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Transforming the Urban Educator: The Power of Reflection and Its Effect on Teacher Perception, Essential Teaching Dispositions, and Teacher Leadership

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Transforming the Urban Educator:

The Power of Reflection and Its Effect on Teacher Perception,

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By Brittany Purr-Brehony

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This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching
and Learning Degree

By Brittany Purr-Brehony

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transforming the Urban Educator:

The Power of Reflection and its Effect on Teacher Perception,

Essential Teaching Dispositions, and Teacher Leadership

By

Brittany Purr-Brehony

Kutztown University of PA, 2021

Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Andrew Miness

To establish the grounds for successful cultural change, within a large urban middle school, members of a school elected Teacher Leadership Team (TLT) engaged in the collaborative sharing and analysis of personal cultural perceptions and essential teaching dispositions. Through the TLT inquiry support team, and their participation in perception interviews and personal narrative reflections, teacher leaders identified and prioritized the successes, challenges, and essential dispositions that are needed to begin the cultural change of Redwood Middle School. Through the implementation of a distributive leadership model, an increase in staff collaboration and support has already begun to plant the seed of positive change. This study proposes the further development of a school-wide distributive leadership model to guide and support the journey of cultural change. This collaborative ethnographic case study honors the educator as researcher, and it is through the sharing of perceptions and narratives that significant insight is gained to begin the process of a true school transformation.

Dedication

To my parents, John & Sue,

for always making me feel

like I have a larger part in this world.

Acknowledgments

To my family, thank you for supporting me in this endeavor. As always, you are always there when I need you the most. This journey was by far the most difficult accomplishment yet. Please know that I could never have gotten this far without all of you.

To my chair, Dr. Miness, the impact that you have made on me will resonate throughout my entire career. Thank you for challenging me to become a better scholar, while still holding true to my voice.

To the Cohort, I am astounded by your passions every day. I have learned so much just from being in your presence. This journey was worth it, just to be able to call you all my friend. Thank you, for being you.

To my RMS teachers and staff, this work is for you. Although it was my pen to paper, your stories and experiences have been my guide. I hope I did you all justice.

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND PURPOSE
A Personal Narrative

It was October and the beginning of legging season. I remember this because I was so excited to wear my new Lularoes to class. With a name like Miss Purr, any clothing that adorns a fluffy fur ball must be added to the wardrobe. This specific pair were bright pink and had the faces of cats all over them. The irony of all this is that I absolutely hate cats, but my students love when I wear anything that represents a symbol of my last name. I believe that my students truly adore my quirky style. For one thing, it brought a smile to their face at 8:00 a.m. As the students walked into the classroom, they immediately took note of the wacky pattern. One student even asked if they were lions on my legs. Another student kindly responded that they were in fact cats, and it was just that Miss Purr had thick calves, so the fabric was stretched. You must love the brutal honesty of middle schoolers. Humor such as this was common in my classroom, and I relish over the fact that the students understood and respected my unique personality. I was never fearful of building student respect, as my students quickly learned that I create a safe space of learning and growing.

After the conversation of lions versus cats had ended, a student walked up to me and asked me to come to his basketball game over the weekend. This was not just any student; this was the student who had forced me to add an extra boost of caffeine into my coffee every morning. Though there were many redeeming qualities, the character of this student was often tested, and unfortunately making the right choice was a struggle. I had worked on building a positive relationship with this student for the last two months, and I finally felt like I was making some headway. As a previous Division I basketball athlete, I was excited to receive the invitation, and I was already thinking of a game plan for the day. The tournament was local;

therefore, it would be no issue to attend the event. After some banter about crossing him over and dropping a double-double, if I ever played against him, I joyously told him that I would be there.

For the next three days, this student reminded me repeatedly, even to the edge of annoyance that his game was this Saturday at 1:15 pm. I firmly stated that I would be there and that I was looking forward to it. The school week progressed, and on Friday right after the dismissal bell, the student waved to me goodbye in the hallway. On the morning of that Saturday, I woke up and did my morning routine. Everything was going as planned, and then . . . I don't remember what happened. To simply put it, I forgot. I forgot to go to his game. Was I upset? Yes! Was I nervous to face the student on Monday? Oh, yes! I was anticipating a verbal blowout. I figured that there would be other games. I would certainly make up for this one mistake, but the reality of the situation was that I let a thirteen-year-old down. I made a promise, and I broke it.

Monday morning rolled around and as the student walked into the classroom, I called him over to my desk. I was extremely apologetic, and unbelievably the student was not overtly upset. He nodded, kept a small grin on his face, and accepted my apology. I was shocked. How could a kid, a kid with a documented temper, simply accept my apology? There was no outburst, no annoyance on any level. When he finally did speak, his words are something that will be a part of my teaching career forever. He told me that it was not a big deal and that he was used to it because that is what his mother does. He nonchalantly told me that his mom says she will come all the time, and that she too never shows up. With a brief smirk and quick exit, the student returned to his desk. In the quickest instant, I went from feeling anxious, to relieved, to utterly negligent. I do not have kids of my own, but I would like to believe that any adult would agree that disappointment should not be the everyday reality of a child.

For that specific student, I was not just his teacher. I was a supporter of his life, and that student was willing enough to invite me to become a part of his outside world. The role of the educator is ever changing, and our responsibility is beyond what has been defined in the contract. From that moment forward, I pledged to never disappoint a student again. Today and forevermore, I am trying to uphold that promise.

Overview

To begin my proposal with my own reflective narrative retelling is a necessity in developing the backstory and purpose of my research topic. Through the sharing of perceptions and reflective storytelling, teachers are empowered, moments are crystalized, dispositions are manifested, and in these readings, future generations of educators gain knowledge. It was John Dewey (1933) who said, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (p. 78). This platform of teacher perception and reflective narrative is paramount in the way that teachers collaborate, learn, and plan for future teaching. In thinking with Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) this study seeks to use perceptions and narratives as the main source of data. Using such data allows for the person's experiences to become the focus and allows for the study to view data in new personalized ways (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). It is through this unique view of data, the reflection and sharing of our professional perceptions and stories, that educators may learn how to navigate the art of teaching. Perceptions and stories, whether of success or failure, may prompt new action, and in result, teachers could model the actions or dispositions most essential to meet the needs of students. The collaborative sharing of such perceptions and reflective narratives may prompt reflective practices in others, as teachers begin to address their own dispositional practices in hopes of gaining knowledge to what dispositions are truly essential. The sharing of this knowledge may reveal essential teaching dispositions that are

student specific and culturally relevant. A purpose of this research is for educators to engage in perception and reflective narrative practice to conceptualize how our viewpoints and personal moments of teaching can positively affect the school culture and future teacher professional development.

My own personal retelling creates a narrative representation of a specific educational moment, a professional perspective of my successes and challenges as an educator. It personifies a moment in which my ideas of what it meant to be an effective teacher were confronted. Reflecting upon this specific story, has allowed me to not only think about what I could have done better, but to also think about what I already positively do. This reflective process, which resulted in the identification of teaching strengths and challenges, needs to be shared so that other educators could learn from this story. The teacher descriptions and actions, to be now referred to as "dispositions," connects specifically to the action or skill sets of the educator. These actions or skill sets are crafted and influenced by our personal beliefs and experiences (Villegas, 2007). If the narrative was read through a more critical lens, the reader will come to understand that these stories of a profound educational moment do provide support in understanding the dispositions that will most successfully impact teaching performance. These experiences of classroom stories; the instances, which are so profound that they need to be remembered, need to be celebrated, communicated, and shared with peers. As identified by Connelly and Clandinin (2016) the power of our stories has the ability to not only support our own personal and professional inquiry, but it also has the power to educate others. Connelly and Clandinin (2016) state,

> We also need to tell our own stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher
> lives. Our own work then becomes one of learning to tell and live a new mutually

constructed account of inquiry in teaching and learning. What emerges from this mutual

relationship are new stories of teachers and learners as curriculum makers, stories that

hold new possibilities for both researchers and teachers and for those who read their

stories (p. 12).

The strength of our stories could empower and educate all teachers and ultimately be a catalyst

for the transforming the RMS culture.

The purpose of this research topic is multi-faceted and was truly created from my own

experiences of hardship and perseverance within RMS. In my five years as an educator, I have

both watched and experienced many obstacles within urban education. I have seen truly devoted

teachers question their abilities to properly teach. The negativity, which is consistently evident,

has left a feeling of hopelessness for the staff. In the past, the building has struggled with

multiple vacancies. These numerous vacancies have caused excessive coverages, as teachers are

forced to give up their prep, sometimes daily, to watch over vacant classrooms. Also, the

building has now implemented a rather extreme all-inclusive model. What this model has done is

over-extend the teacher, as classrooms now include, emotional support students, learning support

students, English language learners, traditional students, and gifted students all in one setting.

Many of the teachers are not trained nor equipped to handle such differentiated instruction, as the

levels of the students are too vast to accommodate. The feeling of hopelessness stems from not

only the stressful demands of the job, but also from the challenges of improper student

placement, as students are often mislabeled or misidentified. These mislabeled or misidentified

students are then placed into a classroom environment that does not meet their needs. The

demand to adequately provide support for an unrealistic classroom composition could be

detrimental to both teacher and student.

Although the problems within my building are various, I do believe that the perceptions and narratives of the RMS teaching staff are significant in determining potential solutions. This research seeks to provide an outlet of reflection for teachers through both the sharing of both cultural perspectives and professional narrative retellings. This study explores a platform for teacher voice, to provide insight into future teacher training and professional development. As supported by DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabar, & Yoak (2016) respected teacher voice and teacher impact on school decision-making creates a balanced school culture. This culture values the beliefs and viewpoints of its educators and provides opportunity to influence potential professional development (DeFlaminis et al., 2016). Through perception interviews and narrative retellings, teachers may reflectively capture significant building successes and challenges as well as essential teaching dispositions. These viewpoints and stories could serve as authentic documentation of how reflective practices are not only used to provide solutions to challenges but are also used to crystalize moments of educational success. The data collected from the perception interviews and the narrative reflections may become a tool for teacher empowerment, teacher voice, and prospective teacher training.

This research will also pursue an understanding of distributive leadership, and how such a model may provide support in sustaining cultural change. This type of cultural transformational change includes "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and action" (Transformative Learning Centre, 2016). Through the implementing and sustaining of a distributive leadership model, members of the RMS school are not seeking minor change. Instead, RMS staff members are seeking to reconceptualize the balance of teacher leadership within the school.

At the forefront of this study is the defining of teacher perspectives and essential teaching dispositions. However, it is the implementation and consistent practice of a distributive leadership model which creates the opportunity to support and sustain the collected data. Through the analysis of perception interviews and narrative reflective stories, evidence may reveal embedded leadership strategies, which could be used to prioritize and then support the most urgent needs of the building. At the core of the distributive leadership model is the collaborate pulse which provides a platform for continuous growth. A hope of this study is that through the implementation of a consistent distributive leadership model, the found perceptions and essential teaching dispositions could be developed into sustaining opportunities of professional development.

Statement of the Problem

The Feeling of Hopelessness

In an interview with a comprehensive school improvement company, I was asked about the culture of my building. I explained that the culture is one of survival that as teachers we are coping to stay afloat. The act of teacher survival can be defined in many ways. In my professional perspective, the educators at RMS fight to survive the challenge of four domains: accommodating such a multitude of educational levels, remaining flexible in the often-chaotic experiences, balancing the inundated workload beyond teaching content, and navigating the stressors of teaching without adequate support. The compilation of such challenges leaves the educator feeling hopeless. As defined by Birmingham (2009),

> Hopelessness is experienced as sorrow but actually occurs when the object of hope is
> mistakenly deemed irrefutably lost or impossible to attain . . . A teacher with little hope

may not have the moral strength to do the challenging moral work required to be caring,

fair, honest, and responsible, much less to promote social justice, maintain high

standards, and commit to a safe and supportive learning environment (p. 33).

It is this feeling of hopelessness which has challenged the building's ability to develop a positive

school culture.

Lack of Professional Reflection

The art of reflection not only provides an outlet for advanced understanding and teaching

transformation, but it also provides the teacher with the ability to document the educational

successes and challenges within their classrooms. Both Brookfield (1987) & Daudelin (1996),

define reflection as a skill set for problem solving, as educators are asked to embark on a journey

of developing solutions for educational challenges. This research will call on the reflection of

perceptions, as select educators will engage in interviews to voice their viewpoints and

perspectives on building culture. This study will also question the role of reflection as solely a

solution seeking exercise and will seek to redefine the act of reflection as a process of

documenting and celebrating the victories which are already occurring in the classroom. Through

the professional narrative reflections, participants will be able to celebrate and share a profound

teaching moment. Although reflection may be advocated within the school building, there has

been no formal training or personal development presented to highlight the usage of such

teaching strategy.

Teacher Empowerment

In understanding the needs of the students, a teacher's perspective will help to promote

the evaluation of student priorities and essential teaching dispositions. In the educational setting,

the teachers are the first lines of interaction with the students. Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) would refer to this role of the teacher as "street level bureaucrats" (p. 172), as the direct contact between teacher and student reveals unprecedented experiences and knowledge. As teachers, we need to be empowered through the questioning of what our students need, especially in the context of teaching dispositions. To empower teachers, voices must be heard, and relational trust must be built across school members. To develop relational trust, teachers must focus on an inclusive and united team identity. This identity is further created and focused through the creation of a collaborative team mission and vision (DeFlaminis et al., 2016).

Teacher empowerment could solidify belief in possible transformational change. As stated by York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie (2001),

Teachers must believe that positive and significant change is possible. As they join together, they begin to realize that others, like themselves, are interested in and committed to significant and positive improvements in the teaching and learning process. Together, improvement seems possible (p. 125).

Through the empowerment of teacher collaboration and reflection, teachers may experience elements of distributive leadership. This supportive leadership platform may support teacher growth, as educators begin to share the modeling of these prioritized teaching dispositions with each other. Teacher empowerment is both upheld and continuously nurtured in a distributive leadership model.

Research Questions

A goal of this research is to provide a space for reflection to potentially transform the culture of RMS. To understand the significance of reflection, teachers will engage in cultural

perception interviews and will develop a narrative retelling, which will highlight their most profound experiences with students. These perceptions and narratives could directly and indirectly document building successes and challenges, as well as unveil essential teaching dispositions. The data collected may then be organized for future teacher training, as the successes of the building could be shared and duplicated, the challenges could be further analyzed and discussed for solution building, and the essential teaching dispositions could be prioritized for future professional development. To provide a support system for data driven change, this study will also evaluate elements of distributive leadership, which may be utilized to support true transformational change. Therefore, this research study will investigate the following research questions:

> 1.How do staff members at a large urban middle school perceive student and staff culture within their own building?
>
> 2.What teacher dispositions are most essential in an urban middle school setting?
>
> 3.How does narrative reflection identify essential teaching dispositions?
>
> 4.How is teacher leadership defined in an urban middle school setting?

Background and Context

In understanding the urgency of this research, it is necessary to address the landscape of my school building. Redwood Middle School (RMS) is an urban middle school in Pennsylvania. This newly resurrected middle level academic setting is the home to nearly 2,400 students. According to the Future Ready PA Index (2021), 95.8% of the student population is deemed economically disadvantaged, and 100% of the student body receives free and reduced lunch. In relation to the academic achievement based upon state standardized assessments, the 2018-2019 school year yielded scores of 19.2% proficiency in English Language Arts and a score of 4.1%

proficiency in Mathematics. In comparison to state averages, this school building scored 42.9%

below average in English Language Arts and 40.1% below average in Mathematics (Future

Ready PA Index, 2021). These statistics have prompted a comprehensive school improvement

plan, which places monumental amounts of responsibility onto all stakeholders. Members of the

state, in conjunction with school and community representatives, have created a list of

mandatory actions steps to strengthen the cultural success of the building. As a necessary

advocate of change, now, more than ever, the teacher is asked to reflect upon their own teaching

practices to provide the most effective supports and teaching strategies for students. Teachers are

tasked with the challenging duty of recognizing what we could do better as educators to alter the

educational, social, and emotional climate of our building. This research study advocates for the

importance of reflective practice in education, while simultaneously promoting the

empowerment of teachers as leaders. Through a perspective and narrative inquiry platform,

teachers will be able to engage in two reflective practices. Through this process, teachers will be

able to personally reflect upon the successes and challenges of RMS as well as prioritize

essential teaching dispositions. Through the sharing of these experiences, pertinent knowledge of

how to assess and begin cultural building transformation may emerge.

<div align="center">**Potential Significance**</div>

Providing educators with a platform to share their reflective perspectives and narratives is

necessary in understanding and developing a plan to meet the needs of our students. Allowing

these viewpoints and stories to serve as potential knowledge may be essential in transforming the

culture within RMS. Maksimovic (2018) developed a study in which reflective practices were

analyzed in changing the student perspectives of teachers. The results of her study revealed an

increase in student satisfaction, which was accredited to the teachers' active participation with

reflection. In her conclusion, Maksimovic (2018) states, "The main aspects of reflective practices are collaborating and exchanging experiences with colleagues" (p. 187). The act of sharing our perceptions and stories could potentially develop a plan for effective change. The potential significance of the collected data could alter the outlook of future professional development, as this data will ultimately address the successes, challenges, and essential teaching dispositions of RMS.

Theoretical Framework

There are three theories which have become the foundation of this study's theoretical framework. The theories are Experiential Learning Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Distributive Leadership Theory.

Experiential Learning Theory

The first theory that supports the development of this research is Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Developed by Kolb (1984), experiential theory is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). As stated, learning is manifested through a cycle of experience, reflection, and action. Experiential learning is achieved when the educator willingly participates and examines themselves through four modes,

> Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities – concreate experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualization abilities (AC), and active experimentation (AE). That is, they must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences (CE). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO). They must be able

to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC), and

they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problem (AE) (Kolb,

1984, p. 30).

This research study upholds the modes of Kolb (1984) yet chooses to prioritize certain modes

within a specific order. For example, the emphasis of this research relies on RO, and the

teacher's ability to reflect through both perception interviews as well as narrative writing. It is

then this study's hope that the data produced may help to create the AC; logical theories of

building successes and challenges as well as the essential teaching dispositions that could best

uphold the positive and combat the negative. This data could also influence AE, with the

possibility of highlighting strategic topics for future professional development. It is the ability to

actively engage in modes two through four, which may allow for a clearer understanding and

evaluation of how to engage in CE. Through the authentic examination of teacher perspectives

and past teaching experiences with narrative, this study creates foundation that could heighten

the educator's ability to engage with experiential learning more actively.

