and making time for themselves.

Improved Personal Maintenance

Three of the five group participants planned to improve personal health habits as part of their plan for better managing stress. Thomas discussed resuming racquetball after school to decrease stress while Cindy focused on an improved diet and quitting smoking. Cindy acknowledged that quitting smoking would be challenging and shared, "I'm looking … to stop smoking. I'm trying to reframe the release that smoking gives me during my workday." Adam shared that he would create schedules that protected his workouts from being cancelled due to job responsibilities.

Four of the group participants also planned to improve personal maintenance by strengthening family and social bonds. Kathy planned to create more time with her nephews and family. Thomas planned to decompress prior to going home, so he could spend more time with family. Cindy planned to reward herself by spending more time with friends and traveling instead of working during holidays. Charles planned "untouchable" time on his calendar to ensure he could spend more time with his family.

Change Environment Through Improved Communication

A common theme shared across the group was the need for improved communication with coworkers. Kathy shared that one of her biggest sources of stress was the limited dialogue she had with her administrator, and she planned to take the initiative to establish a more meaningful professional relationship with her principal. Kathy affirmed, "Part of teamwork is being able to communicate with our leaders and making sure I am being heard as well as listening to what my school leaders have to say." Kathy thus viewed the need to improve communication as essential to team building, but also as a proactive component in decreasing her work related stress. Kathy also

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recognized that external forces negatively affected the well-being of her students, and consequently, served as a source of stress for her. To counter this source of stress, Kathy resolved to redouble her efforts to establish a better dialogue with her students' parents.

Thomas cited the behavior of coworkers as a major source of stress. To address this source of stress, Thomas planned to improve his relationship with fellow teachers by becoming friendlier and initiating conversations. Thomas concluded that many of his coworkers likely suffered with stress on a daily basis, and improved communication would help eradicate barriers and allow for a meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding. Consequently, Thomas felt by better understanding others' behavior, he would be empowered to limit the effect of these actions as negative influences in his life.

Cindy considered ineffective communication with others as a source of stress and planned to change the context of her environment by having more positive conversations with her coworkers at school. It was within these conversations that Cindy planned to better communicate and clarify her expectations of work that would both benefit her school team and reduce her stress levels.

Adam planned to change his work environment by improving the communication at his school and initiating a voluntary reflective writing program for teacher leaders. Adam planned to reduce the stress in his environment by modeling the change needed at his school. Adam shared,

> My leadership will inspire and model the change needed in the environment. I
> will also ask the unit managers to do [reflective] writing in a journal as part of
> personal and professional development. This process will allow people to express
> their feelings and sentiments on paper and if they want to share, they may in the

weekly managers' meeting. These processes will be modeled by me, but

authorized by the CEO of the facility.

Similar to the others in the group, Charles planned several initiatives designed for

improved communicating at his school campus. Charles recognized the value of one-on-

one conversations and shared,

> I believe that deep, individual, or small group conversations is the way to move a
>
> faculty. I also think that a more intimate setting will allow for better and more
>
> authentic feedback in terms of what is happening on campus that is causing
>
> stress…. These conversations will determine who will make up my core as we go
>
> forward…. Each conversation will be personalized to the individual; what I see
>
> and what I want to know more about. This actually fits in really well with my
>
> motto of being a professional growth coach.

Charles understood that improved communication with parents helped his

students as well as diminished the likelihood of parents lodging complaints to his

superintendent and creating unnecessary stress for Charles. Charles pondered how he

could improve his communication with parents and shared,

> With an already crammed schedule, this will be difficult. How much of my time
>
> do I want to block for teacher input, student input, and parent input? I know that
>
> each is critical, but it has to be weighed against grade level and department
>
> meetings about the work at hand and classroom observations.

Charles also planned to reduce his campus leadership team from forty to twenty,

thus allowing better dialogue and communication, and planned to improve his current

collaboration by forming a new principals' club. Charles described this club as a

principals' cohort where "we get together … and just talk about what's going on … and just kind of being there for each other…. I think that it would … build comradery between us."

Improved Work Management

Four of the five participants planned to improve their current work management practices to reduce stress. Kathy recognized that her current work management conflicted with her much needed time with family and reconciled that change had to take place. With the help of coworkers who had similar work constraints and tasks, Kathy shared,

> I only have a few years in this career, that is why I feel stressed out when it comes to time management. I can learn to better cope with this stress by looking to my fellow coworkers who do handle this factor better than what I do.

Cindy endured constant work interruptions during the day. As the school improvement facilitator with an office near the front of the school, Cindy could not afford to have a closed door policy. Still, Cindy understood the need to limit her daily work interruptions, which in turn, would help her limit the stress that resulted from her current approach to work management. Cindy considered developing better defined project timelines and a work schedule that included periods of privacy during the school-day.

Cindy also recognized that a viable plan for improved work management was actually putting less time into work. Cindy commented, "I feel pressured often to attend events after school and on weekends." Understanding that she needed to create time for herself, Cindy resolved,

To make sure that this pressure is realistic with the work I am doing in my personal life. Managing school, work, and teaching [at a second job] does not offer a ton of free time. I plan to be more discriminate on how my free time is used.

Cindy planned to reward herself by taking a vacation over winter break rather than customarily working during her off time, and recognized that coworkers and friends could serve as a source of support, not for providing advice on how to reduce stress, but with helping her remember to reward herself.

Adam considered restructuring his approach to work management important in reducing work-related stress. Aside from performing a form of triage to differentiate between essential and non-essential tasks, Adam considered using checklists as a method of prioritizing his tasks. Although he had a habit of using checklists, Adam modified this practice to include sorting his tasks with dates and times. An essential part of his new work management plan included daily schedules that provided him ample time for sleep and exercise. Adam argued, "I believe strongly in exercising daily…. I have been struggling juggling work and exercising, and I often times feel it, by constantly being tired."

Charles reflected that he typically took on too many demands and would continue to struggle with work management. Still, Charles planned to be more efficient with his work management, reduce the stress that resulted from his heavy workload, and spend more time with what he considered his greatest resource, his family. Charles planned to reduce the negative effects of his current work management system by adding his family time and time devoted to graduate school to his work calendar. "Untouchable" (non-

negotiable) family time would not be infringed upon due to his tremendous workload as a middle school principal.

An additional aspect of Charles' plan for improved work management was to better utilize his staff and teachers by practicing more delegation of responsibilities. By allowing teachers more autonomy to solve problems at the team level and delegating responsibilities to office staff, Charles envisioned more flexibility in his daily routine, allowing him to maximize the amount of time he could spend with students.

Control of Personal Choice versus Control of Others: The Power to Say No.
The difficulty of declining additional duties or tasks at work was a common theme that affected work management and contributed as a source of stress for the group participants. Partly attributed to a servant leadership approach, each participant struggled with saying no when asked for assistance.

Kathy recognized that she needed to prioritize her work on a daily basis and felt that an improved relationship with her administrator might help her decline additional tasks and decrease the intimidation she felt with her administrator. Ultimately, Kathy sought to identify what she was required to do during the day, and what could be continued the next day.

Thomas acknowledged that it was difficult to say no to additional duties at school, but also reflected that when he needed something done in his class, he typically called on one student he could rely on. Thomas also wrestled with taking ownership of other peoples' actions, reflecting that the attention he placed on others' actions at school created enormous stress for him. Reconstructing his understanding of what and who

controlled his environment helped Thomas to put others' actions into a new perspective, with less stress as the result.

Still, Thomas recognized that if his plan for a preferred future did not work, he could exercise the word no and quit teaching. Thomas shared,

> If my stress level gets so high that I cannot manage it, and it's making me ill, I can simply walk away from my job as a teacher and still be able to make ends meet with my retirement from the military…. I definitely want to stay in education, but at least I have the option to leave if I allow things that are beyond my control to dictate my behavior or feelings.

