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# Searching for a Caregiver: The Middle School Principal

William L. Stein

*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by William L. Stein entitled "Searching for a Caregiver: The Middle School Principal." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration.

Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Diana Moyer, Gary Ubben, Thomas N. Turner

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Acceptance for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the  
Graduate School

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Searching for a Caregiver:  
The Middle School Principal

A Dissertation Proposal

Presented for the

Doctor of Education

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

William L. Stein

August 2008

## **DEDICATION**

First, I dedicate this work to all of those people, who are no longer with us, who always encouraged me to not give up and to keep my focus: Martha Stein, my mother; Billie Sharpe, my mother-in-law; Martha Jones, my grandmother; Jimmy Jones and Joe Larry Jones, my uncles; and Sherry Godsey, one of my very best friends.

Second, I dedicate this work to Pattye Evans, my aunt, and Harold Jones, my uncle who are still encouraging me to always be the best that I can be.

Third, to my brother, David Stein, and my best friend, Butch McGuire, who pushed, and pushed, and pushed, and pushed.

Fourth, I dedicate this work to my children, Jason, Jonathan and Jennifer, who had to give up time with their father while he pursued his dream.

Finally, but never last, I dedicate this work, my life, and my heart to my wife Wilma. She stood by, encouraged, commiserated, complained and pushed until this effort was completed.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I gratefully acknowledge the contribution, guidance, and support of the faculty and staff of the University of Tennessee to my education.

I also acknowledge the guidance of my committee: Dr. Diana Moyer, Dr. Gary Ubben, and Dr. Thomas Turner. I especially acknowledge the guidance, support, and friendship of my committee chairman, Dr. Vincent Anfara.

Finally, I acknowledge the contributions to my education made by the cohort that shared all of the ups and downs of this grueling process: Mr. Monty Howell, Mr. Steve Farmer, Dr. John Dalton, Dr. Allison Beuhler, Dr. Christopher Henderson, Dr. Jeff Romanchuk, Dr. Vickie Violette, Dr. Teresa Robinson, and Dr. Elton Frerichs.

## **ABSTRACT**

The time is well past for the American people—especially those that deal with our school aged children on a day-to-day basis—to see what is happening to our children and by extension to our society. If public education is to become truly effective in this time of alienation—both of race and class—then a more caring, nurturing, and trusting approach to the profession of educational administration must be encouraged and engendered. The purpose of this study is to examine the middle school administrator as a caregiver by examining the perceptions of the role by teachers and the principal.

This study focused on the perceptions of the principal as a caregiver in a selected East Tennessee school. This exploratory descriptive case study included thematic development and verification based on data obtained through qualitative means: interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research questions posed at the beginning of this study include: (1) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?; How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?; and (3) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity? A theoretical framework based on the work of Brown and Anfara (2002) and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006) was used to focus the study's design, and the data collection and analysis, and the reporting of the findings.

Subsequently, the conclusions that were developed in this study describe the perceptions of the role of the caring middle school principal. The first major conclusion is that the developmentally responsive middle school principal responds to students and staff with care. The second conclusion is that the developmentally responsive middle school principal actively practices caring leadership. The final conclusion affirms that the developmentally responsive middle school principal uses the team concept to develop in staff and students a sense of ownership of the school and its programs.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Chapter Introduction

Within the educational community there has been a great deal of upheaval since the passage of the No Child Left Behind act, the reauthorization of ESEA. Educators all over the United States are struggling to ensure that students make the academic gains that the law requires as well as maintain students' interest in school. Many researchers have struggled to find an approach that will fulfill both the academic and moral obligations of education. Noddings (1984) promoted the ethic of care in education as not an option but as a moral obligation. She stated: "We are obligated to do what is required to maintain and embrace caring" (p. 94). Sergiovanni (1999) believed that

There is no inconsistency between developing a respectful and caring community characterized by unconditional love, and developing an intellectually rich community with a strong academic focus that demands a great deal from students and gives them a great deal in return. (p. 3)

This study will examine the inroads that the ethic of care has made within the current state of education through the use of an exploratory case study of one middle school principal.

### Statement of Problem

In the preface to Beck's (1994) *Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Profession*, Noddings made the following statement:

Important as it is to face...challenges, it may be even more important to construe caring as an end in itself. Young people in our schools speak poignantly of their

longing to be cared for and the perceived lack of care that characterizes not only our schools but the society at large. (p. ix)

Young people do not just “speak poignantly” of the need to be cared for—young people scream out that need. Gordon, Benner, and Noddings (1996) stated that:

“healthy, vigorous children also need care. For example, while schools are concentrating on narrow academic goals, children—especially teenagers—are protesting ‘Nobody cares!’ The more that our schools are forced to look at academic gains because of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation less time is applied to creating relationships with students. Those relationships are the basis of a caring education. An increasing proportion of our country’s children live in poverty” (p. viii).

Over the past 20 years a great deal of effort and money has been put into testing and accountability. At the same time Noddings, Sergiovanni, and other like-minded educators have sounded a clarion call that our schools need to be a place of nurturing and care. The time is well past for the American people—and especially those that deal with our school-aged children on a day-to-day basis—to see what is happening to our children and by extension to our society. If public education is to become truly effective in this time of alienation—both of race and class—then a more caring, nurturing, and trusting approach to the profession of educational administration must be encouraged and engendered. I believe that through the ethic of care, which calls for providing students with what is needed, rather than from an ethic of justice, which calls for treating all students fairly, academic and behavioral improvement can be seen.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the middle school administrator as a caregiver by examining the perceptions of the role by teachers and principal. Nel Noddings, feminist philosopher and educator, has spent her professional career promoting the provision of education from an ethic of care. A more in depth discussion of her philosophy will be examined in Chapter 2; however, her ideas do not always translate into practical application in a school setting. In order to add more depth to the discussions of the principal as a caregiver Brown and Anfara's (2002) description of the developmentally responsive middle level leader, *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents*, and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross's (2006) extension of the 2002 work, *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument* will be used. In order to examine the middle school administrator as a caregiver two works will be utilized: Noddings interpretation of the ethic of care as a philosophical base and Brown and Anfara's and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross's developmentally responsive middle level leader as the theoretical framework.

One East Tennessee middle school principal will be the focus of an exploratory descriptive case study to determine the perceptions of the principal and the teachers of the role of the principal as a caregiver. The school chosen for this study is a suburban school that has undergone some very dramatic changes over the past fifteen years. A major employer reduced its workforce by 75% which changed the entire make-up of the school population. Also, this closing reduced the amount of in-kind taxes that was returned to the school system. Another effect of the closing was that the school went from having a

white majority to having a black majority. In spite of all of these changes in the community that feeds the school, the school has been successful in providing the students with an excellent education. The principal has been in at the school for more than 20 years. Because of his length of service at the school and because of the changes that the school has undergone, this school and principal was chosen for this exploratory case study. The researcher and the chosen principal worked together 20 years previously as Career Ladder evaluators.

### **Research Questions**

Three questions helped to guide the research and analysis of this study. All three questions are based upon Brown and Anfara's (2002) and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross's (2006) model of a developmentally responsive middle school principal.

1. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?
2. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?
3. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity?

This study will focus on the positive aspects of the principal's action. The principal under study is not perfect by far. However, he does show many of the characteristics that a developmentally responsive principal possesses. Brown and Anfara (2002) and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006) provide a definition of a developmentally

responsive middle level educator that helps to broaden and deepen the discussion. The authors stated that the developmentally responsive middle school principal is:

1. Responsive to the needs of students:
  - a) understands the intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral, and ethical characteristics of young adolescents;
  - b) establishes a learning environment that reflects the needs of young adolescents;
  - c) purposely designs programs, policies, curriculum and procedures that reflect the characteristics of young adolescents;
  - d) understands the relationship between cognitive and affective needs;
  - e) believes that all students can succeed;
  - f) promotes the development of relationships between adults and students, among students and between teachers and families;
  - g) views parents and the community as partners, not adversaries.
2. Responsive to the needs of faculty:
  - a) understands the necessity of reconnecting educational administration to the processes of teaching;
  - b) understands the characteristics of successful middle grades teachers;
  - c) is emotionally invested in the job;
  - d) supports teachers in their efforts to understand and respond to the needs of young adolescents;
  - e) shares a vision for continuous organizational improvement and growth;



- f) governs democratically and collaboratively.
3. Responsive to the needs of the school:
- a) is knowledgeable of and can implement the components of the middle school concept;
  - b) acts as a responsible catalyst for change and understands that change requires time, training, trust, and tangible support;
  - c) is flexible and able to deal with ambiguity and chaos. (pp. 154-155)

This definition will provide a current view of the state of middle school leadership thought as well as provide a true middle school focus to the interviews and observations.

### **Definitions**

In this section two terms will be defined to better clarify the research of this study. First must be a philosophical definition of the term care since the ethic of care is the basis of this study. Second, the term developmentally responsive leader because this term provides the conceptual frame for the research of this study.

Noddings (2002) defined care as “an operation of deep concern that carries us out of ourselves and into the lives, despairs, struggles, and hopes of others” (p. 5). Beck (1994) stated “true caring occurs when persons relate to others in ways that honor and encourage the healthy unfolding of all types of development” (p. 6). Noddings (1984) emphasized that caring must go beyond an attitude and actualize itself in some kind of action (p. 92).

Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, and Gross (2006) provided a multifaceted definition of the developmentally responsive school leader. These authors believed that the developmentally responsive leader holds utmost the belief that the developmental

characteristics of the students should be the basis for all organization and operation (p. 21). The developmentally responsive leader values the teachers that provide the education for the middle school student (p. 23). Finally, the developmentally responsive leader sees the middle school in terms of cyclical school innovation and continuous growth (p. 24).

### **Delimitation**

This study is confined to interviewing and observing one middle school principal that has had a productive history of successfully turning around a rather dysfunctional middle school, grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. The principal operates his school in central East Tennessee in a suburban area with a high racial diversity and a majority of students having low socioeconomic status. The principal has a minimum of ten years experience as the building level principal at this school. The school, in spite of being in a suburban area, also serves rural students as well. This study only looks at the perceptions of one principal and one set of teachers at one school. Students and parents of this school are not included in this study.

### **Limitations**

Because this study is confined to a middle school principal who operates in a suburban setting, the generalizability of the findings is limited. The findings cannot be generalized to principals in general.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is of significance to other researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of education because efforts to improve the performance of middle school students is an increasingly important area of need especially with the advent of the reauthorization of ESEA, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Of particular significance to the scholarly research and literature will be the data pertaining

to administrative behavior in light of the ethic of care and how the ethic of care, as demonstrated by the building principal, affects the perceptions of teachers. To practicing middle school principals, the results of this study will provide strategies to build relationships with middle school teachers and students that will result in schools that nurture. Policymakers need to consider that the role of the school is not just to produce a group of students that can perform well on standardized test; but rather, another role is to provide our children with a solid foundation of giving and receiving care that can carry on to future generations. To universities with programs on the training of perspective school leaders, it is hoped that these programs will consider both more training on providing care for students and staff and increase the amount of field experience for those perspective administrators.

Overall the significance focuses on the role of the principal in reforming middle schools in light of the ethic of care. It is critical that our middle schools provide a relational atmosphere where the early teenager can flourish. The central figure to ensure the creation of that relational atmosphere is the building principal.

### **Organization of the Study**

Briefly the organization of this study is typical of most case studies. Chapter 2 will review the pertinent literature that applies to this study—specifically, a historical overview of care, caring education, and caring leadership and will present the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 3 will examine the methods used in this study. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study. Chapter 5 will conclude the study with a synthesis and discussion of the findings, address implications for practice, and suggest future research that is needed in this area.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

In this review of literature, three areas were revealed that needed to be considered. In this study the following areas—a historical/philosophical perspective of caring; caring and middle school education; caring and middle school leadership—will be reviewed. AS there has not been much research into this area, this review has centered upon the philosophy behind the ethic of care. To gain a complete understanding of the impact that care should have on the field of education, and middle school education specifically, the ethic of care must be placed in a historical perspective. The discussion continues with an overview of middle school leadership and the idea of caring leadership. After considering all of the relevant literature, the final focus will be upon the works of Nel Noddings that have formed the philosophical base for the study and Brown and Anfara's (2002) *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents*, and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross's *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument* that form the theoretical framework for this study.

#### **Caring: A Historical/Philosophical Perspective**

Overall the historical/philosophical perspective of care centers on a development of and refinement of the concept of relationships. This discussion begins by considering Martin Buber's greatest piece, *I and Thou* (1970), which presented two fundamental orientations – relation and irrelation. We can either take our place alongside whatever

confronts us and address it as ‘you’ (thou); or we can hold ourselves apart from it and view it as an object, an “it.”

The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, not can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; and as I become the *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting. (pp. 24-25)

According to Buber (1970), we view both objects and people by their functions. Doing this is sometimes good. Unfortunately, we frequently view people in the same way. Rather than truly making ourselves completely available to them, understanding them, sharing totally with them, really talking with them, we observe them or keep part of ourselves outside the moment of relationship. This is the I – it interaction. Buber stated it is possible to place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and be there with another person, without masks, pretenses, even without words. Buber called this an I – Thou interaction. Buber (1970) believed:

I – Thou relationships are not constant or static. People move in and out of I – it moments to I – Thou moment. Attempts to achieve an I – Thou moment will fail because the process of trying to create I – Thou relationships objectifies it and makes it I – it. (p. 8)

This whole idea of relationship is the basis of Buber’s work. Buber argued “the central commandment was to make the secular sacred” (p. 9). Most significantly for education and the ethic of care, Buber stated “what counts is not these

products of analysis and reflection, but the genuine original unity, the lived relationship” (p. 70). A further refinement of this idea of relationship is a discussion on the longing for relationship. Buber (1970) made several statements that clearly define the longing for relationship:

The innateness of the longing for relation is apparent even in the earliest and dimmest stage... The longing for relations is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles, and the relation to that, which is a wordless anticipation of saying ‘You’, comes second (pp. 77-78).

I believe that Buber might not be considered very politically correct in today’s society. Buber was a religious scholar who was watching humanistic concepts being dented as the Nazis slowly overtook Germany. Buber (1970) observed that the spirit was where all of mankind truly had the type of relationships that characterized his ideals. He stated that “spirit is not in the I, but between I and You” (p. 89).

This religious basis for the ethic of care is an important part of western civilization. This ethic has a stronghold within the Judeo-Christian literature and creeds. What has been the practice over the last 40 years in education is to try and eliminate religious connotations from the ethic of care. That effort has resulted in a weakening of the ethic. It has also made it difficult to develop the types of relationships that Buber envisioned.

Another contributor to the ethic of care has been Erich Fromm (1956). Fromm started his discussion focusing on developing that relationship through loving rather than being loved. “Most people see the problem of love primarily as that if being loved, rather

than that of loving, of one's capacity to love" (p. 1). Fromm (1956) echoed much of Buber's (1970) thought in describing the lack of love as a source of many of man's problems. "The awareness of human separation, without reunion by love – is the source of shame. It is at the same time the source of guilt and anxiety" (p. 9). This points to a need to develop that relationship.

Another aspect of relationship is giving. According to Fromm (1956):

Giving is the highest expression of potency. In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power...Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness. (p. 23)

Fromm continued to echo Buber as he discussed responsibility, respect, and communication.

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love...Brotherly love...the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life...is based on the experience that we are all one. (pp. 46-47)

For Fromm "the affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love" (p. 60). This capacity to love is centered in what Buber called the I – Thou relation. Fromm echoed this in saying. "Love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the center of their existence hence if each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence" (p. 103). As important as

this relationship was to Fromm, he was not unaware of the problems that attended that type of relationship. Fromm (1956) stated “Love is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together” (p. 103).

Fromm believed that to show love is to show faith in the one loved. He elaborated by saying “To have faith requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment” (p. 126). The caring teacher who has worked hard to create that caring atmosphere within the classroom is a teacher who loves.

In order to break down the components of ‘relationship,’ Myeroff (1971) took the work of Buber (1970) and Fromm (1956) to an even higher level. In fact he started his book by making a statement that greatly impacted education. “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself “ (p. 1). Myeroff also pointed out that “caring for certain others, by serving them through caring, a man lives the meaning of his own life” (p. 2). He specifically described the process of caring as “overcoming obstacles and difficulties” (p. 5). Myeroff (1971) listed several ingredients of caring. The first of these is knowing. Myeroff described that ingredient by stating “In order to care I must understand the other’s needs and I must be able to respond properly to them, and clearly good intentions do not guarantee this” (p. 9).

For Myeroff (1971) it was important to delineate between directly and indirectly knowing something. He stated:

By knowing something directly, I mean encountering it, apprehending it as existing in its own right. I do not mean simply experiencing it. In caring, I know the other directly; the union I experience with the other goes with my awareness of its separateness and individuality. The caring teacher, for



example, directly knows his student as an individual; he experiences him as someone in his own right, not as a stereotype or as a means for his own self-aggrandizement. (p. 11)

Here, Myeroff directly addressed the thrust of this research. He stated “that the teacher must care, must know, must experience the student in order to be successful in today’s school atmosphere of achievement and accomplishment’ (p. 11). In other words the teacher must form a relationship.

To have a true relationship, Myeroff included two other ingredients that are a part of caring: honesty and trust. Myeroff (1971) observed that “Honesty is present in caring as something positive and not as a matter of not doing something, not telling lies or not deliberately deceiving others” (p. 13). Honesty took its form in seeing “the other as it is and not as I would like it to be or feel it must be” (p. 13). Trust was also related to the growth of the other. Myeroff stated “caring involves trusting the other to grow in its own time and in its own way” (p. 14). According to Myeroff, trusting was an act of courage. He believed that trusting “involves an element of risk and a leap into the unknown” (p. 15).

Meyeroff (1971) pointed out that the product is not what is important in the act of caring. He stated “The process rather than the product is primary in caring, for it is only in the present that I can attend to the other” (p. 23). Myeroff also argued that there is a continuity that is ever present in caring. “Caring assumes continuity, and is impossible if the other in continually being replace. The other must remain constant, for caring is a developmental process” (p. 25). Not having that continuity in the caring process can lead to feelings of guilt, which can help the caregiver maintain his focus. “Like pain, guilt tells

me that something is wrong; if it is felt deeply, understood, and accepted, it provides me with the opportunity to return to my responsibility for the other” (p. 26).

Myeroff offers teachers guidance in forming relationships. Many teachers reflected Myeroff’s discussion of limits. “If I evince little desire or ability to modify my behavior in the light of what actually helps and does not help the other to grow, I am not caring” (p. 28).

Myeroff commented that, as humans, that by not caring we miss our “place” in the world.

We are “in place” in the world through having our lives ordered by inclusive caring. This is in contrast with being “out of place,” trying to escape from the “wrong place,” seeking one’s “place,” and indifference and insensitivity to “place.” It is not as though a pre-existent place were waiting for us; we are not in place as coins are in a box, but rather we both find and make our place in the same way in which the person who “finds” himself must have helped “create” himself as well. (p. 39)

Myeroff continued with a discussion of caring by describing the life that is lived without belonging or caring. “The man who is not needed by someone or something does not belong and lives like a leaf blown about in the wind” (p. 50).

Finally, Myeroff, concluded his work by discussing faith and gratitude. Faith takes away the fear of self-betrayal. Myeroff elaborated on this idea by stating:

Faith as a way of being, as a basic trust in life, goes with confidence in going with the unknown in the course of realizing ourselves and caring for

our others. It is the antithesis of closing ourselves off through fear of the unknown; instead of avoiding life, we are more accessible to it. (p. 60)

He concluded by stating that “Caring becomes my way of thinking for what I have received; I thank by caring all the more for my appropriate others and the conditions of their existence” (p. 61). This described the give and take of a healthy relationship.

Gaylin (1976) added to the discussion of care and care giving when he defined caring: “Caring—that is the protective, parental, tender aspects of loving—is a part of relationship among peers, child to parent, friend to friend, and lover to lover, person to animal, and multiple other patterns” (p. 61). He concluded his work by stating “Caring and loving we are, caring and loving we must be—caring and loving we will be as long as we so perceive ourselves” (p. 180). This perception of ourselves as caring and loving is one that again emphasizes the creation and maintenance of relationships.

A major tenet of Christianity being relationships, the Christian ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas, in 1981 stated “ For the church to be, rather than to have, a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behavior, such as acts of kindness, friendship, and the formation of families” (p. 11). The moral existence must be sustained. He stated “No moral theory is capable in principle of closing the gap between what I should do (my public responsibility) and what I can or have to do (my own responsibility)” (p. 134).

Hauerwas (1983) continued this discussion of Christian ethics and relationships when he stated, “Christian ethics...is a form of reflection of service to a community, and it derives its character from the nature of that community’s connections” (p. 54).

Hauerwas also contended that humans cannot hold themselves apart. He stated “Pure

disinterestedness is an ideal which an individual cannot achieve and is absolutely impossible for human groups” (p. 139).

Colby and Damon (1992) examined the lives of people whom they describe as “moral exemplars.” The authors discussed a common characteristic of all their moral exemplars—positivity. “This quality of positivity—a capacity for finding hope and joy even while frankly facing the often dreary truth—was a striking characteristic in most of our moral exemplars” (p. 16). For our discussion, Colby and Damon provide a description of the characteristics of moral exemplars. It is possible to find a description of the caring educator from this list of characteristics:

- (1) A sustained commitment to moral ideas or principles that include a generalized respect for humanity; or a sustained evidence of moral virtue.
  - (2) A disposition to act in accord with one’s moral ideas on principles, implying also a consistency between one’s actions and intentions and between the means and ends of one’s actions.
  - (3) A willingness to risk one’s self-interest for the sake of one’s moral values.
  - (4) A tendency to be inspiring to others and thereby to move them to moral action.
  - (5) A sense of realistic humility about one’s own importance relative to the world at large, implying a relative lack of concern for one’s own ego.
- (p. 29)

Colby and Damon found that “Moral commitment leads to a focus on causes and concern broader than the self” (p. 66). They also found that these moral exemplars continued to

grow morally because of a particular interactional style (pp. 196-197). All of which points to the need for the creation and sustenance of relationships.

### **Summary**

This section has taken a long view of the origins of the modern day ethic of care. These thinkers have promoted the idea of an ethic that is based on relationships—personal, one-to-one relationships—that respond to the individual needs of the ones cared for. All of the authors relate that the care that is needed relies on responsibility, respect and communication. For educators this historical/philosophical view has shown that to be successful the teacher must experience the student or, in other words, build that personal relationship. In addition to responsibility, respect and communication, the successful caring educator must show humility, hope and courage. For all of the authors in this section, the one cared-for is of utmost importance. All of the authors in this sections observed that the process of caring is more important than the product. This is also where the ethic of care comes in conflict with current practices in education.

### **Caring and Middle School Education**

After taking such a look at the ethic of care and the thinkers that have brought it into the twenty-first century, it is important to be able to look and see how those whose main vocation is education have tried to incorporate the ethic of care into the fabric of the everyday practice of teaching and learning. This idea of the ethic of care in education is not a new one. Again the emphasis is upon creating that relationship in order to promote care. As early as the 1970s, writers were including pieces of the ethic into their suggestions as to how to make education more effective.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1971) stated that “the classroom is not a depersonalized

setting: it abounds with emotion between teachers and students and between a student and his peers. It is primarily members of the peer group who respond most to a student's affective needs" (p. 2). In their discussion of group processes Schmuck and Schmuck also discuss the relationship between students and teachers and students and students. They stated:

As students interact, and as students and teachers elate, they communicate, however indirectly, their feelings about one another. Such gestures of affect influence the manner in which a student views himself, his abilities, his like ability, and his general worth. These feelings or evaluations of himself make up a student's self esteem and have impact on the degree to which he uses his intelligence and on the way in which he forms his current educational aspirations. (pg. 11)

Slavin (1987), Johnston (1995), Lewis, Schafs and Watson (1996), Palmer (1997), and Swerklik, Reeder, and Bucy (1999) discussed the need of a cooperative learning atmosphere and a positive climate within the classroom. This cooperative atmosphere and positive climate will help to develop the kind of relationship needed in a caring constructivist classroom.

Brooks and Brooks (1999) delivered a lengthy discussion about the heart of the caring classroom—constructivist educational practice. Brooks and Brooks averred that "learners control their learning. That simple truth lies at the heart of the constructivist approach to education" (p. 21). The first tenet emphasized the need for a positive relationship: "Constructivist teachers seek and value students' point of view" (pg. 22).

Brooks and Brooks also stated that “education is a holistic endeavor. Students’ learning encompasses emerging understandings about themselves, their relationships, and their relative places in the world” (p. 25).