Critical Race Theory

Another aspiration of this study is to both shed light to possible teacher bias caused by

racial differences as well as define teacher dispositions that consider the injustices, which are

socially constructed within our urban school building. Determining the necessity of this study

lies in the need to distinguish the root cause of the issue; why do teachers need to transform their

teaching dispositions and how does society play a role in this transformation? The answer to

these questions may lie in the changing landscape of student composition. Paris (2017) states,

"Within twenty years public schools are projected to be upwards of sixty-five percent students of

color" (p. 3). Documented by the United Stated Department of Education (2018), 79.3% of all

public-school educators are White. As determined by the National Center for Education Statistics

(2019), RMS is currently the home to 84% students of color. As the racial composition of

students change, it is only natural that the art of teaching change as well. This teaching

transformation may call for an educator's reflection of the systematic racism in public schools,

and a newfound acceptance and respect of our students' culture (Yosso, 2006). This study was

designed to investigate teacher perceptions to better understand viewpoints and beliefs

surrounding both student and faculty culture. This study was also designed to identify the

teaching dispositions which may be essential for the students we serve today, the authentically

diverse students that fill our classrooms.

Delgado and Stefancic (2013) speak to the power of stories and counterstories. I found

connections to my own research and CRT in that a story has an ability to transform one's outlook

and understanding. In my specific study, I am transforming the stories of two entities. First, I am

seeking to challenge the hopelessness of an educator through narrative reflection. The stories,

which dominate the negativity of my building, are not all inclusive, as there are counterstories

which speak to the culturally relevant teaching and positive dispositional success that is already

occurring. The act of the narrative reflections seeks to bring light to the positive, as the

counterstories of cultural awareness and successful teacher action will share just as much value

as the stories of struggle. Second, the development of culturally responsive and essential

dispositions may develop new counterstories, ones which will hopefully change the negative

perceptions of the building's culture from within and will ultimately change the teaching

pedagogy to one of cultural acceptance and understanding.

Distributive Leadership Theory

The final theory that supports the development of this research is Distributed Leadership Theory (DLT). As the landscape of public education continually changes, the models and structures set in place for effective educator and building leadership also needs to change. As expressed through Harris and Spillane (2008),

In the increasingly complex world of education the work of leadership will require diverse types of expertise and forms of leadership flexible enough to meet changing challenges and new demands. There is a growing recognition that the old organisational structures of schooling simply do not fit the requirements of learning in the twenty-first century (p. 31).

To best serve the demands of twenty-first century learning, leadership within buildings needs to be equitably divided, so that school-wide culture may be supported upon the vast expertise of all stakeholders. The urgency of developing a consistent and effective distributive leadership model is directly related to the systems which may be needed to effectively assist in the efforts of transformational change. DeFlaminis et al., (2016) provided a list of leadership activities that could be implemented to create improvement in instruction. This list includes, "planning professional development, designing school policies, forming teams, and setting instructional goals" (p. 147-148). It is leadership activities such as these that may be needed to drive the data of this study into fruition. The knowledge revealed could be utilized to create positive change. However, the leaders within the building will have to support and scaffold the purpose and importance of those changes.

In describing a successful distributed leadership team, DeFlaminis et al., (2016) stated,

> They [strong distributed leadership teams] were defined by norms of trust and
>
> collaboration. Teacher leaders played strong roles in leading conversations, particularly
>
> around instruction. Administrators respected teacher voice and abided by shared decision
>
> making structures, creating the space for teacher leaders to influence the leadership
>
> practices of the school (p.156).

This depiction of a successfully implemented distributive leadership model provides a clear
understanding of the value of such a collaborative approach to educational growth and learning.
In this model, dispositional practices of trust and collaboration are at the core of teamwork, and
teachers have increased autonomy, as their voice and viewpoints are respected by those in
administration. It is apparent that through a distributive leadership model, RMS may finally have
the opportunity to not only transform the building culture but to develop a sustaining structure of
support and growth. These leadership practices could be the remedy to end teacher hopelessness,
increase teacher reflection, and empower all RMS educators. This has always been my wish for
RMS.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be personified throughout this research study:

Community knowledge: Depicts a teacher who engages with their students' community outside
of the classroom (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Coping with violence: Depicts a teacher who celebrates effort (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Cultural conflicts: Depicts a teacher who is aware of and prepared for the differences between
community and school cultures (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Cultural human development: Depicts a teacher who is aware and understanding of the factors that influence the lives of our students (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Dispositions: A teacher's actions or skill sets which are crafted by personal beliefs and experiences (Villegas, 2007).

Distributive leadership: A leadership system that is upheld through balanced partnerships. Leaders may vary depending on the context and need of the building (DeFlaminis et al., 2016 & Spillane, 2006).

Empathy: Depicts a teacher who has understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for their students and their families (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Functioning in chaos: Depicts a teacher who can survive in a disorganized environment (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Generating sustained effort: Depicts a teacher who celebrates effort (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Perceptions: the discourse that personifies the successes and challenges that will help to develop transformation (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

Reflection: The process of evaluating the evidence and experiences that helps shape our understanding and future actions (Dewey, 1993).

Relationship Skills: Depicts a teacher who is accepting of diversity and is respectful of all (Haberman & Post, 1998). This definition extends to include a teacher who can build meaningful and supportive connections with students.

Relevant curriculum: Depicts a teacher who connects content to the value of the students' lives (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Self-acceptance: Depicts a teacher who exudes confidence and pride (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Self-analysis: Depicts a teacher who engages in reflection and embraces change (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Self-knowledge: Depicts a teacher who understands and embraces their own cultural roots (Haberman & Post, 1998).

Transformation: A complete reconstruction in the thoughts, beliefs, actions, and processes of a school building (Transformative Learning Centre, 2014).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To build upon the understanding of this research, this literature review seeks to explore four fundamental domains. This literature review, through both critically developed theory and research will investigate teacher perception and the educational impacts of reflection, the overarching dispositional themes of Haberman & Post (1998), the power of narrative story, as well as the central elements of distributed leadership.

Developing a Positive School Culture Through Reflection and Shared Perception

It was John Dewey (1933) who identified reflection "as a process of obtaining evidence to support our knowledge and beliefs and allows individuals to make conclusions about the future" (as cited in Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006, p. 500). Barnett and O'Mahony (2006) further identify the process of reflection as an examination of past experiences and behaviors to make well-thought-out choices in the future. Reflection allows for the individual to reconcile or celebrate past experiences, while acknowledging that these experiences will ultimately affect future choices. When reflecting through a professional means, this approach, "emphasizes teachers' interpretations of the context in which their decisions are made and the validity of their judgements drawn from their own experiences" (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991, p. 42). Therefore, a consequence of reflection is the development of our own perceptions. Through two distinct acts of reflection, select educators will have the opportunity to interpret their perceptions of school culture as well as share their experiences of profound teaching moments. It is this study's desire to engage in avid teacher reflection to possibly identify building successes and challenges, while unveiling essential dispositional teaching practices to both support continued positive change as well as provide possible solutions for challenges. The engaged discourse of

these perceptions will support the investigation of success and challenges in efforts to develop

necessary knowledge for cultural transformation (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

The goal of Barnett & O'Mahony's (2006) work was to personify the reflective practice

to advocate school improvement. It is when the community of teachers come together and all

share in the same vision and mission that the process of reflective practices may have the most

influence (DeFlaminis et al., 2016). My study seeks to integrate reflective practices, which too

may yield school improvement. This reflective process will begin with "reflective questioning"

(Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2006, p. 509). The reflective questioning will call upon the Teacher

Leadership Team to engage in two rounds of perception interviews and to develop a written

retelling of a profound teaching moment. In response, these reflective activities may empower

these teachers, as they acknowledge their perceptions and profound teaching moments as

experiences for both personal and school community growth. This process has the potential to

bring to light two RMS realizations. One, through the sharing of school culture perceptions,

teachers may identify the varied successes and challenges within the school building. Through

this identification, educators at RMS will now have a cohesive list, created by their teacher

leaders, of what is already positively impacting the school building, and what may need to be

prioritized as a topic of improvement. Two, the written engagement of a reflective narrative may

reveal essential teaching dispositions that are needed to sustain the already positively developed

pieces of school culture, while identifying the essential teaching dispositions which are most

needed to positively transform the challenges. This improved culture will hopefully be created

through the "collaborative efforts (of a) shared vision" (Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2006, p. 513). A

goal of my study is to create a positive culture through the sharing of knowledge which could be

gained from our teaching perceptions and reflections.

The positive effects of the reflective process as outlined by Barnett & O'Mahony (2006) personifies the work of a true "reflective practitioner" (Maksimovic, 2018, p. 172). According to Maksimovic (2018), a reflective practitioner is an educator who signifies the reflective process as a tool to continuously learn and achieve. As the study of Barnett & O'Mahony (2006) examined the students' perceptions of the effects of a teacher's reflective practice, my own research will focus on the educator's perceptions and reflections. Through the investigation of these perceptions and reflections, teachers will authentically contribute to the conversation of their responsibility in building upon a better school culture and the actions that need to occur to effectively support this change.

In a study developed by Soisangwarn & Wongwanich (2014), middle school teachers in Thailand engaged in the reflective practice of peer coaching. This style of reflective practice "involves colleagues collaborating and sharing ideas, thoughts, and observations" (p. 2505). The goal of the peer coaching practices was to increase a promotion in self-reflection and collaboration, in effort to increase the betterment of teaching pedagogy and learning. To simulate peer coaching demeanor, teachers were organized into professional learning communities (PLCs). The functions and goals of these PLCs greatly mimics this study's utilization of the Teacher Leadership Team.

The procedure of Soisangwarn & Wongwanich's (2014) research is broken down into three phases. Phase 1includes a conceptual change, Phase 2 develops the practice to become a reflective teacher, and Phase 3 provides an outlet for self-assessment of reflection and teaching skills. The figure below, visually identifies these changes.

Figure 1

Three Phases of Research (Soisangwarn & Wongwanich, 2014)
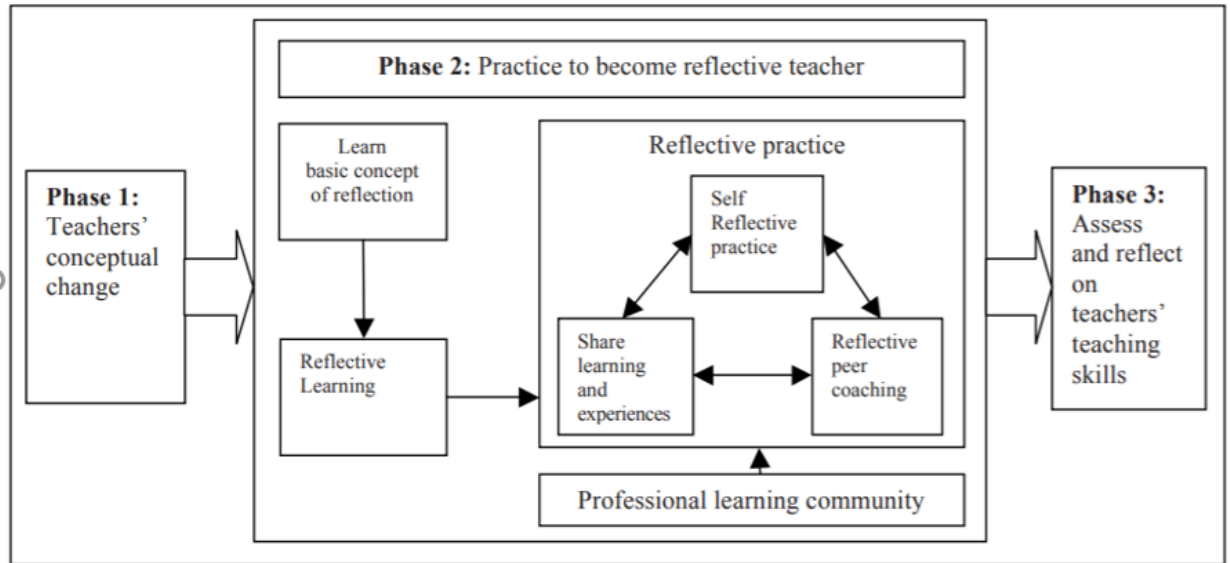
In evaluating the procedures of my own reflective study, the phases of research as

analyzed by Soisangwarn & Wongwanich (2014) are consistent with the long-term goals of this

research. However, my study's procedure represents the phases in reverse, as my study begins

with the self-evaluation and reflective assessment of school cultural perceptions and teaching

dispositions. The assessment and reflection of this study are intertwined, as the assessment of

school culture and the reflection on essential teaching dispositions may trustfully lead to the

knowledge that is needed to develop cultural change. It is only after the analysis of the teacher

perceptions and reflective data that the Teacher Leadership Team and this research may be able

to make recommendations for future professional development.

As previous identified, 79.3% of public-school teachers are White (U.S. Department of

Education (2018). The disparity between the race of public urban educators and their students is

a topic that has been consistently researched and studied. Research has shown that differences in

race between teachers and students does significantly affect student success and teacher

perceptions (Dee, 2005 and Martinez, 2018). The abundantly White racial composition of the

teachers at RMS greatly differs from the vast and majorly Hispanic population of the students.

The reality of the difference in racial composition and culture from staff to student body, may

influence the perceptions of the teacher. In a study conducted by Martinez (2018), the

perceptions of teachers were analyzed to investigate if student diversity played a role in how

teachers viewed student problems. The research concluded that teacher's perceptions are in fact

affected by the racial diversity within the classroom. The data revealed that "White teachers

perceive more student problems than non-White teachers" (Martinez, 2018, p. 1003).

To help decrease racial perceptions, the work of Martinez (2018) develops an argument

for more teacher training, specifically aligned to the understanding and sensitivity to other

cultural groups. Like Martinez (2018), a goal of this research it to prioritize topics of training to

provide teacher support and school cultural change. However, it is through the act of reflection,

the sharing of perceptions and narrative writing, that a platform may be created to safely discuss

how racial differences could affect the educational process at RMS.

Across the country, there has been an urgency for reflection. In the wake of police

brutality and the murder of George Floyd, many Americans, independent of skin color, turned

towards reflection as a means of re-evaluating their own perceptions of racism. In June of 2020,

74% of Americans believed that the death of George Floyd was a clear example of the systemic

racism that continues to impact our country (Karson, 2020). In comparison to similar survey

results, this data revealed a thirty-point increase in the belief that America is challenged with

racial injustice (Karson, 2020). The realities of racial injustice are not only reflected upon at the

school level, but it has become apparent that the topic of racism is also in the forefront of

American minds.

As educators, we not only reflected on our perceptions of racism, but we also reflected

upon the dispositional practices that would best meet the needs of our marginalized groups of

students. As a white, female educator, teaching in a predominantly Hispanic student population, I

am constantly searching for solutions to rid the perils of systemic racism within my own

classroom. Paris (2017) questions the act of reflection as a process for uncovering the systemic

racism which is historically embedded in school curriculums. Paris (2017) states, "One crucial

starting place for moving toward culturally sustaining teaching and learning is to think deeply

about how we are situated in systems and spaces that perpetuate the curricularization of racism"

(p. 3). As described by Paris (2017), the response to evaluating and producing plausible solutions

to systemic racism begins with the art of reflection.

In September of 2020, *Education Weekly* ran an article questioning the public teacher's

authentic advocacy of the Black Lives Matter Movement. According to the article,

> It is not enough for teachers to say that Black lives matter. Teachers must live those
>
> words; school districts must live those words as well. But not all teachers believe that
>
> Black lives matter, and not all teachers believe that Black lives matter enough to abandon
>
> textbooks that devalue Blackness, elevate whiteness, and seek texts that portray
>
> American history accurately (Miller, 2020).

As developed through this work, the urgency of reflecting upon systemic racism in schools has

become even more prioritized, as now more than ever, educators must evaluate the root of their

perceptions and teacher dispositional practices to ensure a trusting and equitable classroom. In

following the guidance of Ladson-Billings (1995) and the beliefs in culturally relevant pedagogy, the teachers who engage in such a process recognize knowledge as being continuously "recreated, recycled, and shared" (p. 163). Investing in Ladson Billing's (1995) model, the act of recreated could represent the teacher's lived experiences, as they reflect upon those moments in time. The act of recycled may refer to the reflection process and its ability to salvage the teaching skills are already deemed successful. Last, the process of shared is inclusive of the collaboration and sharing of such perceptions and experiences. Through the process of reflection, it is my hope that the school culture of Redwood Middle School will continue to grow with and through a multitude of reflective and collaborative experiences.

Investigating Essential Teaching Dispositions

Much research has been conducted and theorized regarding the investigation of essential urban teaching pedagogy. However, it was Ladson-Billings (1995), who through her witnessing and examination of cultural relevant teaching, urged all educators alike to invest in the pedagogical research process. Ladson-Billings (1995) believed that the key to finding good teaching was as simple as observing teachers in their authentic workspace. Ladson Billings (1995) promoted the idea that the most effective way to come to know and understand the essential and best teaching practices was to share in the lived experiences of your fellow educators. In valuing the teaching artform, Ladson-Billings (1995) stated, "Their [the teacher's] unique perspectives and personal investment in good practice must not be overlooked." Therefore, the investigation of essential urban teaching dispositions requires a thorough examination of both professional teaching perceptions as well as the experienced teaching narratives of educators.

Terms or phrases such as teaching strategies, teaching skill sets, and even teaching practices have all been utilized to express the understanding of what specific actions a teacher needs to engage in to successfully impact their students. In defining the actions and skill sets of educators within their own work setting, this study chooses to use the word "dispositions." Borrowing from the definition of Villegas (2007), "dispositions are tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs" (p. 373). The important elements of this definition articulate that the dispositions are actionable; in that they can be observed by others. Another important element of this definition is that the dispositions are created based upon personal beliefs and perspectives. Therefore, how we perceive or believe are students to be, will in fact impact our dispositional practices (Dee, 2005 & Martinez, 2018).

 Although the term "teaching dispositions" is not novel to the education profession, there is a contradiction in the importance of such teaching qualities, as there is a gap in the significance of honing those skills in teacher education programs. Thornton (2006) states, "Knowledge, skills, and dispositions are embraced within these standards as essential elements of teacher preparation and teacher quality, yet dispositions remain a neglected part of teacher education" (p. 53). I find truth in Thornton's reality, as teaching programs focus on theory and pedagogy, but neglect developing a certain skill set of teacher dispositions. In hopes of bridging these dispositional gaps, my study seeks to identify the most essential dispositions at RMS, to provide tangible data, which can be used to drive conversation and support potential teacher training and ultimately cultural change.

Sharing likeness to the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2010) developed the six tenets of culturally responsive teaching. According to Gay (2010), the six tenets of culturally responsive teaching are validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering,

transformative, and emancipatory. Each of these tenets include a rather robust description of the

necessary knowledge, views, and teaching dispositions needed to adhere to the culturally

responsive teaching demeanor. Such descriptions include many facets of the teaching profession

and may require further breakdown of the overall tenet term to truly grasp all the responsive

responsibilities. For example, the tenet of culturally responsive teaching as multidimensional

"encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher

relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments" (Gay, 2020, p. 31).