Charles understood that he took on too many duties, reflecting, "I have a real difficult time telling others that I cannot help them." Cindy shared that she valued the fact that others could count on her, but also acknowledged that a limit needed to be put in place as to how many additional duties she could accept. Cindy reflected, "There is always going to be something more to do, someone else to counsel with, or some project down the line. I do not need to be the one to take on all the projects." Similar to Thomas, Cindy extended her understanding to also not take ownership of things that she could not change. Cindy decided to practice an emotional response of "no" and become more realistic of her control of her environment. Cindy shared,

> I take ownership of the things that I cannot change…. that is where my stress lies…. One of the things I have to realize is that I cannot control the actions of others, and must realize that allowing them to create stress for me is not beneficial to my work.

Adam noted that saying no to some tasks would require a change in his thought processes, but would also enable other staff members at his school to lighten some of his work load thus making it more manageable. Adam reflected why many people are consistently asked to take on extra duties: "The person who is giving you that work, they're not offering it to someone who says no, they're offering it to you first because you always say yes."

The Need to Disconnect

Although disconnecting from work or coworkers was a reaction to and effect of stress, prior to the collaborative autobiography the need to disconnect in a positive way in order to relieve stress was also a common theme among all of the group participants. Kathy expressed a need to periodically disconnect from work, and planned to have occasional disconnects to better deal with the stress at school by not taking phone calls from work or check work email at home. Kathy shared, "there are times we need to disconnect…. that break reminds us that there is more to us than just what happens within the walls of our schools." Thomas planned to separate himself from school, relieve stress by playing racquetball, and then return home. Cindy acknowledged needing fewer interruptions at work and more time to reward herself. She acknowledged that disconnecting work from home would be very difficult. Adam planned to take more breaks at work and shared,

> Short, frequent breaks are very important to keep sane in a hectic environment. I never take breaks, eat lunch, or just leave the workplace during the day…. To maximize my day and efficiency, I will make daily goals with incorporating a few minutes each day for me in order to relax, or just step away from the work, in

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order to enjoy a meal or a little freedom. This is not only imperative for the

reduction of my stress levels, but will positively impact my health and readiness.

Charles shared that one way he would disconnect from work was to continue to

refuse to put his work email on his phone. Charles reflected on this practice and shared,

"I think I'm the only one … all my [Assistant Principals] have their email go [to their

phones, but] I just might be the only principal in the district…. I'm not going to put my

work email on my phone."

Benefits of Collaborative Autobiography

The group agreed that multiple benefits stemmed from the collaborative

autobiography process. Each member reported gaining new perspectives and self-

awareness in the sources, reactions, and effects of stress. By reconstructing their pasts

through reflective writing and collaboration, the group made cognitive connections

between their behavior and stress, and considered collaborative autobiography as a form

of therapy and networking. By understanding others, the group gained more self-

awareness and empathy.

Gained New Perspective

The collaborative autobiography process provided the group a change in

perspective of their jobs, personal lives, and education. The process allowed the group to

slow down and reflect on the different phases of the process and adopt a broader

perspective that enabled them to formulate an action plan for a preferred future. Kathy

shared,

> I really enjoyed being a part of this research study…. It [made] me look at the
>
> whole perspective of what I've done in my career … and hearing from others…. I

take in everyone's opinion, point of view, and … I kind of pull a piece from

everything…. that's how I like to form my own opinions, my own views…. [and]

that gives me hope that I'll be in this particular field ten or twenty year from now,

possibly.

Kathy considered her problems at school and shared,

[The collaborative autobiography process] made me realize [that] the problems I

think I have … are big problems, but I listen to somebody else that has bigger

problems…. it made me appreciate my problems a little bit more because they

weren't as problematic as I thought they were.

Kathy reflected, that as the newest participant in public education, she learned from

others' past experiences and commented, "whenever they mentioned something that

worked for them, I [took] a mental note and see if maybe I can apply that in my

classroom for later on."

Thomas appreciated the role diversity of the group participants and acknowledged

that he gained from others' experiences. Thomas reflected on changes that occurred in

his perspective of sources of stress and stated, "The most eye-opening experience for me

was to realize that most of the stress I go through is actually pure stupidity on my part.

That is where this course has been the most valuable to me." Thomas also focused on

administrators as a source of stress and the benefits of administrators being a part of the

group and argued,

Bringing up the topic of work-related stress and how it affects me … has allowed

me to figure out ways to deal with stress. Amazingly, I have even begun to

realize that my director cannot simply give me all the good assignments. Her job

is to share those and distribute among all of us who are trying to become administrators or advance in some way.

Cindy appreciated the diversity of roles and life experiences shared in the group meetings and noted, "It's nice to see that you're not alone in your stress…. but, it's also nice to see that stress has a life cycle." Cindy commented that the collaborative autobiography process helped her consider changing her thought processes in dealing with stress by formulating ways to reduce the impact of stress.

Similar to the rest of the group, Adam valued the variety of roles in the class and appreciated listening to other peoples' life journeys and the perspectives they shared with their struggles and strengths. Adam commented that "hearing the stories lends to advice to each other on how to deal with stress." Adam found that the collaborative autobiography process allowed him to reconstruct his own past by linking his actions of integrity with similar events that occurred in his mother's life. Adam also reflected that the collaborative autobiography process created a new lens for him and shared, "This class has opened up my eyes to the fact that most people go through a stressful tenor in their lives, especially at work; and stress really does create a domino effect in their respective lives."

Charles valued the sharing of experiences of others in the group and commented, "You kind of help each other in terms of finding ways … to deal with [stress]…. What worked best for this person [may] work for me…. You're looking for ideas and suggestions on how to deal with [stress]."

Sense of Familiarity in Causes, Reactions, and Effects of Stress

Each of the participants valued the understanding that many causes, reactions, and effects of stress were common to the group. Previous to the collaborative autobiography study, many of the participants felt they were unique in their reactions to stress, and subsequently, felt out of place with their feelings. Kathy benefited with the group's similarity in reactions and effects of stress and felt fortunate to receive advice from the group. Kathy shared, "Participating in this project has also made me realize that I am not alone in this adventure…. There is a huge community of teachers … that experience … most of the same exact problems that I go through."

Thomas reflected on the benefits of discussing stress and finding common issues within the group, and was comforted in knowing that he was not alone in what he experienced. Cindy also expressed feeling comfort that she was not alone in experiencing stress and found comfort in knowing that other group members considered adults a source of stress. Adam commented on valuing the realization that each group member faced barriers or obstacles to overcome.

Charles appreciated the group's common reactions to stress and stated, "Too many times, stress relief does not come in the form of healthy options…. Negative ways of handling stress include drinking, smoking, swearing, and closing yourself off from others. I do not feel that I'm unique from the rest of the group."

Group Support and Encouragement: A Form of Therapy

Similar to a common sense of familiarity, a common theme across the group was the interpretation that the collaborative autobiography process provided therapeutic benefits. Kathy expressed feeling encouraged when others shared the struggles they

endured at their jobs. Kathy stated, "It gave me encouragement…. and kind of bolstered me up … to stay in the teaching field longer…. Hearing your stories and how they handle such a chaotic lifestyle gives meaning and encouragement I need."

Thomas added that the collaborative autobiography process provided an adult learning environment void of interruptions, where each participant listened to the others. The group conversations also offered moments of reflection and healing. An example was Thomas's recollection of Adam's conversation about his biological father. Thomas shared,

> One of the class members talked about the idea that his father left him, and I detected a little bit of a twinge of pain in his voice…. I knew his pain because I had felt some of the pain…. I appreciated collaborative autobiography because you're able to tie things that happen in your daily life, your school year, back to a way you can talk about it, so that you can begin a process of healing and moving on with your life…. These group settings … are like therapy … I enjoy them…. I do enjoy listening to other people talk about their life stories, and it makes me feel as though I'm not the only one going through tough times, or who has endured tough times.

> Cindy shared, "Working with others in the course that share the same desire to identify where they have control and not to "fix" their campus and professional lives has created a sense of belonging." Cindy likened the collaborative meetings as a form of networking of like-minded people, and felt that everyone grew in the process. She reflected that she could visualize working with some of the group members in the future.

Adam described the group meetings as a positive form of counseling, "In taking this course, I realized many things through reflective writing, and most important, sharing and receiving feedback from the group." Adam reflected on the course and valued the mix of writing, sharing reflections, the variety of emotions that came out of the discussions, and gained a better understanding of himself by understanding others. Similar to Thomas, Adam felt one of the greatest values of the collaborative autobiography process was the forum that allowed for the participants' voices to be heard.