Another facet of caring education is the idea of relationships with respect to our multicultural society. Banks, et. al. (2001) observed that “schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards” (p. 198). This group of educators held that teachers should teach social skills needed to interact with all racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups (p. 200). This instruction would lead to a reduction of fear and anxiety between groups.

In discussing constructivist education, McCombs (2001) promoted a learner-centered framework that she argued must be used to infuse a system with personal relationships and caring. She emphasized:

To bring the system into balance and bring some of the joy of learning back into the educational process, the focus must also be on personal issues and the needs of all people in the system, including students and the adults who serve them in the teaching and learning process...The needs of individual learners are often downplayed in the implementation of standards-based programs...our current educational paradigm defines the goal of learning as knowledge conservation rather than knowledge production. (p. 182)

McCombs realized that there is a need for schooling to prepare children to behave in moral and ethical ways (p. 185). She stated that this can be accomplished through a learner-centered framework.

“Learner-centered” is the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners—their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs—with a focus on learning—the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation learning, and achievement for all learners. (p. 186)

Continuing in this line of student centered thought about education, Darling-Hammond (2003) contended that teachers should be taught to support student learning. She commented that “teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly, so that they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate ideas to one another, and address misconceptions” (p. 277). Darling-Hammond also stated that teachers learn best when they study, when they do, and when they reflect (p. 278). She contended that teachers need to collaborate with other teachers and by looking closely at their students and their work. Then finally they need to share what they see (p. 278). Darling-Hammond also echoes the idea of establishing relationships to better care for students and to provide a supportive learning atmosphere.

The idea of the importance of creating relationships in the middle school, Inlay (2003) reported that:

To grow as individuals, students must believe that the school community accepts individual differences. One test of a school’s effectiveness in teaching social responsibility is how well students treat those who are socially inept on the playground. (p. 70)

Inlay stated that the message we should be sending is “we deeply respect our students,



not just because they are our students, but because all human beings have the right to be respected in these ways” (p. 71).

Mendes (2003) discussed empathy and its role in helping to create connection and collaboration, two other facets of school relationships. Mendes stated that:

The teacher needs a genuine desire to build a connection with students and strategies for reframing experiences so that they elicit a student’s interest rather than frustration...Caring teachers succeed in managing their classroom effectively, including maintaining discipline, solving problems, and setting expectations, limits, and rewards. (p. 57)

Mendes provided a listing of what a teacher or an administrator can do to build relationships with students: acknowledge all responses and questions; mention students’ names, skills, ideals, and knowledge in your presentations—without mentioning weaknesses or confidential information; use self-disclosure when appropriate. Be a real person; use responses beginning with “I agree,” “I appreciate,” and “I respect;” ask students about their interests (p. 58). Mendes stated “Know your students’ world and go there first to open the relationship door” (p. 58).

Palmer (2003) emphasized his theme of the heart of a teacher by stating, “The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able, so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require” (p. 71). Sparks (2003) in an interview with Parker Palmer reported that

Good teachers create a centered and trustworthy space around themselves in which students can find the relational trust...a space that’s important

not only among teachers and between teachers and administrators, but also between teachers and their students as well. (p. 50)

Weissberg, Resnik, Payton, and O'Brien (2003) promoted a relationship-based school as a caring community of learners.

Schools become caring communities of learners by using the following approaches: class meetings in which students and their teacher discuss issues, plan, and make decisions that affect classroom climate; a cross-age 'buddies' program that pairs older and younger students for academic and recreational activities to foster a schoolwide atmosphere of trust; family involvement activities, which provide opportunities for students and their families to share ideas and experiences about what the students are learning at school academically, socially, and ethically; innovative whole-school, community-building activities that involve students, parents, and staff in building a caring, inclusive environment. (pp. 48-49)

One of the hallmarks of social and emotional learning programs, according to these authors, is the ability to teach students to apply social and emotional learning skills and ethical values in daily life (p. 47).

Wolk (2003) discussed the democratic classroom where care comprises a central tenet. Wolk stated "The underlying principles of a democratic classroom—choice, discourse, social responsibility, community, critical inquiry, authentic learning, and teaching a relevant and creative curriculum—help promote caring relationships between teachers and students" (p. 14). For Wolk, caring and trusting relationships are interwoven. Caring and trusting relationships are also the basis for discipline and

curriculum (p. 15). This is also predicated on the creation of relationships: administrator and community; administrator and teacher; teacher and teacher; teacher and student; and student and student.

Berliner (2004) discussed reaching the unmotivated student in the following way:

Create positive learning environments: look for regular and authentic reasons to offer congratulations and encouragement; de-emphasize competition; establish schoolwide procedures for communicating, collaborating, and problem-solving; invite students to help develop rules that are respectful and reasonable, and reinforce personal responsibility.

(pp. 46-47)

Viadero (2004) commented that schools can create a more caring environment by setting high academic expectations; applying fair and consistent discipline policies; fostering trusting relationships among students, teachers, administrators, and families; ensuring that a supportive adult watches over every student; creating small learning environments; and even reducing lunchroom-noise levels (p. 10).

### **Summary**

This section has clearly shown that caring education requires that teachers and leaders establish a relationship with their students. In addition to the students, caring educators establish that same relationship with parents and the community. The caring educator responds to the needs of the entire school community. It is a given that the educators must have subject area knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and the desire to be in the classroom. The caring educator goes that extra mile to establish a relationship with the students that come to the classroom.

## **Caring and middle school leadership**

After considering this picture of what caring education should look like, it is important now to consider what is being said in the research about caring leadership. This is the heart of the school since the leader sets the tone for what goes on within the walls. Greenleaf (1977) described what he considered the ultimate in caring leadership—the servant leader. He states “A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (p. 27). This principle of servant leadership has helped to define the entire body of thought on caring leadership.

In discussing the human perspective of supervision, Sergiovanni (1983) reflected that “Human resources supervision recognizes and supports legitimate and portion authority but it stresses and attempts to develop competence and personal authority” (p. 109). This idea of developing competence and person authority is an important one for caring leadership. Ultimately the needs of the students must be met by competent teachers—teachers that have the authority to make decisions. However, Sergiovanni offered a caveat. He stated that “the human growth needs of students should never be subordinated to objectives dictated by the needs of society and the demands of the disciplines” (p. 228). Keeping the needs of the students a priority is of the utmost importance in caring leadership. Those needs can only be determined through a caring relationship.

Sizer (1985) in his work about the American high school stated that caring leadership begins with putting some of the burden for learning on the students

themselves. He stated: “We should expect them (students) to learn more while being taught less. Their personal engagement with their own learning is crucial; adults cannot ‘give’ them an education” (p. 34). The caring leader should demonstrate to the teachers under his/her charge the same behaviors that he expects them to show to the students.

We should show them respect by expecting much of them and by being straight—and part of being straight is telling them that they are still inexperienced and therefore must share their freedom with older people until they have learned the dimensions of liberty. (p. 52)

Sizer echoed the idea of the democratic classroom when he stated “If each (student) is given a significant part in choosing his or her kind of learning, so much the better” (pp. 66-67). The ethic of care comes out in his discussion in a variety of statements—the most telling of all is the idea that the inescapable purpose of schools is the education of character (p. 84).

Sizer (1985) stated “A school that relies on threat for its motivation eventually provokes unrelenting hostile reactions by students” (p. 169). For leaders, he offers some warnings. “Public address systems are the most malevolent intruder into the thinking taking place in public school classrooms since the invention of the flickering fluorescent light” (p. 173). One final comment for leaders: “Good schools make it O.K. to exhibit one’s lack of learning and make it safe to do so (p. 174). Sizer summarized his work by listing five imperatives for better schools:

1. Give room to teachers and student to work and learn in their own appropriate ways.
2. Insist that students clearly exhibit mastery of their school work.

3. Get the incentives right, for students and for teachers.
4. Focus the students' work on the use of their minds.
5. Keep the structure simple and thus flexible. (p. 214)

Barth (1985) began his discussion of the leader as learner by summing up the current state of affairs by stating “the moral order of the school universe places the principal in authority as knower. There is little place for the principal as learner” (p. 93).

In opposition to the current state of affairs, Barth stated that

Being a learner, a life-long adult learner, is the most important characteristic of a school leader. Learning is not just another item on the long list of critical characteristics—it belongs at the top of the list. (p. 93)

Barth discussed the connection between learning and collegiality. He observed that the most powerful form of staff development happens not from listening to others but sharing what we know with each other. Barth observed that more learning comes from giving than receiving (p. 93). He concluded his discussion by stating, “The power of the leader as learner in improving schools rests squarely on the extent to which we proudly and openly find ways of inventing, owning, sustaining, displaying, and celebrating our own learning” (p. 94).

Grant (1988) described the need for a common ethos that binds individuals into a community (p. 117). In discussing the success at Hamilton High, one of the keys to its success is the belief that “the ethos represents the enduring values or character of the school community: the spirit that actuates not just manners, but moral and intellectual attitudes, practices, and ideals” (p. 172).

Kron (1988) promoting a shared leadership model, argued that:

when teachers are involved directly in important decision, they work

harder, they are more committed to the organization, and they find greater satisfaction in their professional lives. Many times the efficiency of the school is improved as well. (p. 4)

Through the use of participative management, Kron stated that trust, unity and leadership can be achieved.

Mitchell and Cunningham (1990) held that “educational administration is a turbulent field in a hostile environment” (p. 16). To ease that hostile environment, Mitchell and Cunningham stated: “We have learned from decades of child development research that children benefit substantially from a sense of continuity and constancy in their environment. Children need a secure one-to-one relationship with a caring adult” (p. 38). Mitchell and Cunningham (1990) commented that educational leaders should ensure that “the authority of the school is not of coercion or negotiation” (p. 66). This article goes on to define leadership “as an interactive, dynamic process drawing members of an organization together behind a culture within which they feel secure enough to articulate and pursue what they want to become” (p. 188).

Rubenstein (1990) described the quality leader from a teacher’s point of view.

The quality principal:

has enough confidence in himself or herself and others to allow teachers to teach and students to learn. His or her first commitment is to people, not to a building. This principal has the ability and the willingness to share authority and to work with the staff for a quality education program. (p. 151)

The teachers also argued that the quality principal includes staff in the important decisions that affect teachers, students, atmosphere, policy, and morale (p. 152). Teachers

want their leaders to be the guide “for an exciting, warm, and cohesive educational experience for both students and teachers” (p. 152).

Hodgkinson (1991) stated educational leadership to be a moral act. For Hodgkinson educational leaders should practice a conscious reflection toward intentional actions not just react to stimuli—or praxis (p. 43). Hodgkinson commented that “praxis is at the core of the art of leadership” (p. 45).

Norris (1991) took a more humanistic approach to supervision. For Norris, the supervisor should work to develop each teacher’s uniqueness (p. 132). She suggested that supervisors should advise, encourage, and assist teachers rather than direct them (p. 132). Ultimately, supervisors “must have a genuine respect for the diversity of life. They cannot assume that all minds operate on the same principles as their own” (p. 133).

Arhar (1992) discussed the idea of enhancing membership and the role of the leader. Arhar stated “creating a small community within the school enables teachers to develop trusting relationships with students. This encourages the kinds of risk-taking needed for learning to occur” (p. 13). Arhar also stated that:

Leaders can set a tone for the school that reduces the dominance of peer groups such as “jocks” or “tough guys” by replacing it with a commitment to providing all students with in-depth, practical, and relevant educational experiences by a few adults who get to know student strengths and weaknesses. By valuing rather than denigrating diversity, leaders set the stage for celebrations of different cultures. (p. 16)

Sergiovanni (1992) promoted the idea of moral leadership as a pathway to school improvement. He said that leader’s decisions are influenced by what is valued and in



addition to self-interest (p. 21). For Sergiovanni, “the true leader is the one who follows first” (p. 72). He stated that the leader should promote collegiality and that collegiality is rare in schools (p. 86). Sergiovanni stated “the principle of justice is expressed as equal treatment of and respect for the integrity of individuals...the principle of beneficence is expressed as concern for the welfare of the school as a community” (pp. 105-106).

Throughout this particular work, Sergiovanni (1992) promoted a virtuous school. He listed the characteristics of the virtuous school as follows:

1. The virtuous school believes that, to reach its full potential in helping students learn, it must become a learning community in and of itself.
2. The virtuous school believes that every student can learn, and it does everything in its power to see that every student does learn.
3. The virtuous school seeks to provide for the whole student...Prime among its values is the ethic of caring and caring is viewed as a key to academic success.
4. The virtuous school honors respect.
5. In the virtuous school, parents, teachers, community, and school are partners, with reciprocal and interdependent rights to participate and benefit and with obligation to support and assist. (pp. 112-113)

Sergiovanni promoted the use of servant leadership. With servant leadership as the model, “moral authority should become the cornerstone of one’s overall leadership practice” (p. 139). He concluded his discussion by emphasizing the ideas that “moral leadership is designed to bring people together in a common cause” (p. 142).

Marshall (1995) described the caring administrator as possessing a “caring ethic

that emphasizes connection, responsibilities, and relationships rather than rights and rules” (p. 450). Marshall in broader terms gives caring a much larger role. She stated “Caring is critical to transforming schools into successful living and learning environments. Many teachers and administrators already practice caring—but they must do so outside the bounds of formal structure” (p. 453).

Tonnson (1995), after spending three days as the principal of an elementary school discovered that the principal must have the ability to deal with ambiguity and with the unpredictable and sometimes even the inexplicable (p. 83). He felt that building leaders, while working to maintain an effective organization, had to be out there making friends and making enemies (p. 83).

Townsend (1997) stated that the leader is responsible for developing an ethical framework. Townsend believes that “we have to work consciously to make sure that we consistently act upon the beliefs and values we express...we must talk openly about the ethical basis for decisions made and those facing us” (p. 3). The caring leader must carefully walk several treacherous lines.

Morris (1999), in discussing what school leadership should look like for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stated:

A caring model revolves as a mutually initiated and reinforced connection. Caring is both natural and ethical. This type of leadership is an injunction to act responsibly toward oneself and others and to sustain a connection applying the caring ethic to everyday practice. The caring ethic emphasizes connection to responsibility and relationships rather than rights and rules. Caring requires the ability to listen actively and carefully

and to make decisions with the goals of affirming and encouraging the best in others. It would seem then that, given the thoughtful kinds of planning required for school-based leadership, a model that focuses on personal behaviors would be very appropriate. (p. 6)

Morris also held that school leaders should be sensitive to the fact that the schools reflect their educational beliefs—intended and unintended (p. 6).

Sergiovanni (1999) observed that a caring attitude shown through connections and commitment was the avenue to building community. He stated:

Connections and commitment are the means by which students and adults alike find sense and meaning in their lives and find the resources needed to persist when times are tough, to look ahead to brighter days, to meet life's challenges, and to be successful with life's endeavors. (p. 2)

Sergiovanni held that developing a caring community that is based upon unconditional love is not inconsistent with developing “an intellectually rich community with a strong academic focus that demands a great deal from students and gives them a great deal in return” (p. 3). He also stated that caring and learning become interdependent, but he did provide a caveat:

But neither caring nor learning can be scripted. Both must emerge from the school's sense of what is important, the school's inventory of values and purposes, the school's commitment to do well, and other cultural concerns that provide a school with character. (p. 4)

He also stated that principals are asked to succeed rather than to serve. Sergiovanni commented that the only way for a school leader to succeed is to serve (p. 5).

Kaplan and Owings (2000) discussed the idea of how the school leader can make students feel safe, valued, and competent. They argued that “teachers who have formed enduring and caring relationships with their students often become informal mentors” (p. 25). The authors stated that a personalized learning experience for all students creates atmosphere that is safe and nurturing (p. 27).

Tomlinson (2000) felt that leadership should look at differentiation as a mean of reaching and nurturing students. She commented that “human capacity is malleable, and the art of teaching is the art of maximizing human capacity; a central goal of schools ought to be maximizing the capacity of each learner” (p. 17). The school leader maximizes human capacity through differentiating instruction. The leader’s role in differentiating is to “assist educators in probing the beliefs behind their actions, developing new classroom practices, and encouraging educators to use the new practices as new lenses for looking at students, teaching, and learning” (p. 44). Tomlinson also stated that leaders kill enthusiasm by over promising and under delivering (p. 62).

Tomlinson stated

Leaders for responsive, personalized, or differentiated classroom focus much of their professional energy on two fronts: what it means to teach individual learners effectively, and how to extend the number of classrooms in which that sort of teaching becomes the norm. (p. 132)

Hansen and Stephens (2001) discussed the various problems with creating a learner-centered education. They stated that “too many students have been socialized in earlier schooling to believe they cannot learn course material unless it has been

predigested by an instructor” (p. 41). These authors called this learned helplessness. The authors stated:

Learned helplessness is a convenient way out both for students and instructors. It requires less student work for good grades, and it allows the instructor to stay in control of the classroom, focusing on content delivery rather than student learning. (p. 42)

Leaders must possess a sense of justice as well as a sense of caring to maintain “a harmonious and productive social relationships inside and outside the classroom” (p. 47).

Hansen and Stephens see teaching and learning as moral virtues are based:

on a mutual interest in intellectual growth and development. Helping students become educated members of society constitutes a contract between three partners: the student, the teacher, and society at large. Each of them is responsible to the other two. Knowledge acquisition is only one element in this contract. (p. 47)

Kearns and Harvey (2001) leveled intense criticism at the current status of education. They stated “everybody can learn. That’s the talk we talk, but it’s not the walk we walk. In fact, we have established an educational system that simply requires that everyone go to school” (p. 55). These authors argued that “transformative leadership can make something happen for our schools—and the parents and students who depend on them” (p. 56).

McHenry (2002) in discussing alternative education for students with behavior disorders enumerated the key elements that make up the cornerstone of that particular program. “Structure, a caring and committed staff, a safe environment, and coordinated services are the building blocks” (p. 37).

Murphy (2002) provided a blueprint for reculturing schools. For Murphy the key was for the leader to become a moral steward.

Moral steward means that person wishing to affect society as school leaders must be directed by a powerful portfolio of beliefs and values anchored in issues such as justice, community, and schools that function for all children and youth. They must maintain a critical capacity, foster a sense of possibilities, and bring to their enterprise a certain passion that affects others deeply. (p. 186)

Murphy saw the moral stewardship as seeing “the moral implications of the thousand daily decision made by each school administrator” (p. 186). The administrator must “learn to lead from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from a web of interpersonal relationships—with people rather than through them” (p. 188). Murphy also stated that the role of the administrator “is to nurture the development of open systems in which access and voice are honored” (p. 188). Murphy guided thinking by stating “there is as much heart as head in this style of leading. It is grounded more on modeling and clarifying values and beliefs than on telling people what to do” (p. 188).

Richards (2002) described a very special kind of school leader. She stated “Positive, caring, encouraging principals who are concerned about the personal welfare and happiness of their teachers have a greater impact on their school’s climate and their teachers’ performance than they may know” (p. 86). This type of principal provided an emotionally safe environment and a feeling of appreciation (p. 90).

In 2003, the Center for Educational Policy Analysis described what is known about successful school leadership. Their report stated:

Successful school leaders respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work: creating and sustaining a competitive school; empowering other to make significant decision; providing instructional guidance; strategic planning. (p. 5)

According to this study, successful leaders responded productively to both opportunities and challenges (p. 6).

Allen (2003) described a goal of service learning as providing students with the ability to examine and respond to social issues (p. 52). Byrk and Schneider (2003) saw response to social issues through the building of relational trust. They stated “relational trust is grounded in the social respect that comes from the kinds of social discourse that take place across the school community” (p. 42). The authors observed that relational trust is what binds adults together “to advance the education and welfare of students” (p. 44).

Deiro (2003) continued the discussion of relationships and the importance of the relationship between the school leader and the students. Deiro commented that relationship is based on dignity.

Treating children with dignity meant honoring their position and their abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem. Treating children with respect means showing regard for their basic human right to expression and believing in their growing abilities to manage their own lives successfully. Respect requires listening and sincerely considering what children are saying. (p. 60)

Respect is also an integral part of the relationship that must exist between the students and the teachers and administration. “Caring teachers can be stern and strict. They can even appear detached and aloof. But they must be respectful to be perceived as caring...A teacher’s respect and an ethical use of power are key to students’ perceptions of caring. With respect, teachers can communicate caring to students when disciplining them, correcting their assignments, lecturing, or playing with them” (p. 62).

This relationship with the students took on a different tone with Kohn (2003). He stated that “what we call behavior problems are often situations of legitimate conflict; we just get to call them behavior problems because we have more power than the students do” (p. 28). In a somewhat shotgun approach, Kohn also stated that “teachers who work with students to create a caring community sometimes pay insufficient attention to deficiencies in the academic curriculum” (p. 29).

Rooney (2003) related that :

Care involves a vigorous insistence on high expectations for students and teachers. Care rejects second-rate teaching and does not allow lame excuses for low achievement. Care requires a standard of equality for all students, regardless of how they look or what they bring to the schoolhouse door. (p. 78)

Reflecting some of Kohn’s thinking, Rooney stated “every principal has the power to weave an environment in which people care for one another—and thereby to foster excellent teaching and learning. Good principals model care” (p. 76). Caring principals “do their best to protect their staff and students from external forces that do not foster a culture of learning and caring” (p. 77). Rooney concluded her article by stating: “caring



principals speak up for their deeply held convictions about teaching and learning, and they let go of less important issues” (p. 78).

Schaps (2003) in discussing the creation of a school community argued that inclusive participatory communities for students are especially important. Schaps stated:

Research suggests that schools can strengthen students’ sense of community by adopting feasible, commonsense approaches. Four approaches are particularly beneficial: actively cultivate respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents; emphasize common purposes and ideals; provide regular opportunities for service and cooperation; provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for autonomy and influence. (p. 32).

Sergiovanni (2003) in discussing the politics of virtue also spoke of communities and the political games that interfere with the operation of schools. Sergiovanni defined the roots of school leadership as stewardship, which he defined as “a commitment to administer to the needs of the school by serving its purposes, by serving those who struggle to embody these purposes, and by acting as a guardian to protect the institutional integrity of the school” (p. 287). For Sergiovanni:

Leadership as stewardship is the sine qua non for cultivating civic virtue. Civic virtue can help to transform individual stakeholders into members of a community who share common commitments and who feel a moral obligation to help each other to embody those commitments. (p. 289).

Slavkin (2003) called on the leader to allow students a role in their learning. He stated:

“Students who are in charge of their learning are more likely to make deeper connections

with material...In changing their relationship with material, students also may be changing the way they think. Learner empowerment and personalization of information is thought to make neural connections stronger than they would be without student empowerment” (p. 21). He also stated that leaders should encourage teachers to allow their students “opportunities to relate the curriculum to their personal lives, provide an environment that reveals multiple meanings of material, and allow students to see the dynamic nature of information” (p. 24). All of this discussion again emphasizes the need for leaders to be aware of the needs of not only students but staff and community. Only through this awareness can the leader create the caring community that the students need to flourish.

Sparks and Ferguson (2003) observed that “one of the important roles of leadership is to help people regard one another as trustworthy and to help people who are not trustworthy become more so” (p. 47).

Starratt (2003) in discussing the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of not leaving a child behind commented that the leader should make “every effort to provide differentiated learning opportunities with instruction that is clearly aligned with state curriculum standards and adequate time frames to allow the learning to occur” (pp. 300-301). He stated that leaders should not fall into the trap of quick fixes. He stated:

Merely offering remediation classes without making the changes necessary to ensure student learning—developing better diagnostic skills, new pedagogical skills, new lesson designs, new forms of partnering with parents and guardians, and new motivational strategies to promote student

interest—will continue the injustice of punishing the victims of a system that has failed to provide them a genuine opportunity to learn (p. 302).

Leaders clearly must work to provide for students the caring environment and opportunity to take ownership of the learning. This is a critical task.

Thomas (2003) stated that “We have to remember that public schooling is all about people and relationships... We need to be caring and empathetic... We need to be sensitive to their needs, and very aggressive with positive and upbeat communication” (p. 9). Another perspective of that idea is presented by Weissbourd (2003). He stated:

Educators influence students’ moral development not simply by being good role models—important as that is—but also by what they bring to their relationships with students day to day: Their ability to appreciate students’ perspectives and to disentangle them from their own, their ability to admit and learn from moral error, their moral energy and idealism, their generosity, and their ability to help students develop moral thinking without shying away from their own moral authority. (pp. 6-7)

Weissbourd also stated “many teachers communicate high moral expectations and provide steady listening opportunities for accomplishment that reduce students’ shame and distrust” (p. 8). Weissbourd warned that leaders must watch for disillusionment within the faculty. Disillusionment is “freedom from illusion. It is the ability to face and absorb a greater portion of reality—a foundation for wisdom and maturity. But disillusionment turns pernicious when it slides into helplessness and passivity—when teachers don’t have the confidence, support, or opportunities for the creativity needed to master these realities” (p. 10). Leaders must be aware of the state of mind of their

teachers and work to keep an even keel. Black (2004) reflected some of that frustration of faculty by stating: “Focusing exclusively on raising test scores without attending to students’ health and social needs will leave many children behind” (p. 1). Black stated that “schools should concentrate on providing high-quality education through individualized instruction, team-teaching, cooperative learning, alternatives to tracking, parent involvement, and a healthy school climate” (p. 2).