Although the inclusivity of such diverse and abundant teaching elements is truly

multidimensional, the unpacking of such essential teacher responsibilities as dispositions could

be difficult to comprehend.

The work of Khalil & Brown (2015) is also responsible for laying the groundwork of

defining essential urban teaching dispositions. This research depicts the qualities of a highly

effective urban educator. Khalil and Brown (2015) developed the "3C's: (a) cultural competency,

including cultural awareness, experience, and understanding; (b) communication skills bridging

urban teaching and learning; and (c) commitment to serve students and the community" (p. 77),

and it is in their study that such teacher qualities were analyzed through the urban teacher hiring

process. This study incorporated qualitative interviews with school leaders, which examined

problems in urban teacher recruitment and hiring, equitable distribution of new hires, and

potential solutions to these problems. The conclusion of this study reflected upon the importance

of content knowledge as well as the 3C's in reviewing potential teacher candidates.

What is notable about this study is the lack of teacher opinion in what defines the 3C's, as

well as what qualities and or dispositions are essential for an urban teacher candidate. Unlike

Khalil & Brown (2015), this study seeks to analyze the experiences of the teachers, who are

ultimately on the front lines of education. Although there is significant value in listening to the dispositional beliefs of all stakeholders, this study seeks to define the experiences of the teaching staff, which may offer the most authentic perceptions and narratives of what is occurring in the classrooms. Through the collaboration of teachers and the sharing of these perceptions and narratives, it is a goal of this study to utilize teacher voice in hopes of discovering a targeted set of dispositional practices which are specific to the unique needs of RMS students.

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education held a forum entitled, "Great Expectations: Reforming Urban High Schools" (Lewis et al., 2000). It was during this forum that fifteen of the most high-stake and poverty driven urban districts, which included Philadelphia, met to review and "to share the best practices for reforming high poverty urban high schools" (Lewis et al., 2000 p. 4). The forum lasted two days, and the present stakeholders included central office administrators, curriculum and instruction directors, and principals. Within the summary of discussion, ten points were deemed to be most essential in establishing proper urban reform. Of those ten points, seven of them included the questioning and or transforming of the dispositional practices of educators. Some of the major points of summary were, the building of student-teacher relationships, differences in practitioner agendas, implementation of research-based strategies, leadership professional development, pedagogy changes and increased technology, articulating and applying high standards, and high commitment (Lewis et. al., 2000, pp. 5-6).

I believe that the results of this forum produce two significant insights. The first, which is like the study of Khalil & Brown (2015), depicts a lack of teacher voice in decision making. To truly gain teacher buy-in and the authenticity of teacher voice, such forums need to include the experiences of teaching staff. Second, the broadness of the reform points, leave for much interpretation. For example, point number one states, "Successful reform efforts are initiatives

that are centered on local relationships such as student-teacher interaction" (Lewis et al., 2015, p. 5). I agree that almost all stakeholders would attest to the importance of student-teacher relationships, but the essence of truly establishing school reform is providing solutions on how to do so. Therefore, how can teachers strengthen and create better bonds with their students, if there is not a clear plan of action? It is a goal of this research study to not only establish the needed teacher dispositions, but to ultimately provide insight into what these dispositional practices may look like in a classroom. Through both the interview process as well as the narrative reflection, this study has the potential to discover valued dispositions that could become essential for all educators at Redwood Middle School.

Haberman & Post (1998) have developed the teacher knowledge base for multicultural learning, which will be applied to my study as the thematic analysis of teacher dispositions. Through their research, which spans over forty years, Haberman & Post (1998) have outlined "twelve teacher attributes for offering a multicultural program, focusing on specific teacher qualities and ideologies" (p. 97). The chart below depicts the twelve teacher attributes and or dispositions that will be used for analysis.

Table 1: Haberman & Post, 12 Teacher attributes

Self-knowledge	Depicts a teacher who understands and embraces their cultural roots. These teachers urge students to explore and their own culture
Self-acceptance	Depicts a teacher who exudes confidence and pride.
Relationship skills	Depicts a teacher who is accepting of diversity and is respectful of equality of all.
Community knowledge	Depicts teachers who engage with their students' community outside of the classroom.
Empathy	Depicts a teacher who has understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for their student and their family.

Table 1. Continued

Cultural human development	Depicts a teacher who is aware and understanding of the factors that influence the lives of their students.
Cultural conflicts	Depicts a teacher who is aware of and prepared for the differences between community and school cultures.
Relevant curriculum	Depicts a teacher who connects content to the value of the students' lives.
Generating sustained effort	Depicts a teacher who celebrates effort.
Coping with violence	Depicts a teacher who has skills for preventing and de-escalating violence.
Self-analysis	Depicts a teacher who engages in reflection and embraces change.
Functioning in chaos	Depicts a teacher who can survive in a disorganized environment.

The strength in the attributes created by Haberman & Post (1998) lies in the fact that each of these dispositions are defined with specific skill sets that can be tangibly witnessed when observing a classroom. The ability to authentically view these attributes within a classroom, develops an understanding that these characteristics can be identified as observable teacher dispositions, and therefore can be modeled and taught. As an educator within an urban school setting, I felt as though the dispositions developed by Haberman & Post (1998) spoke to many of the experiences witnessed at Redwood Middle School. Upon researching potential dispositional themes, I wanted to find a theory that closely fit to the realities of what RMS teachers have experienced, as well as a proposed language and or jargon that was easily understood. In my opinion, Haberman & Post (1998) have created both authentic and observable dispositional practices, which greatly speak to the current culture at RMS.

Like Haberman & Post (1998), who argues "that only teachers with a particular set of attributes and ideology can offer a multicultural curriculum" (p. 98), I believe that these dispositions can be taught to any educator willing to invest in the process of reflection,

collaborative sharing, and support. Haberman & Post (1998) also explain how such teachers acquire these dispositions. Significant to learning these dispositions is the authentic experience of teaching, as well as the need for a true teacher mentor. A goal of this research is for the Teacher Leadership Team to develop a mentor-like responsibility, as these teachers have been identified as the strongest teacher leaders within RMS, and therefore have the knowledge to be a support for other educators.

Haberman & Post (1998) state that a "teacher's preferred way of learning is to observe colleagues whom they regard as credible because they are successful with similar students in the same school system" (p. 99). The sharing of perspectives and reflective narratives is a form of observation, as the told perspectives and narratives could reveal insights and truths about the successes and challenges at RMS. Unlike physically walking into a classroom, this form of observation will allow multitudes of teachers to learn from the past experiences of some of the most credible and respected teachers in the school. The conversations that may be developed through this type of reflection could allow teachers to engage in authentic discussions about successful dispositional practices. This collaboration indirectly develops mentorship, as teachers are speaking upon their school perceptions and narratives to potentially help the future educational practices of others.

Through the guidance of Haberman and Post's (1998) twelve dispositions, my study seeks to discover which dispositional practices are truly essential to meet the unique needs of the students at Redwood Middle School. Thornton (2006) references Wenzlaff (1998) in stating, "teacher education must be concerned with more than teaching methods, classroom management, lesson-design and assessment. In fact, for teachers to be more than mere 'cogs' in a technical process they must possess the dispositions necessary to teach and reach students" (Thornton,

2006). It is a goal that through the evaluation of current dispositional teaching practices at RMS, evidence of essential dispositional practices will emerge to help prioritize the future and needed training of the staff.

Coined by Christopher Emdin (2016), this study is seeking to define a form of "reality pedagogy" (p. 27) that fits the specific needs of our current RMS students. It was Emdin (2016) that said,

> Reality pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf . . . Most importantly, it begins with the acceptance of the often-overlooked fact that there are cultural differences between students and their teachers that make it difficult for teachers to be reflective and effective, while providing a set of steps that allow these misalignments to be overcome (p. 30).

Profound to the goals of this study is that fact that reality pedagogy uplifts and honors the culture of the students, and it is the educator who creates the culture of the students as the foundation of all learning. Reality pedagogy does not shy away from the difficult conversations of race. Instead, this teaching practice recognizes the difference in student to teacher racial composition and develops the systems for increased reflection and teaching effectiveness. Like the beliefs of Emdin (2016), this study seeks to develop a system of dispositional teaching practices that may develop a unique form of reality pedagogy which could ultimately meet the needs of the diverse RMS student body.

The Significance of Teacher Growth Through Narrative

Stress and the teaching profession have developed an unsettling relationship. According to a study conducted by Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, and Reinke (2018), 93% of teachers within their urban school study sample identified themselves as characterized by high levels of stress. This stress will cause nearly 46% of educators to abandon the teaching profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2002). The alarming rates of both teacher stress and teacher turnover greatly impact the behavioral and academic achievement of students, as a teacher's low self-efficacy greatly affects an educator's ability to teach and manage classrooms (Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2007). A teacher's self-efficacy is defined as "teachers' beliefs about their capabilities to organize and execute actions that lead to a positive learning environment" (Poulou, Reddy, & Dudek, 2019, p. 27). In connecting this research study to the self-efficacy work of Bandura (1977), the idea of obtaining increased self-efficacy can be sought through Bandura's four proposed domains. One of these domains highlights a teacher's ability to increase self-efficacy through vicarious means. These vicarious means may include the power of narrative reflection, and how storied experiences could both educate and transform teaching practices and dispositions.

It was John Dewey (1933) who so eloquently connected the idea of experience with education. Based upon Dewey's belief, there is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). This linked connection between what our lives have endured and how those stories can be used to educate others, supports the very foundation of this research study. Dewey (1933) suggests the importance of an experience lies within its quality. This quality derives from the experiencer's ability to categorize the moment as positive or negative, a success or a challenge. As educators, we have experienced both moments of success as well as

moments of challenge. No matter what the occurrence, we all can learn from those experiences. The experiences we encounter, create the stories that will impact and empower future events and decisions. The influence of Dewey directly relates to this study's goal of providing educational narrative reflections to support future teacher dispositional success and positive school-wide cultural change. Through the retelling of teacher experiences within reflective narratives, other educators will hopefully come to understand how the experiences of others may empower their teaching actions and dispositions.

In speaking to the strength of narrative experience and its possibility to educate, it is nearly impossible to not reflect on the words of Chimamanda Adichie (2009), and her examination of narrative in *The Dangers of a Single Story.* It is in this modernly relevant Ted Talk address that Adichie speaks to the ever-urgent threat of only viewing stories through one lens. The monotonous recycling of the negative narrative has created an educational divide in two distinct ways. One, we as educators have preconceived narratives as to how to define our students. These stereotypical stories, which have been brought to recent light and are viewed as methods of systemic racism effect our dispositional teaching outlook and potential practices even before the students enter our classrooms. In a study conducted by Vaught & Castagno (2008), two large urban American high schools, named Jericho and Zion, engaged in a study which analyzed teacher attitudes towards race, racism, and white privilege. These observed teacher attitudes were analyzed at the conclusion of a series on anti-bias professional development sessions. Data was collected through interview, observation, and participation. The results of this study state,

> White privilege, and institutionalized racism, was understood by teachers in Jericho and
> Zion as contingent upon local context and so was cast as an entirely individual

experience. They communicated no recognition that their privilege moved with them

from context to context and that their authority as White teachers of children of color was

highly powerful and determinative (Delpit 1988). And, they seemed unaware of the fact

that White institutions create power hierarchies with or without the immediate presence

of White students (Fine 1997; Fordham 1996; Lipman 2004). As one mixed White/First

Nation female teacher suggested to Vaught, 'I think that all Whites don't understand the

fact that they're privileged because they are White. (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 101).

The developed data from this study speaks to a White ignorance, which can be depicted by the

teacher participant's lack of recognizing the presence or even the impact of racial bias.

Within the walls of Redwood Middle School and as identified through the Future Ready

PA Index (2020), only 5% of Redwood Middle School's students identified as White. With a

staff of 147 educators, most of which who are White, there is a large discrepancy between the

student and staff culture, race, and ethnicity. Therefore, these narrative reflections hope to

provide a foundation for collaborative communication that needs to prioritize educator

dispositions which value the needs of the students were serve today. It is with the guidance of

Ladson-Billings (1995) that educators can begin to reflect upon their own white privilege, to

provide a socially just education for all students. Ladson Billings (1995) and the pedagogical

approach to culturally relevant teaching has been so richly embedded in multi-cultural education.

This approach to teaching personifies the three foundations of how teachers should choose to

reflect upon their own teaching practices and dispositions. Ladson-Billings (1995) states,

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must

experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural

competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they

challenge the status quo of the current social order (p.160).

It is my hope that through the process of narrative reflection, collaboration, and the

acknowledgement of culturally relevant teaching that teachers will begin to evaluate their

teaching dispositions in hopes of educating others and leading RMS into a positive

transformational and socially just change.

Two, the pessimistic narratives which linger within the halls of RMS have helped to

create a culture of helplessness and negativity. To accept that single story, the story of negativity,

as truth is only creating a larger divide among students and staff. I look to Adichie's (2009)

words as a metaphor that transcends the space of race and ethnicity. When applying the power of

a single story to the culture of Redwood Middle School's educators, it is not difficult to see how

the negativity of the stories passed amongst each other have multiplied into a force that is only

weighing the staff down. To engage in such a negative story, is to never feel complete as an

educator. Adichie (2009) states,

> But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook
>
> the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the
>
> problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They
>
> make one story become the only story (Adiche, 13:01- 13:25).

The collective stories of our teaching narratives, whether positive or negative provide a starting

point for continued growth. The power in these stories is developed through the challenging of

the stereotypes that helped to build and maintain the current culture at RMS. The re-telling of

such personal and professional narratives, may have the potential to sustain the consuming

negativity and ultimately support a cultural transformation.

Like Dewey & Adiche, Connelly and Clandinin (2016) focus on the narrative reflection

and power of stories to understand future experiences or choices. Connelly and Clandinin (2016)

state,

> The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are
>
> storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of
>
> narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general
>
> notion translates into the view that education is the deconstruction and reconstruction of
>
> personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their
>
> own and other's stories (p. 2).

It is our personal experiences, which when shared with others and is deconstructed to meet the

needs of the listeners, allows for the development or reconstruction of future actions. These

future actions or educator's dispositions can ultimately be mentored by the narrative story which

was shared.

The ability to share one's narrative can be metaphorically understood as a lifeline for

many educators. As defined by Ross (2008), "storytelling is about survival" (p.65). What this

means is through story, we come to understand how to make sense of the world around us; we

begin to understand what is needed to successfully maneuver within a setting. The idea of stories

being a road map of survival holds true in the educational landscape. As teachers share their

stories, other educators may gain the knowledge needed to withstand the traditional stressors of

the profession.

It is through Maxine Greene's (1995) interpretation of a democratic classroom that I came to further realize the power of narrative as a tool for survival. Greene's idea on democracy can be metaphorically symbolic to a teaching community. Green states, "Democracy, we realize, means community that is always in the making. Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers" (p. 39). I have interpreted the newcomers as the teachers who are challenged by helplessness, stress, and negativity. These teachers are those who struggle within a classroom setting. Through the sharing and building of a democratic reflective narrative community, teachers may begin to communicate stories, which may ultimately benefit and transform their teaching dispositions and practices. As this teaching culture continues to transform, more and more teachers will hopefully be willing to take a part in this democratic narrative sharing.

It is through our ability to "think with stories" (Morris, 2001, p. 56), that allows educators to think beyond the traditional understanding of what a narrative is. These narratives are to "put us in contact with valuable resources for moral thought and action" (Morris, 2001, p. 56). These stories could ultimately serve as educational tools for future teaching. The stories may empower teachers to reflect upon their own teaching narratives to understand what dispositions are most essential within their own classrooms.

The study of Attard & Armour (2006) depicts an authentic example of the power of experience and narrative reflection, specifically for the betterment of personal teacher growth. The essence of this personal case study can be described as to what Attard & Armour (2006) calls a "reflective odyssey," (p. 209). This description truly speaks to the study's methodology, as Attard & Armour (2006) critically engaged in the data collection process at three levels: "reflection upon personal practice, pupils' learning, and 'official' professional development

activities (p. 209). The data collection lasted over a thirty-month period, and it was during this

time that the researchers engaged in "meticulous recordings" of journal entries depicting the

narratives of his experiences. The goal of this action research case study was to examine the

method of critical reflection and its effect on teacher learning. Most specifically, Attard &

Armour (2016) wanted to use the power of narrative personal reflection to navigate through the

stressors of adapting to new curriculum and testing scenarios.

Most significant to my study are the results from this research. This data could serve as

potential support for the collaboration of narrative reflections. Attard & Armour (2006) stated,

Reflection indeed helped me in gaining insight into various issues; in bringing to light

that which otherwise might have remained tacit (PD, 30 September 2003) . . . However, I

found that gaining a deeper understanding of something did not result automatically in a

change to professional practice (Clegg et al., 2002). Trying to change established practice

and thus working against the status quo was a difficult task: 'no matter how hard I try,

I'm always feeling like I'm swimming against the tide (PD, 12 February 2004) (p. 224).

The results of Attard & Armour's (2006) work have brought to light two significant revelations.

One, engaging in critical reflection as an active teacher participant will create insight into your

dispositional teaching practices. The reflective practice allows for further examination of both

successes and possible teaching challenges. Ghaye & Ghaye (1998) states, "we view teaching

and learning problematically, that we question it, look into it systematically and continuously

strive to learn from it" (p. 17). The conclusive responses of Attard and Armour (2006) prove that

critical personal reflection provides a platform for self-realization and personal growth.

Two, although self-reflection provides opportunity to evaluate oneself through a multitude of lenses, there is still challenge in taking the self-reflected revelations and putting them into action. Unlike the study of Attard & Armour (2006), my own action research case study depicts the collaboration of actively engaged narrative participants. Where Attard & Armour (2006) may have felt alone in his revelations, my study seeks to offer comfort in the ongoing narrative communication, collaboration, and reflection within the Teacher Leadership Team. My hope is that putting our dispositional revelations into action will not be as challenging as Attard, simply for the fact that we have each other. Creating a study in isolation, which develops such emotional and difficult evaluations of self, has the potential to lead to exhaustion before the revelations ever make it to action. Attard & Armour (2006) stated,

> As I noted in my diary: 'Being a reflective practitioner is hard work and is time-consuming ... It dissipates energy in trying to find better ways to facilitate students' learning' (PD, 16 March 2003). Furthermore, I noted that 'I'm tired ... I'm both physically and mentally tired ... especially mentally (PD, 20 May 2003) (p. 222).

Through the support of the Teacher Leadership Team, a sample of educators at RMS will embark on this journey of self-discovery together, greatly anticipating how our findings will help the teacher dispositional practices of others and the culture of the building.