Charles focused on the reflective writing as beneficial. Charles articulated on the necessity of building trust as essential before we could discuss stress, "we don't talk about stress." Charles also mentioned that the collaborative autobiography process increased his appreciation of "the power of writing and reflection."

Improved Empathy and Understanding of Others' Stress

Four of the five group participants expressed an increase in empathy for others as a result of the collaborative autobiography process. Thomas concluded that, with the goal of decreasing stress, why should he be a source of stress for others? Thomas also expressed an increase of empathy for his school director, and stated that due to his director becoming more human in his eyes, he felt kinder towards her. Cindy considered wanting to make her customers (people who visit) happier as a result of her. Adam stated, "I never thought by just observing people in my work environment, and their stress levels, is so important in maximizing workload and sustaining efficiency."

Charles valued the collaborative autobiography process and shared,

By being able to reflect on myself and my work, my past, and the systems that influence my work, I am better able to narrow the lens on issues at hand. The first thing that I was able to learn, or remember, was that teachers have stress.

Charles sited one of his biggest gains from the collaborative group was the insight he gained from the teachers in the group and the reminder they provided of the stress that teachers go through. The process caused Charles to reflect,

What am I doing to cause [teachers] stress? What systems or processes can I put in place or take out of place that would help with the stress the teachers are dealing with. Or, am I just taking the time to listen?

Benefits of Reflective Writing

The act of reflective writing was therapeutic to the research group and was embedded in the collaborative autobiography process. Kathy shared that being able to put feelings down on paper was soothing. Thomas believed that he benefitted greatly from "Putting down what I went through as a child, the difficulties I had with interviews, and then the difficulties I had the first time I taught was medicinal for me." Thomas was expressive in his positive feelings towards reflective writing and shared that the writing portion of the collaborative autobiography process allowed him to vent some of his anger and frustration. Adam noted the therapeutic benefits of reflective writing and applied this to writing kudos to his teachers as a form of positive written reflection on their work.

Charles affirmed, "We all got value out of writing and reflecting…. I know that it felt therapeutic for me to think about those different things and write it out. It seemed like that came across with others as well." Charles added that he loved reflective writing, and unlike orally sharing things about oneself, reflective writing removed "feeling weird

talking about yourself [and] … was a great therapy session without paying the price of therapy." Similar to the rest of the group, Cindy felt she benefitted from reflective writing, but stated her preferred method of reflecting was verbal and she would not likely practice reflective writing on her own.

An additional theme that cut across the group was that reflective writing was a tool for increased self-awareness. Kathy recalled,

> Being able to write down what I feel causes me stress, as part of the reflective writing, has caused me to take a step back and ask myself if there is anything I can do to make it not as stressful.

> Thomas valued the reflective quality of writing and stated, "I found that by putting down on paper, it's … another way for me to realize that I have those stressors … and it helped me to contemplate and to think why." Thomas shared, "Writing about what caused me stress and speaking and listening to my group members … allowed me to see that our backgrounds and uniqueness dictated our reactions. Something that seemed trivial to me was a serious blow to another person."

Cindy found value in the reflective writing as a process that jarred her memory and brought instances of her life back to the forefront of her mind. Cindy also stated that reflective writing reminded her of good things she had done and served as a morale boost for her. Still, as for the process of reflective writing itself, Cindy shared,

> I hate reflective writing, absolutely hate it…. I thought that it was good to be forced to do it. It's just so hard to speak … in the first person (I)…. I liked being forced to it. I don't think that I'll do it personally…. But, I did think that it was neat.

Adam found the reflective writing invigorating as well as liberating, and added, "It's wonderful because you get to see your side of things through your lens. It also makes you think about what's real and what's not real, what's important, and what's not important." Adam used the analogy of putting a mirror to his face when given probing questions to reflect and write about. Adam shared,

Putting it down on paper really made me hone in and [realize] … there're a lot of stressed out people … You go through the day so fast, sometimes you don't look at your stress and know that everyone is stressed out…. how can I minimize their workload and maximize their efficiency?

Charles stated, "Writing about your past is definitely beneficial to understanding your present and your future." Charles summed up the reflective writing by sharing,

Until you start writing about it, sometimes you really don't realize what the issue is, and through that process of self-reflection and writing it down, you can really do a lot of self-analysis and come to some conclusions about why things are the way they are.

Charles also shared that sometimes he did not feel positive towards work, and was in an occasional bad mood. Reflective writing helped him figure out the source of his mood.

Participants' Recommendations

The group participants provided multiple recommendations intended to equip educators with a greater likelihood of meeting the needs of the students and gaining the status of professionals. Recommendations for overhauling educator certification programs, standardized tests, and teacher evaluations were considered necessary to creating a holistic approach to education while strengthening collaboration within the

schools. Each participant recommended collaborative autobiography or reflective writing for sustained school improvement.

Improved On-Site Staff Development

Kathy and Charles recommended improved on-site professional development as a tool to guide teachers to adopt a more professional approach to their educational environment. Kathy supported site-based professional development tailored to the specific school and supporting community. She reflected that the professional development should be focused on student success and preparation for post-graduation. Similar to Kathy, Charles recommended a robust professional development for school staff. Charles shared a recommendation for intensive professional development,

> I would shut the doors of my campus for two to three months and have intensive training in all the areas of teaching that my teachers are lacking; areas that should have been covered before they were allowed to become teachers. Instead, I am given two weeks before school starts.

Educator Certification Programs

Four of the group participants felt that many educators did not behave or were not perceived as professionals by the public. With the exception of Kathy, each participant voiced concern about unprofessional practices of teachers and the subsequent detrimental effects on students. A common concern among the group was the ineffectiveness of current teacher certification programs in meeting the needs of teachers entering into the classrooms. Thomas felt that teacher certification programs did not adequately prepare teachers for the reality they faced in the classroom or the processes that drive public

education and reflected, "the districts, maybe even the State, they don't teach us things that we need to know."

Although each participant witnessed student suffering as a result of health issues or personal family crisis, Charles and Cindy were deeply affected by the tragedy of student suicide. Cindy shared that student or faculty death was a yearly occurrence, but current systems reacted to these tragic events by offering psychiatric services by strangers to the students after the tragedy occurred. Cindy partly attributed this reaction to trauma to inadequate social-emotional education in teacher certification programs. Cindy recommended a shift from excluding the discussion of death to providing training focused on how to support students when tragedies occur. Cindy also argued for the need to examine counselor certification programs due to the inconsistent quality of counselors that came out of the current programs.

Charles proposed elevating teachers to the status of true professionals by imitating medical doctors' licenses attained at the graduate level. Charles argued, "I … do not feel that educators are professionals because we have not taken the necessary steps to be called professionals." Charles envisioned a comprehensive educator program that did not allow undergraduates to major in education, but rather, teacher candidates would be required to attend graduate school in order to obtain teaching certifications. Upon completion of graduate school, teachers would be required to pass a rigorous exit exam. Once hired, the teachers' pay would be elevated to match the entry pay of other professionals. Charles concluded, "When teachers go through this type of program across the nation, we could start to call ourselves professionals."

Standardized Tests

State mandated testing elicited an opinion from each participant with varying concerns of its negative ramifications on student learning and preparation for life after graduation. Each participant agreed that excessive value was placed on test scores, and in some cases, the emphasis placed on passing encouraged students to cheat and teachers to teach to the test. The group argued that the current system of testing placed more importance on an arbitrary score than on student learning. Cindy and Charles reflected on the emphasis on testing resulting in the diminished likelihood of a well-rounded education for the students.

Both Adam and Charles argued for testing a representative sample of students. Charles recommended that testing should resemble National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing, which relies on a sampling of students. Still, Charles maintained, that "every child should be tested within the school on a regular basis," and should leave school every day believing that something was learned. Adam felt the current usage of standardized tests placed enormous pressure on teachers to teach to the test, and consequently, failed to make "connections that can be applied to learn further knowledge." Kathy argued that project based learning would not only be a more effective measure of students' performance, but would also relieve a lot of stress associated with testing conditions. Thomas did not express opposition to standardized tests, but opposed significant financial expenditures for foreign companies to write and grade these tests.