The school leader might be wise to develop teacher leaders in a hope to increase the care needed from administration. Patterson and Patterson (2004) stated that “a source of teacher leader influence is the ability to forge relationships—to connect with other teachers as colleagues” (p. 75). Patterson and Patterson focused on the need for schools to develop resilience—the ability to use a school’s collective energy to achieve school goals even in the face of adversity (p. 75). Patterson and Patterson listed seven ways teacher leaders can create resilient schools: “stay focused on what matters most; create a climate of caring and support; maintain hope in the face of adversity; remain flexible in how you get there; take charge; maintain high expectations for students and adults; create meaningful participation and shared responsibility” (pp. 76-77). Patterson and Patterson commented that by mobilizing the capacity of teachers to strengthen student performance and working to develop real collaboration within the school, then the school can realize the kind of resilience that is needed to have a caring supportive school (p. 76).

Sergiovanni (2004) listed seven crucial conditions for school improvement that he called a framework for hope. The conditions are:

Provide continuity of care by forming small learning communities that keep the same group of professionals and students together for extended

periods during the day and across multiple school years; set high, clear, and fair standards for academics and conduct that clearly define what all students will know and be able to do by graduation and at key points along the way; reduce student-adult ratios to 15:1 or lower during core instructional periods, primarily by redistributing the professional staff; provide enriched and diverse opportunities for students to learn, perform, and be recognized; equip, empower, and expect all teaching staff to implement standards-based instruction that actively engages all students in learning by giving teaching teams the authority to make instructional decisions, creating opportunities for continual staff learning, and specifying clear expectations about that good teaching and learning look like; give small learning communities the flexibility to quickly redirect resources to meet emerging needs; ensure collective responsibility for student outcomes by providing collective incentives and consequences for teaching teams based on improvements in district performance. (p. 3)

Starratt (2005) presented a caveat in a discussion of responsible leadership. He stated that “Human beings have to observe considerable delicacy and diplomacy in dealing with one another, because there is a basic level of respect and dignity with which human beings deserve to be treated, to violate that respect—to deny people their dignity—is to violate their humanity, which is an ethical violation” (p. 125). Starratt called this transformational ethics, which he sees as a critical aspect of a leader’s ethical behavior.

In transformational ethics, the educational leader calls students and

teachers to reach beyond self-interest for a higher ideal—something heroic. The educational leader does not ignore transactional ethics. He or she understands that the glue holding together the morale of the school relies on the unspoken trust that people will honor their agreements. (p. 130)

Starratt stated that if an educational administrator is to be an ethical administrator, then everyone within the school must be treated with care and compassion. He said that the leader “has to be humane, caring, and compassionate, even while appealing to altruistic teacher and student motives” (p. 131).

Beck (1994) agreed with Noddings who stated in the forward of *Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Profession*: “It may be even more important to construe caring as an end in itself” (p. ix). Philosophically, this is what is hoped. Principals who are practicing in middle schools are caring individuals that respond to the needs of their students. In the forward, Noddings goes on to state that “Caring implies competence. When we genuinely care, we want to do our very best to effect worthwhile results for the recipients of our care” (p. ix).

Beck very carefully summarized the activities that are involved in caring. The carer must “receive the other’s perspective; respond appropriately to the awareness that comes from this reception; remain committed to others and the relationship” (p. 12). She said that caring involves openness and receptivity (p. 15) and she stated that “caring is fundamentally a reciprocal intervention and that the responses of the recipient are as pivotal to the process as the actions of the giver” (p. 17).

Beck (1994) saw several implications for educational leaders.

First administrators who believe that a caring God desires or commands an ethic of care to govern human interactions will seek to respond to those with whom they work as a people rather than objects...they will seek to understand the perspectives of those with whom they work and to consider those perspectives as their own when making decisions. (p. 27)

Central to this idea is the fact that participation in caring interactions is the only way to be completely human.

Beck (1994) saw three challenges that face administrators. Administrators must be concerned with improved performances of both students and teachers. Administrators must address a host of social problems. Finally, administrators must rethink organizational structures in order to be able to meet the first two challenges (p. 58). Beck proposed that administrators look for an ecological model of schools that complement a variety of perspectives. She stated that the ethic of care is that ecological model that will satisfy that requirement.

Foundational to caring is a belief in the intrinsic value of persons. In affirming this, it defines enterprises as ethical to the extent that they promote human development, welfare, and happiness. Grounded in this ontological, unconditional conception of value, this perspective emphasizes that students, teachers, and administrators deserve a supportive nurturing educational environment—*simply because they are persons*. (italics in original) (p. 64)

Beck stated that practitioners of the ethic of care, by emphasizing the worth of persons, “would view anything that promoted personal development as being of value” (p. 64).

Beck stated that “A caring educational ethic would support the idea that schools should promote maximum individual and community growth and development and not settle for simply achieving more—on some set of indicators—than others” (p. 65). Beck also stated that caring and its’ commitment to total development of the cared-for is a distinguishing characteristic of caring leadership. Central to the ethic of care is an emphasis on the value of human beings.

A caring ethic—with its enduring commitment to person, its concern with the continued ecological health of schools and their related communities, and its view that human needs must not be ignored—has the potential to ground and focus administrative thought and to protect educators from being swayed by quick-fix, short-term solutions to complex problems. (p. 71)

Beck stated that utilizing the ethic of care required a major rethinking of organizational strategies. She saw a need for decentralization; lateral rather than vertical authority; expanded role definitions; leadership based upon competence; independence and isolation replaced by cooperative work.

Beck (1994) stated that morality plays a major role in the ethic of care. In school leadership it should lead to radical redistributions of power and emancipation. However, Beck saw three aspects of the ethic of care as described by liberationists that are areas of concern for middle school leaders.

First, this perspective has an incomplete view of power and, thus, is of limited usefulness to educators. Second, this ethic, because of its emphasis on the overthrow of existing structures, is likely to be more rhetorical than



practical in actually effecting organizational change. Finally, a liberationist ethic is useful only in certain situations. (p. 74)

However, as a philosophical background, the ethic of care leads into a way of thinking of what communities should want from a developmentally responsive principal.

Beck (1994) saw the caring administrator in three roles. She saw the caring administrator as a values-driven organizer; as a creative and capable pedagogue; and as a cultivator of nurturing cultures. In looking at the caring administrator as a values-driven organizer, Beck stated that “caring leaders, recognizing that many factors influence educational operations and that schools are not solely their possessions, will seek to understand the perspective of others involved in schooling” (p. 81). The ability to understand the perspective of others helped the caring administrator to create a vision that is responsive to the needs of the various and sundry parts of the school community. The ability to understand the perspective of others also helped the caring administrator to closely assess the system where they work and to seek ways to move the organization toward the vision that is held by the caring administrator.

Beck (1994) saw five organizational features of organizations where values are linked to caring.

First, a caring ethic would prompt leaders to assert that professional educators should take the lead in defining values and insuring that schools support and nurture the development of all persons. Second, it would encourage the development of non-bureaucratic decision-making school structures. Third, this ethic would emphasize skills and competencies rather than assign titles as determinants of organizational rules, and it

would encourage the separation of roles and status. Fourth, caring would prompt leaders to support collaborative efforts among and between students, teachers, and administrators. Finally, this ethic would call for structures conducive to honest ongoing communication between persons within schools and between educators and those in the larger community.

(p. 82)

Having these values linked to caring would allow school leaders to truly help students with what they need and hopefully get all aspects of the school community on the same track—the education of our young people.

Beck's (1994) second view of the caring administrator as a creative and capable pedagogue saw the building level principal as the instructional leader. Beck stated that principals would:

view themselves as learners and continually strive to develop their knowledge and skill base; consider themselves to be teachers and work to transform interactions into pedagogical opportunities; function as skillful managers so as to promote teaching effectiveness; and, finally, function as colleagues to teachers in supervision and evaluation. (p. 88)

This view of the caring administrator went along with the ideal of an ecological approach to middle school leadership. Beck reflected that:

Taking an ecological approach, these (instructional) leaders would seek not to bend individual behavior to conform to externally imposed notions of school improvement, but, rather, to transform schools so that they no longer alienate teachers, administrators, and students, and to free the intelligence of those who

work in schools, so they might better analyze their problems, invent solutions, and improve the quality of education. (pp. 92-93)

Within this ecological approach, caring administrators would invite students, teachers, parents and other administrators to help evaluate his performance in order to help improve the administrator's professional practice.

Beck's (1994) third view of the caring administrator as a cultivator of nurturing cultures contained the administrator's most difficult tasks. Beck saw two themes that dominate this aspect of the caring administrator. "The first is that the culture of the school has important and far reaching effects on the thinking and actions of students and teachers. The second is that administrators can do much to shape, define, sustain, or change a school's culture" (p. 96). Beck saw the administrator with three very important tasks in operating within this role. The caring administrator must use metaphor. Where formal language is the language of a bureaucracy; humor, imagery and metaphor, and personalized messages are the language of caring. That language of caring is also seen through the storytelling that is so important in promoting a climate of care. Finally, caring administrators are ever aware of the symbolic dimension that their actions and decisions have to influence the thinking of the various communities involved with any one particular school.

In summarizing Beck's (1994) work, it is important to realize that using the ethic of care is foundational to how we have historically operated within our communities. "A caring ethic is appropriate in educational institutions because it is consistent with the nature not only of individuals but also of the social networks they inhabit" (p. 23). Beck saw caring as foundational to all aspects of administration.

### *Middle School Leadership*

There has been a wide range of literature written about middle school leadership. There has been one definitive work that has set the tone for thinking about middle school leadership for the past sixteen years. In 1989 the Carnegie Council released *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The report opened eyes by stating that “the early adolescences basic human needs—caring relationships with adults, guidance in facing sometimes overwhelming biological and psychological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups, and the perception of future opportunity—go unmet at this critical stage” (p. 20). To meet these needs the council stated: “Caring is crucial to the development of young adolescents into healthy adults. Young adolescents need to see themselves as valued members of a group that offers mutual support and trusting relations” (p. 33). The Carnegie Council delineated eight essential principles for responsive middle schools:

- Schools divided into small learning communities;
- Transmission of a common core of knowledge to all students;
- Organization to insure success for all students;
- Major responsibility and power to transform middle grades lies with teachers and principals;
- Teachers are specifically trained to teach young adolescents;
- Promotion of good health practices;
- Established alliance between families and school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication;
- Communities and schools partner in educating young adolescents. (p. 36)

The provision of care for students is critical on the part of the teachers at the middle school level. “Every student must be able to rely on a small caring group of adults who work closely with each other to provide coordinated, meaningful, and challenging educational experiences” (p. 37). The Carnegie Council also proposed three goals for all middle school students.

Every student in the middle grades should learn to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralist society. (p. 42)

The Carnegie Council stated the curriculum is of ultimate importance in addressing the educational needs of the young adolescents. “Young adolescents demonstrate an ability to grapple with complexity, think critically, and deal with information as parts of systems rather than as isolated, disconnected facts (p. 47). The council recommended that the educational program for middle school students fit the needs of students by grouping students for learning; scheduling classroom periods to maximize learning; and expanding the structure of opportunity for learning (p. 49).

Johnston, Markle, and Forrer (1984) observed that the effective principal is “a team leader who displays high levels of interpersonal skill and is especially adept at communicating with all levels both inside and outside of the school system” (p. 15).

Marson (1990) stated that principals should “build the educational program on an understanding of and a commitment to young adolescents as individuals as well as learners—our actions, not our words, will influence our judges” (p. 33) Marson also stated that principals should encourage students participation in community activities in

hopes of developing a concerned citizenry (p. 33).

Dorman, Lipsitz, Verner (1985) commented that middle schools should respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents through diversity, self-exploration and self-definition, meaningful participation in school and the community, positive interaction with adults, physical activity, competence, structure and limits (p. 46).

Capelluti and Stokes (1991) saw five challenges that face caring middle school principals—three of which center on the educational program: curriculum, professional preparation, and instructional programs (p.3). The authors felt that “students need to be actively engaged in learning. They need to be encouraged to think and to make logical decisions and discoveries on their own and with the cooperation of classmates” (p. 21). Capelluti and Stokes stated “Developmentally organized instruction relies on teaming. Teaming can integrate learning among areas and reduce departmentally isolated learning” (p. 26). The developmentally organized middle school, according to Capelluti and Stokes, in order to insure that the compassion component is in place, must have the following elements:

- Role models in the form of caring adults;
- A regularly meeting consistent peer group;
- Community service projects that involve students, individually and in groups;
- Decision making should be encouraged and taught;
- Wellness programs for adults and students should be provided;
- Age-appropriate social activities should be provided;
- Early identification of at-risk students;
- Student needs should drive the guidance curriculum. (p. 32)

The authors also commented that the middle school program must be flexible and adapt to the needs of middle level students. “This aspect of the administrative role requires a sensitivity to the needs of constituents (students, staff, and parents) as they plan and implement programs” (p. 38). Capetulli and Stokes concluded their article by placing middle level education in the correct spotlight by stating that “middle level education is more than a bridge. Schools in the middle must provide an educational program appropriate for the early adolescent, one that is based on their unique needs and characteristics” (p. 42).

George and Grebing (1992) stated that effective middle level principals should “demonstrate a compassionate understanding of the characteristics and needs of the developing adolescent” (p. 3). The authors also related that the effective middle school principal knows that good middle schools are never finished and the search for ways to improve is continuous (p. 7). Truly effective middle school principals “must enjoy being around middle level students and be eagerly involved in their classroom life” (p. 9). Joel Milgram (Irvin, 1992) said that middle school principals must understand completely the human condition in order to effectively meet the needs of young adolescents (p. 26). Linda Kramer (Irvin) warned that adolescents are concerned with the impressions others have of them. This leads to the construction of imaginary audiences where they feel constantly scrutinized and criticized (p. 30). Irvin (1992) stated that:

Good middle schools...deliver curriculum in a developmentally appropriate manner to accommodate young adolescents' need to move, to explore, to debate, to interact, and to relate new learning to what they know and what they will need to know to be productive citizens. (p. 311)

Alley (1993) observed that the middle school principal “builds a climate of trust, respect, earnestness, and mutual interdependence by doing what they say and believe” (p. 44).

Manning (1993) felt that middle school principals should consider all aspects of the educational program rather than “focus on one entity and retaining traditional elementary or secondary perspectives” (p. 40). Manning also pointed out that while caring middle level educators work to make all students feel accepted, some still feel a sense of anonymity.

“The move from elementary school to middle level school and the transitory nature of friendship and cliques can resulting students feeling ‘lost’” (p. 53). Lord (1996) stated that middle level principals must design “meaningful programs and experiences to enhance the social, emotional, physical, and educational growth of young adolescents while ensuring students a smooth transition to high school” (p. 38). Porter (1996) said that principals and assistant principals, in order to help at-risk middle level students, must develop the skills of dignity, lack of grudges, eye contact, and positive reinforcement (p. 27).

Dougherty (1997) discussed several philosophies that have gone far in shaping the middle school approach. Invitational education, in which students are summoned to realize their potential in all areas of endeavor, is centered on five basic principles:

- People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;
- Educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity;
- The process is the product in the making;
- People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor;
- This potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes specifically designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others. (pp. 12-14)



Since early adolescence is the time of not quite giving up the past and not quite embracing the future (p. 17), Dougherty felt that:

each individual constructs an understanding of the world in which he or she lives. Each makes sense of the world by synthesizing new experiences with existing understandings. Teachers must provide a learning environment in which students search for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly. (p. 28)

Dougherty felt that “constructivism is not a theory about teaching but one about knowledge and learning” (p. 29). The caring, developmentally responsive middle school that is led by a caring, developmentally responsive leader should adopt the constructivist approach to education. Dougherty listed the basic understandings of constructivist teaching:

knowledge is actively created or invented by the child, not passively received from the environment; ideas are constructed when children integrate them into their existing knowledge structures; learning is a social process in which children grow into a shared intellectual life with those around them. (pp. 29-30)

Dougherty (1997) also stated that reflective teaching is another valid philosophy in the process of developing a caring, developmentally responsive middle school. He stated:

Reflective teaching requires teachers to be willing to think seriously about the origins and consequences of their actions and decisions and about the situations and constraints embedded in the instructional, curricular, school,

and social contexts in which they work. Teachers must consider the moral, ethical, and social complexities of teaching and must think rigorously, critically, and systematically about educational practices and problems in order to grow as professionals. (p. 35)

Hipp (1997) wrote that to sustain middle school change and the creation of the developmentally responsive middle school the principal must practice behaviors that reinforce teacher efficacy. The principal must model behavior; promote teacher empowerment and decision-making; inspires group purpose; manage student behavior; create a positive climate for success; foster teamwork and collaboration; encourage innovation and continual growth; provide personal and professional support; and inspire caring and respectful relationships (p. 43). Neufeld (1997) stated that principals should have strategies for involving teachers and others in the decision-making (p. 493). Schukar (1997) observed that one goal for the middle school principal is “to create learning opportunities that are student centered and provide for student responsibility for learning” (p. 177). Schukar also stated that the organization of the curriculum should transcend separate subject areas and “focus on themes that emerge from the concerns of middle school students” (p. 178).

Doud and Keller (1998) described the successful principal of the future as needing “a combination of better preparation, visionary insight into what schools can and should become, the ability to influence others to share that vision, and realistic expectations of what he or she is able to accomplish” (p. 10). Jarolen (1998) stated that:

Middle level administrators need to understand the characteristics of the young adolescent to comprehend the impact of these characteristics on the

everyday functioning of the school. He/she will accept that middle school will look and often even sound different from elementary or high schools because successful teachers who are skilled in interdisciplinary methods will utilize time and resources differently to help all of their students achieve. (p. 22)

Raebeck (1998) promoted whole-school change that started with the middle school principal as a transformational leader. Raebeck described the transformational leader as modeling

life long learning; compassion; saying yes; being an umbrella; taking risks and encouraging mistakes; being flexible and fluid; demanding exceptionality while relinquishing control; exemplifying and exacting high standards; maintaining accountability; hollering out the vision; and picking up tiny bits of paper. (p. 169)

He described the transformational school as “one where inquiry is central.

Thoughtfulness abounds in such a place. The teacher has moved from the role of all-knowing dispenser of information to expert co-learner” (p. 106). Raebeck placed the responsibility on the adults in the middle school. “The onus is on us as adults to demonstrate our care first. Once that is established and only then, can we expect certain behaviors from our students” (p. 22). Raebeck (1998) concluded by stating “In order for transformation to occur we need to do just three things more: Find the courage to begin; maintain the will to persist; give voice to our spirits calling for a brighter light” (p. 181).

Cohen (1999) looked at adolescence and social emotional learning. He recommended to leaders and teachers that:

Forming ongoing, caring, and responsive relationships with students makes a profound difference. Think about what you most fondly remember in your own life as a student....It was a teacher whom we felt cared about us and helped us in some way, sometime academically, more often socially and emotionally. (p. 17)

He also stated that “a basic skill in any relationship...concerns the ability to be empathic, to truly see the world through the eyes of the other person” (p. 62). Not just socially, but also academically, leaders and teachers needed to “develop realistic expectations and goals and to make appropriate accommodations, given a student’s makeup and learning style” (p. 68). Cohen saw a major goal of school and discipline, beyond creating safe schools, “is to have students develop self-discipline, which requires that we teach and educate children rather than humiliating or intimidating them” (p. 70).

Pollak and Hartman (1999) stated that in order to prevent middle level students feeling isolated or alone, each student needs an adult advocate (p. 23). The authors presented that creating a nurturing climate is of utmost importance.

One of the most important aspects of a nurturing climate is respect among all of the school community: administrators, teachers, students, staff members, parents, and visitors. Students and teachers should feel safe to take risks and become totally engaged in the learning process. Visitors to the campus should sense a warm and caring presence and be aware that learning is paramount. (p. 26)

Pollak and Hartman concluded their article by trying to help the leader focus on the adolescent between the ages of 10 and 14. “Their developmental needs should come first

as teachers, parents, and administrators design and implement programs and procedures to nurture and challenge middle level students” (p. 27).

Williamson and Johnston (1999) argued against following along with the way that it has always been done—or orthodoxy. The authors began their challenge of orthodoxy in promoting discussions “about fundamental reasons for middle level schools. Such schools were created to serve students—to assure their success—not just to house particular grades or embrace particular organizational patterns” (pp. 12-13). Williamson and Johnston promoted a particular course for a middle school to be successful.

To be successful, middle level schools must focus on the students in their own schools, their particular needs, and the challenges of life in their communities to design effective programs. The motivation for middle level reform, originally found in the developmental literature on adolescence, created a national movement. Now, to fulfill its promise, this national agenda must give way to the very real and localized needs of children in communities throughout this vast and diverse nation. (p. 15)

The authors firmly observed that the current attitude of maintaining the status quo would have a detrimental effect on education. They stated “adherence to orthodoxy breeds superficial compliance and minimal commitment to change” (p. 16).

Anfara, Brown, Mills, Mahar, and Hartman (2000) promoted a more extensive educational preparation for middle level leadership.

Principals cannot be expected to mold middle level education principles into meaningful programs and experiences without both the theoretically-based knowledge and the practical, performance-based skills deemed necessary to

do so. Enhancing the social, emotional, physical, and educational growth of young adolescents while ensuring students a smooth transition from elementary school to high school requires distinctive preparation. (p. 34)

While other researchers have suggested reform of middle level education, Anfara, Brown, et.al. suggested that principals undertake what they call a “daunting task.” The authors said that principals who truly want to reform their schools “need to reconstruct core ideas about their role, and therefore, how they spend their time, set their priorities, seek new knowledge and skills, and situate themselves with respect to teachers and others in the educational community” (p. 35). This task is beyond most administrators coming out of programs that are currently in place. A different approach to leader preparation is required.

The Carnegie Corporation through the authorship of Jackson and Davis (2000) took another look at the state of the middle school at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jackson and Davis reflected the ethic of care in describing what is needed for middle grades education.

There is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire a durable basis for self-esteem, flexible and inquiring minds, reliable and close human relationships, a sense for belonging in a valued group, and a way of being useful beyond one’s self. (p. ix)

The authors reemphasized this attitude in speaking about how middle schools should establish relationships. “Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose” (p. 24). The authors held fast to the idea of democratic governance for middle schools. They stated that the system “with structures and processes that are systematically inclusive, collaborative, and focused on

the improvement of student learning” (p. 146). The authors also stated that all “stakeholders” should be given a voice in all facets of school improvement. Jackson and Davis concluded their work with an imperative warning. “A significant challenge facing schools is to prevent standards-based instruction from becoming synonymous with instruction meant solely to improve students’ scores on high-stakes tests” (p. 220).

In a later work, Jackson and Davis (2000) in discussing their book, *Turning Points 2000*, emphasized the importance of relationships. They stated:

the emotional environment within a school and the opportunities that kids have to know adults well and to know other kids well is important. Those factors are all, in effect, in the service of learning, not independent of learning. (p. 61)

They also emphasized that the principal is the “chief advocate” for the creation of an internal shared understanding and an external understanding of how the school is improving itself (p. 61). Most important of all, according to Jackson and Davis, was to understand the nature of the middle level student.

There is still a distinctive focus on schools being developmentally responsive while bearing in mind the nature of kids at this age. They are not junior high school kids, or junior older adolescents, or older children. They really are kids at this early adolescent phase in their life, which has a distinctive characteristic. (p. 62)

Little (2000) reflected some of the same type of thinking about the school leader. Little observed that the principal “inspires confidence and inspires others...is a visionary committed to developmentally responsive middle level education” (p. 26).