Supporting Transformational Change Through Distributive Leadership

Much research has been conducted throughout the years in developing a standard model for effective school leadership. As defined by James Spillane (2006), "Leadership refers to those activities that are either understood by, or designed by, organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practice of organizational members in the service of the

organization's core work" (p.11-12). The norm of traditional academic leadership typically

demonstrates a top-down approach, as many of the actions and decisions within the school

building are the sole responsibility of the figures in authority (DeFlaminis et al., 2016). These

authoritarians usually include the entities of the state, principals, and other members of the

administrative staff (DeFlaminis et al., 2016). This style of leadership is clearly defined and has

been termed by Yokl (2010) as the heroic leader bias. DeFlaminis et al. (2016) describes the

heroic leader bias as, "A view of leadership that associates leadership activity with individual

practices and decision making, without looking to broader and collective patterns of social

interaction or contextual influences for examples of leadership practice" (p. 5). This style of

leadership focuses on the individual as the proprietor of all decision making and actions. These

types of leaders guide in isolation, and there is little opportunity to reach out to other school

personnel or teachers for leadership support.

Spillane, Shirrell, & Hopkins (2016) speaks to the importance of an effective

instructional guidance infrastructure (IGI). This infrastructure is the developed systems of

leadership within a school building. Throughout modern education, the traditional IGI of public

schools has undergone a drastic shift. According to Spillane et al. (2016), "The rise of high

stakes accountability placed emphasis on bureaucratic arrangements, shifting some authority for

instructional decision making from individual schools and teachers to state and district

policymakers" (p. 102). For example, the mandating of state standardized testing, caused for a

transition of instructional power. School and educators were now directed to prepare students for

the test, and with that responsibility came a decrease in school and teacher autonomy.

In response to the standardized testing movement and the transition to a higher political

power, Spillane et al. (2016) spoke to the importance of the PLC creation,

District officials designed the PLC to focus school staff interactions on instruction and its

improvement . . . AP's design and deployment of the PLC thus captures how

policymakers can purposefully design a routine that structures ongoing collaborations and

reflective deliberations about teaching and learning, which prior research suggests are

important characteristics of effective PLCs. Further, we theorize not only how

bureaucratic and collegial structures co-existed, but worked in tandem (p.106).

The development of the PLCs provided a platform for educators to both collaborate and provide

avid reflection for the purposes of strengthening instructional practices. PLCs provide an

opportunity for both the teacher and school to maintain some autonomy, while still adhering to

the mandates of the state. It has been witnessed by Spillane et al. (2016) that the use of the PLC

structures is a process which finds common ground for both the state and the school districts.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) investigated the qualities and responsibilities,

which would be developed into a framework of educational leadership. The data collected

through their research spanned a total of thirty years and included a meta-analysis of over 5,000

studies. In result of this work, twenty-one leadership responsibilities were identified and

theoretically known as a significant element in the "balanced leadership framework" (p. 2). The

study of Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) correlates positive connections between

effective leadership and student achievement. Similarly, my own research study seeks to

investigate essential responsibilities and dispositional practices among educators. The data

collected through that research study may yield potential dispositions that also could increase

student achievement both academically and behaviorally.

Although the work of Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003) clearly identifies the

responsibilities of a leader in increasing school achievement, the identity of these so-called

leaders was seclusive to the role of the principal. Walters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003)

developed a list of leadership responsibilities to demonstrate this role's significance. The list of

twenty-one responsibilities may appear daunting, as it is calling for the understanding,

implementation, and modeling of these responsibilities through the actions of a single person.

How then is it possible for one person to take on the responsibility of so many leadership actions

and qualities? Differing from the research findings of Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2006), my

study seeks to explore the foundations of distributive leadership, (DeFlaminis et. al, 2016 &

Spillane, 2006) and its effect on identifying essential teaching dispositions. The distributive

leadership perspective includes the idea that:

> Leadership is not synonymous with formal roles or individual characteristics. Leadership
>
> may vary per situation, often being shared across one or more formal and informal
>
> leaders. Leadership does not reside solely in the decisions or actions of leaders. Rather,
>
> leadership practice is mutually constituted by the interactions between leaders and
>
> followers, and their situation (DeFlaminis et.al, 2016, p.12).

In this leadership model, the responsibilities within certain situations are distributed to various

leaders, making no one person the sole entity in decision making, expressing opinion, or

becoming agents of change. This leadership model is reflected through my own research study in

the implementation of the Teacher Leadership Team as members of "inquiry support" (of Dana

& Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p. 84). The potential goal of the Teacher Leadership Team is to not

only be active participants in the research gathering and analysis, but to also develop the

potential to become positive agents of change within our own school building, which could

ultimately welcome more teacher autonomy and teacher voice. The essential dispositional

practices, which may be discovered through this research process, could ultimately be guided,

implemented, and modeled by the Teacher Leadership Team, eventually solidifying their responsibility as distributive leaders within the school community.

In 2004, the Philadelphia School District participated in the "Distributed Leadership Project," (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 24). The focus of the project was to "take on the challenge of designing, operationalizing, and implementing a concerted effort to build distributed leadership capacity in a diverse set of urban schools, to improve quality of teaching and learning" (p. 25). The goal of this project was to reimagine what leadership could be to change the school culture, teaching, and learning within the Philadelphia School District. Through the development of strategic teams, which included both administration and teachers, these groupings underwent substantial training to support instruction, best practices, professional learning communities, and professional development. In result of such distributed leadership, "these efforts did produce both culture change and instructional improvements in the schools, which contributed to both student engagement and student performance outcomes" (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 28).

Much like the organization of The Philadelphia School District's distributed leadership teams, Redwood Middle School has developed its own Teacher Leadership Team, which consists of nine school-wide selected educators. The role of these educators is to engage in professional leadership training, uphold the school's mission and vision, and implement and guide potential positive change within the teaching community. Including the Teacher Leadership Team as active participants in the data collection and analysis processes of my study, could further personify collaboration and communication, as these selected educators are taking an active role in identifying potential areas of dispositional success and challenge.

Currently, RMS has invested training and programming to employ an inaugural distributive leadership model. The Teacher Leadership Team was created to offer sustained support in modeling the school's mission and vision as well as supporting fellow teachers. Most impactful has been the implementation of structured PLCs. These PLCs are organized by content area and grade level. Utilizing a PLC model has transformative power. Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) state, "Those who cultivate PLCs must engage in an intentional process to impact culture" (p. 91). A goal of this study is to provide data for the transformation of RMS. Through the analysis of TLT perspectives and narratives, it is this study's hope to provide insight into the successes, challenges, and essential teaching dispositions that could help drive an actionable plan of transforming the school culture. The process of creating a new culture will include the confrontation of past and present norms, as the only way to adapt to the new culture is to evaluate where we have been an where we want to go (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) speak to the importance of this confrontation, "The work of developing PLCs is not the work of adopting new programs or developing an innovative practice; it is the challenge of reculturing-the challenge of impacting the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm" (p. 92). It is through the investigation of teacher perspectives and narratives that RMS will come to understand how prior actions have impacted both the successes and deficits of the entire school culture. Only then can RMS begin to build upon a new transformation.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the methodological research elements of this mixed methods action research study. More specifically, this study engaged in the action research approach of collaborative ethnography. According to Carr & Kemmis (1986),

> Termed 'action research', this approach to educational research has many benefits. (1) Theories and knowledge are generated from research grounded in the realities of educational practices, (2) teachers become collaborators in the educational research by investigating their own problems, and (3) teachers play a part in the research process, which makes them more likely to facilitate change based on the knowledge they create (p. 8).

Although the definition of ethnography has been frequently re-created. This study seeks to employ the ethnographic definition set forth by Brewer (2000). The applicable definition of ethnography states:

> Ethnography can be defined as the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting (if not always the activities) in order to collect data in a systematic manner, but without meaning being imposed on them externally (Brewer, 2000, p. 189).

The above definition of ethnography describes this research study in that this definition illustrates the act of teacher as researcher within their own setting. In this research study I was an

active participant and did engage in the inquiry of teacher perspectives and essential teacher

practices through reflection.

The objective of this study addressed the teacher discourse that shapes perceptions about

teacher agency through narrative reflection and the analysis of essential teacher dispositions. The

method of action research allows for a deeper understanding of teacher discourse and agency

through a lens which, "transcend[s] mere knowledge generation to include personal and

professional growth, and organizational and community empowerment" (Herr & Anderson,

2015, p. 1). As depicted by Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez (2012) the integration of collaborative

ethnography emerges around a group of researchers collectively analyzing their stories for

similarities and differences. It is then that these researchers further evaluate the narratives "to

discover the meanings of the stories in relation to their sociocultural contexts" (p. 17).

Replicating the collaborative inquiry structures of Dana & Yendol-Hoppey (2014), this study

will involve an "inquiry support" team (p. 84). This type of inquiry structure allows other

teachers to serve as helpers within the process of research. These other "teachers serve as critical

friends helping colleagues engaged in the process to formulate meaningful wonderings and study

design, as well as aid in the collection and analysis of data" (p. 84). The inquiry support team

consisted of seven members of the Teacher Leadership Team or TLT. Further explanation of the

specifics of this research study will be examined below.

Research Participants

The inquiry support team and participants of the study are all members of the school's

Teacher Leader Team or TLT. The TLT was developed through Transformational Growth, a

contracted professional development company, who specializes in "empowering educators to

raise student achievement" (Transformational Growth, 2020). To identify teacher leaders, the

school's administration team sent out a digital form asking for teacher nominations, and from

those nominations the group of teacher leaders was selected. The TLT is made up of nine

teachers, including myself, who represent all four grade levels within the school as well as varied

areas of professional experience. The mission of the TLT is to uphold positive expectations and

standards to strengthen the academic, social, and emotional culture of the school. The necessity

of the TLT was developed to accommodate a comprehensive school improvement plan mandated

by the state. The agenda of the TLT is to mimic the standards of a modeled PLC. Stoll and Louis

(2007) state,

> There is no universal definition of a professional learning community, but there is a
>
> consensus that you will know that one exists when you can see a group of teachers
>
> sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative,
>
> inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way (p. 2).

According to DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker (2008), a TLT is "an alliance of key members of an

organization who are specifically charged to lead a change process through the predictable

turmoil" (p. 467). This group of educators have been tasked with the duty of uniting the teaching

staff in best teaching practices, engagement with the instructional cycle, and conversation

surrounding student data. Each member of the TLT is also a member of the inquiry support team,

and each will engage in the participation of interviews, the creation of their own personal

narrative reflection, as well as the analysis of the narrative data.

Due to the effects of Covid-19 all of the participant interaction was completed via email

and/or Google Meet. To assess TLT participation, an email was sent to all nine TLT members in

August 2020. Within this email was a brief description of the inquiry support team, an attached

document of the consent form, and a scheduled date for an online information and question and

answer session. The online information session was created to further support the curiosities and

concerns of the potential members of the TLT team. The Google Meet was recorded to

accommodate willing participants who could not attend. Of the nine members, seven teacher

leaders chose to participate and digitally replied with their signed consent. All members were

told that their participation is non-evaluative and will have no bearing on the professional

relationships we have created through the TLT process. Consenting participants engaged in

cultural perception interviews, developed a narrative reflection, and took part in the coding of

teacher dispositions. The collective approach of the TLT exemplifies the study's collaborative

ethnography method.

Methods of Data Collection

The research design of this action research included two perception interviews and a

narrative reflection writing prompt. Members of the TLT participated in all data collection

methods. The first-round interview conducted in August 2020 was recorded via Google Meet.

The pre-developed list of interview questions mimicked the questioning language of Strauss,

Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981). These interview questions are categorized into three

groupings: "hypothetical, devil's advocate, and ideal position" (Merriam, 2001, p. 76). The first-

round interview questions were:

1. HQ: Suppose you had to describe the student culture of Central Middle School to an outsider what would you say?
2. HQ: Suppose you had to describe the teacher culture of Central Middle school to an outsider what would you say?
3. D.A.: Some people would say that this is a difficult school to work in? What would you say to them?
4. HQ: Suppose I was just hired as a teacher at Central Middle School, what set of skills or qualities would I need to be successful in the classroom?
5. IP: What set of skills or teacher qualities are ideal for teaching at Central Middle School?
6. IP: What would an ideal professional development session look like?

After the first-round interviews had been conducted, all recorded interviews were transcribed using an online transcription service, Temi. All transcription language was minimally edited to ensure participant authenticity. Few edits were made to avoid reader confusion. The first-round coding of the interviews was organized into specific themes. The themes of the codes included evidence of cultural success for both students and teachers, evidence of essential teaching dispositions, which were both verbalized and inferred, as well as evidence of any pre-existing distributive leadership processes. In analyzing the evidence of essential teaching dispositions, the theory of Haberman & Post (1998) and their 12 teacher attributes, guided the identification of both verbalized and inferred teaching dispositions. The initial round of coding led to the creation of specific follow-up questions, which were unique to the initial individual responses of the participants (Appendix A) Follow- up questions varied depending on the need of clarification and were completed through the month of December 2020. The follow- up interviews were then coded using the same themes which were identified above.

Each TLT member then engaged in developing their own personal narrative (Appendix B). The prompts were emailed via a Google Document. Each participant had an individualized document, which included their name and the narrative reflective prompt question. The narratives were completed and sent back to me throughout the month of January 2021. The reflective narrative writing prompt read as follows; *Provide a detailed narrative retelling of a profound teaching moment at Redwood Middle School. How did this moment transform or solidify your beliefs of what is needed to be an educator at Redwood Middle School?* This narrative was created to engage educators in the power of story and reflection. These developed narrative retellings highlighted an important moment of teaching growth for each participant. Dewey (1933) stated that educators learn how to "utilize the surroundings, physical, and social,

that exist so as to extract from them all they have to contribute to building up experiences that

are worthwhile" (as cited in Hutchinson, 2015, p. 9). Each prompt response allowed for

educators to reflect upon significant moments of teaching to provide data, which could

potentially lead to the identification of essential teaching dispositions.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the two interview rounds was completed with the guidance of the previously

stated researcher codes as well as the twelve teaching attributes of Haberman & Post (1998). The

primary researcher was the sole data analyst for both rounds of interviews. In contrast, the TLT

participants were leading analysts for all reflective narratives. Prior to the coding of the narrative

reflections, the TLT engaged in a brief overview of the twelve teaching attributes. Due to the

impact of COVID-19, this overview included a recorded video training of the purpose and

process of coding as well as the description of the Haberman & Post (1998) attributes. This

directional and training video was sent via email. Like the question-and-answer session offered

after the initial consent email, there was another live session scheduled to support the TLT

through the coding process. This session was also hosted via Google Meet. The goal of this brief

presentation and support session was to establish a common understanding of Haberman & Post

(1998) to ensure effective coding of the reflective narratives. Once the overview was complete,

each member engaged in the dispositional coding of the narrative reflections. The TLT engaged

in the coding process with a supporting chart of Haberman & Post's (1998) twelve teacher

attributes and subsequently highlighted and or annotated dispositional evidence. All data was

then collected and organized in accordance with the four research questions.

Validity

The validity of this research project will be addressed through the triangulation of data. Adhering the work of Denzin (1978), four types of triangulation has been developed to increase credibility and dependability. Investigator triangulation refers to the idea that there is more than one researcher investigating the study. To engage in investigator triangulation, the assisting researchers must be closest to the data, and not an outside source offering supports (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018, p. 22). The participation of the TLT validates the study, as they are active agents who live the lives of the research being examined. Due to their positionality within the school setting, the TLT upholds the standards of investigator triangulation. The validity of the study will be upheld through collaborative research, particularly through the engagement of inquiry support by the TLT. As the TLT engages in inquiry support, the validity of the study increases as the credibility and dependability is verified through diverse coding checks.

The validity of this research study will also be ensured through external validity. As stated through Merriam (2001), "External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 207). In this case, the data derived from this study could be applied to future teacher educational growth opportunities. Personal development themes could be greatly impacted by the dispositional teacher findings. An essential dispositional inventory could be a catalyst for future personal development topics. Also, the data produced from this study could further support the mission and vision of a distributive leadership model. The possibility of revealing pertinent information in regard to cultural perceptions and essential teaching dispositions could create more of an urgency in developing a leadership platform that supports cultural change.

Security of Participants

Due to my personal positionality with the research setting and the TLT members pseudonyms have been used to keep anonymity. Participants have been given a number for identification purposes. All consent forms, interview paperwork, narrative reflections, and any data collections are kept in a locked cabinet within my personal home office and on my secured google drive. To ensure no coercion is evident, all participating members of the study could have refrained from participation at any point during the research process. Complete confidentiality was upheld through the entire research study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Overview

In the following chapter, I will discuss the mixed methods analysis of the Teacher Leadership Team (TLT) and their responses in providing data to support the investigation of the four research study questions. The four research questions are,

1. *How do staff members at a large urban middle school perceive student and staff culture within their own building?*

2. *What teacher dispositions are most essential in an urban middle school setting?*

3. *How does narrative reflection identify essential teaching dispositions?*

4. *How is teacher leadership defined in an urban middle school setting?*

Members of the Redwood Middle School's TLT are the focal point of this entire research study. Their participation in all processes was essential in completing this action research. TLT members were peer selected through a staff-wide nomination process. At the conclusion of the nomination process, nine teachers, including myself, were identified as active teacher leaders and were asked to represent the building wide TLT. The responsibility of this TLT was to develop and to lead a cohesive mission and vision statement for the school, create a list of shared collective commitments to be adhered by staff, and to create a support system for fellow teachers. Clear in purpose, but not formally defined, the initiation of the TLT was an integral part of developing a distributive leadership model. The development of the TLT as well as consistent PLC protocols do uphold and foster a distributive leadership environment. The work of the TLT spanned nearly three quarters of the 2019-2020 school year. However, due to COVID-19 and the ceasing of in person instruction, the work of the TLT has been temporarily halted, and there is no date in which the work of these teacher leaders will continue.

Seven members of the TLT agreed to participate in this action research study. As the lead researcher of this study, I chose not to be a TLT participant within this research. Therefore, I did not personally answer the interview questions, nor complete the personal narrative reflection. In conclusion, all school-wide selected teacher leaders participated in the study but one. All seven participants also consented to participate as a member of the inquiry support team. As an inquiry support team member, all seven consenting TLT members engaged and completed all four stages of the mix methods action research process. The four stages include: (1.) a first-round interview, consisting of six previously developed questions, (2.) a second-round follow-up interview consisting of questions developed by the researcher based upon initial interview one coding, (3.) the writing of a personal reflective narrative, (4.) the anonymous coding of a fellow TLT member's narrative reflection. The importance of TLT participation and the inquiry support involvement not only reflects the study's research questions, but it also seeks to qualitatively analyze the perceptions and dispositions of the building wide selected teacher leaders. It is this study's desire that through the in depth-analysis of the TLT, data will begin to reveal common building successes and challenges, teacher dispositional practices that will best serve the students at Redwood Middle School, and a clear insight into the current distributive leadership practices that have positively impacted school-wide culture. The emerging data from this study could help to foster positive transformational change. The analysis of TLT perceptions and narratives could lead to continued collaborative conversations, and these conversations could guide future teacher trainings and professional development.