Related to the groups' frustration with standardized tests was the group members' limited control of the curriculum taught within the schools. Kathy argued that the

teachers needed more control of the curriculum, and Charles argued that the curriculum should be focused on the whole child. Charles recommended that the curriculum be student centered, and that each student should have an IEP tailored to his or her academic progression. Charles shared, "I am … a believer in student choice. I think that by a student's junior year in high school, the student should be able to choose what courses they wish to pursue."

State and Local Processes

Each participant expressed frustration with state and local processes that often convoluted the students' education, and recommended an overhaul of antiquated systems. Thomas recommended more collaboration in school improvement with an emphasis on authentic student and teacher accountability. Thomas expressed frustration with what appeared to be a consequence-free environment that allowed students to engage in sexual activity, smoke marijuana, and leave the campus without permission. To adequately address these student issues, Thomas recommended that administrators first acknowledge the issues, and then delegate roles and responsibilities to the faculty intended to curb harmful conduct and provide to students. Thomas also recommended an overhaul of his school's policies, matching expected outcomes with responsibility and ownership of staff.

Adam argued that the recidivism that occurred in schools was due to limited social support and not allowing programs intended to support students ample time to work. Adam reflected on a previous failed school that had nine principals in a ten year period: "They changed the name … four times…. They were trying different programs, different things, different people added without letting things work…. Let things

marinate a bit." Along with a renovation of processes and systems, Adam recommended more community involvement in the creation of these processes and systems.

Charles argued that schools were plagued with outdated systems that stifled student learning. Charles proposed new processes created from the ground up, not only to help establish buy-in and commitment from students, teachers, and parents, but to help schools overcome their greatest challenge; getting adults out of the confinement of the mold that was set over the last one hundred years. To help break this mold, Charles recommended a better understanding of the hidden agendas within schools and building new processes to impede destructive agendas. In addition, to create positive change, Charles advocated a one-day-a-week time for teachers to prepare lessons. He argued that more in-depth preparation time would help create higher quality instruction within the classrooms. Charles stated, "… if teachers were given one day a week just to work on planning and analysis for each student, the other four days would be ten times more productive."

In addition to recommendations to change standardized testing, Thomas and Charles recommended changes to the PDAS to create better evaluations of teachers' practices and provide sustained support for professional growth. Thomas shared that the dog and pony show put on for teacher observations neglected the reality of what really occurred in the unobserved classroom. Thomas also cited the enormous stress caused by formal observations and shared, "Teacher evaluations are a farce in my opinion…. Fifteen minute walk-throughs is not enough to determine whether a teacher is doing their job or not." Charles expressed a similar concern about PDAS and the fear felt by

teachers being observed. Charles recommended one-on-one conversations as more likely to create positive change and provide meaningful feedback.

Implement Collaborative Autobiography in Schools

The group participants shared a consensus that educators should be reflective practitioners, and that each participant grew in the study as a result of the collaborative autobiography process. Each participant recommended that collaborative autobiography be introduced in schools, but stressed that trust must be established prior to initiating the collaborative autobiography process. Charles acknowledged that "trust" was central to a successful collaborative effort at his campus and noted "It really is about the trust building…. Can you sit in a room and be vulnerable enough to open up, and not only talk about your successes, but talk about your failures." Kathy shared,

> I would highly recommend other educators to take a course such as this one where collaborative autobiography is involved. I feel that teachers' voices are not heard too often for fear of ridicule, and this collaborative autobiography course has been a safe place to voice those concerns and to directly link those concerns to our problems with stress.

Thomas recommended, "The approach taken by this course should be introduced in school systems as a way of helping identify harmful or antiquated systems … especially as a means for stressed-out teachers to relieve some of their stress." Thomas planned to approach his director and propose a school-based setting for educators to reflect and write about their sources of stress.

Cindy recommended collaborative autobiography to anybody working in education, including custodians, cafeteria workers, teachers, and administrators. Adam

recommended collaborative autobiography to "anyone who could write." Charles recommended collaborative autobiography for new teachers and the principal advisory council that he belonged to. Charles argued,

> Until you start writing about it, sometimes you really don't realize what the issue is, and through that process of self-reflection and writing it down, you can really do a lot of self-analysis and come to some conclusions about why things are the way they are, whether that be through your thoughts or your actions. Writing about your past is definitely beneficial to understanding your present and your future.

Each participant valued the safe environment that the study provided, but felt that more participants would have enriched the conversations. Estimates from five to twelve participants were suggested for future collaborative settings. Each participant valued the diverse roles found within the group. The teachers appreciated the dialogue with administrators and the administrators felt that teacher input helped them better relate to the stresses experienced at their respective schools.

Summary

This chapter focused on the findings related to the six research questions for the collaborative autobiography project. From the written reflections provided by the five participants, observations, and field notes, common themes emerged in relation to the research questions. This chapter discussed group themes concerning causes of participants' stress, participants' reactions to stress, and the effects of that stress; participants' life histories and the effect of those life histories on the present; and how collaborative autobiography assisted educators in understanding the causes, reactions,

and effects of stress. This chapter also discussed group themes regarding participants'

plans for better managing stress in the future, and the participants' perception of benefits

of the collaborative autobiography process. Finally, this chapter reviewed group themes

concerning recommendations for decreasing educator stress by changing systems at the

local, state, and national levels. The group participants demonstrated sincerity and

candor in their reflections and group discussions, and reminded the researcher of their

devotion to education. Perhaps Thomas put it most aptly when he argued,

> We have … experienced conflict with supervisors, colleagues, students, and
>
> parents. As well, we have all experienced relationship, marital, and family
>
> problems. The one thing that I think is most amazing is that we are all still in the
>
> career or job that has caused us a lot of pain and stress.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This study focused on collaborative autobiography as a process for addressing educator stress. The purpose of the study was to help fill the dearth of available resources educators have in effectively dealing with job related stress. The findings for the five educators who participated in the study centered on six research questions that dealt with causes, reactions, and effects of educator stress as well as reflections of personal histories as they related to current stress, the creation of a plan for a preferred future in dealing with stress, and benefits resulting from the collaborative autobiography process. To review, the research questions that guided this study were:

1) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the causes of the educators' stress?

2) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the educators' reactions to stress?

3) What does collaborative autobiography reveal about the effects of the educators' stress?

4) In what ways, if any, does collaborative autobiography help the educators understand the causes of, their reactions to, and the effects of their stress?

5) In what ways, if any, does collaborative autobiography empower the educators to create a plan for better managing stress in the future?

6) Beyond a plan for better managing stress in the future, what benefits, if any, do the educators perceive as resulting from collaborative autobiography?

The five educators invited to participate in this research study enrolled in an elective course on collaborative autobiography. Throughout the study, the participants shared their reflections on the four phases of the collaborative autobiography process. The four phases of the collaborative autobiography process were:

1. Reflections on professional context, educational platform, types of professional stress, and professional and personal effects of stress.

2. Reflections on past personal and professional life to better understand current stress and its effects.

3. Critical appraisal of professional stress and its effects.

4. Preferred future relative to addressing professional stress.

The data gathered from the collaborative autobiography process consisted of four reflective papers from each participant based on the four phases of the collaborative autobiography process, two interviews with each participant during the study, and observations of the five collaborative meetings. It was during the group meetings that I observed the collaborative autobiography process and took field notes based on the interactions of the participants. After coding the data for each participant, a re-immersion in the data allowed for the identification of broader categories that served as the basis for individual case studies organized around each participant's four phases of collaborative autobiography.

The first of the five participants, Kathy, was a kindergarten teacher at a charter school in central Texas. Kathy experienced a variety of sources of stress, including a difficult principal and external pressure on student assessment and classroom curriculum. Aside from the heavy workload, Kathy's stress was compounded by threats of being fired by her school principal. Kathy's stress was intensified by a suppression of her feelings and a significant discomfort in dealing with contention. The effects of her job related stress affected her blood pressure, self-esteem, and severely limited the time she could spend with her family.