Dickinson (2001) stated that the middle school concept is in arrested development—which involves both lack of implementation and lack of belief and attention. He saw several elements that have led to this state of arrested development in the middle school concept:

- The incremented stage implementation model used by middle schools to implement the concept;
- The lack of teacher education programs and licensure that focus on the middle school level;
- The lack of middle school principal preparation;
- The inability to balance good places for young adolescents to learn with challenging and involving work in those good places;
- The parade of self-serving consultants;
- The absence of significant and qualified researchers from the dialogue about creating middle schools;
- The lack of attention to curriculum and the hesitancy to implement integrated curriculum;
- The failure of national organizations to focus on the middle school level;
- The failure of The National Middle School Association to fully realize leadership for the middle school level;
- The absence of research to sustain the middle school concept;
- Our overall misunderstanding of the original concept as a total ecology of schooling. (p. 5)



One answer to these elements is the creation of the caring classroom. There are five principles of practice that help to create caring classrooms with an academic edge:

- Warm supportive stable relationships;
- Constructive learning;
- Important, challenging curricula;
- Intrinsic motivation;
- Attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning. (p. 97)

Dickenson stated that differentiated reform is what is needed to get middle school movement back on track. Differentiated reform is defined as

every reform effort that is differentiated to mesh with the contexts of school communities, not that reform efforts meet schools where they are and assist them in making progress in variable currents, while remaining true to the ideology propelling the reform itself. (p. 267)

Most important to success is commitment. “Commitment seems to be at the heart of successful reforms: in a context of commitment reform blooms; without it they wither on the vine” (p. 259). It is imperative that teachers and school leaders understand when learning occurs.

Learning occurs when educators expect a lot of learners and of themselves; when they connect subjects, people, and multiple communities; when they respect learners and themselves; and when they care enough to reflect on their own and their students development. (p. 327)

In order for educators to expect a lot from their students, then the educators must know

and understand their students. Ohanian (2001) reminded educators that

a seventh grader is a person between the ages of eleven and thirteen who is thinking about sex every three and a half seconds, a person you probably cannot beguile into thinking about the formation of the Finger Lakes or compound interest or the importance of setting in *Johnny Tremain*...No definitions or case studies can prepare a teacher for the reality of seventh and eighth graders. Ear-blasting laughter one minute, hysterical sobbing or silent pouting the next; the need to be cuddled and comforted in one moment, and the stiff, don't-come-near-me hauteur the next. (pp. 64-66)

The next step in dealing with middle school students comes in the form of classroom management. Dougherty (2002) went to great length in informing the readers of what not to do. He stated: "When a teacher humiliates students through words or actions, mutual respect is neither shown nor fostered" (p. 11). Dougherty does not stop with just negatives about dealing with middle school students. He also provided the reader with positive approaches to providing a true learning experience. He stated:

Students learn best in a classroom without distractive, disruptive, and undisciplined students. In addition, teachers and students enjoy being in a classroom environment that is free of discipline problems. Students' behavior will be at its best when students are actively engaged in positive learning experiences. (p.17)

Dougherty suggested that the strongest way to provide positive classroom management is through relationship building. He suggested:

Never assume that students are aware they are breaking a classroom rule;

let them know what they are doing...The most effective strategy a teacher can use is to stop minor disruptions...before they become major. (p.23)

Another relationship-building quality is for teachers to show their emotions. Students view teachers as more human and honest when they share their humor, concern, sorrow, or confusion. Teachers should admit when they make an error and offer an apology when mistakes occur. Openness and honesty gain students' respect and build a trusting relationship. (p. 25)

Ecker (2002) provided a very succinct statement of the difficulty there is in leading a middle school. He stated:

middle school education is a transition period, focusing on the changing needs of students moving from the primary to the secondary school. It must take into consideration the fact that the 1- to 14 year old is changing physically, emotionally and intellectually faster than at any other time in his or her life. It requires flexible learning modalities that maintain a balance between structure and choice. It must maintain a balance between structure and choice. It must maintain the close relationship between student and teacher and foster good communication and involvement of the parent. It must demand accountability but provide for opportunities to improve. (p. 31)

In 2003 the National Middle School Association (NMSA) released a document that detailed what it stated was necessary for a successful middle school. The opening statement sets the tone for how middle schools should think about the practice.

Middle level educators promote schools that build on effective traditional

practices as they create schools where learning is both expedient and joyful and where learners are celebrated for their initiative and accomplishments. (p. 2)

NMSA provides a list of characteristics of a successful middle school:

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so;
- Courageous, collaborative leadership;
- A shared vision that guides decisions;
- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment;
- High expectations for every member of the learning community;
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning;
- An adult advocate for every student;
- School-initiated family and community partnerships.

NMSA stated that successful schools provide:

- Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory;
- Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity;
- Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning;
- Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning;
- School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety;
- Multifaceted guidance and support services. (p. 7)

The task for the middle school leader is critical and difficult. NMSA recommended that educators “model inclusive, collaborative, democratic, and team-oriented approaches to teaching and learning” (p. 9). NMSA provided educators with a series of

recommendations to create a successful middle school.

Successful middle level schools are grounded in the understanding that young adolescents are capable of far more than adults often assume. (p. 14)

Developmentally responsive instructional practices place students at the center of the learning process. In such situations students are viewed as actors rather than audience. (p. 15)

The successful school demonstrates a continuity of caring and support that extends throughout a student's middle level experience. (p. 17)

Anfara and Lipka (2003) summarized the middle school concept. They stated:

We cannot lose sight of what the middle school concept is all about—the development of the whole child. As middle level advocates, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers we must reaffirm our commitment to the desired results of improved academic performance and socio-emotional growth. (p. 20)

Anfara and Brown (2003) described visionary leadership for middle schools.

They stated that “successful school reform involves a shift from controlling and directing at the top level to guiding and facilitating at all the levels” (p. 23). The authors also saw a moral imperative for teaching middle level students and should have a commitment to reform efforts for their schools (p. 24). The idea of team building is one way that the authors saw middle schools becoming successful. “Only when people regularly meet, work, and play together does a deeper connection arise. Time to meet and time to mesh must be adequately provided and sacredly guarded” (p. 29).

Brown (2004) carried this discussion further in listing the joys of middle school education. She stated “Caring schools foster a sense of loyalty, belonging, and responsibility, providing the foundation for intellectual, social, and moral growth...Caring school understand the unique needs of their clients and meet those needs quickly and effectively. Caring principals willingly embrace the challenge of this transitional period in their young adolescents’ lives” (pp. 30-32). Brown also said that leaders needed “a sense of humor, a listening ear, an open heart, a versatile thought process, and a grasp of the fundamental changes” (p. 34). She continued to promote team building when she stated “Caring school leaders try to bring students into community with themselves and with one another—not simply for the sake of warm feelings, but to do the difficult things that teaching and learning require” (p. 36). By creating that type of community, the end result will be a caring, responsive middle level school.

Meese (2001) promoted learner-centered practice in middle level schools. These practices included:

a movement toward a constructivist and authentic approach to teaching; a focus on conceptual understanding, problem solving, and reasoning; an emphasis on student improvement and learning for its own sake; a collaborative learning and decision making process, and a classroom environment that honors and respects students’ voices.” (p. 113)

Weller (2004) added to the discussion of learner-centered practices by promoting “learning that is a creative, interactive process that is best promoted when content areas interact with other learning activities...Active learning, engaging students in the learning process both, mentally and physically, coincides with the philosophy of the true middle

school” (p. 101). Weller also said that teachers who believed that students can learn on their own and will take responsibility for their own learning will utilize learner-directed strategies (p. 263).

Weller (2004) also discussed the role of the leader in actualizing learner-centered strategies. He observed that:

Effective middle school principals are proactive; they initiate change, challenge their staff, and excite emotions. They are aware that their actions are contagious and recognize direct relationships between their actions and outcomes. (p. 103)

By being proactive, Weller stated that middle school leaders who are proactive can “accommodate the ten to fourteen year olds whose chronological age is dominated by problems of coping with change—changing interests, changing social and emotional behavior, and changing bodies” (p. 17).

Petzko (2004) in a NASSP sponsored study of leadership in middle schools listed several findings about the role of the leader. She found that “governance should be systematically inclusive, collaborative, and focused on the improvement of student learning” (p. 7). She also stated that leaders must “understand issues of power, authority, and influence. They must understand and be able to apply effective models of decision making” (p. 11).

### **Summary**

The preceding researchers give an accurate picture of what caring relationship should be. First and foremost for all of these researchers is the need for the caring leader to develop relationships with students, teachers, parents and the community. This

relationship will lead to other caring practices such as shared leadership, vision development and promotion, promotion of the middle school concept, constructivist teaching, and learner-centered practices.

### **Theoretical framework**

The ethic of care and middle school leadership are very broad topics and require a lens by which attention can be focused and the research can be specific to the current need. Two works lend themselves as the conceptual framework for this research. Brown and Anfara's (2002) *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents* and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, and Gross' (2006) *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument* will help focus this study. This approach will allow the researcher to have an effective means of researching the ethic of care in practice in current middle schools.

For over two decades Nel Noddings has provided a clarion call for the inculcation of the ethic of care into public education. Her writings have inspired many other educational philosophers and leaders. Her writings also provide a philosophical lens for the work of this study. It therefore seems appropriate that some time is taken to examine her work and how it speaks to educators currently in the field. Noddings has written many books and articles. Specifically, there are eight of her works that deal directly with the ethic of care and education. To give the reader a strong sense of the philosophical base for this work, three of Noddings works will be considered.

Since 1984 Noddings has delineated what she believes about care and care giving. In looking at how teachers should help students learn how to be recipients of care,



Noddings (1993) gave some guidelines for dealing with this dilemma. She stated: “An ethic of caring does not simply sit in judgment and proceed by accusation and punishment. It is concerned with raising the moral level of relations” (p. 120). This task, for Noddings, took on a constructivist approach. She stated that “constructivism is a cognitive position holding that all mental acts, both perceptual and cognitive, are acts of construction. No mental act is a mere copy or externally imposed response” (p. 153). She stated that “the primary aim of every teacher must be to promote the growth of students as competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (p. 154). Noddings concluded the discussion by stating:

All students should be engaged in a general education that guides them in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals, and the environment, the human-made world, and ideas...Here’s what I think we must do: Be clear and unapologetic about our goal. The main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people. Take care of affiliative needs. Relax the impulse to control. Get rid of program hierarchies. Teach them that caring in every domain implies competence. (pp. 173-174)

Noddings (1995) spent a great deal of time writing her philosophy of education. Her philosophy echoed much of what John Dewey proposed in his philosophy of education. She started her discussion by stating “the aim of education is more education. Education thus functions as both end and means” (p. 27). Part of the ethic of care is to teach children to be self motivating learners, to become the life-long learners that so many schools have as part of their mission statements. Noddings also promoted a democratic education. She stated:

Learning to participate in democratic life involves living democratically—students working together on common problems, establishing the rules by which their classrooms will be governed, testing and evaluating ideas for the improvement of classroom life and learning, and participating in the construction of objectives for their own learning. (p. 35)

By participating in a democratic education, Noddings stated that this would develop in students “the capacity to reflect, to plan, to choose, and to become” (p. 62). She emphasized that developing these capacities is “the fundamental work of human existence” (p. 62).

Also very important to Noddings was the idea of students being able to create their own learning. She stated “Constructivism—one of its basic premises is that all knowledge is constructed; knowledge is not the result of passive reception” (p. 115). She goes further to describe the constructivist teacher. “Constructivists teachers deemphasized lecturing and telling and encourage instead the active engagement of students in establishing and pursuing their own learning objectives” (p. 116). She concluded her discussion of her philosophy of education with a discussion about the ethic of care. She said that “the greatest contribution of an ethic of care is its emphasis on the relation and the role of the cared-for” (p. 188). Noddings returned again and again to the theme of the “cared-for.” The students, the recipients of our care, are of primary importance. Noddings centered on the care of students by stating “the ethic of care guards against exploitation by emphasizing moral education” (p. 190).

In a discussion of caregiving, Gordon, Benner, and Noddings (1996) began by making a very strong statement.

Healthy, vigorous children also need care. For example, while schools are concentrating on narrow academic goals, children—especially teenagers—are protesting “Nobody cares!” To make matters worse, an increasing proportion of our country’s children live in poverty. (p. viii)

After that strong statement, the authors presented a definition of caring that applies almost perfectly to how education should enact a caring education.

We define caring not as a psychological state or innate attribute but as a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility...these practices are required in relationships that are devoted—for however short or long a period of time—to helping educate, nurture, develop, and empower, assisting others to cope with their weaknesses while offering their strengths. (p. xiii)

In 2002 Noddings wrote one of her most influential works. In discussing character education, Noddings offered a choice. “I offer an alternative to character education. It is a sympathetic alternative in that the approach suggested (based on an ethic of care) has much in common with character education” (p. xiii). This key concept is a sympathetic alternative based on an ethic of care. Noddings made a very strong point about character education in stating “Character education requires a strong community but not necessarily a good one” (p. 5). From the perspective of care, being sensitive to the needs of each individual and providing encouragement is more important than a specific character education program (p. 7).

Noddings (2002a) said that the atmosphere within the school is most important in

supporting a moral life.

We concentrate on establishing the conditions most likely to support moral life. We want schools to be places where it is both possible and attractive to be good...And so it becomes part of our everyday moral obligation to develop and maintain an environment in which moral life can flourish. (p. 9)

Much of Noddings discussion centered on the ethic of care. For Noddings “the ethic of care speaks of obligation” (p. 13). That obligation shows itself in teacher’s responsibility to establish relationships.

Ethical caring is always aimed at establishing, restoring, or enhancing the kind of relation in which we respond freely because we want to do so...A relational interpretation of caring pushes us to look not only at moral agents but also at the recipients of their acts and the conditions under which the parties interact. (p. 14)

Noddings pointed out two essential ingredients are needed in that caring relationship: moral agents or caregivers, and recipients or cared-for. This is what makes up the caring relationship. Philosophically, the ethic of care “may be regarded as a form of pragmatic naturalism. It does not posit a source of moral life beyond actual human interaction. It does not depend on gods, or eternal verities, or an essential human nature, or postulated underlying structures of human consciousness” (p. 15).

Noddings (2002a) discussed four components of the ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. For Noddings, modeling is important in all forms of moral education (p. 15). She stated “In the care perspective, we have to show in our modeling what it means to care” (p. 16). Dialogue is the delivery mechanism for the ethic

of care. “The emphasis on dialogue points up the basic phenomenology of caring. A carer must attend to or be engrossed in the cared-for, and the cared-for must receive the carer’s efforts at caring” (p. 16). Dialogue is always asking the question: What are you going through? The ethic of care allows that question to be answered in a safe setting and allows the carer to answer appropriately (p. 16). Noddings stated that “the purpose of moral reasoning is to establish and maintain caring relations in both individual and societal levels...Dialogue is the means through which we learn what the other wants and needs” (pp. 18-19).

The third component is practice. “To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in caregiving activities” (p. 19). The most critical component is confirmation. This becomes critical for the classroom teacher. “To confirm others is to bring out the best in them” (p. 20). Noddings stated:

In the ethic of care, confirmation is very different from the pattern we find in many forms of religious education: accusation, confession, forgiveness, and penance...Confirmation is not a ritual act that can be performed for any person by any other person. It requires a relation...The ethic of care begins with the universal desire to be cared for—to be in positive relation with at least some other beings. (p. 21)

Noddings reaffirmed that “students should not forget the central aim of moral life—to encounter, attend, and respond to the need for care” (p. 23).

Noddings (2002a) stated that “schools must be thought of and restructured as multipurpose institutions...The evidence suggests that schools that accept full-service, family-like obligations also do better academically” (p. 27). This will also require a

restructuring of the attitudes of school boards and state departments of education. However, a school dedicated to serving the whole child “must encourage continual discussion of what it means to care. Teachers must have time to talk with one another about the problems they encounter, and students must learn how to detect and appreciate caring” (p. 28). The real problem as seen by Noddings and many other educational philosophers is that there is not enough time, with local, state, and federal requirements, to give attention to caring and caring activities (p. 28). Noddings discussed something that Alice Miller calls “poisonous pedagogy.” Those teachers that practice this “poisonous pedagogy” are rigid and coercive. This pedagogy places the will of the teacher above the needs of the students. Those teachers are highly moralistic in tone and insist that they are demanding what is right and the coercions are necessary for the student’s own good (pp. 28-29). Noddings stated that “any time we force children to do something that is not connected to their own purposes, the coercion is at least questionable” (p. 30).

Noddings (2002a) launched into a series of discussions on care and critical thinking. She is not saying that critical thinking is not present in schools but that much critical thinking is morally directed. Noddings stated:

My claim here is that critical thinking needs a starting point in both character and feeling, and most episodes of critical thinking should be liberally sprinkled with turning points—points at which the thinker reaches toward the living other with feeling that responds to the others condition. (p. 42)

Noddings also stated that “episodes of critical thinking must start with the arousal of

feeling” (p. 44). This feeling comes from learning to care for others. To learn to care for others the schools must develop a universal caregiver model. Noddings suggested that

A universal caregiver model would be designed to prepare both girls and boys for the work of caregiving. As both parents become breadwinners, so must both be caregivers, and, of course, caregiving involves much more than watching the kiddies for a few hours. It takes knowledge, energy, and organizational skill to maintain a home that will nurture all of its members. (p. 57)

Finally, for Noddings (2002a) the ethic of care is “grounded in the human condition” (p. 148). She stated that we operate within the sphere of humans and we need to be more responsive to the needs of those fledgling humans. She stated “children who are genuinely and continuously cared for usually turn out to be reasonably good people” (p. 154).

Noddings (2003) extended this discussion of teaching for caring by stating “we should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement and we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others” (p. 59). Noddings said that in caring, we want to do our very best for the object of our care—the students (p. 60). She stated that we show our care in the choices that we make concerning the curriculum. She stated “Themes of care connect our students and our subjects to great existential questions” (p. 60). Noddings stated:

Care must be taken seriously as a major purpose of schools; that is, educators must recognize that caring for students is fundamental in

teaching and that developing people with a strong capacity for care is a major objective of responsible education. (p. 63)

Brown and Anfara (2002) took this philosophical foundation and established a method of realizing, within the administrative arena, the ethic of care. Brown and Anfara suggested that the building level principal is responsible for leading change and building support. “Through open doors, open ears, open mouths, open minds, and open hearts, middle school principals are able to effectively build the necessary support for change” (p. 73). Brown and Anfara wanted to build support for the developmentally responsive middle level administrator. The authors presented a list of key characteristics of an effective school principal:

- Admonishes behaviors rather than personalities;
- Advocates a school of problem solvers rather than blamers and fault finders;
- Ensures a base of community support for the school, students, and faculty;
- Emphasizes the importance of making everyone feel like a winner;
- Encourages risk taking;
- Ensures that school policies are collaboratively created and clearly communicated;
- Ensures that staff and students receive proper and timely recognition for their achievements;
- Ensures that teachers’ administrative duties and classroom interruptions are limited to only those that are critically important to student learning and the effective functioning of the school;



- Establishes a climate in which teachers and students share responsibility for determining the appropriate use of time and facilities;
- Follows up promptly on recommendations, concerns, and complaints;
- Fosters professional growth and development of teachers and self;
- Has a vision of what an exemplary middle school is and strives to bring that vision to life;
- Involves teachers, parents, and students in decision making and goal setting;
- Is an advocate for teachers and students;
- Spends time each day with students. (p. 11)

Brown and Anfara used the characteristics to promote their vision of the developmentally responsive middle school principal.

Brown and Anfara (2003) wanted principals to be developmentally responsive to the students, teachers, parents, and the community. The safe school is of utmost importance to all principals. For the developmentally responsive principal the safe school takes on a different meaning. “Principals work hard to create safe school environments—ones that allow children to emerge independent while supporting them in the process. They provide young adolescents opportunities for increased independence and self-direction while simultaneously setting clear limits” (p. 32). This increased independence puts an additional burden upon the developmentally responsive leader. Other dimensions of responsibility are added to the leader’s job when students become more independent. The developmentally responsive leader must balance firmness, fairness, exploration, energy, developmental needs, all facets of life that are socially relevant to young adolescents. The developmentally responsive principal must “understand the psychology

of the young adolescent while simultaneously insisting that their young students engage in the learning process” (p. 34). For this process to be successful, the leader must be willing and have the ability to develop relationships with young adolescents (p. 34).

It is also imperative for the developmentally responsive leader to be an advocate for the teachers and other adults within the school. The leader must establish “organizational structures that fosters teachers’ reflections, collaborative planning, and curriculum integration” (p. 39). The end result of these organizational structures is that real learning will occur. “What good teachers have always known is that real learning does not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher” (p. 43). It is the proposition of Brown and Anfara that the developmentally responsive leaders provide “their teachers the flexibility and autonomy to create the most efficient learning environment for each student in their group” (p. 68). These leaders practice a ‘can-do’ attitude. These leaders hold high expectations for themselves and for the other adults within the building (p. 61). The developmentally responsive leader sees the need for the present bureaucratic entrenchment to give way to a type of professional autonomy, efficacy, and supportive environments that will support and enhances commitment and expertise (p. 73).

Brown and Anfara (2002) had high expectations for the developmentally responsive middle school leader. They stated the “responsive middle school principals share a vision for improvement and growth, work diligently at laying a foundation for change, investigate fully the rationale underpinning reform, and dialogue passionately with purpose” (p. 117). This vision should include a shared decision making model. This model places the decisions in collaboration with all of the parties that are closest to the children—because those that are closest to the students will make the best decisions (pp.

119-120). The authors stated that:

Education must accept moral responsibility for educating young adolescent middle level students, have sufficient autonomy and resources to encourage educational entrepreneurship in the development of new programs, and possess a deep-seeded commitment to such reform efforts in their schools. (p. 122)

In order to assume that moral responsibility, the authors contended that middle school students required principals that have a tolerance for chaos and an understanding of the ever-changing undulating temperament of early adolescents. “Responsive principals go a step beyond tolerance and actually admit that they are energized by the unpredictableness of middle school students” (p. 131). How exciting to be energized by the students that occupy the building...how open minded and open hearted.

Brown and Anfara (2002) stated very strongly that the developmentally responsive middle level leader is a major step in successfully dealing with early adolescents. From the research done by Brown and Anfara they presented a definition of the developmentally responsive middle school leader that will steer and focus the course of this research. Roney, et. al. (2006) extended their earlier work and greatly expanded the definition. The authors saw the developmentally responsive middle school leader as

- Responsive to the needs of students:
  - Understands the intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral, and ethical characteristics of young adolescents;
  - Establishes a learning environment that reflects the needs of young adolescents;

- Purposely designs programs, policies, curriculum and procedures that reflect the characteristics of young adolescents;
  - Believes that all students can succeed;
  - Views parents and the community as partners, not adversaries;
  - Provides students with opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics to develop their identity and demonstrate their competence;
  - Provides students with opportunities to explore, make mistakes, and grow in a safe, caring environment.
- Responsive to the needs of faculty:
    - Understands the necessity of reconnecting educational administration to the processes of teaching and learning;
    - Is emotionally invested in the job;
    - Shares a vision for continuous organizational improvement and growth;
    - Creates opportunities for faculty professional development that address strategies for meeting the needs of young adolescents;
    - Encourages teachers to employ a wide variety of instructional and assessment approaches and materials;
    - Provides teachers with the resources necessary to effectively perform their teaching responsibilities.
- Responsive to the needs of the school:
    - Knowledgeable of and can implement the components of the middle school concept;
    - Acts as a responsible catalyst for change and understands that change

requires time, training, trust, and tangible support;

- Flexible and able to deal with ambiguity and chaos;
- Advocates for middle level education and what is best for young adolescents. (pp. 24-25)

This description of the developmentally responsive middle school leader is the heart of the research. The study will reveal how much of the past 70 years of discussion and research on the ethic of care has made it into the practice of middle school leadership.

Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006) suggested that “working with early adolescents requires a strong orientation toward the ethic of care as its underpinning” (p. 8). Anfara, et. al. wanted to see middle level education reformed by school leaders that are responsive to the needs of the students, the teachers and the community which includes parents.

Middle school principals who are serious about reforming their school face a daunting challenge. They need to reconstruct core ideas about their role, and therefore, how they spend their time, set their priorities, seek new knowledge and skills, and situate themselves with respect to teachers and others in the educational community. (p. 25)

**CHAPTER 3**  
**RESEARCH DESIGN**

**Chapter Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of a particular principal and group of teachers of the role of the principal as a caregiver. Using the ethic of care as described by Nel Noddings and using the work of Brown and Anfara (2002) and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006) as the theoretical framework, this study sought, through an exploratory descriptive case study, to answer the following questions:

1. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?
2. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?
3. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity?

This chapter will provide a description of the methods and procedures used to conduct this study. Figure 1 (p. 84) displays a flow chart of the research process.

**Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design**

This study is an exploratory, descriptive case study of the perceptions of both the principal and teachers of the principal as a caregiver. Merriam (1998) stated that “researched focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 1). It is hoped that this approach to the

research will be instrumental in providing the connections between those being studied and the significant contributions that could be made to the knowledge base and the practice of education. The nature of the questions to be asked will hopefully generate hypotheses based upon the interviews, observations, and analysis of information gathered in naturalistic, educational settings. From an etic perspective, a descriptive case study will be conducted in an educational setting in an effort to develop a better understanding of the dynamics and influence of educational administration as a caring profession (Merriam, 1998).