The analysis of all research study questions will be broken down into five subheadings, providing individual attention to each research question. The five headings include, *1. TLT Perceptions: Noticings and Wonderings of Student and Teacher Success, 2. TLT Perceptions:*

Noticing and Wonderings of Student and Teacher Challenges, 3. TLT Essential Dispositions:

Noticings and Wonderings, 4. TLT Narrative Dispositions: Noticings and Wonderings, and 5.

TLT Evidence of Distributive Leadership: Noticings and Wonderings. In upholding the processes

of distributive leadership, the analysis of all data will follow a systematic PLC data-driven

discussion protocol. This protocol established by Daniel Venables (2015) includes a practice of

reflecting upon data through noticings and wonderings. According to Venables (2015), "Noticing

and wondering are nonthreatening, both for the teachers doing the noticing and wondering and

for the teacher hearing the comments (Notice & Wonder, para 10). Like the core foundations of

distributive leadership and its PLC model, this study was to be supported through collaboration

and teamwork, and it is this study's hope that through the following of this specific analysis

protocol, significant conversations surrounding potential positive change will begin. Within this

analysis, the notice statements will identify the basic facts of the data, whereas the wonderings

will adhere to more specific data reflection and ponderings. The data presented could continue to

build upon future discussions of growth, collaboration, and community.

Perceptions of RMS Culture: Through the TLT Lens

All selected portions of the interview responses are authentic snapshots of RMS life,

depicted through the lens of the teacher leaders within the school building. To adequately define

the perceptions of the above topics, TLT members will be represented through a complete TLT

spotlights, which will provide an in-depth viewpoint and analysis of the TLT's interview data.

Although robust in length, these snapshots serve a greater purpose than to just inform and

analyze. Providing these TLT members with a platform to share their voice, is a monumental

foundation of the distributive leadership model. As stated by Ingersoll (2007),

> Schools in which teachers have more control over key schoolwide and classroom
> decisions have fewer problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and
> cooperation among teachers and administrators, have a more committed and engaged
> staff, and do a better job of retaining teachers (p. 4).

It is apparent through Ingersoll's (2007) research that providing teachers with voice, engaging in
a distributive leadership model where teachers have a presence in decision making, greatly
increases the culture of both the teaching staff and the school. It is through the presentation of
these spotlight snapshots that I wish to not only provide impactful data relevant to the outlined
research questions, but to also pay respects to the RMS teacher voice and perspective. These are
the realities and the narratives at RMS, as witnessed through our teacher leaders.

TLT Perceptions: Noticings & Wonderings of Student & Teacher Success

The following chart depicts a summation of the data collected for research question one.
In creating a concise and focused analysis of the perceptions of student and teacher successes
and challenges, two separate headings were created, one for cultural successes and one for
cultural challenges. The first heading to be analyzed is that of student and teacher success. The
proceeding chart will lay out specific data collection details, a holistic view of the data collected,
and the subheadings that were created for data analysis.

Table 2. Summation chart of research question one, perceptions of student/teacher success.

Heading	Quantity of Coded Responses	Emerging Themes	Subheadings
TLT Perceptions: Noticings and Wonderings of Student/Teacher Successes	29	4	• A Normalization of Negativity • Emerging Themes of Success • Experiences with Distributive Leadership

Table 2 articulates the analysis heading, the quantity of coded responses, emerging themes, and the discussed subheadings. The quantity of coded responses refers to the number of verbalized or inferred participant responses that were coded into the category of student and teacher successes. As stated by the data chart, twenty-nine responses were coded as being cultural successes. The coding of this specific data collection was conducted by the main researcher through the analysis of TLT interviews. From these twenty-nine coded responses, four themes emerged. The themes were Evidence of Student Success, Evidence of Teacher Growth, Evidence of Student/Teacher Relationships, and Evidence of Distributive Leadership. Subheadings were then developed to provide formal analysis and discussion. The subheadings created were, A Normalization of Negativity, Emerging Themes of Success, and Experiences with Distributive Leadership.

The next two charts present a summary of the successes and challenges that were identified through TLT perspectives. These successes and challenges characterize both the student and teacher culture. These results support the analysis of research question one. Research question one stated, *how do staff members at a large urban middle school perceive student and staff culture within their own building?* Each table describes the analyzed overarching theme, the verbalized or inferred perspective, and the TLT member responsible for such a viewpoint.

Table 3. Teacher Leadership Team perceptions of student/teacher success.

Theme	Verbalized & Inferred Perception	TLT Member
Evidence of Student Success	Students value teachers	TLT2
	Students like being in the school building	TLT2
	Students are normal teenagers	TLT7
	Some students value their education	TLT2, TLT5, TLT6

Table 3. Teacher Leadership Team perceptions of student/teacher success cont.

Theme	Verbalized & Inferred Perception	TLT Member
Evidence of Teacher Growth	Teachers are creating a stronger community	TLT6
	Staff culture has improved	TLT3, TLT6
	Optimistic that things can change	TLT4
	Teachers speak of a fresh start	TLT1, TLT3
	New teachers buying into a better culture	TLT3
	Teachers work hard	TLT2
Evidence of Student/Teacher Relationships	Teachers understand student home-life	TLT2
	Teachers create trust with students	TLT4
	Teachers have fun with the kids	TLT4, TLT7
	Teachers listen to students	TLT4
	Teachers create safe spaces in their classrooms	TLT4, TLT7
	Teachers engage with extracurriculars	TLT2
	Teachers do anything to improve for students	TLT2
	Teachers view the school as a family	TLT1, TLT7
Evidence of Distributive Leadership	Teacher Leadership Team	TLT4, TLT6, TLT7
	Better communication in departments	TLT6
	Restorative practice training	TLT3, TLT5, TLT7
	Peer walkthroughs	TLT3
	Developments of PLCs	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT6, TLT7
	Balance of power in departments	TLT6
	Some teachers reflect	TLT1, TLT5
	Began the process of learning how to make effective change	TLT2
	More supportive staff	TLT1, TLT7
	Certain teams have great success	TLT6
	Optional PD began to be available	TLT1

A Normalization of Negativity

The first noticing has to do with the large disparity between perceived student success and teacher success. The perspectives of the TLT members include five times the amount of teacher success as compared to student success. In total, there were four perspectives which included student success, and there were twenty-five perspectives which included teacher success. I wonder if this large gap in positive perceptions is due to our building's normalization of student negativity, or even more specifically the inferred student shaming and bias that was identified in TLT interviews.

For example, when asked to describe the culture of the student population, TLT5 took seven minutes and sixteen seconds to respond to this question. Within this time frame, TLT5 spoke to both the academic and behavioral characteristics of the student body. The dialogue which represented the positive perception of the academics of our student body lasted only eleven seconds, and in highlighting the positive academic outlook of our students, TLT5 spoke to the population of students who are hardworking and who want to be high achieving. When offered to speak of the positive descriptors of our students' behavior, there were no positive descriptors mentioned. This lack of positivity in student behaviors may infer a normalization of the negative behavior which occurs at RMS. It could be assumed that the nature of the students' behavior has always been characterized in a negative light, which would challenge some teachers to speak positively of such a topic. Our ideas, beliefs, and perceptions are shaped by our experiences within our cultural communities (Ellis, 1998), and as such, the past negative behavior of the RMS student body, may have normalized negative student perceptions.

Furthermore, TLT2 inferred to student shaming as they found that much of the negative responsibility has fallen on the fault of the teachers. TLT2 stated,

> I think it's the deal with the students. Maybe the maturity level, they get lost in the
>
> building and like on purpose to do some negative things. But I do not know if they would
>
> be that way, if the teachers didn't already establish the fact that our building is impossible
>
> (TLT2 Interview).

It appears that the normalization of negative student perceptions may have developed into

examples of student shaming. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, perception has become reality. The

belief that the building is impossible has manifested into reality for many staff members, and in

result, could be rationale as to why there was a great disparity between the perceptions of student

success to teacher success.

It way Gay (1997) who stated, "when the cultures of students and teachers are not

synchronized, someone loses out. Invariably, it is the students" (p. 223). I wonder if the student

shaming and bias of who our students are and where they come from runs so deep that our ability

to document student success has become so warped. Warped enough that we as the staff struggle

to even recognize student success. To further illustrate, TLT5 described the academic

perceptions of some of the student population when they stated, "You also have the opposite end,

which is you have a lot of students that are showing up to avoid fines." In further emphasizing

the need to attend school to avoid receiving a fine for truancy, TLT5 recalled an experience with

parent teacher conferences in which a parent questioned the student's need to attend school.

TLT5 stated,

> I've heard parents during parent teacher conferences that actually have shown up, which
>
> surprises me, saying, I don't even know why he still has to go [to school]. You know, can
>
> you tell us why he has to come to school, and then I remind them that your kid is in
>
> seventh grade (TLT5 Interview).

This example reveals two instances of teacher bias. First, there is evidence of bias in TLT5's surprising response to a parent who shows up for conferences. The second is a bias of this teacher's understanding of how the parents of RMS prioritize the importance of education. Such beliefs help to shape the culture of RMS, and furthermore validates the negative culture of the building. Moreover, TLT5 demonstrated characteristics of an educator who is aware of cultural conflicts (Haberman & Post, 1998). Through the retelling of this short narrative, TLT5 acknowledges that there is a difference between the school and community cultures, which parallels the theory of Gay (1997).

In addition, TLT1 ended their perception of the staff culture with insight into how and why teachers place blame on the students. In communicating how this blame affects the school, TLT1 first stated,

> Blaming the kids means they don't have to change what they're doing . . . they don't have the motivation, um, or the ability to reflect on themselves and say, what is it that I'm doing? Or what can I do differently? Um, it's just like an easy way to, to not take responsibility (TLT1 Interview).

TLT1 explained that student blame is a copout for teachers who do not want to change their teacher habits. By placing blame on the students, it is inferred that these teachers build up their complacency of never having to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of the students. Current research has demonstrated concerning evidence, specifically regarding a White teacher's engagement with conversations about race in the classroom. This concern has been identified as teacher complacency, as White educators appear to be shying away from presenting culturally diverse teaching practices (Crowley & Smith, 2015 and Durand & Taveras, 2021).

TLT1 then explained another reason why teachers may blame students and that is

because, "Or maybe they feel like they don't have any power as a teacher to make the changes

that need to happen. And so out of frustration, blaming the kids, they're not feeling empowered

to make any of those changes." TLT1 speaks to lack of teacher autonomy and how the lack of

empowerment may affect a teacher's willingness to reflect upon their practice and instill

changes. This lack of teacher autonomy may also speak to a lack of distributed leadership at the

classroom level.

Emerging Themes of Success

The second noticing pertains to the themes that were developed dependent on the TLT

perceptions of teacher success. In analyzing the data, the three themes developed were, *1.*

evidence of teacher growth, 2. evidence of student teacher relationships, and 3. evidence of

distributive leadership. In evaluating all three themes, the theme of student/teacher relationships

was identified as a key example of teacher success within RMS. Topics discussed, which helped

support the development of these relationships, included understanding students and creating

trust and safety within the classroom.

TLT2 established a solid foundation of the importance of building relationships. TLT2

stated,

> I think that coming from the area that our students come from, they don't always, even if
>
> their parents really do care about them, they might not actually be able to see that because
>
> their parents, a lot of times have to work really hard to take care of their families. So, I
>
> think the fact that we have, um, we, we build good relationships with our kids. A lot of
>
> our teachers understand that our kids are not coming from the same exact, uh, home life

that a lot of other students or their peers and across the county are facing (TLT2

Interview).

TLT2 echoes the importance of building relationship skills with the students to better understand

and to better engage them. This stems from TLT2's perception of the student home life, where

parents are often busy trying to provide for their families. TLT2 inferred that the relationships

that are built between student and teacher are significant, especially since the teacher may be the

person to offer continuous support. TLT2 also highlights the staff's ability to show an awareness

for the outside factors which may affect the lives of our students. TLT2 proposed that through

relationship building, educators will better come to understand the outside factors that may affect

the students' lives. In this response, TLT2 addresses the need for cultural human development

(Haberman & Post, 1998), a skill set, which requires successful urban educators to grasp the

environment which so greatly reflects and affects our students.

Throughout interview one and on multiple occasions, TLT4 spoke to their ability to

create a safe student environment within her own classroom walls. In stark opposition to how

TLT4 described the student culture in the hallway, TLT4 further defined her classroom system

and procedures to ensure student safety and respect. TLT4 stated,

I would try and get to know each kid on some type of level in some way, shape or form,

whether it be, they got new glasses, or their little brother did something, anything just to

make some type of relationship with them. I tried to build that trust so that if they did

start acting up in my classroom, like I just gave him a look. Sometimes they would be

like, Oh, sorry, you know, like this is not the time or the place to do that. But I would also

have their back if something happened, or they knew they could come talk to me or

whatever it may be, um, just being available to them (TLT4 Interview).

In analyzing the classroom environment that has been sustained and implemented by TLT4, this

teacher holds great value in relationship skills (Haberman & Post, 1998). TLT4 took pride in

getting to know their students beyond the academic agenda. Throughout this response, TLT4

spoke to the connections that were built from genuine interest. By asking the students about their

families or their interests, TLT4 is building positive student/teacher relationships. TLT4 also

upholds trust. In this response, it is apparent that this trust leads to respect, which is clearly

described in the teacher's ability to cease a behavior with a simple look. Last, TLT4 prioritizes

an open-door policy, where they are personally available for the student to listen and provide

guidance.

I wonder if the frequent and consistent identification of the significance of building

relationships has developed this disposition into an essential skill set. I also wonder what action

steps can be created to ensure that all educators at RMS are engaging in building relationships

with their students. Studies indicate that to develop an effective system of accountability,

teachers need to engage in the development and promise to collective commitments (Dufour,

Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). The establishment of collective commitments further supports the

implementation of a distributive leadership model. According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker

(2008), "When they [the teachers] clarify and commit to the specific responsibilities they will

assume in the collective improvement effort, they are more likely to fulfill those responsibilities

 . . . as collective commitments articulate new expectations and establish new norms, they help to

reshape the culture of schools and districts" (p. 154-156). I wonder if a re-establishment of the

current collective commitments can be reorganized to include relationship building

accountability.

Experiences with Distributive Leadership

The final noticing is the fact that there were eleven perspectives which fell under the umbrella of distributive leadership. As previous research has developed, the distributive leadership model supports a democratic view of leadership (DeFlaminis et al., 2016 & Spillane, 2006). In this model, designated leaders may change due to the context of the situation and or school building need (DeFlaminis et. al, 2016 & Spillane, 2006). Looking more specifically at the TLT perspectives, five teacher leadership members spoke or inferred to the success of the professional learning communities or PLCs. Many of the other perspectives are effects of the implementation of the distributive leadership model of a PLC.

For example, in explaining the teacher culture, TLT3 made aware that the teacher culture has significantly improved over the past few years. TLT3 stated,

> The teacher culture has improved and especially like among my own cohorts, like in my department, I think our culture is awesome. We are positive. We help, you know, help each other out. We, you know, collaborate, we take over one another, person is having an issue. Like we're great (TLT3 Interview).

TLT3 draws upon her own experience as department head to explain the growth in positive culture. TLT3 characterizes a supportive teacher cohort as positive, supportive, collaborative, and problem solving. These characteristics have been mimicked through other TLT members as points of challenge and or rationale for a focused distributive leadership model. In this personal account, TLT3 prioritized the success of this distributed leadership platform, and how it has positively transformed their department. According to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008), "it is impossible for a school or district to develop the capacity to function as a professional learning community without undergoing profound cultural shifts" (p. 91). It is apparent that the work of

TLT3's PLC team underwent cultural shifts to develop an improved culture of positive

collaboration.

TLT6 also highlighted the PLC work of RMS as the tipping point for a positive

transformational change within the staff. TLT6 stated,

> With Transformative Growth coming in, and I know how, you know, we got a lot of
>
> pushback for that from teachers . . . I think that program, at least got the conversation and
>
> the, the stress off everyone doing everything on their own to really create that stronger
>
> community (TLT6 Interview).

TLT6 paid notable attention to the power of that professional development, and how through that

experience the teaching staff began to take a newfound appreciation for the potential of success

through staff collaboration. TLT6 recognized that it was not easy to get initial buy-in from staff,

but it is apparent that staff noticed the benefits of engaging in collaboration. Intertwined with this

professional development was the implementation of formal PLCs within the building. TLT6

praised the development of the PLC as another element that pushed to positively transform the

teacher culture.

As an example of teacher success, TLT6 spoke about their own team experience. TLT6

noted that the success of their teacher culture was built upon collaboration, consistency, open

communication, and positivity. TLT6 stated, "If you could work on my team, you would enjoy

being in the building . . . when you have a consistent goal in mind and you work towards it, it

leaves a more positive, um, thought, you know, uh, perspective and things like that." TLT6

shared their experiences and perspectives with great confidence, and it is apparent from the tone

in the interview that TLT6 was firm in their beliefs and abilities to lead an effective, positive,

and successful group of educators.

I wonder how RMS can ensure that the PLC protocol becomes a permanent fixture and is utilized with fidelity across the entire building. I also wonder if the RMS staff could successfully document effective PLC growth through engaging and sustainable professional development. It is apparent through these distributive leadership perspectives that the majority of the TLT members believe that such PLC systems and protocols are imperative to continue the growth of the school-wide culture. Therefore, the development and implementation of a professional development platform, which upholds the elements of a PLC may be necessary. This newly created professional development may need to have yearly endurance and may need to be constructed to ensure teacher buy-in.

TLT Perceptions: Noticings & Wonderings of Student & Teacher Challenges

The summation chart below visually represents the data collected which identified both student and teacher cultural challenges. Like the previously discussed summation chart, this chart also identifies a holistic view of the student and teacher challenges. As previously stated, this summation chart also supports the data analysis of research question one.

Table 4. Summation chart of research question one, perceptions of student/teacher challenges.

Heading	Quantity of Coded Responses	Emerging Themes	Subheadings
TLT Perceptions: Noticings and Wonderings of Student/Teacher Challenges	55	5	• Views on Student Behavior • Structural Challenges • Defining Collaboration

The summation chart of challenges defines fifty-five coded responses, five emerging themes, and three subheadings for analysis. The fifty-five coded themes refer to the verbalized and inferred responses of both student and teacher cultural challenges. All responses were

coded by the main researcher, and the responses were analyzed with the data collected through

the TLT perception interviews. The five emerging themes of student and teacher challenges

were Evidence of Behavior, Evidence of Learning Value, Evidence of Structural Challenges,

Evidence of Individual Teaching Challenges, and Evidence of Collaborative Challenges. Three

subheadings were created to present formal analysis. The three subheadings were Views on

Student Behavior, Structural Challenges, and Defining Collaboration.