Thomas was a high school teacher in central Texas who previously had served over twenty years in the military. Raised in a low SES family, Thomas considered educators with low dedication to the profession a significant source of stress. Thomas experienced severe frustration with educators providing minimal support for students, and felt particular stress at administrators who seemed to allow student misbehavior and prejudice to be a part of their educational platform. The effects of job related stress not only negatively affected his family, but Thomas previously suffered a stroke due to unmanageable stress.

Cindy was a school improvement facilitator at a high school in Central Texas. With previous work in the Peace Corps, Cindy was fascinated with diverse cultures and demonstrated a deep devotion to her students. Similar to Thomas, Cindy considered teachers not doing their jobs as her primary source of stress. Her stress was compounded when she considered the students as victims of low standard teachers and systems that did not address student needs. Cindy reacted to stress by practicing poor health habits which consequently degraded her physical and emotional well-being.

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Adam was a program director at a Central Texas school for emotionally disturbed children. Similar to Thomas, Adam's service in the military provided a focused approach to leadership that he used at his school. Similar to the research group, Adam considered teachers his primary source of stress and lamented that unnecessary drama and contention were brought to the classrooms by teachers who failed to remember the special needs of the students. The effects of stress not only caused Adam to redouble his efforts in training his staff, but also weakened his trust that the teachers would interact appropriately with the students and use the standards he provided.

Charles was a middle-school principal in Central Texas. With an eclectic background that included acting and managing restaurants, Charles entered into education as a means of serving others. Frustrated with school staff that countered his initiatives, Charles perceived teachers as his greatest source of stress. Charles also considered local, state, and national systems as well as teacher certification programs that failed to adequately prepare teachers to handle educational issues in school as significant sources of stress. Charles' stress was accentuated by feeling helpless due to the lack of professional standing many educators carry as well as his inability to control antiquated systems. The effects of stress created more work at school and less time with his family.

Following completion of the individual case studies, the case reports were compared and common themes were identified. These themes are reported in chapter 5. All of the participants cited multiple causes of job related stress. Each member considered ineffective work management as a significant source of stress. The greatest source of stress was other adults. Conflicts between educational platforms and educator behavior as well as ineffective communication in school served as causes of frustration

and stress. Philosophical differences with coworkers were closely aligned with perceptions of students' wellbeing being compromised. The participants viewed ineffective systems and processes as largely to blame for the limited autonomy at school that served as another source of stress for the group members.

Each participant shared how they reacted to job related stress, and common themes were seeking physical well-being and spirituality, and spending time with family and friends, but these positive reactions to stress were often limited by the demands on participants' time at their schools. Each participant found solace in celebrating student success and understanding that they were making positive differences in many young lives.

Not surprising, the effects of stress denigrated each participant's sense of wellbeing. Several of the members suffered from decreased health, with one participant suffering from a stress related stroke. Isolation was a common effect of job related stress, with each participant reporting feeling forced to focus on job demands in lieu of spending time with family, friends, or students. This disconnection with family and friends added to general feelings of inadequacy and marginalization.

The collaborative autobiography process asked the group members to consider their personal past and its influence on the present. Each member successfully identified role models that helped build a sense of confidence and guide the members' trajectory towards education. Participants recalled teachers who helped create transformational moments in their young lives, and family members who were instrumental in refining their focus on education.

Each participant analyzed stress in their lives and shared their findings in a collaborative group setting. Each member reported feeling an increased control of their reactions to stress by virtue of having better understood the causes of their stress. Each member recognized how their personal pasts helped shape their individual reactions to stress, and recognized that trust was a central factor in how they reacted to stress. Four of the five participants felt they improved their understanding of the effects of stress, and consequently, felt more empowered to mitigate the negative effects of stress.

In the fourth and last phase of the collaborative autobiography process, the participants were asked to formulate a plan for a preferred future on addressing the causes of stress, their reactions to stress, and the effects of stress. Each participant recognized the importance of reincorporating previously relinquished rewards that had been lost due to job demands, and elected to spend more time with family and friends in addition to taking breaks from their hectic schedules. The majority of the participants planned to improve their personal health by adhering to exercise schedules and placing more controls on dietary habits. Each participant considered the value of being empowered to say no to additional duties at work, and planned to improve personal communication and dialogue at work as a means of reducing stress.

Upon completion of the collaborative autobiography project, each participant was asked to share any benefits derived from the research study. Each member considered the collaborative autobiography process as a form of therapy. The group members commented that a sense of commonality and collegiality arose from the collaborative autobiography. The participants agreed that each gained new perspectives from the collaboration, and the reflective writing enabled them to recognize aspects of stress they

were previously unaware of. One of the most important findings in the study was the level of empathy discovered during the research. As each member better understood the causes, reactions, and effects of stress, their empathy for others' stress was magnified with the understanding that they affected others' stress levels.

Each participant shared recommendations that addressed causes, reactions, and effects of stress. Several of the participants recommended elevating teachers to the level of professional by holding teachers to a professional level of accountability. Other recommendations centered on improved on-site staff development, a de-emphasis on standardized testing, and a revisiting of how teacher evaluations are conducted. Each participant recommended more social support for and collaboration of educators in K-12 schools.

Interpretations

Causes of Participants' Stress

The group members reported multiple causes of stress with each stressor increasing with intensity over time. The participants' discussions of the negative effects of heavy workloads and responsibilities are consistent with research concluding that extensive responsibilities and heavy workloads are significant source of stress for educators (Clausen & Petruka, 2009; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Similarly, Allison (1997) found that administrators considered heavy workloads a significant cause of stress, especially when compounded with unforeseen events at school.

Adults served as the greatest cause of stress for each group member, with administrators reporting some teachers as sources of stress, and teachers reporting some administrators as sources of stress. Consistent with these findings, Sogunro (2012)

reported that administrators considered teachers their greatest source of stress; and Blasé and Blasé (2006), Bobek (2002), Haberman, (2005), Rubinstein (2005) all found that teachers considered principals their greatest source of stress, with principals also cited as the leading cause for teachers leaving their profession. The teachers in the present study also reported some other teachers as sources of stress, a finding in accord with Haberman (2005), who found that stress from coworkers often resulted in teacher isolation.

The participants also considered parents as a significant source of stress. Adera and Bullock (2010) found contention between teachers and parents due to student behavior, with teachers also stressed because parents undermined school initiatives, did not speak English, or were dissatisfied with how teacher behavior affected their children. Parallel with these findings, Lareau and Munoz (2012) reported parents as a significant source of stress for educators.

Conflicts regarding educational platforms also caused stress for the participants. This stress often was due to inconsistency between the participants' beliefs and school practices, and exacerbated by poor communication between the participants and their coworkers. These findings run parallel with research concluding that many educators felt professional autonomy was undermined when forced to support school initiatives and student accountability (Davis, et al., 2005; Myers, 2007).

Each participant experienced stress when student wellbeing was viewed as being compromised. The participants experienced stress when the emotional needs of students were not met, student misconduct was allowed on campuses, and school did not adequately address student dropout rates. These findings agree with research

demonstrating that teachers trying to meet the needs of students experience an increase in workload and stress (Rowe, 2010).

Ineffective systems and processes frustrated the group members and served as a substantial cause of stress by undermining what they considered optimal educational opportunities for the students. Components of these systems that served as sources of stress for the participants included state-mandated testing, a controlled curriculum, and teacher appraisal systems that created more contention and fear than actual constructive guidance and growth. Many of the group participants viewed current systems as antiquated and stifling, with a majority viewing current educator certification programs as insufficient in meeting the needs of today's schools. These participant perceptions are similar to Cruz and Brown's (2010) findings that many teachers in their study perceived the curriculum as focused on test preparation and severely restricting creativity and a holistic approach to education. This finding is also consistent with Gill and Arnold's 2014 research which concluded that redundant and excessive bureaucratic paperwork from district offices was an added stress for administrators. Similar to Gill and Arnold, Lock and Lummis (2014) reported external pressures from district offices and superintendents created stress for administrators and lessened the likelihood of administrators being able to focus on school centric initiatives and staff development.