### **The Type of Design Used**

This study employed a qualitative, case study design. A case study design was chosen to yield “an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). This exploratory, descriptive type of research was used because case study research is best suited for “situations when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). In this current proposal, the principal and teachers of an East Tennessee middle school were studied to determine if the perceptions of the principal and teachers revealed the principal as a caregiver. Yin (2003) presented a very concise definition of a case study. Yin stated that a case study inquiry “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13). This investigation depends upon the data collection and data analysis strategies that are characteristic of case study processes.

The case study copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to

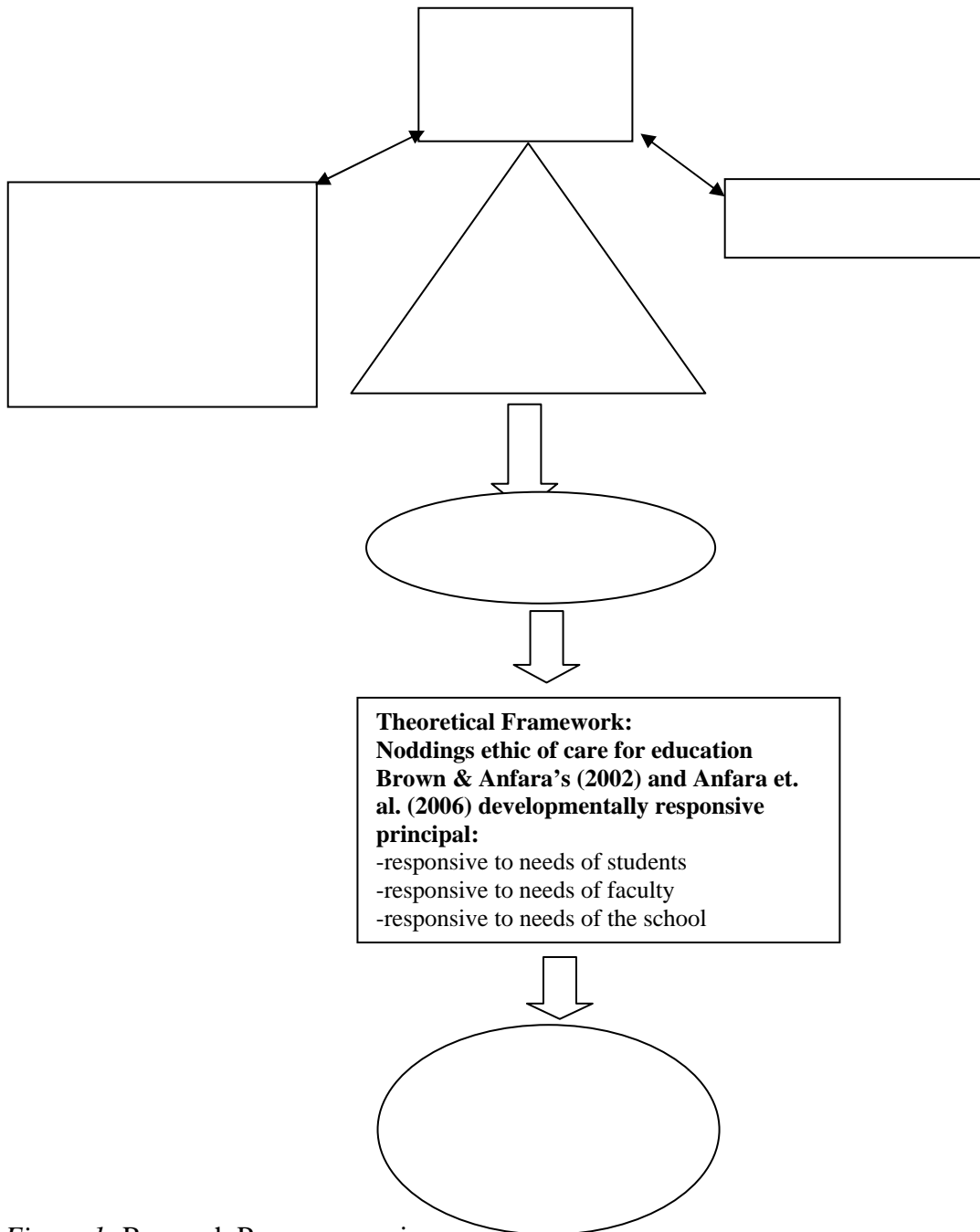
converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2003, pp. 13-14)

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This case study of the perceptions of the role of the principal as a caregiver started with three interviews of the principal over a thirty day period. This gave the researcher the opportunity to do some additional clarification from the previous interview. In addition, each teacher that was willing to be interviewed was interviewed with a provision for a follow-up interview. Again, this gave the researcher the opportunity to follow-up on areas that needed additional clarification. The interviewing of the teachers continued until saturation had been reached. The principal was observed for ten days over the thirty day period using an observational instrument developed from Brown and Anfara's (2002) *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents* and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, and Gross's (2006) *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument*. This observation instrument is found in Appendix B. The final part of the research examined various documents collected from the school: principal correspondence, student handbooks, teacher handbooks, yearbooks, school policy manuals, and school newspapers. Figure 1 shows the research design used in this study.

Data collection procedures for this study included interviews with the principal and teachers, observations of the principal, and examination of documents from the middle school under study. The principal was interviewed three times over a span of





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*Figure 1: Research Process overview*

thirty days which comprised the month of April of 2007. Follow-up interviews were used for issues from the first three interviews that needed clarification. During that same time span there were ten observations of the principal. All faculty members were asked to participate in the interviews. Six teachers at the school were willing to be interviewed. In any event, interviewing was continued until saturation was reached.

*Interviews.* It is important for the researcher to show how the interview protocol and the research questions are related. The interview protocol for this study was based upon the scholarship of Brown and Anfar's (2002) work *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents* and Anfar, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, and Gross's (2006) *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument*. The interview protocol is located in Appendix A. Examining the role of the principal as caregiver helped to establish relevance for the study. Table 1 shows how the questions of the interview protocol related to each of the research questions. The letter "P" represents questions that related to the principal interview protocol and the letter "T" represents questions that related to the teacher interview protocol.

Another way of looking at the interview protocol is to examine the type of questions that are being asked of the participants. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the types of questions that were asked of the participants. Since the purpose of this research was to discover the perceptions of both teachers and the principal regarding the role of the principal, the questions remain in the descriptive and opinion mode to be able to discover exactly what perceptions the participants possessed. Patton (1990) presented these types of interview questions as well as feelings, sensory, and background questions. For the

Table 1

*Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions*

Research question	Interview question
1) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13
2) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?	P10, P11, P12, P13, P14 T16, T17, T18, T19, T20, T21
3) How does this East Tennessee middle school Principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity?	P15, P16, P17, P18, P19 T7, T8, T14, T15

Table 2

*Types of Questions Used in Interview Protocol*

Type of Question	Interview Question
<i>Experience/behavior questions:</i>	
questions aimed at eliciting descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities	P1, P3, P6, P7, P15 T1, T5, T7, T8, T9, T14, T16, T20
<i>Opinion/value questions:</i>	
questions aimed at finding out what people think about the world or about a specific program	P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, P16, P18 T4, T5, T7, T8, T9, T14, T16, T20
<i>Knowledge questions:</i>	
questions aimed at finding out what a respondent considers to be factual information	P2, P9, P12, P13, P14, P17, P19 T2, T3, T6, T12, T15, T18, T21

purpose of this study, experience, opinion, and knowledge questions were made part of the interview protocols. As in the previous table, the letter “P” represents questions that related to the principal interview protocol and the letter “T” represents questions that related to the teacher interview protocol.

*Observations.* Yin (2003) reported that the strengths of observation covered events in real time and that observations covered the context of the event. Merriam (1998) reported that “observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (p. 94). Using this as a basis, observations were an integral part of the research process in this study. More than just the words of the principal and the teachers were used in order for the reader to see the principal as a caregiver. Direct observation was also used to see the caregiving in practice. The principal was observed ten times over the thirty day period using an observational instrument developed from Brown and Anfara’s (2002) *From the Desk of the Middle School Principal: Leadership Responsive to the Needs of Young Adolescents* and Anfara, et al. (2006) *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument*. The observation instrument is found in Appendix B.

In relating Brown and Anfara’s (2002) and Anfara et al. (2006) works, the researcher collected evidence of the actions of the principal that showed the principal responding to the needs of students by showing the belief that all students can learn and establishing an environment that reflects the needs of young adolescents. The researcher collected evidence of actions of the principal that showed the principal responding to the needs of faculty by sharing the vision of the school and governing collaboratively.

Finally, the researcher collected evidence of actions of the principal that showed the principal responding to the needs of the school by acting as an agent of change and being flexible when faced with ambiguity and chaos. The observations were guided using a modified check list, note-taking process. The observations were broken down into segments of six to ten minutes of observation followed by three to five minutes of note taking about the observation. Notes were taken in brief terms using an active voice while at the same time noting location, participants, and time.

*Documents.* Using Merriam's (1998) definition of documents, I am referring to documents that "are public record, personal documents, and physical material *already present* in the research setting" (p. 118). Documents collected included examples of the principal's correspondence that relate to students, teachers, or the needs of the school, student handbooks, teacher handbooks, yearbooks, school policy manuals, and school newspapers. All of these are considered primary sources which Merriam (1998) stated "are those in which the originator of the document is recounting firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest" (p. 122). The researcher collected evidence of the ethic of care in the written documentation of the school. Where the interviews and observations showed attitude in words and actions, the document analysis showed the caring attitude in the written correspondence with parents and the community. These documents also contained evidence that could describe a caring educational environment and help to emphasize the importance of relationships to the learning process. Documentation analysis is important to a qualitative study in two main ways. Merriam (1998) stated "one of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability" (p. 126). That stability comes from the fact that the presence of the researcher does not change what is

being studied. A second strength, according to Merriam, especially for qualitative case studies is “they ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (p. 126).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The primary data collection agent in qualitative studies is the researcher. Merriam (1998) stated that:

Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective. It might be recalled that one of the philosophical assumptions underlying this type of research is that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. (pp. 22-23)

It is incumbent then for me, as the researcher, to explain enough of my background so that my own biases, values, and personal interests are transparent for the research topic, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis.

Having started teaching in the mid-70s in a private school where small classes were the rule, personal relationships were a cornerstone of my teaching. Four years later when I moved to a public high school, the creation of personal relationships with my students became a hallmark of my teaching. After I became an administrator, the opportunity to create relationships grew to include not only students, but also parents and community members. Over the past 30 years I have served on many committees, both

school and community related, that dealt with the welfare of students and the communities where they live. I have served on the City Charter Committee, the City Arts Council, and several committees at church that deal with the welfare and relationships of the congregational membership. I tend to look for the relational experience in all that I undertake.

Knowing that personal biases have an impact upon the research and the interpretation of data, I used triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documents to help minimize the effects of my personal bias. In addition, I produced audible and written records of all data gathered; created code maps and a temporal record explaining how data analysis was done. I used several tables and figures to place all the data in the public light. Member checks, the process of asking participants to verify the analysis, were used in this research. Maxwell (1996) stated that, "It is clearly impossible to eliminate the researcher's theories, preconceptions, and values. The task is not to eliminate bias but to understand how values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (p. 91). Using rigorous procedures, transparent data collection, and understanding my own partialities helped to minimize bias in this research.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) stated that:

Data collection and analysis is a *simultaneous* activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypothesis direct the next phase of data collection. (p. 151)

It was my responsibility as the researcher to make sense of the vast amount of data that

was gathered through the process of interviews, observations, and document collection. Maxwell (1996) suggested a strategy called “coding.” According to Maxwell “the goal of coding is not to produce counts of things, but to ‘fracture’ the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (pp. 78-79). “Code maps” (adapted from Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) were employed to display the categories, their analysis results, and to emphasize their significance. An example of this type of code map is displayed in Table 3.

Most categories, according to Merriam (1998), “are constructed through the constant comparative method of data analysis” (p. 179). The constant comparative method of data analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). These two researchers used this method for “developing grounded theory, which consists of categories, properties, and hypotheses that are the conceptual links between and among the categories and properties” (Merriam, p. 159). It is not the intent of this research to create grounded theory. However, using the constant comparative method of data analysis allowed the researcher to take those small bits of data, create categories, and consequently, look at themes that may help guide the profession. Merriam cautioned that “categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181). Merriam further stated that “categories should *reflect the purpose of the research*. In effect, categories are the *answers* to your research question(s)” (p. 183).

Finally, in considering data analysis, Merriam (1998) discussed the need for categories to be “conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should characterize all categories at the same level” (p. 184). Merriam related that this is



Table 3.

*Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 32)*

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(Third Iteration: Application to Data Set)  
Code Mapping For Searching for a Caregiver: The Middle School Principal:

1. **Care for Students and Staff**  
Themes: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d
2. **Caring Leadership**  
Themes: 2a, 2b, 2c
3. **Team Concept**  
Themes: 3a, 3b, 3c

---

(Second Iteration: Pattern Variables—Components)

1a. attention and listening	2a. visibility and accessibility	3a. shared leadership
1b. physical contact	2b. developing caring open relationships	3b. teacher autonomy
1c. developing ownership	2c. modeling behaviors	3c. open lines of communication
1d. building relationships		

---

(First Iteration: Initial Codes/Surface Content Analysis)

1a. meeting student needs	2a. soliciting feedback	3a. team building
1a. care for students	2a. leader attitude	3a. middle school concept
1a. care for faculty/staff	2a. principal accessibility	3a. leadership facilitation
1b. care for students/staff	2a. principal visibility	3a. shared leadership/responsibility
1c. teacher professional development	2b. philosophy	3a. transition
1c. teacher performance	2b. preventative relationships	3b. collaboration
1c. care for students/staff	2b. perception of communication	3b. promoting decision making

*Table 3, cont.*

(First Iteration: Initial Codes/Surface Content Analysis)		
1d. modeling care for students/staff	2b. community relations	3b. school climate
	2c. community and parents	3b. teacher autonomy
	2c. management/conflict	3c. situational relationship
	2c. modeling	3c. integration through sharing
		3c. communication of vision
DATA: Interviews	DATA: Documents	DATA: Observations

probably most difficult to achieve. She suggested that “one of the best strategies for checking all the criteria against your category scheme is to display your set of categories in the form of a chart or table” (p. 184). In summary, this research used the constant comparative method of data analysis.

### **Methods of Verification**

By using triangulation of data, it is hoped that each of the themes was corroborated by multiple data sources. Using multiple sources of data collection for the triangulation method prevented the themes from depending upon a single data collection method. This helped to neutralize any bias toward using a particular data source.

One of the most crucial jobs for the researcher was the creation of categories for analysis using the constant comparative method. Conastas (1992) related that “categories do not simply ‘emerge’ from the data. In actuality, categories are created, and meanings are attributed by researchers who, wittingly or unwittingly, embrace a particular configuration of analytical preferences” (p. 254). Categorization has three procedural elements, according to Conastas—origination, verification, and nomination. These three are more adequately displayed in Table 3. What becomes critical is the temporal designation or when during the research process were the categories created. Conastas (1992) described the temporal designation in three ways

First, categories may be created *a priori*, or before the data are actually collected. Second, categories may be created *a posteriori*, or after the data have been collected. A third and quite popular designation option is called *iterative*. In the interactive option, categories may be created at various points in time during the research process. (p. 261)

Table 4 allows for 48 documentational options. Constas (1992) reiterated that “the main objective is to help eliminate the privatization of data analysis events” (p. 265).

Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) discussed the idea of internal and external validity. They stated that “internal validity is concerned with how trustworthy the conclusions are that are drawn from the data and the match of these conclusions with reality, while external validity refers to how well conclusions can be generalized to a larger population” (p. 33). These authors suggested displaying that information in a table that shows “how multiple sources of data collection as well as multiple voices were used to triangulate the data” (p. 33). The findings and the data sources will be correlated in Table 5. This table relates how each of the themes is directly tied to a data source. Merriam (1998) in discussing internal validity listed triangulation as one of six basic strategies to enhance internal validity (p. 204). She defined triangulation as “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204). In considering reliability, Merriam stated:

Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether findings will be found again but *whether the results are consistent with the data collected.* (p. 206)

The goal here is to establish validity from a variety of sources that the middle school principal can be successful as a caregiver. The process of triangulation will be reported in Figure 2.

Table 4.

*Components of Categorization/Temporal Designation (Constas, 1992)*

<b>Component of Categorization</b>	<b>Temporal Designation</b>		
<i>Origination</i> Where does the authority for creating categories reside?	<i>A priori</i>	<i>A posteriori</i>	<i>Iterative</i>
-participants		CSF, CL, TC	
-programs	TC		
-investigative			CL
-literature	CSF, CL, TC		
-interpretative	CL, TC		
<i>Verification</i> On what ground can one justify a given category?			
-rational		CSF	
-referential			
-external			CSF, CL
-empirical		CSF, CL, TC	
-technical			
-participative		CSF, CL	
<i>Nomination</i> What is the source of the name Used to describe a category?			
-participants		CSF, CL, TC	
-programs			
-investigative			
-literature	CSF, CL, TC		
-interpretative			

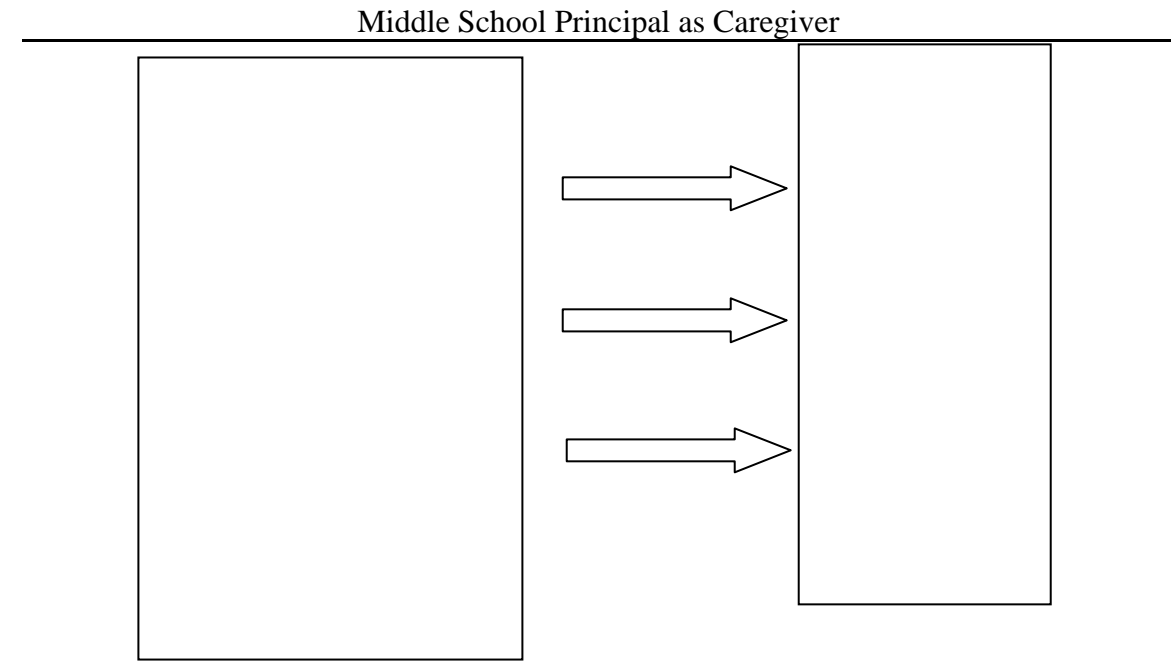
*Category Label Key:*  
 Care for students and faculty (CSF)  
 Caring leadership (CL)  
 Team concept (TC)

Table 5

*Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation*

	<b>Sources of Data</b>		
	<b>I</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>O</b>
<b>Category 1: Care for Students and Staff</b>			
1. Importance of attention and listening	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
2. Importance of physical contact	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
3. Importance of developing ownership	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
4. Importance of building relationships	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<b>Category 2: Caring Leadership</b>			
1. Importance of visibility and accessibility	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
2. Importance of developing caring, open relationships	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
3. Importance of modeling behaviors	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Category 3: Team Concept</b>			
1. Importance of shared leadership	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
2. Importance of teacher autonomy	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
3. Importance of open lines of communication	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

*Note.* I = Interview, D = Document, O = Observation



*Figure 2: Triangulation Methods Employed*

## **Summary**

It is the intent of this research to show the middle school principal as a caregiver through responsiveness to the needs of students, the needs of teachers, and the needs of the school. By using an exploratory, descriptive case study and the constant comparative method of analysis, it is hoped that the end result will be a rich, thick case study of a middle school principal as viewed through the lens of a caregiver as a developmentally responsive principal.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is organized to answer the following research questions: (1) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?; (2) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?; (3) How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity? This chapter starts with a description of the community where the school is located, a typical daily routine for the middle school principal under study and offers qualitative analyses for each of the three research questions.

The findings are based on an analysis of three main data sources. First, interviews were conducted with the principal under study. Over the course of 30 days, Mr. Kevin O'Connor was interviewed for more than seven hours using an interview protocol designed for the principal. The principal's interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. During that same 30 day period, six additional classroom and school-wide personnel were also interviewed using the interview protocol found in Appendix A. Second, I reviewed a collection of documents (see Chapter 3 for a listing of these documents). Third, I conducted observations and collected a series of field notes based on these observations. For a complete description of data collection methods and procedures, see Chapter 3.



Table 6  
*Participant Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Total Years Experience</b>	<b>Years Experience at this school</b>	<b>Age</b>
Andrew Johnson	Sp. Education Teacher	9 yrs.	9 yrs.	34
Bradford Stinnett	Asst. Principal	27 yrs.	7 yrs.	50
Gladys Crowell	Librarian/Art Teacher	33 yrs.	14 yrs.	56
Mildred Miller	5th grade teacher	13 yrs.	4 yrs.	38
Roger Tilford	8th grade teacher	23 yrs.	19 yrs.	45
Wanda Lawrence	School Counselor	9 yrs.	8 yrs.	25
Kevin O'Connor	Principal	36 yrs.	30 yrs.; 17 as principal	59

Table 6 presents the reader with a visual representation of the participants. The table includes the pseudonyms of each of the participants, current position, total years of experience, as well as years assigned to the current school, and the age of each participant.

### **The Community of Riverside**

Riverside, Tennessee is a community of approximately 8,000 people that is located just south of one of the major East Tennessee cities. Sitting on the banks of the Tennessee River, Riverside is part of one of the routes that lead to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Green spaces dot the city of Riverside and the city fathers

encourage walking and cycling. The median family income is \$44,000 and the average age of the population is 40. Twenty-five percent of the households have children under the age of 18 living with them. The racial makeup of the city is 81% white, 16% African-American, and 2% Hispanic (Tennessee Department of Education, Report Card, 2007). In the mid-80s, a major employer reduced their workforce by almost 80%. This resulted in a major loss of in-lieu-of-tax monies for which the community is still trying to compensate.

Riverside Middle School serves 500 students in grades 5 through 8. The racial makeup of the students is 72% white, 22% black, 5.4% Hispanic. The Hispanic population has grown significantly over the past five years and is expected to continue to grow over the next several years. The school stands in “Good Standing” as far as No Child Left Behind standards are concerned. Students at Riverside Middle Schools scored a 95% three-year average in Math, a 96% three-year average in Reading/Language Arts. The school’s attendance rate was 95.4% as compared to a state average of 93%.

Academically, Riverside Middle School scored straight ‘A’s’ in all areas of the state criterion referenced test. The students also scored significantly higher than the state average scores. 5<sup>th</sup> grade writing scores were also higher than the state average—a score of 4.4 over a state average of 4.1. In the state of Tennessee, academic growth is determined by ‘value added’ measures. Riverside Middle School scored straight ‘A’s’ in all ‘value added’ measures. Riverside Middle School also achieved a 99.4% promotion rate.

The principal of Riverside Middle School is Mr. Kevin O’Connor. He has been in education for 36 years. He has spent 30 years at Riverside Middle School. He started out as a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and became principal in 1990. He has overseen the movement from

a standard junior high concept to a middle school concept that includes extensive teaming and broad student offerings in all areas of young adolescent development.