   The specific challenges that were witnessed from the TLT members are outlined below.

Like the success depicted above, these results also support the analysis of research question

one. Each table depicts the analyzed themes, verbalized or inferred perspectives, and the TLT

members responsible for each viewpoint.

Table 5. Teacher Leadership Team perception of student/teacher challenges.

Theme	Verbalized & Inferred Perception	TLT Member
Evidence of Behavior	Bullying	TLT4
	Incidence of student violence	TLT4, TLT5, TLT6
	Students do not feel safe, especially in the hallways	TLT4
	Lots of student conflict/discipline	TLT3
	Different cultures on different floors	TLT1, TLT4
	Student cliques	TLT4
	Students act older	TLT4
Evidence of Learning Value	Students and parents do not value education	TLT2, TLT5, TLT6
Evidence of Structural Challenges	Lack of teacher empowerment	TLT1
	Staff favoritism	TLT1, TLT3
	Lack of consistency	TLT3, TLT4
	Lack of teacher preparedness for changes	TLT1
	Micromanaging	TLT3
	Professional development is one size fits all	TLT6
	Work is full of menial tasks	TLT2, TLT3

	Lack of support systems for students	TLT6
	Broken systems	TLT4
	Will hire anyone	TLT2, TLT3
	District view kids as numbers	TLT6
	Same teacher leaders chosen	TLT3
	Need trauma training	TLT3, TLT5
Evidence of Structural Challenges	Lack of training for current staff leaders	TLT2
	Teacher growth is not supported by administration	TLT2
	Lack of overall support systems for teachers	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4
	Unclear procedures	TLT3
	Burnout	TLT3, TLT4, TLT5
	Teachers are not their authentic selves	TLT4, TLT6
	Teachers do not build relationships	TLT1, TLT6
	Lack of empathy	TLT1, TLT5
	Married to the lesson plan	TLT4
	Teacher do not understand students	TLT1
	Teacher complacency	TLT1, TLT2, TLT7
	Emotional toll of the job	TLT1, TLT4
	Student shaming	TLT1, TLT2
Evidence of Individual Teaching Challenges	Negative mindsets	TLT1, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6
	Teacher bias	TLT5
	Hierarchy over students	TLT4
	Inability to adapt/change	TLT4
	Lack of teacher confidence	TLT2
	Lack of teacher reflection	TLT1, TLT2, TLT5
	Teachers are not lifelong learners	TLT2
	Lack of desire to work with RMS students	TLT4, TLT5
	Teachers take things too seriously	TLT5, TLT6
	Teachers cause re-traumatization	TLT5
	Teacher do not know how to help students	TLT2
	No collective responsibility of students	TLT1, TLT2, TLT4, TLT6

	Teacher competitiveness	TLT5, TLT7
	Low staff buy-in	TLT6
	Teacher cliques	TLT1, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5
Evidence of Collaborative Challenges	Lack of relational staff trust	TLT2, TLT3, TLT5
	Growth of negativity	TLT1, TLT4
	Lack of cultural responsiveness	TLT1
	Inconsistent teacher support for students	TLT6

Views on Student Behavior

The first group of noticings are regarding the identified student challenges, and the fact that the student challenges were significantly smaller in number than the teacher challenges. Most of the student challenge were categorized by the theme of behavior, as the most common perspective was "incidences of student violence." I am not surprised that student behavior would be of the greatest concern, especially since the building has had a history of violent tendences.

In describing the negative attributes of student culture, TLT5 retold a story of when two female students engaged in a physical altercation. This retelling provided evidence to TLT5's description of our student culture of condoned violence and yet again could uphold TLT5's perceptions towards cultural conflicts (Haberman & Post, 1998). TLT5 recalled an instance in which violence was condoned by the students' families. TLT5 stated,

> One of the moms, if not both the moms, organized this fight. And I said, why would they
>
> do that? [The students said,] Well, our moms had fought like seven or eight times. We do
>
> not really have an issue. We just know our moms do. So, it has been just like the third
>
> time we fought (TLT5 Interview).

TLT5 attributed this condoning of violence in helping to develop our student culture. TLT5 also interpreted our student culture as one that has a large gang affiliation. TLT 5 stated, "We have a lot of gang membership that goes back to three generations. Um, it is what they grew up in. This

is their [students'] normal." Perceptions of the student culture based upon TLT5s' interview, revolves strongly around a history of physical aggression and violence, and speaks to the teacher's acknowledgement of cultural human development (Haberman & Post, 1998).

A significant data point, worthy of a noticing, is the fact that only one TLT member did not verbalize or infer any negative perceptions of the student body. In defining the student culture at RMS, TLT7 had a unique perspective in comparison to the other members of the Teacher Leadership Team. TLT7 stated, "For our [grade] it seems almost like the kids are very jokey and they're very, like, they like to poke fun at each other, but in like a positive way." TLT7 viewed students in a high behavioral light, as they referenced how kids "enjoy their time with each other" and demonstrate a "positive vibe" with all classmates.

TLT7 did explain how in previous years there were issues with behavior when they stated, "I know in the past, like way before I started teaching, people had issues with, uh, the amount of like fights and stuff like that would go on. But in my experience, there hasn't really been a very high concentration of it." Throughout the entirety of the first-round interview, TLT7 depicted a student body that was normalized in their juvenile ways, and in that respect, there was no concern or challenges with the culture of the student body.

 Within the second-round interview TLT7 was asked to further explain their perceptions, as during the 2019-2020 school year and pre-COVID-19 shutdown, the grade in which this teacher taught submitted 3,334 behavioral referrals. In their response TLT7 stated,

> I think that I tend to see things in a more positive light than others. Whereas some people
> might take that jokey behavior as being disrespectful or disruptive. I kind of embrace it
> and encourage it and joke back with them. And I think that lends itself to having a
> positive classroom climate (TLT7 Interview).

TLT7 spoke to the importance of positivity as well as the need for fun and engagement within the classroom. The research has shown that when a classroom lacks engagement in fun, students feel more uncomfortable with the learning process. These students often become bored and disinterested and may lose all connection with learning (Willis, 2007). TLT7 creates a classroom space in which students can have fun and be themselves and in return, the students help to support a positive classroom environment. The idea of creating this work/fun balance within the classroom has revealed itself as a priority among many members of the Teacher Leadership Team.

I wonder what specific strategies are being implemented in TLT7's classroom, and I wonder if their outlook and dispositional practices could be implemented by all staff. I also wonder how distributive leadership support systems could help to uphold and spread this positive school wide outlook. A distributive leadership system "first creates leadership teams that are collaborative, strategic, and instructionally focused to identify and prioritize school needs, define the leadership work necessary to address those needs, and establish feedback systems to monitor their progress" (DeFlaminis et al. 2016, p.31). It could be possible that the TLT members become tasked with the responsibility of strategically implementing positivity in the building, as part of their core foundational values is to address the needs of the building and monitor its development.

Structural Challenges

The second noticing is the theme of structural challenges. Nineteen of the teacher challenges are in this category, which highlights concerns that may have been caused from those of authority. These challenges appear to be effects of actions and or decisions from higher administration. Four TLT members said that the greatest challenge was that of teacher support.

Regarding the challenge that is teaching at RMS, TLT3 is in complete agreement with this belief. TLT3 stated, "I would say 100% accurate, super difficult school to work at." TLT3 recognizes that this hardship may have begun from their first moments at RMS. TLT3 recalled, "I felt like I had no support at the beginning at all, like zero." Lack of support, especially at the beginning stages of one's professional teaching career, could develop a feeling of hopelessness and uncertainty. TLT3 also spoke to a lack of support in understanding the school's systems and procedures,

> It's more of the procedures that are not clear that make it difficult. Like if you know what the rules are, you can enforce them, and it is less difficult. But if you do not know what the program is, nobody is on the same page. You really are just managing your kids. And the only way to manage them is to love them and like make them adore you. Otherwise, they are not gonna, you know, do anything that you say, cause there is no rules (TLT 3 Interview).

TLT3 explained a school system that lacks clarity and may have some chaotic tendencies. It is apparent that at times there is no clear direction, and because of that the focus has become just taking care of the kids. TLT3 also described a building where the rules are not upheld. This school leader personified that the only way to get your kids to follow any rules is to show them love. If love is not show, the students do not comply. It is also implied that the lack of consistency and or misunderstood communications creates a disconnect among administrators, teachers, and students. As teachers are doing their best to navigate the unclear expectations, they often rely on relationship building skills to get them through. TLT3 speaks to the reality that if teachers do not have relationships with their kids, nothing will ever get accomplished. It is

inferred that even the students are aware that the rules have no follow through. Therefore, there

is a heightened urgency in crafting the teacher relationship skills (Haberman & Post, 1998).

To further develop the idea of support for staff members, the second-round interview

began with a simplified question which asked how teachers in RMS are specifically supported.

TLT3 stated, "I don't feel like there's a huge amount of support. I feel like everyone does the best

they can do, but there's oftentimes where no one has anything left to give because everyone is

just stretched so thin." TLT3 referenced the lack of support, which again implies in effect a

feeling of hopelessness. The idea that teachers may feel as though they have "nothing left to

give" reinforces the need for a developed and structured support system. TLT3 also brought up

the notion of school "marigolds," which is a metaphor for teachers who exude positivity. The

idea of finding a marigold for teacher support began with Jennifer Gonzalez, an avid blogger and

former middle school teacher. The idea of the marigold was developed to provide guidance for

new teachers. According to Gonzalez (2013), teachers need to,

> Surround yourself with good people. By finding the positive, supportive, energetic
>
> teachers in your school and sticking close to them, you can improve your job satisfaction
>
> more than with any other strategy. And your chances of excelling in this field will
>
> skyrocket. Just like a young seedling growing in a garden, thriving in your first year
>
> depends largely on who you plant yourself next to (Cult of Pedagogy, 2013).

The marigold effect encompasses the belief that positivity can spread and help provide teacher

support. However, the challenge may be in identifying the teachers who exude true marigold

status. TLT3 stated, "I think teachers heavily rely on their marigolds at our building. I feel like

there's not a sense of like, if I felt like something was going on or I was having a struggle with

something there's only a handful of people I would go to necessarily." Although TLT3 expresses

the need for building marigolds, it is stated in their response that that type of teacher may be rare

in this setting. TLT3 revealed that there are not many fellow teachers to which she would turn to

for guidance and support, which speaks to a lack of relational trust. To help build this relational

trust, an investment in the norms of communication and respect may be necessary. Schools who

participate in a distributive leadership structure honor and uphold "member confidence, engage

in focused, purposeful, professional dialogue centered on student learning, and uses team

meeting space as a two-way communicative space" (DeFlaminis et al. 2016, p. 113). The

reiteration of these norms may be necessary to set the standard of communication and respect

amongst peers.

      TLT2 also spoke to teacher supports, as they described an example of administrative

leadership. TLT2 specifically showed how there has always been a top-down approach which

struggled to focus on growth. TLT2 stated,

> Like when they, when we have walk-throughs and they walk through a classroom, they'll
>
> check off boxes and you get zero feedback. So, teachers look at that as though it is an
>
> assessment and not a growth thing. And I think that in here that begins the thought
>
> process that, okay, well we are not growing here. We are just being judged here. So that
>
> does not instill in the environment or in the community that we are helping one another.
>
> So honestly, I think that, um, it is the teacher's responsibility to do that, but I think it is
>
> the administration's responsibility to hone those skills for their teachers so that the
>
> environment can exist (TLT2 Interview).

TLT2 went in detail to explain the challenges of the support systems that exist within RMS.

Consistent with TLT2's reflection of the teacher's multitude of "menial tasks," TLT2 expressed

yet another checklist mentality, as administration completes walk-throughs with the same

monotonous purpose. TLT2 spoke to the administration's responsibility in helping to develop

these skills for recognizing, conversing, and implementing teacher growth both through

modeling as well as training. Significant to this response is TLT2's belief that teachers can

accept the responsibility to develop a support system with the building. According to Pink

(2009), "If you want people to perform at a high level, especially for complicated things, they

have to be self-directed, they have to be able to move towards mastery, and they have to have a

purpose for what they are doing" (p. 80). Fundamental to the philosophy of distributed leadership

is the teacher's ability to exercise autonomy within the profession. Supporting autonomy and

working towards teacher competence has increased professional well-being, trust, and teacher

effectiveness (DeFlaminis et al, 2016).

As vocalized and inferred from all TLT member data, the presence of peer support

through the implementation of PLCs had a significant effect on transforming the staff culture. I

wonder if such PLC protocol could be created to encompass all stakeholders working within

RMS. As defined by Spillane (2006) and DeFlaminis et al. (2016) leadership roles can change

from person to person depending on the context and need. If the PLC teams were developed to

be all-inclusive and include a diverse mix of staff and administration, these members could work

together, each as equals, to communicate, celebrate, and problem solve. I wonder if

administration took more of an active role in our PLCs, if teachers would feel more supported.

Defining Collaboration

The third noticing is of the collaborative teacher challenges. All TLT members either

directly or indirectly referred to a collaborative challenge amongst the staff. Ironically enough,

collaboration was identified as the top teacher success, as five TLT members referenced PLC

implementation as the greatest teacher achievement. PLCs are built upon collaboration and

would cease to function if collaboration were not upheld as a pillar in the process. I wonder how the definition of collaboration differs depending on the context within a school building.

TLT1 was asked to speak upon the responsibility of the staff in trying to implement and support a positive culture among the students. TLT1 stated,

> 100% they [teachers] have the responsibility. I mean they do, but do they believe that they do or act that they do? I would say it might be generous to say that half of the teachers really believe that it is their responsibility to create that positive culture and community with the kids and the other half feel like it is somebody else's job that it's not the teacher's job (TLT1 Interview).

TLT1 expressed a statistic that deems half of the teachers would take on the task of helping to create a positive student culture, why the other half believe that it is not a professional duty. With such a large portion of the teaching staff negligent to the belief of their need to help build a positive school culture, it could be indirectly inferred that a continued challenge in the success of positive school culture could rest on the fact that teachers are unable to see their responsibility in the process. In this example, collaboration is defined by the teacher's ability to be aware of their responsibilities in helping to create a school wide culture.

TLT4 established that the teaching staff could take some responsibility in helping to create and uphold the current student culture at RMS. TLT 4 stated, "As teachers at the school, we need to lead by example." TLT4 acknowledges that teachers have a responsibility in modeling proper behavior, and as such should be catalysts of positive behavior within the building. However, the focus of TLT4's response spoke more to a collaborative staff effort, as TLT4 described a want for a collective responsibility, an entire community working together to reinforce a positive student culture. TLT4 stated,

So, I think it is a collective responsibility that we have to, as the teachers, as the

responsible adult in the building, we have to always be like that constant role model and

help the entire building no matter where we are, because people would act like this all the

time. Like not my kids, not my problem. And that's not gonna make things better (TLT4

Interview).

TLT4 acknowledges a disconnect among staff, one in which staff members do not take a

collaborative approach to taking a unified responsibility in advocating for positive behaviors

throughout the entire building. TLT4 describes a teaching staff who will possibly turn their heads

to negative behaviors without intervening simply because those students may not be on their

rosters. This perception speaks to the importance of collective responsibility in creating a

collaborative community within schools. Research has shown that schools and staff members

who share in a collective responsibility of student learning have better educational effectiveness

and equity. Teachers who exude high levels of classroom management skills indirectly effects

student learning and therefore would increase collective responsibility as well (Lee and Smith,

1996). Therefore, the participation in collective responsibility efforts could not only decrease

unwanted behaviors but could also increase learning effectiveness.

Within the second-round interview, TLT2 was asked to further qualify the teacher's

responsibility in upholding negative school perceptions. Regarding this question, TLT2 inferred

elements of distributed leadership, as they implicitly discussed the need for accountability among

teachers. TLT2 stated,

I think that it is important for teachers to make sure that they're not afraid to talk to each

other, um, make sure that you understand that you are working as a team. And the only

way that you get better is to actually, like, if you see somebody that's not doing

something and be like, Hey, maybe you could try this next time or try to offer advice in a

nice way (TLT2 Interview).

TLT2 speaks to the creation of leadership elements, which allows teachers to have difficult

conversations regarding holding each other accountable for our actions and lack thereof. This

element of distributed leadership can be further defined by relational trust and can be found in a

teacher's responsibility in demonstrating and supporting the level of respect that is necessary to

have such conversations. According to Byrk and Schneider (2002),

Relational trust is grounded in the social respect that comes from the kinds of social

discourse that take place across the school community. Respectful exchanges are marked

by genuinely listening to what each person has to say and by taking these views into

account in subsequent actions. Even when people disagree, individuals can still feel

valued if others respect their opinions (para. 11).

Though indirectly stated, the lack of relational trust between staff members could be a large

factor as to why these conversations and ultimately a collaborative community atmosphere is not

consistent at RMS.

Furthermore, TLT5 began their inferred definition of staff collaboration by talking about

staff numbers, and as such described the staff as being a much more unified unit than the student

population. However, the conversation quickly altered course as the TLT5 began to discuss the

plethora of cliques that dominated the staff culture at CMS. TLT5 states,

You know, you have, uh, this group that hangs out with this group, this group that talks

with this group, some groups are isolated. So, it's kind of almost like a prison gang

mentality. They get swallowed up by, uh, whoever they need for protection, whoever is

around them. Um, some of our cliques are prison gangs (TLT5 Interview).

TLT5's metaphorical description of the staff creates an ultimate vision of division among the coworkers and provides a clear example of a lack in cohesive collaboration and community.

In responding to a follow up question, TLT5 reaffirmed the staff culture to prison gang comparison, which describes a strong lack of togetherness and poor universal staff relationships. To further support this idea, TLT5 stated, "So true. Um, I mean, in, in the way that I would say that it's one out to get the other squabbling for a position for the higher, higher position, higher water so to say." TLT5 then began to retell a personal narrative about issues amongst the staff,

> There were two teachers who were exaggerating a little bit but talking about the lack of work that they're able to get away with. So, these [other two] teachers decided that they needed to go to an administrator, to complain about, to complain about, um, what was going on (TLT5 Interview).

In this recount TLT5 questioned the trust of the staff, as it is evident that there is a sense of competitiveness amongst the coworkers. TLT5 further stated, "So everyone's trying to get each other, to try to make their life easier rather than working all working together for our students." In this description of the RMS staff, there is evidence of exploiting drama, which has appeared to stall collaboration and community building.