Participants' Reactions to Stress

The group members shared common reactions to the causes of stress. Each member strove for a sense of calm and physical wellbeing, with varying degrees of success. The temporary positive effects of the participants' use of exercise runs parallel with Botwinik's (2007) argument on the benefits of exercise and its effects on reducing

stress. One member reacted to stress by adopting negative health habits that included

smoking and an unhealthy diet. This finding is consistent with Amschler and McKenzie's

(2010) conclusion that many educators suffer from negative physical effects, including

deteriorated health and obesity, due to educator stress. Other reactions to stress included

four of the five members finding temporary relief that mirrored Sorenson's (2007)

recommendations for managing stress, including developing social networks including

family and coworkers. Four of the five members considered people in their personal

lives as essential in mitigating the severity of stress experienced at school. The value

placed on social support was in accord with the findings from Zost (2010) who found that

collegial support was instrumental in building teacher resilience and reducing stress.

The participants unanimously considered the celebration of student achievement

as a major source of stress relief. Student wellbeing and success were integral to the

participants' value system, with each participant willing to endure tremendous levels of

stress if the end result netted positive results for the students.   Evidence of academic

growth and emotional wellbeing in students vindicated the personal suffering that each

participant endured in the execution of their duties. Diehl (2012) reported similar findings

in her collaborative autobiography research with administrators and stated that student

success helped administrators reduce job related stress. Perhaps the strongest response to

stress among the group was each member's avoidance of aggression when experiencing

stress. The participants internalized much of their frustrations and stress out of fear of

escalating negativity in their environments and offending coworkers and family. Each

participant expressed feeling additional stress due to not being able to fully express their

feelings in stressful situations. In short, internalizing stress produced additional stress.

The Effects of Participants' Stress

The effects of job related stress created negative health issues for three of the five members. Interestingly, it was the three members of the research study who were not administrators who reported the most severe effects of stress, including disruptions in sleep patterns, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and in one case a stroke. These findings are consistent with the research on the negative effects of educator stress (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Boyland, 2011; Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2007; Robert-Okah & Nyenwe, 2013; Sogunro, 2012). One participant successfully established a good exercise program, but added responsibilities at work inhibited his regular workouts. The lapses in his exercise regimen denigrated his sense of wellbeing, and in turn, created more stress. These findings are similar to those of Clausen and Petruka (2009), who reported that heavy workloads often resulted in educators abandoning healthy habits.

Other effects of stress shared among the group were feelings of inadequacy and marginalization. With disparities between educational platforms and behaviors, the participants felt a loss of control and self-efficacy when their professionalism was questioned and felt ineffective in combatting the effects of antiquated systems. These findings mirror Berryhill and associates' study (2009), which found teacher self-efficacy was limited due to pressures placed on student performance. Participants in the present study expressed frustration with the detrimental effects of some systems on the quality of education they believed the students deserved. The visible gaps in student well-being resulting from antiquated systems and processes left the participants questioning if they had done enough for the students, in line with Kumar's (2010) findings that sustained

stress often results in diminished sense of well-being, emotional exhaustion, and a lowered self-esteem.

A common effect of stress among the group was a diminished relationship with coworkers and family, ultimately due to a combination of increased workloads and ineffective work management. The lack of control of the work environment forced the members to sacrifice personal time and rewards to accomplish their workload. The resulting absence of family and friends exasperated the participants, and consequently, created a heightened sense of stress. This finding is supported by the research of Lock and Lummis (2014), and Margolis and Nagel (2006), who reported that heavy workloads often resulted in educators having decreased time with family and friends. Table 1 provides a comparison between findings from the research field and findings from this study, as they pertain to the causes of, educators' reactions to, and the effects of educator stress.

Participants' Past and its Influence on the Present

A common theme within the group was the importance of role models. Each member reflected on educators who took special notice of them and inspired them to believe in themselves. Several of the group members also identified family members as critical role models. Each participant provided critical historic or life events that shaped their interest and entry into education. Cindy was affected by the pregnancy of an older sister as a catalyst for pursuing education, while Adam and Charles were inspired by the attacks on September 11, 2001 to enter into education and serve. Thomas drew heavily from his low SES upbringing as a rite of passage.

Interpretations

	Research Field	Research Field and Research Study	Research Study
Causes of Stress	Low pay/moonlighting Classroom management Isolation Lack of cultural competence Inadequate facilities/resources	Work management Other adults Systems and processes	Conflict with educational platform and behavior Student wellbeing
Reactions to Stress	Social and emotional degradation	Dietary and exercise Marginalization Isolation	Avoidance of aggression
Effects of Stress	Quitting Job Burnout Physical, psychological, and social decline	Disconnect with coworkers and family Health issues	

Table 1. **Comparison Between Research Field and Research Study**

Each member expressed thankfulness for those influences that encouraged them to become educators. These results are congruent with Lapadat's (2009) observations that individuals' memories of their past, especially significant people and events in their past, play a significant part in how they construct their lives.

How Collaborative Autobiography Assisted Participants

The collaborative autobiography helped the participants to understand the causes of their stress, which enabled them to modify their reactions to stress. The participants believed that their new understandings and commitments to change were due not only to their reflective writing but also to their collaborative reflection with other group members. The commonality of shared responses resonated with the group and allowed the participants to appreciate their reactions to stress as common rather than abnormal or out of the ordinary. These findings are consistent with Dearman and Alber (2005), who stress the importance of educators collaborating to better deal with school events and stresses. In addition to mitigating the effects of stress on one's self, collaborative reflections allowed both administrators to consider that they may inadvertently be sources of stress for their teachers.

A Plan for Better Managing Stress in the Future

The culminating step of the collaborative autobiography process was the creation of a plan for better managing stress in the future. Each member considered the available options and elected to reincorporate rewards and family time back into their lives, improve personal maintenance, and positively affect their work environments through improved communication with their coworkers. Citing other adults and limited

communication as significant sources of stress, each member planned to be proactive in establishing better relationships at school.

The participants realized that many of the causes of their stress would not change. Because work management was a significant source of stress for each group member, each participant elected to better manage their workloads with techniques varying from implementing work schedules, delegating duties, limiting interruptions at work, and being empowered to decline additional duties and responsibilities. Controlling the amount of additional duties, or saying no, was perceived to be an integral part of the plan for a preferred future.

Each member recognized the importance of taking time for themselves and temporarily disconnecting from work. By limiting interruptions and taking breaks, the group realized that stress levels could be significantly lowered, and work management could be positively affected. Each member recognized that disconnecting from work and taking breaks would be difficult due to past habits, but each agreed that by de-conflicting issues at work, more time could be made for them after they left for the day. The plans for improvement that resulted from the collaborative autobiography mirror the results found by Raymond, Butt, and Townsend (1992); when educators reflect collaboratively on common problems their individual improvement efforts are enhanced.

Benefits of Collaborative Autobiography

Each participant reported benefitting from the collaborative autobiography process. This finding supports Gregson and Sturko (2007) in their assessment of the importance for educators finding safe environments in which they can collaborate. Levine (2010) cites the value of reflection that explores assumptions and beliefs and

leads to more informed decisions. The findings from this study are parallel with research describing collaborative dialogue resulting in creative solutions to individual issues (Kazempour, 2009; Servage, 2008). The reflective nature of the four phases of the process allowed each participant to gain new perspectives on common causes, reactions, and effects of stress. The participants concluded that many causes of stress were consistent from campus to campus. This sense of common experience allowed the group members to consider collaborative autobiography as a form of therapy that provided support and encouragement and resulted in concrete plans for dealing with job-related stress. This finding is consistent with Diehl's (2012) research that concluded collaborative autobiography had many of the positive effects of group therapy.

Each participant valued the reflective process as a means for gaining understanding of how solutions reside within the individual and her or his willingness to adjust reactions to stress. Each participant gained empathy for many of the colleagues they originally considered sources of stress. Each member valued the benefits of reflective writing, and considered reflection a viable means of organizing thoughts, connecting events, and illustrating relationships among sources, reactions, and effects of stress. These findings extend the findings reported by Raymond et al. (1992) on collaborative autobiography as a mechanism for addressing personal struggles by refining philosophies and practices to shape their personal and professional lives.

Conclusions

The interpretation of the data and multiple themes shared among the participants brought forth six significant conclusions that pertain to the findings of this study.