### **Mr. O'Connor's Daily Schedule**

During each of the interviews with Mr. O'Connor, I asked him to provide a brief description of a typical day. A typical day begins at 7:00 a.m. For approximately 30 minutes, he answers email, returns phone calls, and speaks with faculty and staff that have need of his attention (Field Notes, April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007, April 24, 2007). Mr. O'Connor's day always starts much in the same way. At 8:00 a.m. each morning, he leaves his office and moves to the student-run television studio to prepare for the morning broadcast of the daily show called "Opening with O'Connor." Along the way, he calls many students by name. He asks about family members. He pats students on the back and gives hugs to many students. When he gets to the studio, the entire production staff, which is all students, greets him and he in turn greets each of them by name. He continues a constant conversation with the students the entire time that he and the students are preparing to broadcast. The broadcast is mainly student produced. The students make the school announcements and promote a wide variety of school activities. The whole broadcast lasts about fifteen minutes. The broadcasts also include the moment of silence and the pledge to the flag. Also one part of each broadcast is a brief section that Mr. O'Connor chooses. I observed him speaking to the students about ways to get good grades using the scan-read-review method (Field Notes, April 10, 2007). He told students that "We have no one here that can't be proficient or advanced. Work hard and get at it" (Field Notes, April 12, 2007). He also noted "Knowing your learning style will help you study smarter" (Field Notes, April 17, 2007). Each morning

after the broadcast, he takes 30 to 45 minutes to walk through the halls and check on classrooms. The entire time that he is in the halls, he is constantly greeting students, calling them by name, giving 'high-5s', and hugging as many students and staff that want to be hugged. During four observations of this morning routine, Mr. O'Connor was observed speaking with a prospective teacher and getting a copy of her resume. He gave a custodian and a teacher a birthday card and hug for their birthday. He spoke with a variety of teachers concerning curricular and disciplinary issues. He would also look in several classes just to see what was happening. On each occasion, he would always speak with both the teacher and the students about how their day was going (Field Notes, April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007, and April 24, 2007).

On one occasion, Mr. O'Connor had a very emotional situation with a transfer student. To be sure that all of the adults were informed of the situation, the principal gathered the student's grade level team, the guidance counselor, and the special education teacher. Mr. O'Connor, the team, the parents, and the child sat down and the principal began by saying "Listen, we care about your son and want him to do well and be successful. Everybody here cares..." (Field Notes, April 12, 2007). At that point in the meeting, the parent stood up, got the child's hand, and left the room in a very angry mood. Needless-to-say, the other adults in the room were shocked at the quick turn of events. Within 30 minutes, the parent and student returned. Mr. O'Connor called for the Special Education Supervisor and the rest of the team reconvened and successfully came up with a program for the student. By the end of the meeting, the mother left smiling but was saying that she didn't think the plan would work (Field Notes, April 12, 2007). This is the type of routine that the principal goes through each and every morning.

Mr. O'Connor also has a lunchtime routine that is his favorite. This routine brings him in closer contact with the students. Unlike his morning routine, he only gets to do the lunchtime routine two or three times per week. Because of needing to see parents, or to deal with students, or other responsibilities, the principal does not get to interact with the students as much as he would like. Mr. O'Connor usually goes to the lunchroom at approximately 11:15 each morning. Along the way to the cafeteria, he speaks to students, gives and receives 'high-5s', and speaks and greets teachers. He never stops his interaction with students and staff. He does not go into the cafeteria to run the process. He is there to interact with students, teachers and staff that are in the cafeteria at the time.

During the cafeteria time, Mr. O'Connor is constantly interacting. He speaks with all of the students. Many of the students were observed coming up to him and initiating a hug or a 'high-5'. During the three days of lunchtime observation, the principal was seen looking at a student's pictures, talked with a student about a book, and shuffled cards for a student magic trick (Field Notes, April 10, 2007; April 12, 2007; April 17, 2007). He is very personal with his students. He asked one student if the student's mother had gotten a job. He spoke to several students about how members of their families were getting along. Personal interactions between Mr. O'Connor and staff and students that lasted longer than three seconds were tallied. Over the three days of lunchtime observations, more than 75 student and staff interactions were noted. The principal greeted everyone that came into the cafeteria much the same way—with a smile, a hug or a pat on the back. He worked very hard to make all who came into the cafeteria to feel welcome.

Also during the 30 day period of observation and interview, Mr. O'Connor was observed in four other types of meetings. Mr. O'Connor was observed in a system-wide

administrative meeting (Field Notes, April 2, 2007); an impromptu team leader meeting (Field Notes, April 5, 2007); a regularly scheduled team leader meeting (Field Notes, April 10, 2007); and a parent advisory meeting (Field Notes, May 3, 2007). The administrative meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April was routine. There was a discussion of all day literacy training; targeted teaching, a wellness fair, a separate handbook for parent notifications, and parental concerns about dress codes. There was nothing unusual about any of the meetings except that Mr. O'Connor was constantly bragging on his school and his students and staff (Field Notes, April 2, 2007).

The impromptu team leader meeting was the morning before the walk-a-thon. The meeting took place in principal's office. Many of the members were sitting on the floor or leaning against tables and the dress was very athletic. Mr. O'Connor reminded the leadership team that 280 students were participating in the walk-a-thon and that constant supervision would be needed. The principal also spoke to the team leaders about TCAP preparation and using games and websites to help with the review process. He also encouraged the teams to use the 'problem of the week' to encourage students to think through a problem. The principal reminded the team leaders of the need to get a written plan for TCAP review to him by the end of the week. He ended the meeting by thanking them for their leadership (Field Notes, April 5, 2007). The regularly scheduled team leader meeting was held in the office conference room. Mr. O'Connor provided light refreshments and a printed agenda. The principal started the meeting with a joke. The discussions included a focus on student planners, test security, and the use of the literacy wall with four or five words per week. He also shared some very big news with the leadership team. Riverside Middle School, for the second year in a row, was named one

of the top schools in the state in value-added achievement. Mr. O'Connor stated, "Says a lot about you all. I am confident in you all" (Field Notes, April 10, 2007).

The regularly scheduled parent advisory meeting was held in the Riverside Middle School library on May 3, 2007. The meeting was attended by 15 parents and one pre-schooler. The agenda for the meeting included a discussion of the plan for transition of 8<sup>th</sup> graders to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This discussion was led by the school counselor. The discussion then turned to a discussion of the Mascot Club's trip to New York in June which was led by the Mascot Club's sponsor. The final part of the parent meeting was an open discussion led by Mr. O'Connor. The meeting agenda included discussions of student supervision at the pond after school, the school's student dress code, a discussion of the large number of clubs, and the need for better communication—especially with each club doing fund raisers. Finally, the parents were concerned with the large number of movies that were being shown at that particular time of year. The principal met each and every one of these discussions head on and repeatedly explained that, especially at that point of time in the school year, after the TCAP test, some time was used for student rewards. He referred parents to the student handbook and encouraged parents to speak with grade level teams. Mr. O'Connor related to the parents, as he did with me, that the curriculum of the school was designed and implemented by the grade level teams. On all other concerns, the principal told the parents that he was either working on the situation or that he would look into the situation and report back at the next parent advisory meeting. The parents were obviously well-practiced in the way that the advisory worked. All parents left in pleasant moods and had many good things to say to the principal about either the school teams or the school in general terms.

### **Data Analysis: Three Themes**

The research for this study was based upon three research questions.

1. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of middle school students?
2. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the teachers who support learning for middle school students?
3. How does this East Tennessee middle school principal respond to the developmental needs of the middle school as an innovating entity?

The data from the interviews, documents, and observation of the principal's documented activities, behaviors, and opinions that served to support the research for this study revealed three overriding themes in the research: Care for Students and Staff; Caring Leadership, and the Team Concept. These three themes will guide the discussion of the accumulated data.

#### *Care for Students and Staff*

According to Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006), the developmentally responsive middle school principal establishes a learning environment that reflects the needs of young adolescents and understands the necessity of reconnecting educational administration to the processes of teaching (p. 154). The data from the interviews, documents, and observations were placed into several categories that helped to illuminate this part of the research. In focusing on the developmentally responsive middle school principal as a care giver, the following categories were developed: (1) the importance of attention and listening; (2) the importance of physical contact; (3) the



importance of developing ownership; (4) the importance of building relationships (see Table 3, Code Map, pp. 91-92).

One of the first questions that was asked of Mr. O'Connor was how does he know that what he is doing is working as far as the faculty is concerned. By this point in time I had watched the principal several times interacting with both students and faculty and had seen him demonstrate multiple times care and regard for the people in his school.

Mr. O'Connor said:

In my fourteen years I may have hired ten people and that is because of retirement or somebody has moved out of state...I can look at my teachers not leaving me, the teachers wanting to stay here, other teachers from other schools asking to come here (Interview, April 2, 2007).

The principal made a great case for insisting that the students were of the utmost importance to him and that meeting student needs had to be a major focus. The idea of the importance of care for the students was repeated frequently in the discussions with the faculty.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

I treat them like they are my own and they treat me like I am theirs. We all know that those needs have got to be met. If it takes discipline, the students know I am just liable to put them in the car, not because I am mad at them, but if they can't function here, then I may take them to the workplace or whatever until they can function here (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson echoed:

Mr. O'Connor still hugs kids, in a proper way. He loves the kids, but he can be tough. The kids have an utmost respect for Mr. O'Connor (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett declared:

Mr. O'Connor is hands on. He interacts with the kids. He will hug the kids, shake

their hand, or give them a high five. We are told not to touch the kids. We decided to make a statement: If it gets to the point where we can't hug the kids anymore, then we need to get out. So many of these kids don't ever get a hug (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell said:

Mr. O'Connor provides opportunities for kids. When we were classroom teachers we realized that there were children that only got out of the city if they were on an athletic team. So he made it a point to take the kids somewhere. He is very adamant about providing real opportunities for the kids (interview, April 17, 2007).

The principal practices this just with all issues concerning students. He makes a case for trying to reach each and everyone of his students. His faculty also speaks to the fact that he is very interested in the welfare of all the students.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

My goal is to turn those kids around. The ones that I know that have a hard time with me or they don't like me or I don't like them. I make them my little projects. I am going to make them like me one way or another. That is what I want the teachers to do. Those that you are having difficulties with, if you can make them like you then you can say that you are successful. I don't believe a child can be successful if he feels that a person doesn't care about him (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Ms. Crowell averred:

Mr. O'Connor knows every kid's name. He will give them a hug. He will take them out to lunch. He will take care of them and the kids appreciate that. He will be mad at a kid and let them know, but at the end of the day he will find that kid and hug him. That makes a bigger impression on the kids than sitting down and writing a paper (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller declared:

Kids are extremely comfortable with Mr. O'Connor. They are comfortable coming to him and talking to him—even the fifth graders. I don't think he is this big intimidating factor like some principals can be (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

The students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. I think that is pretty much the philosophy of this whole school. The kids see that

teachers genuinely care about them and it is all about building relationships. My philosophy of teaching, parenting, and coaching is: rules without relationship leads to rebellion (Interview, April 20, 2007).

The principal believes that to be able to reach students a relationship has to be established. He feels that the best way to reach students is to share on a personal level with the students. This idea of having a personal relationship with the students is also reflected the attitude and comments of the staff.

Mr. O'Connor declared:

I tell them I didn't make good grades in school. I was a poor student, but you don't have to be a great student to be successful. I feel like I am successful and I am doing what I want to do. I wanted to work with children, but I wasn't the brightest. I tell the kids that I am a poor reader. I don't like to read, but to get this job I had to learn to read (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence said:

We are a very nurturing school, which is what a middle school should be. We look at the kids where they are developmentally which is very different from elementary and high school. We understand that all of the students are different at this age. We try to nurture that and we try to build self-confidence. We do the academic side, but I think why we are successful is because we do such a good job about working with them where they are and trying to raise their self esteem (Interview, April 25, 2007).

To help students develop an ownership of the school and its programs, he maintains an open door policy with students and faculty.

Mr. O'Connor said:

I have kids coming to me all the time. We have class officers and there is no use having class officers unless they do something. I meet with them on a monthly basis. Kids are all the time bringing me petitions about what they want to see changed...The students know I will follow through with it. Even if it is ridiculous, I will follow through with it just so that the kids know that they can come to me and their input is respected. They feel more a part of this school. (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett stated:

If somebody is having trouble Mr. O'Connor will say to come and see him later in the day. Just come to talk. (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Mr. Tilford echoed:

You hear about other schools where the kids don't even know who the principal is and when you say something about the principal, fear is there. Here they just go down and hang out with the principal. Is that appropriate? I don't know. It accomplishes what he wants to accomplish. That a kid comes to school and knows he is loved and cared about. It starts from the top down (Interview, April 20, 2007).

He also makes it a practice to ask students what they have learned that day in school

(Field notes, April 10, 2007, April 17, 2007, and April 24, 2007. May 1, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor said:

For the kids to be able to tell you what they have learned today is very important and the student thinks it is a good idea (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Physical contact with students is a very important part of Mr. O'Connor's philosophy. On every occasion of observing him, physical contact with both students and teachers was seen (Field notes, April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007, April 24, 2007 [morning observations], April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007 [afternoon observations], April 2, 2007, April 5, 2007, April 10, 2007 and May 3, 2007 [administrative meeting; team leaders meeting, impromptu and scheduled; parent advisory meeting]). This habit of physical contact has been inculcated with the faculty as well. In fact, many of the faculty members take great pride in the fact that physical expressions of regard are used with students and staff. The physical contact is usually preceded with words of encouragement and praise.

Mr. O'Connor declared:

I have the need to tell them I care about them. It is a good feeling when somebody says, 'I care about you'. I always start discipline with the statement: You know I care about you. You know I think you are wonderful. It is hard for a kid to be mad

at somebody that does that. Some of the students come in here because they need that affirmation. They don't have it at home (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett said:

Mr. O'Connor talks to the students and the staff. He gives them a hug. For the staff, he has a lot of incentives. For their birthday he will get them a gift certificate. He does something for everybody's birthday. If there is something that happens to one of our teachers, we always take up money and we try to do things. We will have a Christmas party every year. We will have an end of the year party. So he tries to do a lot with the faculty away from the kids and that builds camaraderie amongst your staff (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell related:

Anything happens to anybody he is on the phone and team leaders are on the phone. If there is a kid in the hospital he will be there. If there is a spouse of a faculty member in the hospital he will be there. These kids are everything to him plus the faculty (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence declared:

We get a lot of hugs. We get a lot of pats on the back. We get a lot of "How are you today?", a lot of eye contact. Mr. O'Connor knows your name. He is sincere. When he looks at you and when he speaks to you (Interview, April 25, 2007). The principal also believes that loving students and staff is an integral part of his role as principal. Many of those expressions of love are physical: hugs, pats on the back, and high fives.

Mr. O'Connor said:

I'm going to love them to death until they love me. That is the caring aspect of it for me—to know that people care about you. I think that is what life is all about. You can't buy that. I think because the students know that I care about them, because they know I want them to do well, the students believe they will make me happy by doing well (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Crowell stated:

I can go tell Mr. O'Connor anything in whatever way I choose to do it. I can be angry and sit there and cuss him and he'll come back to me with the same thing or I can go up and hug his neck. I feel very comfortable around him and that is what works between the two of us (Interview, April 17, 2007).

The principal feels that building relationships with his staff will help the teachers take care of the students. He encourages teachers to build that relationship beyond the walls of the school building.

Mr. O'Connor averred:

The faculty and I have built a relationship together. My teachers go out to eat together. I will go and stay in the cafeteria for them so they can all go out to eat as a team and have that time together. Those are the kinds of things I encourage them to do. To get together and talk and enjoy each other for a few minutes (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Ms. Crowell stated:

I love working here, you know. There is nothing else, there is no other place that I would like to do this (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller declared:

It's a very small school and it's got that kind of a homey personal touch because of the size of it. As far as working here, I absolutely love it. We have a team environment (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

One of the strengths at Riverside Middle School is relationships (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence added:

If a teacher is going to be out more than a day, Mr. O'Connor is going to be calling and checking on you. If a teacher has anything going on in their life he is going to be asking how it is going. He is just so sincere (Interview, April 25, 2007).

The principal works to build that professional relationship with the staff by allowing them to have ownership in the program that the school offers the students.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

The faculty might have an idea and sometimes I think my idea is better. I give in because if the faculty doesn't have ownership in the program then it is not going to work (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson said:

Mr. O'Connor is a great guy. He is a wonderful boss to work for because he allows you so much leeway. He allows me to use my personality to get to the ultimate goal of giving the kid the opportunity to learn (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett declared:

By putting teachers first, Mr. O'Connor tries to take care of the teacher's emotional needs by not pounding them or pressuring them. We stress test scores, but he doesn't come in and jump on them (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Miller commented:

There is a lot of communication. He meets with team leaders every week and goes over everything going on in the school. He is real open about it. A lot of principals won't share, but he shares everything. We always know what is going on (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Developing a strong teacher work attitude is also very important to Mr. O'Connor. He feels successful when his teachers feel successful.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

My rewards come from teachers saying to me 'I never knew that it could be this good' (Interview April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson observed:

Mr. O'Connor is not a guy that is going to say you have to teach it this way, or you have to teach this plan, or you have to use this type of book or software. There is no hidden agenda. He will allow you tons of opportunities to go places and learn new things (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett argued:

Mr. O'Connor wants his faculty to be able to have a voice and to know that he is going to back them by looking at what the majority of the people would like to do. However, he is going to also look at the kids needs—what is best for the kids (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Another method that the principal uses to help make his staff feel successful is to ensure that the faculty learns from each other.

Mr. O'Connor declared:

I make sure the teachers get out there with the idea of coming back and sharing the good things that were learned... We are working on literacy currently and two of the teachers were picked to go to these literacy workshops. Each time we have had a faculty meeting, those two teachers have shared what they have learned and what direction we should be heading (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor commented:

One of the biggest mistakes we make in education is to invest too much in some untried program. We could have done a better job of taking teachers out and doing something nice for them. That would have been more beneficial than blindly jumping on the latest band wagon (Interview, April 2, 2007).

This idea goes hand in hand with the principal's attitude about effecting change within his building. He sees change as necessary to be able to continually provide the students with the kind of education that the public has come to expect of Riverside Middle School.

Mr. O'Connor said:

I have got to make change a good thing. I have got to precipitate change. I have got to make sure that we are always changing, that we are never stagnant. If we are happy where we are then we are not going anywhere. If we are happy sitting here at Riverside Middle School then we are not moving ahead. I want us to always be moving and changing (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Beyond actions with the students and the staff, Mr. O'Connor also expresses his care for both students and staff through his correspondence with faculty, students, and parents. In a series of emails with a parent, Mr. O'Connor expressed concern over some of the problems the parent saw that her son was having. The principal went out of his way to assure the parent of his interest.

Mr. O'Connor wrote:

I told David that anytime he needed to talk I was available (personal email, February, 15, 2007).

I will have the teachers check with David when they are watching something to see if it will upset him. Then you may come and get him (personal email, April, 20, 2007).



The principal also uses his personal correspondence to help promote student achievement above and beyond the school program.

Mr. O'Connor noted:

This will be a great opportunity for Timmy to present at another middle school. Just tell him to come to me and we will take care of it (personal email, January 16, 2007).

I am writing the following recommendation for Timmy James. I don't often do this because I come in contact with so many unique students being a principal. Timmy is one of the most outstanding young men I have ever had the privilege of knowing (personal correspondence, December 9, 2006).

Riverside Middle School also publishes a yearbook and a monthly newsletter. The yearbook is for the students and the newsletter is for the parents. In both of these publications, Mr. O'Connor communicates his care for students and the staff. The RMS yearbook, *The Middle Ages* (2003) describes a series of photos, in which Mr. O'Connor is seen with various group of students, in the following manner:

These photos of Mr. O'Connor and his family members (he considers all of us his family) were taken on his special day to honor him with this well-deserved award (Tennessee Middle School Principal of the Year) (p. 8).

Mr. O'Connor wrote:

The students are the stars of our school. Their smiles and laughter brighten up our hallways (RMS *The Middle Ages*, p. 2).

Many students and staff respond to Mr. O'Connor's correspondence and actions by writing to him. Mr. O'Connor shared some of the letters that students and staff had sent him.

Chelsey, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, wrote:

Mr. O'Connor is the best! He is a person who wants to know what we think and what we want. He thinks of us like we are his children (11/22/2006).

The cheerleading squad wrote:

We wanted to give our big Riverside yell to say “Thank you!” for coming to see us at camp. (7/9/2006).

Cathy, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, wrote:

I was just saying thank you for everything. You helped me when I was sad. You helped me when I was put down. You helped me when I needed it (11/22/2006).

*Summary for Care for Students and Staff*

When examining the data for the developmentally responsive middle school principal that cares for students and staff, the data revealed that the principal developed relationships with students through actions that showed the students that the principal was interested in them (e.g., attention, listening, physical contact). This interest is shown to the students not only in the halls, in the gym, and in the cafeteria; but also, the students see the regard that the principal has for them when he deals with disciplinary issues. At those times, when the principal has to take action against the student, the principal shows the most care, concern, and regard. The principal also encourages the students to take an active part in the life of the school and to develop ownership in the school and its programs.

The data also revealed that the principal developed relationships with the staff through the same actions—showing interest through attention, listening, and physical contact. In addition, the principal worked very hard to develop in the staff a feeling of ownership in the school, the schools program, and in the students. The principal encourages the teachers to develop personal relationships outside of the school day. He provides opportunities for the staff socialize with one another and their families. He also encourages staff to learn and grow professionally. Teachers are sent to learn about new techniques and then are expected to return and share what they have learned with the rest

of the staff. The principal encourages to experiment and to change.

### *Caring Leadership*

According to Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006), the developmentally responsive middle school principal promotes the development of relationships between adults and students, among students and between teachers and families; shares a vision for continuous organizational improvement and growth; governs democratically and collaboratively; is flexible and able to deal with ambiguity and chaos (p. 154-155). The data from the interviews, documents, and field notes were placed into several categories that helped to illuminate this part of the research. In focusing on the developmentally responsive middle school principal as a caring leader, the following categories were developed from the research: (1) importance of visibility and accessibility; (2) importance of developing caring, open, relationships; (3) importance of modeling behaviors (see Table 3, Code Map, pp. 91-92).

One of his greatest strengths is his ability to be able to state and elaborate upon his personal philosophy about how his school is to operate. He believes that the genesis of his philosophy started when he was a classroom teacher.

Mr. O'Connor commented:

I never felt like anybody put me first when I was teaching. I always felt like I was told to do this or that. Never did I feel important for what I was doing. So I want my teachers to feel like they are the most important thing in the world to me. That is my goal...When I was in the classroom, I resented somebody that was not in the classroom, did not know the everyday problems I was having, and then coming into my class and telling me what to do (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor comes straight to the point in stating and elaborating upon his philosophy.

He has an unusual stance on which group gets his attention within the building. That philosophy is reflected in the comments from his staff.

Mr. O'Connor averred:

My philosophy is that I love the kids, but I don't have to worry about the kids. I have good people taking care of the kids. I need to take care of my teachers and make the environment good for them and have good relationships going on here. First of all it is my job to hire people that are going to take care of these children and give them what they need.

I have teachers here that tell me to let them know when I plan to retire. They tell me that they will leave as well. When teachers put their arms around me and tell me that they love me and thank me for caring about them, that makes all the difference in the world for me (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett declared:

If you feel good about yourself and you like your job and you don't dread coming to work, you are going to do a better job. Mr. O'Connor puts teachers first. By putting his teachers first implies that they are going to take care of the students. The staff is going to want to and they will want to help the children (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell argued:

We are a family here and I know a lot of people will say that about their schools, but we are involved in each others personal lives. We care about each other. Mr. O'Connor is accommodating and has the gift of being able to talk. He is not afraid to put himself out there. We are here for the kids, addressing the needs of the child not just academically but emotionally and socially (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Mr. Tilford commented:

Mr. O'Connor bases his thoughts on the idea that he is going to take care of the teachers so that the teachers can take care of the kids. The people that you work with care about each other and that transfers over to caring about kids. As you get older you see that you really do get a whole lot more when you build that relationship (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Mr. Tilford also saw carry over of Mr. O'Connor's philosophy in the actions of the students at Riverside Middle School

Mr. Tilford observed:

I've seen other kids when a new kid comes in, will say to that kid that we don't act that way at this school. It just amazes me that they would say that to a new kid coming in (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor takes the care of his staff very seriously. He believes that it is incumbent to not only hire the best people he can, but to care for them, recognize them, and reward them.