Regarding the competitive nature within the teaching staff, TLT7 believes that this culture could be changed, but it would take a mindset transition on behalf of the staff. TLT7 stated,

> I think that in order to increase that [teaching collaboration] it would just have to be a change in mentality across the board...So very similar to what we are doing with the TLT and our PLC work, you know, trying to be that positive force that other people can see and use as an example (TLT7 Interview).

TLT7 believes that positive collaborative change could occur, and that the steps to do so could already have been set in motion. TLT7 referenced the work of the Teacher Leadership Team and their mission of building distributed leadership through developing consistent and structured professional learning communities. The challenge of staff competition will hopefully subside if the work of the TLT can refocus the staff into buying-in and upholding a consistent school mission and vision.

TLT Essential Dispositions: Noticings and Wonderings

The following summation chart represents the data which supports research question two. This data chart illustrates the collective responses, emerging themes, and subheadings that were created to define the essential teaching dispositions within CMS.

Table 6. Summation chart of research question two, essential teaching dispositions.

Heading	Quantity of Coded Responses	Emerging Themes	Subheadings
TLT Essential Teaching Dispositions: Noticings and Wonderings	23 Verbalized 39 Inferred 18 Not Defined	12/12 H.&P., 1998	• Identified Essential Teaching Dispositions • Verbalized versus Inferred Dispositions • A Call for Creativity & Fun

As explained in the summation chart, there were eighty coded responses which fell under the umbrella of essential teaching dispositions. Of those eighty, twenty-three of them were verbalized. This verbalization of the essential teaching dispositions occurred during the TLT interviews and was in direct response to research question two. Thirty-nine responses were inferred. These essential dispositional teaching inferences were documented through the TLT sharing of narrative and experience throughout the interview process. The inferred essential dispositions were not collected through the direct questioning of research question two.

However, these inferred responses were articulated through organic conversation, which spanned

the interview process. Eighteen responses were not defined by Haberman and Post, 1998, and

were therefore considered novel teaching dispositions dependent on the need of RMS teachers

and students. Yet again, all coded responses were analyzed by the main researcher. From these

responses, twelve themes emerged. All twelve of the urban teacher's attributes, as defined by

Haberman and Post (1998), were identified through either verbal or inferred TLT responses. To

guide the formal analysis of this data collection, three subheadings were developed. The

subheadings were Identified Essential Teaching Dispositions, Verbalized Versus Inferred

Teaching Dispositions, and A Call for Creativity & Fun.

The two tables below represent a summary of the identified essential teaching

dispositions, which have been deemed most important by the TLT members. Both charts reflect

research question two, which states, *what teacher dispositions are most essential in an urban*

middle school setting? Table 7 is organized to represent both verbalized and inferred essential

teaching dispositions. Whereas Table 8 organizes the non-defined teaching dispositions. The

identified dispositions in this table, did not fall into one of the twelve attributes presented by

Haberman and Post (1998). Instead, these dispositions were labeled as novel dispositional

practices, wholly dependent on the needs of RMS.

Table 7. Teacher Leadership Team essential teaching dispositions.

Haberman & Post Skill Sets	Verbalized Dispositions	Inferred Dispositions
Self-knowledge	TLT1, TLT4	TLT1, TLT6
Self-acceptance	TLT1, TLT3	TLT6, TLT7
Relationship Skills	TLT4, TLT5, TLT6	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7
Community Knowledge	TLT4, TLT5	TLT2
Empathy	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7
Cultural human development	TLT3	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7

Cultural conflicts		TLT2, TLT5, TLT6
Relevant curriculum	TLT1	TLT1
Generating sustained effort		TLT4
Coping with violence		TLT4, TLT5
Self-analysis	TLT1	TLT3, TLT4
Functioning in chaos	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7	TLT1, TLT4, TLT6, TLT7

Table 8. Teacher Leadership Team essential dispositions not defined by Haberman & Post (1998).

Knowing Material	
Relational Trust	
Collective Responsibility	TLT2
Listening	TLT2, TLT3
Fun	TLT2
Willingness to	TLT4
change/Growth Mindset	TLT1, TLT4, TLT7
Advocacy of Self	TLT4, TLT7
Classroom Management	
Honesty	TLT6, TLT7
Authentic Self	TLT7
Motivation	TLT7
	TLT4, TLT6, TLT7
	TLT1

Identified Essential Teaching Dispositions

My first noticing speaks directly to fulfilling research question two, which seeks to define the essential teaching dispositions needed to teach at RMS. The verbalized responses were in direct reply to a first-round interview question, whereas the inferred dispositions were analyzed and coded through other responses, such as the retelling of narratives or the answering of follow up questions. Clearly, there is a stark contrast between the identified essential verbalized and inferred dispositions. The most essential verbalized disposition was that of functioning in chaos, whereas the most essential inferred dispositions was calculated into a three-way tie. Those three inferred dispositions include relationship skills, empathy, and cultural human development.

Verbalized, was the need to function and survive. There was not one TLT interview that did include, directly or indirectly, the need to remain flexible as an educator. For example, TLT4 expressed a need for flexibility, which is characterized by the teacher skill set of functioning in chaos (Haberman & Post, 1998). TLT4 stated,

One thing that I learned immediately was at least after lunch, my students, there was always something that happened at lunch. And my class after lunch was always like five minutes because to calm them down from lunch, like, and some teachers will freak out and be like, we have lesson plans to do you have to, you know, but I tried to calm down or solve whatever problems and the fastest way I could so that the rest of their day wasn't completely gone out the window (TLT4 Interview).

TLT4 spoke to their positionality to the lesson plan and inquired that teachers should not feel angst if their lesson is not completed to fulfillment. TLT4 spoke about other school factors that occur outside the classroom that may affect the learning process. TLT4 believed that a teachers' priority is to help solve the student issue at hand, to salvage what is left of the academic school day. The element of teacher surprise seemed frequent in their recollection of what occurs after the lunch period, and it seemed as though teachers must employ a reaction of flexibility to deal with a sometimes-disorganized environment.

TLT7 inferred that teachers who work at RMS need to be equipped with an internal and external responsiveness and flexibility. TLT7 believes that the daily functions within RMS call for external flexibility, as situations may arise at any moment. TLT7 also referenced an internal responsiveness and flexibility that must be called upon to develop the necessary teaching skill set based upon this unique population.

When asked to further identify instances in which a teacher must be responsive and flexible at RMS, TLT7 inferred to the use of the Haberman & Post (1998) skill set of functioning in chaos. TLT7 stated, "fire drills, school events, and potential fights." At first listening, the identified instances seemed a bit surface level, as there were not any verbalized and specific actions that described how a teacher would be responsive and flexible in any of these situations. However, within the second round interview, TLT7 chose to engage in a retelling of a story in which they personally had to be both responsive and flexible towards their students. TLT7 stated,

> So, for example, one of the kids last year, one of their more favorite rap artists, had
>
> passed away. And I do not know who this person was. I did not know who they were, but
>
> I knew the kids were off that day. So, you know, I was responsive that day and kind of
>
> asked them to talk about how they were feeling and why it upset them so much. And I
>
> tried to really assure them, you know, in their feelings that their emotions were okay to
>
> feel (TLT7 Interview).

In this example, TLT7 engaged in what could formally be identified as an element of restorative practices. As stated by Stewart Kline (2016), "Restorative practices can be described as an umbrella of tools that educators can use to establish positive relationships with all students and stakeholders" (p. 98). Through the creation of open communication dependent on the students' interest, TLT7 strengthened her relationship with her students. The action of adapting restorative practices within the personal classroom is not only an example of building upon relationships, empathy, and cultural understanding, but it is also an example of distributive leadership at the classroom level. TLT7 acknowledged the importance for students to express their emotions, prior to engaging in any academic content. The practice of initiating restorative practices as a strategy

of teacher flexibility also speaks to the skill set of cultural human development and relationship

skills (Haberman & Post, 1998).

In contrast, the inferred essential dispositions included relationship skills, empathy, and

cultural human development. In many ways, there are threads of connection as both empathy and

cultural human development are needed dispositions in order to successfully build a strong

student/teacher relationship. TLT6 inferred the importance of relationships when they said,

> We know how important those connections are, you know, and, and we, and maybe this
>
> is why our scores aren't the greatest, because we're trying to make that a note, emotional
>
> connection with the students. And we understand the value in that as opposed to them
>
> doing well on the state tests, you know, cause some of these kids, the struggle is just
>
> getting out of the city and, you know, getting through high school and, and deciding that
>
> they want to do something productive with their lives. You know, that's already set for
>
> you in a district like the wealthy suburban school (TLT6 Interview).

TLT6 acknowledged that building relationships is the fundamental essential disposition for

educators at RMS. TLT6 rationalized the low standardized test scores to provide insight on the

importance of emotional caring and support. TLT6 also referenced how schools, like the wealthy

suburban schools, do not have to worry about such issues, and that in RMS the priority must

always be that positive and supportive student/teacher relationship.

The other tying dispositions of empathy and cultural human development tuck nicely into

the relationship theme, as both dispositions are essential to creating a supporting relationship

with students. During their second-round interview, TLT1 greatly explained their prioritized list

of essential dispositions, most specifically the disposition of empathy. When asked to explain if

and how teachers at RMS show empathy, TLT1 stated,

A lot of them, no. Some yes . . . and I wonder if they just, they don't even know the kids,

they don't know anything about their students. Like they do not bother to even make the

relationships to know about some of the things that the kids may be struggling with or

going through or have gone through. Um, and maybe it's just like their ignorance too, to

like to the kids' lives outside of school (TLT1 Interview).

TLT1 explained their perception in that there is an imbalance of teachers who show empathy for

their students. TLT1 rationalized with that idea, as they discussed the lack of/or possible inability

to make connections with their students. TLT1 infers that if teachers build relationships with

their students, and truly got to know them on a level beyond academics, there would be a clearer

understanding of why teachers need to show empathy. Comparable to the beliefs of Ladson-

Billings (1995), TLT1 is indirectly referencing the significance in adapting a modeling a

culturally relevant framework of teaching. In this framework, Ladson-Billings (1995) speaks to

the importance of academic excellence, cultural competency, and critical consciousness. TLT1

also said,

I want to believe that if they knew what the kid was really going through, cause kids, a lot

of them won't just share with you, you know, unless you've built that trust in that

relationship. So, I want to believe that if they did know that a particular kid was

struggling, that they would show some empathy toward that child, but because they do

not know, and they haven't built that trusting relationship. Um, a lot of times they'll just

assume like the kids being lazy or the kids not trying hard enough or whatever (TLT1

Interview).

TLT1 infers that building relationships with students may be a challenge, which hinders the

dynamic and culture within the building. The challenge of relational trust is yet again

personified, as this example identifies the teacher struggle to create and sustain trusting relationships with their students.

In supporting both empathy and cultural human development, TLT2 reiterated the importance of teacher compassion and empathy when they stated, "Like it's, it's necessary for teachers to have compassion because if you don't care about the fact that our kids are going home to real crappy, crappy situations, I don't know if you can actually be a good teacher in their building." Again, TLT2 prioritizes empathy and cultural human development (Haberman & Post, 1998), as teachers who are understanding of the lives of our students outside of school generate an awareness that could affect instruction and other teaching dispositions.

In the second-round interviews, TLT2 explained how showing empathy and understanding towards your students has nothing to do with teaching. TLT2 defended the belief that there are certain elements of care that are more important than learning content. TLT2 expressed,

> But just making sure that their basic needs are taken care of. If they are coming to school, and they do not have stuff, I try to make sure that they, I figured out a way to get it for them . . . none of this has to deal with teaching. You have to make sure that you can teach them. If they are too worried about their stomach growling, I can't teach them (TLT2 Interview).

TLT2 spoke to the need to provide necessities for your students, which ultimately needs to be done if students are expected to learn. Again, TLT2 prioritizes social-emotional needs before content, which wholly aligns with Haberman & Post's (1998) disposition of empathy and cultural human development. I wonder why teachers indirectly referenced the absolute importance of relationship skills, empathy and cultural human development but were hesitant to

verbalize this in the interview. As stated by Duncan-Andrade (2009), "At the end of the day, effective teaching depends most heavily on one thing: deep and caring relationships" (p. 191). It is apparent that through the identification of such social-emotional needs, that TLT2 values the importance of showing empathy and building student relationships.

Verbalized vs. Inferred Dispositions

My second noticing is the difference between the number of coded dispositions. When verbalized, the TLT members accounted for twenty-two dispositional skill sets that fell into the theoretical framework of Haberman & Post (1998). However, when inferred, the TLT members accounted for thirty-nine dispositional skill sets. I wonder why there is such a discrepancy in numbers.

For example, cultural human development was only verbalized once, yet all seven TLT members inferred the need to be aware of the outside factors that affect the lives of our students. TLT3 verbalized and believed that teachers should be trained in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). According to The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, (2020), ACEs includes all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. In that belief, TLT3 described this process as,

> So, it's a specific kind of training in what occurs in children when they are grow up with trauma . . . with growth mindset and, you know, constantly repeating those kinds of things and like creating that culture. I mean, you can create a person who believes in themselves again (TLT3 Interview).

TLT3 touched upon the idea of having a professional development which focused on cultural human development (Haberman & Post, 1998), or the emotional needs of the students. TLT3 believes that teachers should engage in training to understand how outside factors and life

experiences affect the classroom setting. TLT3 also implied that a staff who engages in the ACES training and practice could develop a skill set which may transform the student culture.

Upon reflection, I began to think about the topics and conversations that occur when in a formal PLC. Many of those conversations are academic and revolve around lesson planning or reviewing data. With that being said, I wonder if the staff is familiar and or comfortable with having conversations that revolve around personal teaching dispositions. I do not ever remember having a conversation with any of my teammates describing how I show empathy or understanding towards my students. Based upon the data, maybe PLC agendas should be including these types of dispositional conversations However, to increase the relational trust to have these types of conversations, PLC groups may need to revisit their norms of communication and respect (DeFlaminis et al. 2016). The revisiting of this norms may help to provide a more comfortable space for sharing and collaboration.

A Call for Creativity & Fun

The last noticing has to do with the list of dispositional skill sets that did not easily fit into the Haberman & Post (1998) framework. There was one skill set that had the greatest similarity in response and that was the disposition of fun. Three TLT members expressed the importance of including fun in your instruction and or providing time for fun.

For example, TLT4 opted to challenge their initial list of essential teaching dispositions and substituted a new response. TLT4 believed that a teacher needs a sense of creativity and fun to be successful in RMS. TLT4 stated,

> I think being creative and fun is kind of important in our school because I mean, I think
> it's important at any school nowadays, but especially with our kids, they have such
> limited resources. So, to teach them something, you have to be interactive and creative or

different because they're not going to sit for something boring because you cannot

compete with *Call of Duty*. That is why I do crazy stuff and I wear crazy things just to do

something different and the kids talk about it. They remember it (TLT4 Interview).

TLT4 speaks to the student engagement and how the use of creativity and fun could greatly

impact the effects of learning. Although this is not a specified skill set from Haberman & Post

(1998), this disposition speaks to the uniqueness of the RMS student population, and how the

educators within this building could use such dispositions to best engage their students.

In further defending the disposition of fun, TLT7 spoke to their own successes with

classroom management. TLT7 stated, "Honestly, I'm just myself. I do not really have a

philosophy. Uh, like I said earlier, I am goofy. I like to goof off with the kids. I like to play

music and dance around with them, um, and have like little dance breaks. Um, I don't lie to

them." TLT7 spoke to the importance of the work/fun balance, through the revealing of their true

self.

TLT4 also believes that engaging in such creativity and fun may not be as easy for other

staff members. TLT4 values a level playing field with their students, rather than a dominant

system of hierarchy. However, this teacher leader is aware that there may be a misconstrued

understanding of what your fun may mean in the classroom. TLT4 believed that teachers have a

challenge with revealing their true self, which suppresses the teachers from engaging with their

students TLT4 stated,

> They're [teachers] just either afraid to be themselves or afraid to just let loose and express
>
> themselves or just be real with kids. They think maybe they have no, I am not saying to
>
> break that like professional wall down because obviously you still need to stay
>
> professional. But some teachers, I feel like they think of themselves as like a hierarchy

over children. And like, they have to be like this, you know, on top of like, I am the boss

because I am the teacher and that kids don't like that. They do not really like to be

intimidated. All the teachers that I remember growing up, like they were funny. They

were weird. They were quirky. They were kind, they were helpful. They had my back;

they were never like strict (TLT4 Interview).

TLT4 speaks to a possible fear of teachers being themselves, but in the same breath discussed

how it is the teachers who show their fun-loving side who are the most memorable. The idea of

being authentic with students was a teacher disposition that was echoed by three TLT members.

I wonder how teachers at RMS implement fun into their classrooms. I also wonder if the

teacher's definition of fun agrees with the students' perception. Finally, I wonder will behavioral

challenges decline, if the teachers at RMS work to create more engaging lessons and interactions

with their students.

TLT Narrative Dispositions: Noticings and Wonderings

The summation chart below references the data collected which supports research

question three. This data speaks to the narrative dispositions that were identified through the

analysis of the TLT reflective narratives.

Table 8. Summation chart for research question three, narrative and teaching dispositions.

Heading	Quantity of Coded Responses	Emerging Themes	Subheadings
TLT Narrative Dispositions: Noticings and Wonderings	37 Identified & Experienced	11/12 H.&P., 1998	• The Importance of Relationships & Empathy • An Increase in Reflective Practice • The Forgotten Curriculum

From this data collection there were thirty-seven coded responses. These responses were

coded by the TLT and included an anonymous analysis of another TLT member's personal

reflective narrative. The thirty-seven coded responses were all identified or experienced dispositional practices that aligned with the thematic coding of Haberman and Post (1998). Identified dispositions refers to the coders experience of identifying evidence of Haberman and Post's (1998) twelve attributes within another's narrative. Experienced dispositions refer to the writer's written articulation of a particular experience, which provided evidence of the twelve Haberman and Post (1998) dispositions. Eleven of the twelve Haberman and Post (1998) dispositions were either identified and or experienced in this data set. From these themes, three subheadings were created to support further analysis. The subheadings were The Importance of Relationships and Empathy, An Increase in Reflective Practice, and The Forgotten Curriculum.

To further validate the investigation and development of a list of essential teaching dispositions for RMS, TLT members wrote and anonymously coded a reflective narrative. The prompt of the reflective narrative was *"Provide a detailed narrative retelling of a profound teaching moment at Redwood Middle School. How did this moment transform or solidify your beliefs of what is needed to be an educator at Redwood Middle School?"* This data reflects both the identified Haberman & Post (1998) dispositions as well as the experienced Haberman & Post (1998) dispositions. Identified dispositions refers to the TLT member coding, as these are the dispositions that were coded in another TLT member's narrative. Experienced dispositions refer to that TLT member's written word. These are the dispositions that manifested within their own writing and were eventually coded by another member.