1. The participants considered other adults in the school community their greatest sources of stress, and recognized that improved communication and collaboration with coworkers was essential in addressing stress. By better understanding the people who were the sources of stress, each participant believed that their own stress would be better controlled and negotiated with more appropriate responses.

2. Each participant struggled with work management, often sacrificing personal time and rewards to satisfy the demands of the job. Frustration and self-doubt surfaced when individuals faced the stress of not fully meeting the demands of their jobs. Through collaboration, participants developed plans for a preferred future that addressed work management and empowered them to say no to unreasonable expectations.

3. Systems and processes played a vital role in the participants' fluctuating sense of wellbeing and self-efficacy. The members experienced stress when their personal educational platforms fell victim to external forces and pressures they had little influence over. To balance the effects of arbitrary systems and extended workloads, each participant recognized the choice to temporarily separate from external pressures and allow time for personal reflection and regeneration.

4. Each participant considered collaborative autobiography beneficial in identifying causes of stress, better understanding their reactions to stress, and becoming empowered to create a plan for a preferred future.

5. Reflective writing was considered a powerful analytic tool in the group. Participants reported gaining insight by engaging in reflective writing within the parameters of the four phases of the collaborative autobiography process.

6. Collaborative autobiography led to a consensus among the participants that their

   reactions to stress were more common than previously considered. A sense of

   affirmation and empowerment evolved during the process, and each participant

   felt substantial growth was experienced throughout the collaborative

   autobiography process. Each member recommended collaborative autobiography

   to others educators as an effective means of mitigating the negative effects of

   stress.

Recommendations

Recommendations for School Administrators' Professional Development

Davis et al. (2005) argue that "the processes and standards by which many principal preparation programs traditionally screen, select, and graduate candidates are often ill-defined, irregularly applied, and lacking in rigor" (pg. 5). It is unlikely that current administrator certification programs could successfully anticipate and meet all the needs of the varying contexts that newly certified principals enter into. Thus, professional development for administrators becomes tantamount in better equipping administrators for the challenges they face in schools.

Considering the heavy workloads, personnel conflicts, and the effects of sustained levels of high stress, administrator professional development must address the current context in which principals operate and offer viable solutions to mitigate job related stress (Allison, 1997). Professional development could be aided by drawing from lessons learned in successful districts as well as considering the fundamental causes of stress and providing training to better handle the increasing responsibilities of administrators.

In addition to addressing practical solutions to current work management issues at schools, professional development could center on collaborative programs with school staff that focus on shared products to build efficiency and free-up time for principals to put more focus on their schools. Due to many administrators working in isolation (West et al., 2010), collaboration and shared responsibilities may help address the complexity of principals' jobs as well as allow a platform for a bottom up approach to designing and implementing school processes. Based on Diehl's (2012) research and the present study, collaborative autobiography is a viable alternative for dealing with administrator stress in administrator professional development.

Recommendations for School Teachers' Professional Development

Research illustrates the tremendous amount of stress teachers endure (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Kumar, 2010; Sorenson, 2007; Turley, 2005). Professional development can be an important vehicle for mitigating the stress created by the high demands placed on teachers. Many teachers feel out of synch with the positions they have been assigned to, and in the absence of support, leave teaching (Muller, et al., 2011). The high demands and decreased sense of well-being that teachers experience supports the need for collaborative programs to be included in teacher professional development.

Professional development that encourages collaboration with the school community may help to eradicate the inherent distrust found between teachers and administrators, facilitate problem resolution with coworkers and parents, and reduce stress. Through collaboration, the school community could better understand the causes of stress and requirements of the various school positions, and create a more functional approach to students' education. The confidence, mutual support, and self-efficacy

strengthened through collaboration could greatly benefit the students who heavily rely on emotionally healthy teachers and community support. As with administrators, collaborative autobiography is a promising structure for assisting teachers to deal with job-related stress.

Recommendations for Central Office Administrators

According to Lyons and Algozzine (2006), "local leaders are tightening the vise by calling on principals to 'make a difference' in their schools, and the job becomes nearly undoable as the limits of power settle far above the individuals charged with change" (pg. 10.). West et al. (2010) argue that many principals feel subservient to their district offices and consider them significant sources of stress. Central office administrators should be mindful of the demands placed on principals and teachers. To be effective in supporting school staff, central office administrators should evaluate the roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers and understand that, in many cases, the school staff is set up for failure. The amount of externally mandated duties and responsibilities must be decreased so that principals can focus on their own school processes and initiatives (Boyland, 2011).

Added workloads undermine school initiatives and help to create alienation between school staff and their families (West et al., 2010). In lieu of micro-managing the responsibilities of administrators and teachers, central office administrators could offer more support by providing coaching as well as social support. Part of the solution may be to add more support staff for principals so they can delegate some responsibilities. Recognizing that school staff is under tremendous pressure, principals and teachers need outlets they can trust to express their concerns to (MacMillan et al., 2004).

Central office administrators could alleviate the current practice of assigning principals and teachers more responsibilities with less support. Part of the solution rests with providing school staff with a greater likelihood of success by significantly decreasing unscheduled meetings and redundant tasks, including multiple forms and reports that take much needed time from educators (Gill & Arnold, 2014). By decreasing class sizes and providing more support for teachers, teachers could be allowed to have more opportunities for leadership roles and decision making regarding school policies and curriculum, and consequently, operate with higher morale and increased self-efficacy. In addition, district offices could consider implementing a different form of teacher evaluation that mirrors clinical evaluation and allows the teacher to become a partner in professional development. Finally, in addition to providing additional personnel to assist with the growing demands that teachers and administrators face, district offices need to develop and make available coping strategies and resources to contend with the high stress found in our schools (Boyland, 2011).

Additional funding to implement collaborative programs could mitigate educator stress by providing training and coping mechanisms. By increasing collaboration between universities and school districts, current school staff could share some of their responsibilities with university students, who would gain a better foundation for the profession they are entering.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Many administrators and teachers complain of limited control of their environment due to excessive external pressures and expectations from policy makers. Policy makers must respond to the suffocating consequences of their policies, including

administrators and teachers leaving our schools. Chronic stress and the negative effects of national and state policies are well documented in our schools, with the top down approach to policies placing many of our schools in crisis mode (Cross & Hong, 2012; Normore, 2004; Sogunro, 2012; West et al., 2010).

Normore (2004) argues, "it appears that much of what passes for accountability-oriented school reform is driven more by what might be considered ideal rather than empirical evidence" (pg. 72.). Policy makers must consider the contest between the expected roles of school administrators and the severe demands for accountability and recognize that the pressure placed on schools through high stakes testing often leads to negative results and adds multiple levels of stress to school organizations. The implementation of policies detrimental to students often places unbearable constraints on educators, students, and families and prevents a holistic approach to education.

In addition, many national and state policies prohibit the community from becoming effective participants in their children's education, with curriculum determined by exterior entities that lack an understanding of the context within which the learning takes place. It is little surprise that high dropout rates plague our schools, with many of our youth wondering if there is a viable place for them in our society.

Recommendations for Further Research

Collaborative Autobiography is a meaningful tool to add to the reflective practitioners' toolbox. The research group was rich in diversity with three teachers and two administrators, each with very unique life experiences. The results from the study not only support the viability of collaborative autobiography, but encourage further research on collaborative autobiography utilizing more of the variety of practitioners we

find in our schools. Future research may include varied members of the school community including substitute teachers, staff members, educational specialists, teachers, and administrators. Involvement in research focused on collaborative reflection may be useful as a requirement for aspiring administrators and teachers in certification programs, with emphasis placed on the challenges administrators and teachers face in public education. Because educators should be reflective practitioners, being involved in studies focused on collaborative reflection could help new educators as they enter into a very challenging profession.   Additionally, policy makers, district office personnel, parents, and community members could be invited to participate in collaborative autobiography as a means for gaining parent and community involvement and strengthening the relationship between schools and their clients. A modified form of research on collaborative autobiography could include high school students, educators, and representatives from the community. Additional research could include military veterans transitioning into education. Collaborative autobiography could assist these veterans in negotiating their unique background and familiarity with distinct military systems and practices with the educational systems and policies found in our schools.