Mr. O'Connor discussed this:

If the administrator will allow, a teacher will plop their feet up on the desk and had out a worksheet. Some teachers feel like if they are quiet and not causing any trouble, that is a good deal. Then there is another teacher that is creative and has all this activity going on in the classroom. The teacher changes things up and keep the kids actively involved. What is the reward? Unless I get out there and make them feel special and find things for them, recognize them, tell the school board about them. I am continually on the search for ways to recognize the teachers and make them feel important for the job they do (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett added:

The first thing I like about the school is the family atmosphere and I think that comes from Mr. O'Connor's leadership style. I look forward to coming to work everyday and I think most of the people here would tell you the same thing. Mr. O'Connor is not an authoritarian type of leader. He gives teachers input and when you do that people buy into what you are trying to do (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Miller commented:

None of us (the staff) want to leave the middle school. There has been talking about this for years, about moving the fifth to the elementary. We have gone to the superintendent and we have said we would rather not. It would be hard to leave this situation and go into another one after having it so good here. It really would (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

It is probably the most important thing that we do as a group. Those times that we get together and basically socialize, that is probably what has built the relationships throughout the school. As long as Mr. O'Connor is here I see that relationships and the camaraderie within the staff will continue (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence observed:

We are allowed to change as we go. We can do some trial and error stuff and we do a lot of that. The staff has been doing this for quite awhile. They have found out what works and every year we see thing getting better. It gets a little easier

every year because the staff get better at it. We get better at working out the kinks (Interview, April 25, 2007).

The principal does not allow any topic to get far away from the love that he has for his students and the place that the students occupy within his philosophy.

Mr. O'Connor commented:

I tell my teachers constantly, if these kids know that you love them and that the teachers know that I love them, then they are going to love you back... We are very child centered and we believe in meeting the needs of the kids and we believe in the middle school concept (Interview, April 2, 2007).

The centerpiece of his philosophy is the building of relationships. He feels that all relationships—with students, faculty, and community—are the basis of the school and his own philosophy.

Mr. O'Connor said:

The most important thing to me of all is building relationships with parents, the community, the teachers, and the students. If we do not build a relationship with the people that we work with and we don't care about each other, then I don't think we can be successful.

I am very strong-willed and there are certain things that I want and I want these kids to be successful and that is important. You hire people that want the same thing you want. If they don't then they don't need to be here. I want these kids to be successful human beings and loved and cared for, because we may be the only ones that love them in a days time

This is our place and we are going to make it a wonderful place for each other. We are going to take care of each other and not shirk our duties (Interview, April 2, 2007).

The principal continually self-evaluates his performance and can make a final statement about the school, the staff, and the programs that are under his guidance.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

I continually ask them (the staff) to evaluate me. Every nine weeks, I ask them what I did wrong, how I can do a better job, and how I can meet your needs better. I get that continual feedback from them (Interview, April 2, 2007).

The experience of being principal here has made me the person that I am. If I had stated the goals that I wanted to reach in my life, the kind of person that I wanted

to be, this school has given me the opportunity to reach out there and be the best that I can be. Even though I have not been the best that I can be, it has given me the opportunity to do what I wanted to do in my lifetime and do for others. It is an awesome responsibility to know that you have got these people that are depending on you. It is an awesome responsibility to know that after I am gone, that a part of me will be left behind (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Mr. Johnson added:

His door is always open and it is always open for any change as you say, anything. If we are going to change anything, we are going to bounce it off him first (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor believes very strongly in developing community and parent

involvement. This process started when Riverside Middle School was in an older

building in the center of an older neighborhood. He also encourages his staff to develop

those community ties.

Mr. O'Connor reflected:

When I was in the old school, I was right in the heart of the community. I would get out during the day and go from home to home. It is being part of the community. I go to their activities. They will ask me to come to church or to see them play ball. It is being there and knowing. I am sent birth announcements, graduation announcement, and I attend their funerals. If it is your extended family then you treat them as family. You are concerned about what is going on out there in their life. Now I make it a habit of getting in my car and going out and visit the homes and the apartment complexes. They know me and they know I am coming and they come out and speak (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor capitalizes upon his relationship with the community for support for school programs. In return, he makes sure that not only himself but also his staff are visiting in the neighborhoods to help ensure open communication.

Mr. O'Connor commented:

It is easy for me to go into the community because I have got community people who will give me money. I can just say I have a child that needs to be clothed and I can get that done...I go into the home and I require my teachers to go in the homes. This year the staff was told to do at least two home visits. Many of the staff have said that is the best thing they have ever done. When the staff see what these children live in, some have come away in tears. I knew that would be an

impact on them to see how these students live and what the students have been through before they get to school (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett added:

We do home visits. It opens your eyes and you understand the children more having seen where they come from. It has opened some of the teacher's eyes. We tend to live in a box, to teach in a box, and expect all kids to be the same. Doing home visits you see that some of the students don't have enough food to eat.

Some do not have enough clothing (Interview, April 12, 2007).

He also ensures that the parents have a voice in what is going on within the school. Being dissatisfied with the standard PTO where the only attendees were the teachers, Mr.

O'Connor formed a parent advisory board.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

I have a parent advisory board that meets the first Thursday of every month. I have forty to fifty parents that come. This is a time where the parents can give suggestions and ask questions. I always find out the answers for questions and try to get back to parents as quickly as I can. We have also changed things based parent suggestions (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett commented:

It creates more parent involvement. We have a parent advisory the first Thursday of each month. Sometimes the parent's will do a little more than what you want them to do, but having an open enrollment policy, the word spreads (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell said:

I had one of my eighth grade students get a little too cool for school, which 8<sup>th</sup> graders do. I called the parent and the mother said that she would come and sit with him in class during the afternoon. Our parents are involved and we don't have that problem (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller argued:

Mr. O'Connor has been here forever and knows the community. He knows the kids well and has had their parents. I think that is a real strength in a small community—to really know the community and know what is going on (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence added:



Mr. O'Connor has something called a parent advisory board that meets the first Thursday of every month. It is not like a PTO. There is no job to do. There is no fund-raising to do. This is just parents coming in. We have juice and coffee and talk about things. Mr. O'Connor gets a lot of critical information from these meetings. That is why it works so well. He is so open to hearing what the parents think is working and not working, what they want to see more of or less of, what parents are concerned over. He will sit and listen as long as it takes to hear the last parent—that keeps parents involved (Interview, April 25, 2007).

As previously stated, Mr. O'Connor makes every effort to ensure that communication exists between the school and the parents. The principal is in constant contact with parents through email.

Mr. O'Connor noted:

If you have any problem getting information let me know. I can take care of that for you (personal email, 5/3/2007).

Much of his email contact with parents is supplying information to parents, or encouraging the parent to contact the student's team if there is a problem. The monthly newsletter, entitled *RMS News*, is one of the major sources of contact with the parents. The principal uses this platform to encourage parents to stay involved with their children.

Mr. O'Connor wrote:

Parents, continue to stay involved in your child's education, and thank you for all of your support (*RMS News*, March 2006, p. 1).

Remember to always stay involved with your child, and keep informed of everything your child is involved both at school and outside of school (*RMS News*, September, 2006).

The principal also uses the *RMS News* to inform the parents of good things that are going on or are happening at the school.

Mr. O'Connor wrote:

On the 2005 Tennessee Value Added Assessment gain scores in the sixth and seventh grades. RMS took second place statewide in reading/language arts and

science. We took first place in social studies. This is quite an honor. Congratulations to parents, students, and especially teachers for all the hard work. We want to keep it up (*RMS News*, February, 2006).

Riverside Middle School has been selected as one of the most effective schools in Tennessee (that is over 1200 elementary and middle schools statewide). I am very proud of our faculty and students (*RMS News*, May 2006).

Another excellent example of the principal's leadership is how he handles

discipline within the building. His disciplinary actions are tied directly to his philosophy.

The staff has more to say about the handling of discipline than does the principal.

Mr. O'Connor commented:

I believe it is about building relationships. If you build relationships and are talking to the students about what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, then the students learn what is important about living within the school. There is not one rule for everything. Everything is not the same.

When a student is sent to the office, I don't let the student talk until the student is over being angry. I emphasize to the student to tell me the truth and assure the student that the consequences won't be near as bad as if he/she get caught in a lie. Everything is not the same for me. I take every situation individually. It is built on relationships. If the kids know you care about them, then they think you are wonderful (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Like every middle school, Riverside Middle Schools has all of the mechanisms for removal of those students who will not comply after everything else has been tried.

Mr. O'Connor observed:

When I have to suspend a student, I feel like I have failed. I always question myself. I usually dream about it at night and think about what I could have done differently to make this more positive for that child. I am not real popular on the disciplinary board. I always state that it is not what is best for us, but what is best for the child (Interview, April 2, 2007).

In every disciplinary situation, the principal's philosophy comes through. He is constantly trying to show students, even when dealing with misbehavior, he regards and cares for them. The faculty knows that, even in disciplinary situations, the principal allows care for the students to direct his actions.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

I have the need to tell the student that I care about them. It is a good feeling when somebody says I love you and I care about you. I always start out a disciplinary situation by telling the student that I care about the student and think that the student is wonderful. It is hard for a kid to be mad at somebody that does that. Some of the students just come in here because there is a need to be told that since they don't have it at home (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett added:

One of our management tools is our life skills program. It is cooperation, respect...The teachers have it all posted on the walls. Mr. O'Connor stresses to the teachers that they have to emphasize our life skills. The most important of those is to get along with others. If students can't get along with anybody, then the student is not going to be successful (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell observed:

How I use my life skills is for the student to respond to the questions in writing. I don't let them just put one word down as an answer. I like life skills because, one, the event is documented; two, it allows a kid to get his frustration and anger out. On the back of the life skill is a place for me to write. When I fill that out, I allow the kid to look at the comments and say whether or not this is what happened. We discuss what is different. Sometimes we have a meeting of the minds and sometimes we don't. It let's them defuse. It builds that bridge and let's them get over the situation (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller argued:

If there is conflict within the team, we resolve it within the team. If that is not worked out then we go to Mr. O'Connor. If that doesn't work, we can go to the Director of Schools. But Mr. O'Connor doesn't like people jumping the chain of command (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

Each team has their own liberties to come up with their own behavior plans (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor's attitude toward leadership, when connected with his philosophy, reveal another facet of his care for the students and staff under his supervision. The staff sees the principal's attitude toward relationship building through his visibility within the

school and out in the community.

Mr. O'Connor observed:

When I have been really harsh with a kid and I have had a disagreement, I make a rule that after I have disciplined a child, I make sure before they go home that day to tell the student that I love them.

Some people might not think it is a good thing to do, but it has been the thing that I have always done when the kids come up to me. When kids put their arms around you, how do you respond? You love them back. It has gone on for years. It is the way I have treated students for thirty-six years (Interview, April 2, 2007).

I think kids feel that no one cares how they perform, but the kids know that I want them to do well and that they will make me happy by doing well (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Mr. Tilford stated:

Mr. O'Connor can mentor teachers in a positive way. He can really guide them and help them. Anytime he is walking down the hall he will stick his head in the door and place his hand on a student's head and ask how they are doing. There is no fear. There is respect, but no fear associated with him (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence commented:

Throughout Mr. O'Connor's day, he is involved with kids. He is in the lunchroom. He is obviously not doing lunch duty. He is up snacking through the cafeteria line, walking around and patting kids on the back, talking to his teachers, doing the lunchroom duty. I don't think he is happy unless he is out there with the kids (Interview, April 25, 2007).

Perhaps the greatest aspect of his caring leadership is what he has, for over 30 years in education, modeled for the students and the teachers that work with him. Mr. O'Connor did not speak of any conscious effort on his part to act in a way that he wanted his staff and students to act. This is an aspect of his personality that has become a part of the entire school culture. I do not believe, after six hours of in-depth discussion, that there is a realization that he has become a model of caring leadership for his staff, his students and his community. Over a period of 12 days of actively observing and discussing the

program with the principal and his staff, I saw multiple occurrences of physical and oral behavior that showed the principal and his staff to be caring individuals (Field notes, April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007, April 24, 2007 [morning observations], April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, April 17, 2007 [afternoon observations], April 2, 2007, April 5, 2007, April 10, 2007 and May 3, 2007 [administrative meeting, team leaders meeting {impromptu and scheduled}, parent advisory meeting]).

Individual teachers discuss how Mr. O'Connor has suggested something they should try with students or they talk about how the principal handles a variety of situations in similar ways and how they have incorporated those techniques into their own handling of students and parents.

Ms. Crowell commented:

I'm a Yankee and it was hard for me to touch students because I wasn't brought up like that, but I do. When you see kids that need that hug or need that pat on the shoulder, that need some kind of connection, you are going to give it. I know at the beginning of the year he challenged us to pick the kid that you are having the most problems with, the kid that you hate. He told us that this is the kid that we should build the relationship with. I took that challenge last year and the girl who nobody liked, including myself, came through my door and we started throwing eye daggers at each other. By the end of the year we went out to lunch. It was just showing a little bit of concern. I keep up with her still. I can't wait to see what she is going to become. That is a change that he has made in my life because before I just handled the whole class rather than knowing individuals (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller added:

I have two little boys. The one in the elementary school wasn't feeling good and wanted to go home. Mr. O'Connor told me bring him to school and let him lay down in my office. He said, "Anytime I can show these students a good momma interacting with her child, it is a plus for everybody." I would say Mr. O'Connor always puts kids first and leads by example. He truly and sincerely cares about the school and the community (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford observed:

The caring relationship goes from Mr. O'Connor with the teachers and then from the teachers with each other and then from there the kids see us model relationships and how to deal with conflict. Mr. O'Connor models that response to the needs of children. I watch him. I've watched him in a discipline situation deal with a kid and how he talks to the student and how he is not afraid to say 'I'm sorry. I messed up.' I think that is huge. I had a kid last week that I jumped his case because his pants were sagging way low. It offended that kid when I said he looked like a criminal. I said why not dress like a doctor or a lawyer. I got to thinking about it and I went back to that kid the next period and found him in the hallway and put my arm around him and apologized to him for that. The kid went to the Assistant Principal and got a tie for his pants. It wasn't the yelling that accomplished it, it was the asking forgiveness. I did that because I have seen Mr. O'Connor do it. He modeled that. He cares about everyone and that flows from teacher to teacher to teacher to student. So again it goes back to the word relationship. It is all about relationships (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence said:

Mr. O'Connor sets a high standard and he models that for us. We see him interact with students and we see him interact with parents. He is very good at relaxing students and making them comfortable and happy about being in school. He brings parents around and gets them on board. He gets teachers excited to be here and excited and proud of what they are doing (Interview, April 25, 2007).

### *Summary of Caring Leadership*

When examining the data for the developmentally responsive middle school principal as a caring leader, the data revealed that the principal had a very well developed leadership philosophy that permeated the building and that influenced the staff and their philosophy and the students and their actions. The caring principal in this study worked very hard at making sure that his staff was recognized and valued for the contributions that they made to the overall school program. For the staff and the students, the caring principal created a family atmosphere that was felt by students, staff, and the community. This is all connected directly to the caring principal's philosophy: the principal takes care of the teachers, so that the teachers can take care of the students. The principal works long and hard at developing relationships with students, staff, parents and the community. The caring principal is in

constant self-evaluation. He gets feedback from staff and students about the quality of the job that he is doing and how they feel that he can improve. The principal pushes the staff into areas outside their comfort zone (i.e., home visits) in order to respond to the needs of the students and the community. The principal has several mechanisms in place to get feedback about performance. He has a parent advisory board, regular team leader meetings, and impromptu neighborhood visits to evaluate his performance and to discover areas that need attention or improvement. Other strengths shown by the caring middle school principal are accessibility and visibility. He is in the halls and the classrooms and in the neighborhoods. When he is in his office, which is not often, he has an open door for all students, staff and parents. All of the above discussions lead to the caring leader's greatest strength—the ability to model the behaviors that will allow the teachers to show the same care that he does for the students and the community.

### *The Team Concept*

According to Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006), the developmentally responsive middle school principal designs programs, policies, curriculum and procedures that reflect the characteristics of young adolescents, supports teachers in their efforts to understand and respond to the needs of your adolescents, and acts as a responsible catalyst for change and understands that change requires time, training, trust, and tangible support (pp. 154-155). The data from the interviews, documents, and field notes were placed into several categories that helped to illuminate this part of the research. In focusing on the developmentally responsive middle school principal as a promoter of the middle school as an innovating entity, through the promotion of the team concept, the following categories were developed from the

research: (1) the importance of shared leadership; (2) the importance of teacher autonomy; (3) the importance of open lines of communication (see Table 3, Code Map, pp. 91-92).

Mr. O'Connor has been principal at Riverside Middle School for 17 years. Many of the activities that take place have become 'the way that we do things.' At times he struggled to be able to discuss the origin of the team concept. The principal reflects upon the school in those terms that best describe what goes on in his school daily. We started this discussion by talking about faculty.

Mr. O'Connor averred:

First of all it is my job to hire people that are going to take care of these children and give them what they need. I have a group that does anything I ask them to do: look at strategies, attend workshops. This faculty tries to get better to meet the needs of each individual child. I don't have to worry about that (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson said:

Mr. O'Connor will always see how it fits into the school plan and the team concept. He will want to talk it out with all the other team members and slowly implement the change (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Ms. Crowell added:

We have very little turnover in this school. People who come here stay here. They like what is going on. I am not saying that we don't have little problems, but if I have to be out for something personal, I know that my team will cover me, because I will do the same for them (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Mr. Tilford stated:

Everybody's opinion is valued and everybody has an opportunity to make suggestions. On the team basis, we are given a lot of authority to make decisions (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor operates Riverside Middle School firmly within the team concept. He has



four grade level teams and a specials team. All decisions come through the teams.

Mr. O'Connor said:

I don't make out any schedules. I tell them when they are going to have lunch. The rest is all left up to them. If a team wants to stay three hours in reading and do an activity together, they can do that. I won't even take a suggestion unless it has gone through their team. They then come to me and tell me what their team thinks. All of that is hashed out in team leader meetings. We don't have to wait until next year. If something is not working then we change the schedule (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson added:

We are all on one big team. Everyone is equal. There is tons of communication. You work with the other in your team and the teams have to work with one another (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Ms. Miller declared:

Mr. O'Connor gets teacher input on everything. He is real good to include the teachers. He really wants to know from the teachers what they are thinking. He does lead by example because he is a nurturing, caring, personality (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

Mr. O'Connor is by far the best principal anywhere. He let's teachers have a say. He involves everybody in decisions. Sometimes we don't like that. He is a tremendous delegator. Sometimes we have to work harder, but we have ownership. He makes a teacher feel that it is not his school. It is our school and he makes everybody feel involved. He leads by example. He cares about everyone and that flows down from teacher to teacher to student. It is all about relationships (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence commented:

Mr. O'Connor gives the faculty a lot of autonomy. He allows them to be very individualized to their needs. That is the beauty of the leadership team. We all bring a different slant to the table. He allows the team to decide their own schedule according to the needs of the students. There is not a teacher or a TA here that doesn't know that our core middle school is all about kids. I think our parents know our motto. They know that KIDS stands for Knowledge, Integrity, Diversity, and Success. I think we share that vision with him. We do it so well and we care about each other (Interview, April 25, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor believes that each situation must be handled individually. He approaches each faculty member and each student as an individual. For this principal, there are no pat solutions.

Mr. O'Connor stated:

Everything is not the same for me. I take every situation individually. It is part of building relationships. If you build relationships, if you let the kids know that you care about them, then they will think you are wonderful. If there are caring relationships, then people are going to want to work together. The people are going to work to reach the goals that are set. If they don't have that relationship, they will fight you all the way (Interview, April 2, 2007).

The principal, in discussing the origins of the team concept at Riverside Middle School, discussed the importance of compatibility and integration across the team.

Mr. O'Connor observed:

I always thought I was going to be the best teacher in the world. I worked at it and worked at it for 24 years. I always saw somebody else that had something that worked a little bit better. I knew that if I could get another pair of hands in the room then we could meet more children's needs. I talked about this for a number of years, and when they went to the middle school concept, they asked me if I would put the first team together. I picked the sixth grade team and, first, I built a relationship with the team. I had them over to my house. We did something socially all the time together. We worked on communicating all the time as a team. I wanted to be a good teacher. I wanted to make a difference in kids' lives. I decided my goal as a principal was to make a difference in teachers' lives (Interview, April 2, 2007).

At the end of the year, I ask how I have helped you in your classroom grow professionally. When I first became a principal I missed teaching. I realized that I could have an impact with children because I get to see so many children now. I get to grow with them (Interview, April 17, 2007).

It was very difficult to gain complete integration of the concept at first. We could not integrate unless we were bound together socially and academically, and in every other way. I found that if we care about each other then we can share. If I am having problems with a kid, then I want you to tell me how to do a better job with that kid. How can a concept be integrated if the staff won't work together? (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Mr. Johnson said:

We will go somewhere and Mr. O'Connor will feed us. We will have a great time of fellowship. Then he will discuss what we are going to get into for the year. Then more details will come out in team leader meetings (Interview, April 5, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

Riverside Middle School is a great place to mainly because of the faculty, the staff, the fun that we have at this school, and the relationships built. It is not just a place to come to work. The others are not just coworkers. They are part of your family. You are very close to the people that you teach and work with. I think that is one of the greatest strengths of our school (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor believes that unless we show both staff and students how we want them to perform or behave, then we are not working as an effective team. The leader must share responsibility and must facilitate leadership throughout the staff. The leader must be a change agent.

Mr. O'Connor said:

They need to see us modeling those kinds of behavior. They need to see us discussing, disagreeing, coming to an agreement, and working together. That is why they will see their teacher out in the hall making a decision about what they are going to do next. I think you have to model what you want done. You can't tell somebody to do something that you don't ever do (Interview, April 2, 2007).

I don't make the decisions here. I am the facilitator. We have a meeting and it may not go my way. I may want them to do something this way. I suggest things. They may decide it would be better this way. I have to give in. If they don't have ownership in the system, then it is not going to work (Interview, April 2, 2007).

One of the things I said when I became principal: Now we are never going to be the same. I work to make each day different. If we are not moving forward and changing and getting better, then we are not doing what we should be doing. We are the facilitators of change. We have got to get people to like to change. I have got to be the one that says I have to change. I tell my staff every year that they have to evaluate me. How can I do a better job next year? How can I be a better leader next year? (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence stated:

Mr. O'Connor disseminates information to his teams through the team leaders meeting. The team leader then goes back to the teams and share what's been talked about at the team leader meeting. The other teachers never feel out of the loop because he shares it with the other faculty too (Interview, April 25, 2007).

He sees shared leadership and shared responsibility as two of the main cornerstones of the team concept.

Mr. O'Connor commented:

I don't believe in bells. I believe in teaches taking control of what they are doing with kids. It is turning the power over to the people. It is letting go of the power. I can't be power hungry. I can't be in charge of everything. Once people have made a decision as a group, they will buy into that decision. If I am always telling them this is what we are going to do. I am going to have a lot of people fighting me. If I can hold them accountable for things that they have made a decision upon, then they have ownership. If it doesn't work, then we will go into a leadership meeting or a schoolwide meeting and make a new decision. It is the same way with kids in the classroom. If teacher let go of the power and let the kids make some decisions about their learning, then they will have ownership (Interview, April 2, 2007).

It is about being responsible, making decision, and holding people to those decisions. I am not the big cheese in this thing. I am just part of the process. I have the ultimate responsibility, but the teachers have to be held to the fire as well. I don't have to go this alone. I know that I have the support of the people behind me. There are fifty faculty members that are holding everybody to the fire. We are all doing this together and we are going to check on each other. That is what happens when you work in a team (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Mr. Stinnett said:

The team leaders meet at least once a week and we go over notes and expectations from the previous week. The team leaders go back and meet with their teams. Each team meets everyday. They have a common planning time. Everybody is about equal. You can jump in anytime you want to. Sometimes we disagree, but we do it in there in a professional manner. Sometimes he and I disagree. If he gets mad at me, he tells me and in five minutes we are over it (Interview, April 12, 2007).

Ms. Crowell added:

If the sixth grade has a parent conference, then the whole team meets with that parent. The whole team is responsible for that child, not just one of the teachers. That can be pretty intimidating from a parent point of view but everybody on that team knows what is going go. I think that is big. I think the way the Mr. O'Connor treats us as professionals. He let's us do our job and doesn't check upon us (Interview, April 17, 2007).

Ms. Miller declared:

We are able to meet every single day and discuss the kids and discuss what we are

doing. We discuss what we need to change. We have a lot of flexibility. It is a wonderful thing for a teacher not to be told how to do everything. We are taking care of the kids. We have that flexibility within the team to be able to move kids around (Interview, April 10, 2007).

Mr. Tilford said:

The schedule is very flexible. Today we had to adjust our schedules to allow students to meet about the New York trip. We are very flexible in that. If one teacher is doing a project and need more time, then the word is sent down the hall to hold class for ten more minutes. There are no bells, no whistles. We can be flexible with our curriculum, what we teach and when we teach (Interview, April 20, 2007).

Ms. Lawrence stated:

Mr. O'Connor will send teachers out to training. When they come back we share with one another. Mr. O'Connor is always looking for opportunities to see what other schools are doing. He is flexible. He is not afraid to try things. He is not afraid to let us try things (Interview, April 25, 2007).

The idea of communication has been discussed several times in this chapter. But one of the cornerstones of the team concept is the idea of open lines of communication. As has already been demonstrated, the students and faculty have open access to the principal. The principal himself states that he operates with an open door policy. Using the *RMS News*, he regularly informs his parents that he is available for any need of the parents.

Mr. O'Connor wrote:

Thanks for all you do for us and let us know how we can be of support to you. Our door is always open (*RMS News*, January 2006).

As always, we appreciate your support. Feel free to contact us here at RMS if you have any questions (*RMS News*, April 2006).

We have accomplished a lot this year and could not do it without your support. Just let me say thank you so much for letting us work with your most precious gifts (*RMS News*, May 2007).

This idea of the team concept is a part of all aspects of the school. *The Middle Ages*, the

school year book, reflects the positive attitude that dominates the school atmosphere. The yearbook is a student produced project that has a faculty sponsor. The majority of the work is done by the students. The following statements were found in recent editions of *The Middle Ages*:

Students at Riverside Middle School are eager to share smiles and talents with each other on a daily basis (*The Middle Ages*, 2005, p. 2).

Smiling is a favorite pastime of RMS students. No matter where you look you will see their brilliant smiles (*The Middle Ages*, 2006, p. 5).

#### *Summary for the Team Concept*

When examining the data for the developmentally responsive middle school principal as one who sees the middle school as an innovating entity through the design of programs, policies, curriculum and procedures that reflect the characteristics of young adolescents, through the support of teachers in their efforts to understand and respond to the needs of young adolescents, and through actions as a responsible catalyst for change and understands that change requires time, training, trust, and tangible support, the data revealed that the principal in this study uses the team concept to ensure that the school remains an innovating entity. The principal started working with the team concept when he was still a sixth grade teacher. Building relationships is the most important part of the team concept according to the principal and the majority of the staff. The principal also operates the school through a leadership team comprised of representatives from each grade level and a representative from the special groups (e.g., guidance, special education). The most important action on the part of the principal is to ensure that lines of communication between the principal, staff, parents, and students are open and operating. Through the team concept there is an increase in shared leadership and collaboration both

within the teams and across the entire school faculty. The biggest benefit from the team concept beyond the relationship building, is the amount of autonomy that teachers are allowed. Overall the team concept provides the students of Riverside Middle School an wide ranging education that not only provides needed academic skills, but also provides the students with the opportunity to gain ownership in the educational process.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

I began my research to develop an understanding of the inroads that the ethic of care has made in this era of extreme accountability as embodied in the No Child Left Behind legislation. This research was based upon the work of Nel Noddings who has spent most of her professional career promoting the provision of education from an ethic of care. To provide more depth to this research, especially for the role of the principal, Brown and Anfara's (2006) and Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross' (2006) discussion of the developmentally responsive principal contributed much of the framework for this study. I gathered data from one suburban middle school through a process of observations of the principal, interviews with the principal and six members of the faculty, and an analysis of the principal's correspondence, student handbooks, faculty handbooks, yearbooks and newsletters.

When I started my job as a middle school administrator 20 years ago, the advice that I was given was to keep the students under control. As a teacher, I had always impressed upon my students my high expectations for their performance, but I had always worked hard to show the students that I truly cared about their welfare. For the 13 years that I was in the classroom, most of the students that I taught responded well to my efforts at caring for them. After I had gotten my feet on the ground by the third year of my principalship, I began to apply some of the same actions that I used as a teacher with the students and faculty of my school. The major issue that I repeatedly dealt with was the idea of justice. The ethic of care requires that we provide for the student what the



student needs. The ethic of justice requires that all students be treated equally. Strike (1999) states, “justice insists on general rules. It has a concept of the self that reduces everyone to thin moral sameness” (p. 22). As principal, looking at the situation from a global position, I could see what the student needed. The rest of the school community expected the student to be treated according to the rules—not treated based upon the student’s needs. This study examined the perceptions of the principal and staff regarding the principal’s role as a caregiver through care for staff and students, caring leadership, and the team concept.

### **Conclusions**

There are three major conclusions that can be derived from this study of the role of the middle school principal as a caregiver and the middle school principal being developmentally responsive to students, faculty, and to the school itself. First, the developmentally responsive middle school principal responds to the students and staff with care. Second, the developmentally responsive middle school principal practices caring leadership. Finally, the developmentally responsive middle school principal creates a caring atmosphere through the use of the team concept.

#### *Responding to Students and Staff with Care*

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that in order to respond to both students and staff with care, the developmentally responsive principal must develop positive caring relationships. These relationships are developed through the actions of the principal. The principal in this study showed staff and students that he was interested in them through attention, listening, and physical contact. The principal was very proactive in showing both staff and students attention. He made it a habit of greeting

students and staff whenever he saw them. I did not see the principal ever stumble over a student's or parent's name. He asked about family members and what was going on in their lives. This was ongoing. The principal made a tremendous effort to pay attention to those that were around him. As the principal moved through the school, in the cafeteria, during the morning broadcast, in meetings with students, parents or staff, he continually showed intense attention to those with whom he was speaking. In conversation or discussion, the principal gave absolute attention. He would remember conversations from days or weeks before. After closely observing the principal over a period of 30 days, I was very impressed with the amount of attention and listening he provided to the students and staff.

This study uncovered one skill that this principal used most effectively in developing that caring attitude for both students and staff. Riverside Middle School is a grade 5-8 school of less than 500 students. At this age many students do not want hugs or pats or any kind of physical contact with adults. After just two days it was obvious that physical contact was the rule. After more than 10 hours of observing this principal, it became very apparent that this principal believed in hugging his students. But more amazing to me was the fact that the students came up to the principal and put their arms out to be hugged. On more than one occasion these great big eighth grade boys would come up to the principal and hug him. The principal was always hugging students, patting them on the back, or being physically close to the students. It was always very public. The principal, through his actions, showed to his students that caring for one another is very important. This physicality on the part of the principal did much to help create a family atmosphere.

The principal also did much the same for the staff of the school. The principal gave and received hugs and pats from the faculty as well as gave them. The principal escalated this care of his staff by encouraging his staff to develop personal relationships outside of the school day. The principal made arrangements for faculty meetings or work days to also be social times. By adding to the school a social component, the principal engendered a spirit of care in the staff through the development of personal relationships within the staff. In a related sense, the principal also worked very hard to get the staff to develop a feeling of ownership in the school, the school program, and in the students. By showing the staff how he cared for the students, the principal hoped to inspire the staff to feel the same.

The principal also showed that he cared professionally for the staff by providing a variety of opportunities to learn and grow. The teachers at this school are regularly sent to learn about new techniques and then are expected to return and share what they have learned with the rest of the staff. In addition to outside training, the principal encourages the teachers to experiment and to change what they do within the classroom. Noddings (2003) discussed the importance of caring for students in today's schools.

Care must be taken seriously as a major purpose of schools; that is, educators must recognize that caring for students is fundamental in teaching and that developing people with a strong capacity for care is a major objective of responsible education. (p. 63)

### *Practicing Caring Leadership*

Another of the conclusions from this study was the ability of the principal to develop a philosophy that permeated the entire building and that influenced the staff and their philosophy and the students and their actions. The principal's philosophy was that

he believed that it was his job to take care of his staff. He believed that if he took care of the staff, then the staff would be better prepared to take care of the students. The principal repeatedly stated that he did not have to worry about the students because he had good teachers that knew how to take care of the students. This philosophy was not only repeated by the principal again and again, but it was shown through his actions and his dealings with both staff and students. The principal made it a point in dealing with disciplinary issues to start the conversation by stating that he did care about the student but that whatever behavior was not going to be tolerated. This kind of behavior on the part of the principal was seen over and over again during the month that I was actively observing in his building.

Another facet of the principal's caring leadership was the active effort at getting feedback from students, staff, and parents. The principal was constantly asking parents and staff how he could improve the job that he is doing. This constant effort at gaining evaluative feedback helped the principal develop those relationships that helped to create the caring atmosphere that has become the hallmark of the school. This constant effort at evaluation has also allowed the principal to push his staff out of their comfort zone. The principal of this school has made it a habit of visiting in the homes and neighborhoods of his students. Over the past couple of years, the principal has pushed his staff out of their comfort zone by having the teachers make home visits. The principal and the teachers, after a couple of years of home visits, have all commented that the home visits have changed many attitudes about their students. The fact that the staff now has a first hand view of the conditions that some of the students deal with when not at school has changed the attitude of the staff about dealing with these students that are coming out of some of the poorer neighborhoods.

Perhaps the strongest conclusion that I have drawn from this study is the principal's use of modeling. This principal went to extremes to model for the staff the way that he wanted not only the students but also the staff to be treated. This skill of modeling desired behavior over the course of thirteen years has helped to develop one of the strongest middle schools in eastern Tennessee. The principal has worked hard over that time to model for staff and parents how he expects students to be treated. The principal addresses students by name. He always tries to make some type of physical contact with the student or staff member. The principal is a very active listener—he maintains eye contact and gives physical responses to the speaker. The principal is always on the move. There is not a part of the building, in the course of the day, that the principal does not visit. During class changes and lunch, he is in the cafeteria or the halls talking with students and staff alike. His modeling even extends to his wanting his students to see how adults correctly settle differences. During my observations, I saw two instances where the principal and staff members standing in the hall in the presence of students and working out differences (Field notes April 10, 2007, April 12, 2007, and April 17, 2007).

Mr. O'Connor said:

The experience of being principal here has made me the person that I am. If I had stated the goals that I wanted to reach in my life, the kind of person that I wanted to be, this school has given me the opportunity to reach out there and be the best that I can be. Even though I have not been the best that I can be, it has given me the opportunity to do what I wanted to do in my lifetime and do for others (Interview, April 2, 2007).

For this principal to declare that being at this school allowed him to be the kind of person that he wanted to be is a huge understatement of the ability shown by this principal to put

into practice the idea of caring leadership.

### *Using the Team Concept*

The final conclusion from this study to be discussed is the principal's use of the team concept. This use of the team concept allows the staff to be able to better respond to the needs of young adolescents and also allows the adults in the school to act as a responsible catalyst for change as the need for change arises. The team concept at Riverside Middle School is reflected in the following arrangement: There are four grade level teams—fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teams. There is also a specials team that supports the grade level teams. This specials team includes special education, physical education, the arts, library, and guidance services. The chairman of each of these teams also serves on the school's leadership team. The principal of the school uses the leadership team as the primary communication apparatus. Ideas and concerns are discussed at the leadership meeting with all of the team leaders contributions from the grade level and special teams. The leadership team provides the two-way communication for the principal, especially for school concerns and innovations that a grade level might want to try.

The greatest contribution to the operation of Riverside Middle School that the leadership team provides is the feeling of shared leadership and collaboration both within the teams and across the entire school population. The idea of shared leadership and collaboration lead to a sense of autonomy for the staff. This autonomy allows the faculty to gain a sense of ownership in the school.

Mr. O'Connor said:

I don't make the decisions here. I am the facilitator. We have a meeting and it

may not go my way. I may want them to do something this way. I suggest things. They may decide it would be better this way. I have to give in. If they don't have ownership in the system, then it is not going to work (Interview, April 2, 2007).

Overall, the team concept is the heart of the operation of Riverside Middle School. The driving force behind the team concept is the principal. The team concept also reflects the care that the principal shows for both students and staff. It also has a direct correlation to the type of caring leadership that the principal uses.

### **Implications**

In order to better understand the implications of this research, a brief look at the theoretical basis for the study is needed. The research and the writings of Nel Noddings form the basis of this study. Noddings (1993) states very clearly that, "The main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (p. 174). In order to reach that aim Noddings believes that teachers should encourage their students to construct their own learning. In another work, Noddings (2002a) encourages modeling those behaviors that promote caring and a moral attitude in students.

Brown and Anfara (2002) suggested that the building level principal is responsible for leading change and building support. Brown and Anfara discussed at great length what they called the developmentally responsive middle level administrator. One of the key characteristics of the developmentally responsive principal is being an advocate for teachers and students (p. 11). These authors believed that the developmentally responsive leader must balance firmness, fairness, exploration, energy, developmental needs, all facets of life that are socially relevant to young adolescents. In addition, the developmentally responsive leader must move away from bureaucratic entrenchment and develop the middle school as a place of professional autonomy, efficacy, and supportive environments that will

support and enhance commitment and expertise (p. 73). Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, Ducette, and Gross (2006), in expanding their earlier work, wanted to see middle level education reformed by school leaders that are responsive to the needs of the students, the teachers, and the community, including parents.

This study has shown that Mr. O'Connor, as a middle school principal, displays many of the aspects that Noddings and Anfara, et.al. expected of the developmentally responsive middle school principal. Mr. O'Connor provided care for staff and students, practiced caring leadership, and modeled behavior that he wanted teachers and students to imitate, including the team concept. This study has implications in two areas: first, for administrator preparation programs; and, second, for the day-to-day operations of the middle school.

During my tenure in education, the process for training educational administrators has not changed radically. The majority of the preparation for administrators is in the classroom. There is not a great deal of field experience for the prospective practitioner. Mr. O'Connor's method of administration is such that observation of a principal, like Mr. O'Connor, would benefit future administrators. Words are not adequate to describe this principal's method of administration. The actions that he takes, his interactions with students, staff, and parents, his modeling of behavior all are areas that the prospective administrator needs to have exposure. I am not suggesting that every prospective administrator observe this one principal. I do believe that every institution has access to effective administrators that would be willing to act as models for prospective administrators.

Much of administrator training discusses the responsibilities and behaviors of a competent school leader. A great deal of that preparation focuses on the role of the



principal as a 'leader.' This study implies that the administrator preparation programs should include a larger emphasis on shared leadership and teaming. As seen in this study the use of these methodologies has a variety of benefits. I understand that there has been much research that has centered on the effects of a positive climate on student achievement; however, at Riverside Middle School, we have a school that practices shared leadership through a team concept. Not only does the school have a very positive climate, but it also has a reputation for academic excellence. This excellence, I believe, stems from the team concept and the shared leadership that dominate the administration of Riverside Middle School.

The second area of implication of this research concerns the day-to-day operation of the school. The type of day-to-day operation that is shown in this study centers upon the administrator. The administrator shows care for staff, students, and parents. The administrator works very hard at engendering in students and staff a feeling of ownership and belonging. These are not isolated behaviors. These actions are part and parcel of the principal's attitude toward leadership. As a result of this attitude, Riverside Middle School is an exemplar for a caring place to learn. But these two attitudes, care and shared leadership, are only part of the practice of leadership seen in this school. A major tool used by this administrator is modeling of behavior for both students and staff. Over the 17 years that Mr. O'Connor has served as principal, modeling behaviors has become an automatic response for him. The implication concerns the role of the principal. There is always going to be a need for the principal as a 'leader.' However, the leader as a 'facilitator' rather than a dispenser of daily orders for the operation of the school is rarely seen in practice. Riverside Middle School is the success it is because of the facilitation

done by the principal. The question becomes ‘Should the practice of administration become care and facilitation rather than control and expectation?’ The current state of administration does not allow for much flexibility in the area of care and shared leadership and rarely do we see a true team concept in full operation.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the evidence presented in this study, I suggest the following for school administrators that want to improve school performance and atmosphere and to create a program where adults and teachers both care for one another.

1. The training of middle school administrators needs to be expanded to include issues related to care giving and developmental responsiveness.
2. The training of middle school administrators needs to be expanded to include new information related to the team concept and shared leadership.
3. Principals and their staff must work together to create a caring atmosphere where both students and staff feel ownership and a sense of belonging.
4. Principals must develop a sense of caring leadership to be able to better respond to the needs of students and staff.
5. Principals must learn to model the behavior that is wanted to be seen in both students and staff.

At Riverside Middle School, principals are left to create their own schools with little or no guidance from the central administration. Middle school principals would benefit from training in both shared and caring leadership. This training should also include discussions on the ethic of care and how it impacts and works in concert with the ethic of justice. This

training also should be sustained throughout the school year to allow the principal to incorporate facets of his learning into the operation of the school on a trial-and-error basis.

### **Areas for Future Research**

According to Noddings (Beck, 1994), “young people in our schools speak poignantly of their longing to be cared for and the perceived lack of care that characterizes not only our schools but the society at large” (p. ix). While the findings from this study address some of the issues that surround the idea of caring leadership and have shown usefulness in the administration of Riverside Middle School, they are not generalizable. Studies in other locations may not produce similar results. Some of the factors that make these results unique include the school demographics, the culture of the community, and the professional experience of the school administrator. Riverside is a small suburban school system. It would be interesting to know if the size or location of a system would have any impact on the perceptions. Other variances that might impact the results would be the results of mandated test scores, percentages of students qualifying for free and reduced meals, and transient rates of other schools that might undergo this study. It would be interesting to determine if these factors would affect the perceptions.

The present study developed an understanding of the principal’s role as a care giver based upon the perceptions of the principal and the staff at the middle school. I would question if the perceptions from other stakeholder groups, including parents, students, central office administrators, and community leaders, would compare to the perceptions revealed in this study. It is possible that these perceptions would be different based on the possible differences in expectations and priorities.

Finally, as the No Child Left Behind legislation is bringing accountability to the

forefront, there is a need to research what impact the creation of a caring school environment that includes shared leadership and the team concept as its base has on student achievement. Riverside Middle School is one of the highest performing middle schools in the state. It would be interesting to see what correlation, if any, could be made between the caring, collaborative, operation of the school and performance on state mandated tests.

### **Closing Thoughts**

As stated earlier, when I started my administrative career, the only instruction I received was to keep the students under control. I learned quickly that consistency was the way to keep equilibrium between the staff and students. There were times during those early years of my administration that basically a police state existed because of rules and consequences that had to be consistently enforced. As a teacher I had always prided myself on the relationships that I had with my students. I was a tough teacher, but I always let my students know that I cared for them. This caring attitude on my part made my teaching a joy and a true pleasure. I believe that the students in my classes also enjoyed and learned from my instruction.

However, by the end of my second year as a middle school principal, I became no more than a rule keeper and I missed the caring relationship that I had with my students. For the remainder of my tenure as a middle school principal, another nine years, I worked very hard at trying to become the caring principal that I truly longed to be. There were times that I was in almost direct opposition with my staff. The staff wanted consistency and the enforcement of rules. I wanted my staff to care as much for the students as I did. The change in student and parent attitudes in the mid-90s made the job of the middle

school principal even harder. With less support for education in general, parents wanted justice not care when it came to educators.

The principal of Riverside Middle School is an anomaly within the administrative world. He is one of those rare individuals that truly loves both students and adults that work within the school. This principal has the ability to be the care giver and the dispenser of justice. I do not believe that this ability can be taught. I believe that this ability is an intrinsic part of the principal's personality. As such, this principal is a pearl of great price and a true rarity in world of education. Much of what he does can be imitated but, without the mindset and genuine love of people, I do not believe that his 'technique' can be taught.

That being said, this study has led me to this conclusion: there has to be a blending of both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice. After finishing this present study, which focused upon the part that care plays in the job of the principal, I found that the principal of this study also blended both of the ethics of justice and care in his operation of the school. This was most evident in disciplinary situations. The principal would always start his dealing with students by telling the student that he cared for them and that he wanted what was best for them. However, his dealing with misbehaving students was right out of the ethic of justice. The principal suspended students, placed students in in-school suspension, and took students home to ensure that the program at his school still ran smoothly. Even with the principal stating that was not the first option that he chose, he realized that the overriding purpose of school is education. Those students that wanted to prevent other students from learning had to be removed and the principal did not hesitate to make those decisions.

Finally, as administrators, we can learn about the ethic of care and the ethic of justice. Most practicing administrators today have grown up and worked in systems where the ethic of justice predominates. As a profession we must strive to incorporate the ethic of care into our decision making, our day-to-day operations, and our dealing with students, staff, and parents.

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## APPENDICES



## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol—Principal

1. Describe your school and what it is like being principal of this school.
2. Discuss the intellectual, physical, psychological, social, and moral/ethical characteristics of young adolescents and how you as principal responds to them.
3. What do you do as a principal to establish a learning environment that reflects those needs of young adolescents?
4. How do you design programs, policies, curriculum, and procedures that reflect those characteristics and needs of young adults?
5. Do you believe that all students can succeed and how is that expressed in your actions?
6. How do you establish partnerships with parents and community?
7. What kind of opportunities do you as principal provide to your students so that there is an opportunity to explore a rich variety of topics to develop their identity and demonstrate their competence?
8. How do you insure that students have opportunities to explore, make mistakes, and grow in a safe, caring environment?
9. How do you go about reconnecting your job as principal to the process of teaching and learning?
10. Describe how you are emotionally invested in the job.
11. How do you communicate a vision for continuous organizational improvement and growth?
12. How do you provide opportunities for teachers' professional development that help the faculty better address the needs of young adolescents?
13. How do you get teachers to employ a variety of instructional and assessment approaches and materials?

14. How do you insure that teachers have the necessary resources to effectively perform their teaching responsibilities?
15. Describe how you implement the components of the middle school concept.
16. How do you act as a catalyst for changes?
17. What part do time, training, trust, and support have in the process of change?
18. Each principalship is full of ambiguity and chaos. Describe your ability and flexibility in dealing with ambiguity and chaos.
19. How do you act as an advocate for middle level education and what is best for young adolescents?

### Interview Protocol – Teacher

1. Describe your school and what it is like being a teacher at this school.
2. Describe how your principal designs and implements policies and procedures that reflect the needs of young adolescent.
3. Describe how you as a teacher are included in that design process.
4. How does you principal promote the development of caring relationships between teachers, staff, and students.
5. How does your principal organize the curriculum around real-life concepts?
6. To what extent is your principal an advocate for middle schools and the middle school concept within the district?
7. Is your principal current on what the research says about best practices for middle schools and how does he communicate that research?
8. Does your principal have a vision of what an exemplary middle school is and strive to bring that vision to life.
9. Does your principal demonstrate an understanding of the intellectual, physical, psychological, and social characteristics of young adolescents?
10. Does your principal spend time each day with students?
11. Describe how your principal provides students with opportunities to explore a rich variety of topics in order to develop their identity and demonstrate their competence.
12. How does your principal develop connections with and involve families in the education of their children?
13. Does your principal provide students with opportunities to explore, make mistakes, and grow in a safe, caring environment?
14. Does your principal regard young adolescents as resources in planning and program development and involve then in meaningful roles?

15. Describe how your principal makes decisions based on young adolescent development and effective middle level practices.
16. How does your principal encourages teachers to modify time, grouping, and instructional strategies to help individual students achieve mastery of subject matter?
17. Does the principal encourage teachers in their efforts to respond to the needs of young adolescents? (How?)
18. Describe how your principal encourages teachers in the use of a wide variety of instructional approaches and materials.
19. Describe how your principal creates opportunities for professional development of teachers/staff that address strategies for meeting the needs of young adolescents.
20. How does your principal support appropriate instructional strategies with the necessary resources?
21. How does your principal require teachers to provide classroom activities that address the needs of academically diverse learners who vary greatly in readiness, interest, and learning profile?

## Appendix B

### Observational Instrument

**AREA:**

**NOTES:**

**Responding to the needs of students:**

- Understands the characteristics of young adolescents
- Establishes a learning environment for young adolescents
- Believes that all students can succeed
- Works with parents and the community
- Provides a rich variety of topics
- Allows students to explore, make mistakes in a safe caring environment

**Responding to the needs of teachers**

- Reconnects educational administration to the process of teaching and learning
- Shares a vision of improvement and growth
- Provides professional development that help teachers to meet the needs of teens
- Encourages a wide variety of instructional and assessment approaches
- Provides teachers with resources to perform their teaching responsibilities

**Responding to the needs of the school**

- Implements the middle school concept
- Acts as catalyst and supports change
- Shows flexibility and ability to deal with chaos and ambiguity
- Advocates middle level education and what is best for young adolescents

Describe action in brief terms; note location, participants, and time; use active voice not passive voice.

## VITA

William Larry Stein was born in Tullahoma, Tennessee, and grew up in Manchester, Tennessee. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Education in 1975 and a Master of Arts degree in Education Administration and Supervision in 1985. Both degrees were earned from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. He has since complete study for a Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Policy Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Working experience has included nine years as a classroom teacher in both a private and public high school. This was followed by four years as a classroom teacher in a public middle school. Service at the middle school was interrupted for one year of service to the state of Tennessee Department of Education as a career ladder evaluator. This was followed by eleven years as the principal of the middle school. For the last nine years he has served as Assistant Director of Schools, Supervisor of Instruction, and Federal Programs Director for Sweetwater City Schools in Sweetwater, Tennessee. He also serves on the Monroe County Board of Education. He currently resides in Sweetwater, Tennessee.