My Experiences with the Collaborative Autobiography Process

I could not have anticipated how rewarding researching the collaborative autobiography process would be. I feel akin to the five participants as well as the course instructor, and consider each of these individuals etched within my concept of family. Each member of the group demonstrated trust and courage to share some of the most intimate details of their personal histories, the causes of their stress, their responses to stress, and the multiple effects of stress on their professional and personal lives.

I felt very humble as each participant peeled back the multiple layers of their accumulated experiences in life and shared their life stories. The amount of emotion and reflection that came out of the meetings, and the progress made by the participants, is rarely seen in educational research. I often considered throughout the process how rich qualitative research was, and how the depth of feelings and comradery within the group was providing evidence of the extraordinary power of people coming together. Authentic collaboration allows us to leave the conversation with more than what we brought to it.

Negotiating feelings and epiphanies is a wonderful qualitative experience that cannot be predicted but leaves the researcher with added insight. The depth of feeling, the rediscovery of past events, and discovery of common meaning across multiple contexts are some of the treasures discovered in qualitative research. The breadth of the human experience shared in written and verbal expression can have a profound effect on both the participants and the researcher in a qualitative study. Perhaps it is a basic human quality that we all like a good story, probably because it is about people, and typically, there is a little bit about ourselves that comes out in the story. By understanding others, we cannot help but better understand ourselves.

Concluding Thoughts

Over the years, I often reflected on how much I have grown in my understanding of educators and the many trials they endure. Much of the frustration shared from the participants in this study echoed many of the stresses and frustrations I experienced as an educator. Participating as the researcher in the collaborative autobiography process led me to feel richly rewarded for my efforts as a doctoral student. As I recall how Kathy, Thomas, Cindy, Adam, and Charles came together and trusted each other enough to bear

their souls and share vulnerable aspects of their lives, a vast array of emotions competed as I strove to make sense of what I witnessed.

Although some moments in the research project were serious and painful as human trauma was shared, other moments allowed for levity and a shared respite from educator stress. In our group meetings, I chuckled to myself as I saw the two teachers sitting upright and attentive while the two administrators relaxed in their chairs as though they were conducting a board meeting. Cindy, who worked in a grey area between teacher and administrator, sat two chairs away from the group, almost seeming to say "I belong to both worlds and cannot choose one, so I'll sit here." The course instructor made it all happen. He was the magician who captured the attention of the group, and through his wisdom and many years in educational leadership, led them through the collaborative autobiography process. Without him, this study would not have taken place, and collaborative autobiography would not have enriched our lives.

These six educators have etched a place in my life that will continue to accompany me wherever I go. I continue to reflect on the collaborative autobiography process and the rich human quality that made it so meaningful. I can still hear the laughter when Thomas talked about walking on a beach and likening an event to listening to the sea in a shell. The cohesive effect of this group created a playful banter with fellow members chirping "I'm having trouble imagining you on the beach," and "I'm sorry, when you said shell, I thought you were talking about a bombshell, yeah, you would only hear that once." Lots of laughter and merriment came from these discussions, all in good form, and often creating segues into more serious feelings and discussions.

All of this, a wonderful side-effect of a collaborative group of educators who learned to trust and openly reflect on their lives, and left feeling enriched, as I did.

Research Participant Consent Form
Public School Teachers' Experiences and Reflections on Stress
IRB Application # 2014A9154
Titus C. Brown, M.Ed., Texas State University-San Marcos

Request for Participation:

Titus Brown, a graduate student at Texas State University-San Marcos, is conducting research on collaborative autobiography focused on the causes of teacher stress, the effects of teacher stress, and ways of dealing with teacher stress. Titus is a Ph.D. student in Education at Texas State University-San Marcos. Titus may be reached at TB38815@txstate.edu or (512) 773-2583. You have been chosen for this research study because you are a Texas certified teacher and enrolled in a graduate course on collaborative autobiography with a focus on teacher stress.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to document teachers' use of collaborative autobiography to explore teacher stress, their reactions to stress, the effects of stress, and ways of better dealing with stress. This study involves research and is not a funded study.
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Research Method:

The research study has three main components: reviewing reflective writings of teachers in ED 7378 who choose to participate in the course, individual interviews with participants, and the use of field notes using the detached open-ended narrative method. The researcher will attend each class meeting of ED 7378 as an observer. During the first class session, the instructor, Dr. Stephen Gordon, will provide an outline of the course material and information pertaining to the four reflective writing assignments that will occur throughout the semester. The teachers in the study will share their reflective writings in a collaborative dialogue. The topics for the four reflective writing assignments will include the following:

     1) A written reflection that defines the teachers' current professional environment.
     2) A written reflection on how personal and professional histories have influenced their current situation.
     3) A written reflection on a critical appraisal of current situation with emphasis on systemic contributors to teacher stress and how this stress has affected the current professional context of teaching.
     4) A written reflection describing a preferred future on how current sources of stress will be dealt with as well as a refined trajectory on professional and personal growth.

After the first class, each subsequent group meeting will follow the same format. The researcher will receive a copy of each reflective writing from those who wish to participate in the research. Each participant will be afforded the opportunity to receive feedback on the writing as well as voluntary participation in member checking once the analysis commences. The researcher will write field notes in each group discussion and will not digitally record conversations while reflective writings are discussed within the group. The teachers who elect to share their reflective writings will do so in the presence of the researcher. If there are teachers who do not wish to participate in the study, their reflective writings will be shared only after the researcher has left the room. Those who choose not to participate in the study will share neither oral nor print versions of their reflections with the researcher.

Each participant will participate in two individual interviews, which will occur in a pre-agreed upon location or telephonically. The interviews will be recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The first interview will occur at the midpoint of the study, around the October-November timeframe, and the second interview will occur after the last class meeting, December. The questions that will guide the first interview are: (1) How do you feel about reflective writing? (2) Do you feel that you are benefiting from the reflective writing in this project? (3) How do you feel about the group meetings? Are they helpful? (4) Do you feel that collaborating with other teachers specifically is helpful? Additional questions will be created from the first two reflective writing samples and observations, and will focus on sources of teacher stress, effects of teacher stress, and ways of addressing teacher stress.

After the first set of interviews is transcribed and analyzed, the results of the interviews as well as a reexamination of reflective writings and notes taken from observations will guide the questions used for the second interview. The second interview will attempt to clarify concepts brought out in the first interview as well as reflect new concepts that emerge from the data. Throughout the data collection, member checking will be conducted to ensure my interpretation of your responses is accurate.

Duration of Research Participation:
The research will last from August through December 2014.

Confidentiality:
Your name will not be used throughout the data collection, data analysis, or any publication that may result from this research. In lieu of your name, a pseudonym will be used for you as well as any additional names or locations provided throughout the research.

Method of Recording Interview:
A digital voice recorder will be utilized in all interviews. If at any point during the interview the participant requests the recorder to be turned off, that request will be honored. All information recorded with the digital voice recorder will be locked in the

researcher's home. All digital recordings as well as any written documentation with participants' names or personal identifiable information will be destroyed after completion of the researcher' dissertation.

Right of Refusal/Right to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any portion of this study. You may withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions to yourself. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade in the class or your relationship with Texas State University.

Explanation of Risks:
There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is a chance that some of the questions the researcher will ask you may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions for any reason, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

Benefits:
You may benefit from the study by better understanding the causes of job related stress and creating new strategies for better dealing with that stress in the future. A benefit to education and other teachers based on the findings of this study is possible.

Contact Person Concerning Rights or Injuries:
Dr. Stephen Gordon will be supervising the research and can be contacted with any questions or concerns about the research. Dr. Gordon can be contacted at SteveGordon@txstate.edu or 512-245-2441.

This project (IRB Application Number: 2014A9154) was approved by the Texas State IRB on May 23, 2014. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 - lasser@txstate.edu) and to Becky Northcut, Director, Research Integrity & Compliance (512-245-2314 – bnorthcut@txstate.edu).

Copy of Research Study:
A summary of the findings will be provided to you upon completion of the study, if requested. Please contact the researcher, Titus Brown, at TB38815@TxState.edu for a summary of the findings from the study.

Copy of Consent Form:
You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

YES

☐   I give permission to participate in this study.

☐   I give permission to be digitally recorded during the interviews.

_____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

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