Table 9. Teacher Leadership Team narrative reflections and analysis of essential dispositions.

Haberman & Post Skill Sets	Identified Dispositions (Analyzed)	Experienced Dispositions (Written)
Self-knowledge	TLT7	TLT5
Self-acceptance	TLT5	TLT2
Relationship Skills	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7
Community Knowledge	TLT5, TLT7	TLT2, TLT5

Empathy	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7
Cultural human development	TLT2, TLT3, TLT5, TLT7	TLT2, TLT5, TLT7
Cultural conflicts	TLT5, TLT6, TLT7	TLT1, TLT2, TLT4, TLT5
Relevant curriculum		
Generating sustained effort	TLT1, TLT2, TLT5	TLT2, TLT3, TLT7
Coping with violence	TLT6	TLT4
Self-analysis	TLT1, TLT3, TLT5, TLT6, TLT7	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT4, TLT5
Functioning in chaos	TLT1, TLT5, TLT6	TLT2, TLT3, TLT4

The Importance of Relationships & Empathy

My first noticing is yet again referencing both the identified and experienced dispositions of both relationship skills and empathy. In both dispositional categories, all TLT members both analyzed this disposition in the work of another as well as provided evidence of this disposition in their own writing. I wonder if the re-emergence of relationship skills and empathy as the most frequently identified disposition solidifies the belief that they are the most essential teaching dispositions at RMS.

For instance, in the narrative reflection of TLT6, this teacher leader spoke to the ability to transform a student through building positive relationships. TLT6 wrote about an experience with a student in which the student was transferred to his team mid-year. This student was said to have no interest in school, violent tendencies, and a complete refusal of the school rules. In writing about their relationship with this student, TLT 6 stated,

Him and I had built a high level of trust, he came to me when he had issues in his other

classes and I just listened to him vent to calm himself down. We then discussed if there

were better ways to handle the situation, sometimes he said there were and sometimes he

said there was not . . .The connection I made with this student went beyond just him and

I. I have had people reach out to me about how to approach him and talk with him from

the high school, knowing and hearing about the connection we had when he was with me

(TLT6 Interview).

This reflective narrative excerpt clearly demonstrates the power of utilizing relationship skills to

best support the needs of your students. In this account, TLT6, used specific skill sets of trust,

de-escalation, listening, and supportive care to create a strong bond with the student and

ultimately transformed this student's entire outlook on school.

Through the process of narrative coding, TLT5 further revealed the power and

importance of building student/teacher relationships. TLT5 coded a narrative about a fellow TLT

member who built an impactful relationship with a student who was not their own. The reflective

narrative stated,

I will share the story about a student who was not mine but was in my classroom on a

weekly basis . . . he was rarely in the [his] classroom and would do his best to elope from

class every day. I started to ask him questions about himself, and his interests. He was on

the basketball team so when I would go to the games, I'd make sure to cheer for him and

talk to him about his efforts after the game. Of all the games I went to, I did not notice

any adults cheering for him that were his. He was typically waiting for a ride after the

game. It was during this time that I made a deal with him. If he could stay in his classes

for the day, he could come to my classroom at the end of the day during the remediate

and extension period. We would talk about basketball and I found some books and

magazines on basketball for him to read during the SSR time (TLT Narrative).

The author of this narrative built a relationship by connecting with a student through personal

interests. It is through the navigation of student interests that this TLT member was then able to

successfully provide an enriching reading activity. Yet again, it is important to note the impact of

relational trust. This TLT member build relational trust with the student by sharing and supporting the students' interest. This narrative excerpt provides evidence to the power of teacher relationship skills and its impact of relational trust.

An Increase in Reflective Practices

I also noticed that the dispositional practice of self-analysis increased in evidence through the writing and analysis of reflective personal narratives. I am not surprised, as the writing experiences were based upon avid reflection. However, there is much evidence to prove how the power of reflection helps to create experiences that we can all learn from. For example, TLT1 wrote about a personal teaching moment in which a student confided in them that they were pregnant. In this narrative excerpt, TLT1 walks us through their reflective process, as they questioned what it means to truly understand the culture of our students. TLT 1 stated,

> After some reflection, I realized that not everyone grows up like I did. Not all families and cultures prioritize the same things or view success in the same way. I mean, I always knew those things to be true, but I did not truly understand. My eyes were opened to my own preconceptions and bias. I started questioning what I was doing as a teacher - what was my purpose? Every day I was standing in front of students who were different from me and I had not taken the time to learn about their families, their cultures, their priorities, goals, etc. (TLT1 Interview).

Through reflective practices, TLT1 engaged in a self-analysis of cultural differences. It is in this moment that TLT1 came to terms with their own teacher bias and lack of student understanding. I wonder if teacher reflection with an emphasis on relationship skills and empathy could help to provide insight into what strategies are essential in building authentic and successful relationships. In reflecting upon relationship building strategies, Milner, Cunningham, Delale-

O'Connor, & Gold Kestenberg (2019) crafted a list of five action steps. These action steps were developed to support teachers in the process of developing meaningful student relationships. These steps include, student interviews, creating assignments in which students can share their experiences, involving class discussions that make the students the experts, support students in events and activities outside of the classroom, and visit your student's neighborhood (Milner et al., 2019). Such a process could be used to facilitate conversation regarding how to build effective student relationships.

The Forgotten Curriculum

Moreover, I noticed that there was no direct or indirect reference to the dispositional evidence of relevant curriculum in the TLT narratives. Even more interesting is the fact that only one TLT member even touched upon evaluating the cultural responsiveness of what we teach, and that was expressed during the interview phase of data collection. Culturally responsive teaching includes modeling a student-centered approach to learning (McCarthy, 2015). This approach includes honoring the opinions and interests of the students to drive the content that is then developed in the lessons (Milner et al., 2019). This type of teaching focuses on the student and places extreme value on their experiences and ideas.

To define cultural responsiveness within CMS, TLT1 chose to describe what this skill set should look like. However, there were no authentic descriptions of what teachers do to put cultural responsiveness into action. To drive home the urgency of cultural responsiveness, TLT1 expressed their perspective on the celebration of the Christmas holiday. TLT1 stated,

> I'm sorry, but December, like, we should not just be talking about Christmas. There are so
>
> many holidays this month. And, um, I feel like there are kids that are put in a tough spot

every December to be like, Oh, sure, I'll decorate this Christmas stocking because

everybody else is, but my family doesn't celebrate Christmas (TLT 1 Interview).

TLT1 refers to the lack of cultural responsiveness within the building, as they speak of how

students are funneled into celebrating one holiday. TLT1 ended this discussion with this

sentiment, "But I think more importantly [being cultural responsive is], like wanting to learn

more and understand more about, um, your students and what things they value, um, and their

families. And, um, trying to incorporate that in your classroom." Here, TLT1 specifically states

that teachers need to take their cultural understanding of students and incorporate those values

into instruction. Like, TLT7 and their application of student interests prior to the engagement of

academics, TLT1 also upholds the importance of getting to know your students beyond teaching.

I wonder if the teachers believe that they have less a say in the curriculum, therefore it is not

something that they would be likely to change. I also wonder how student/teacher relationships

and culturally responsive teaching would strengthen if we as educators reflected upon our

curriculum choices.

In asking the TLT members to write about their most profound moments, these educators

reflected upon their most impactful experiences, and in result, I noticed that many of our teacher

leaders have experience in implementing and acting upon these dispositions. However, we as a

teaching community fail to acknowledge the great work that is already being accomplished. I

wonder if the teaching staff at RMS is aware of the positive impact that they are already

bestowing upon our students. Although the challenges are mighty, there is evidence that our

teacher leaders are personifying what theory has proven to be needed in meeting the needs of our

students.

TLT Evidence of Distributed Leadership: Noticings and Wonderings

The summation table to follow depicts the data collected and supports the analysis of

research question four. This table represents evidence of distributive leadership, and speaks to

the already implemented structures and supports which uphold a distributive leadership model.

Table 9. Summation chart for research question four, distributive leadership.

Heading	Quantity of Coded Responses	Emerging Themes	Subheadings
TLT Evidence of Distributed Leadership: Noticings and Wonderings	16	8	• The Impact of PLC • Classroom Level Distributive Leadership

In response to research question four, sixteen responses were coded. All coding was

completed by the main researcher. Of those sixteen codes, eight themes emerged. The themes

encompass evidence to support the elements of distributive leadership. All themes are identified

as actionable foundations of distributive leadership that are already occurring within the RMS

building. These themes were Learning to create effective change, PLCs, Setting expectations and

norms, Peer walkthroughs, The TLT, Restorative practices, Teacher choice, and Optional

professional development. From these themes, the two subheadings of The Impact of PLC and

Classroom Level Distributive Leadership were developed.

It has been proposed through this study that the adoption and implementation of a

distributive leadership model could be paramount in positively transforming the school culture as

well as providing a space for teacher professional growth. The chart presented references

elements of distributive leadership that have been experienced and or verbalized by the TLT

within the walls of RMS. As depicted through the data, there are multiple elements of a

distributive leadership platform that are currently being implemented at RMS.

Table 10. Teacher Leadership Team evidence of distributive leadership modeling.

Evidence of Distributive Leadership	TLT Member
Began learning the process of effective change	TLT2
Implemented PLCs	TLT1, TLT2, TLT3, TLT6, TLT7
Setting expectations and norms	TLT3
Peer walkthroughs	TLT3
TLT	TLT4, TLT6, TLT7
Restorative Practices	TLT3, TLT5, TLT7
Teacher choice	TLT1
Optional PD	TLT1

The Impact of PLC

I noticed, yet again, the impact of the implementation of the PLC. As stated previously, five TLT members referred to the protocol of including a structured PLC as monumental to the collaboration and increase in positive staff culture. With that being said, it is also noticed that many of the other examples of distributive leadership evidence can be included as a subset to the PLC, as many of these other actions fall under the umbrella of an authentic PLC. For example, the perspectives of learning effective change and instilling team norms are all key elements of the PLC process.

When asked to explain their experiences with effective professional development, TLT2 began their explanation with our work with an outsourced professional development company. Transformative Growth is a company who began the Teacher Leadership Team and outlined and guided our formal convening of professional learning communities (PLCs), better known at RMS as component meetings. TLT2 stated, "So I feel like a lot of what we're doing with Transformative Growth, it's kind of like the PDs that we need learning how to actually affect change." According to DeFlaminis et. al. (2016), "Many distributed leadership participants described teacher leadership as transformational . . . This impacted how teachers and

administrators alike thought of themselves, how they understood what leadership was, and

informed their approach and strategy in effectuating leadership in their schools" (p. 85). Through

this teacher leader perspective, it appears that distributed leadership would offer the necessary

change that may be needed to build upon school culture and academic success.

To further illustrate the pre-existing acts of distributive leadership at RMS, TLT3 yet

again highlighted the transformational process of their department, which began with the

structural development of a consistent PLC model. "And so, to make, utilize, you know, the

honest use of that time, we had to discuss the bullshit. So, I was very clear with that, um, as an

expectation and a norm," said TLT3. This teacher leader referenced the structuring of their PLC,

as expectations and norms were developed to best prioritize their time. This level of PLC

engagement demonstrates a level of distributed leadership, as TLT3 developed and modeled a

sound and structural PLC initiative. In this personal account, TLT3 indirectly defined the norms

for a professional learning community. As defined by Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour (2002), a main

focus of an effective PLC is the collaboration between team members to achieve common goals.

TLT3, as department head, shows evidence of distributive leadership, as this teacher leader

focuses on goal achievement through the implementation of team norms. I wonder if the

implementation of more diverse and consistent PLCs would grow this list of evidence to become

even more profound.

Classroom Level Distributive Leadership

I also noticed that three TLT members referenced the professional development of

restorative practices. Restorative practice is in fact distributed leadership at the classroom level.

This link to distributive leadership is connected through teacher agency, the idea that teachers

direct their own professional pathways and continue to grow both personally and collaboratively

(Calvert, 2016). Restorative practice training provided the essential tool kit needed to not only support the development of effective student/teacher relationships, but to also increase teacher agency and teacher leadership. Through restorative practices training teachers learn how to problem solve with their own classroom setting. This type of training increases teacher agency and increases student teacher relationships. For example, TLT5 retold a story about engaging in restorative practices with a parent to defuse a parental concern. TLT 5 states,

> You know, I was kind of like the intermediary and we try to, and our goal is going to get all on the same page, to restore this relationship and to make sure this parent knows we're all caring for the same kid. We're all on the kids' side (TLT5 Interview).

The use of restorative practices connects with the foundations of distributive leadership. As teachers use these practices, educators are also increasing their agency, which promotes teacher autonomy and self-growth. Creating relationships with parents could strengthen the bond of trust between the home life and the academic setting. This brief narrative also reinforces the importance of building positive relationships and introduces the Haberman & Post (1998) skill set of coping with violence. Teacher leaders who enact coping with violence skills show techniques in de-escalation and violence prevention.

I wonder what would happen if RMS used the distributive leadership language to define these current professional changes of success and responsibilities. Foundational tools such as PLCs, TLTs, and restorative trainings are not to be used in isolation. They are all tools used to empower the educator and restore autonomy, collaboration, and support to the profession.

A Conclusion to a New Beginning

Through the lens of RMS teacher leaders, building perceptions and essential teaching dispositions have been identified. To begin the process of RMS cultural transformation, all

stakeholders within RMS must take responsibility in this endeavor, as this data and knowledge

can now be shared with those who will have the responsibility of becoming change agents. The

identified perceptions of success could be manifested and shared to offer guidance and support

towards elements of the school culture that have already proven to be successful. The identified

challenges could further be reflected upon, as they could become discussion topics to be

developed and sustained through PLC work. These challenges could also be refined into future

professional development trainings. Like the identified school challenges, the essential teaching

dispositions could serve the purpose of creating future professional development and or future

teacher trainings. A purpose of this research was to unveil knowledge that could have the

potential to transform the culture at RMS. The revealed data, if acted upon, could provide ample

knowledge and opportunity to begin a true cultural transformation. Our new beginning starts

now.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for the Future

Urgent Matters

It was Bettina Love (2020), who addressed the urgency of taking positive advantage of the effects of COVID-19. Both raw in language and emotionally charged, Love (2020) spoke of an opportunity. This was and still is an opportunity to reset our schools, to truly transform from the reality of what public education was, educational brick and mortar which has historically not only failed children of color, but has consistently failed all children (Love, 2020). Love (2020) conveyed for the need to press onward, a need for a true transformation when she said,

> We cannot go back. We now have the opportunity not to just reimagine schooling or try to reform injustice but to start over. Starting over is hard but not impossible; we now have a skeleton of a playbook. It starts with creativity, teacher-student relationships, and teacher autonomy (para. 5).

Consistent to the voicings of Love (2020), this research too has developed support for the elements of Love's (2020) playbook. The results of this study align to the essential need of increasing creativity within teacher dispositions, investing in the process of building impactful teacher/student relationships, and expanding teacher autonomy through a sustaining a supportive model of distributive leadership and a cohesive professional development plan. It is through the lens of this playbook that I wish to invest in a trifecta of job-embedded professional development. The goal of these professional developments is to build a sustaining network of

professional growth, which is focused on empowering teachers and ultimately increasing student success.

According to the work of Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010), job-embedded professional development "refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning" (p. 2). It is through job-embedded professional development that the urgency of positive cultural change could be created and fostered within our own workday (Croft et. al., 2010). I would not be truthful if I did not express the arduous time that was spent reflecting on this study's impact for the future. I have revisited this section many times. In previous drafts, I have developed outlines of school outreach, ideas for parental engagement, and proposed effects on student achievement. However, no matter the detail that was put into these endeavors, I consistently went back to the same original thought, and that this action research project was meant to support the teachers. This research project was meant to begin staff conversations about the possibilities of effective transformation and of continuing professional growth. Consistent to what I envisioned this project to be, now nearly three years ago, it was always about transforming the educator to eventually prompt further positive change. It is not that I do not find connections to parent outreach and student achievement in my work. It is the fact that to provide further opportunity to other areas of challenge within my building, we must first begin with supporting and developing the urban educator. At its core, I believe that the perspectives and dispositions of the RMS teacher are the catalyst to sustaining and implementing effective change. In a perfect world, the transformational impact of RMS would eventually bring into the conversation elements of parent engagement and student achievement. But here, in this moment, this work is solely dedicated to the teachers at RMS. Therefore, to build upon the work

that has already been developed within the building, this study proposes three job-embedded

professional development programs. These professional development programs are the

integration of a critical friend's protocol within PLCs, the creation of an RMS Book Club, and

the formation and celebration of a year-long teacher Portfolio Project.

The Critical Friends Protocol

As witnessed through the data, the development of an effective PLC has greatly changed

the perception of CMS. TLT members were in agreeance when identifying the work of the PLC

as one of the greatest successes of teacher culture within the building. In hopes of building upon

the PLC success, the first job-embedded professional development action would revolve around

the implementation of a new PLC protocol. This PLC protocol is known as "critical friends."

The critical friend's protocol was established by Brown University in 1994 and focuses on the

PLC as a tool to drive dialogue and reflection (College of Career Readiness Standards-in-

Action). In essence, this type of PLC professional development supports problem solving

through the evaluation and critique of student work and teaching strategies (Blake & Gibson,

2020).

As identified by Bambino (2002), critical friends "give feedback," "collaborate," "find

new solutions," and "create community" (p. 25-27). At RMS, the efforts of providing feedback

would be evident in the PLC's ability to provide further support and problem-solving strategies

to the issue at hand. This strategic feedback could help to build upon the creation of a safe space,

which focuses on the building of relational trust. Providing fellow PLC members with feedback

could increase relational trust and provide other teacher members with strategies that have been

proven to be successful in other classrooms. The PLC's willingness to collaborate would be

defined by the PLC team members' transparency in bringing to the table authentic teaching

issues in hopes of driving student achievement and professional growth. Implementing the

critical friend's protocol within the structures of the RMS PLC may help to foster consistent and

purposeful collaboration. The element of finding new solutions correlates to the importance of

reflective practices, as past teaching experiences and data will help to discover new solutions to

professional teaching challenges. Within this protocol members of the RMS PLC team will be

able to engage in their own action research, as newly implemented strategies will have to be

monitored and reflected upon to evaluate success. Last, the critical friend's element of creating

community is truly the purpose of the entire dissertation project. Through the establishment of

such a job-embedded professional development protocol, PLC members not only increase their

own opportunities of professional growth, but they also help to create a more well-rounded

community of teachers.

This concept of critical friends could easily be structured within the current RMS PLC

schedule. For example, typical PLC component meetings are scheduled twice a week. Teachers

are also granted extended pay, if the PLC team chooses to meet after contractual hours to plan,

assess data, and or provide team member support. The concept of the critical friends protocol

could be established as a regularly scheduled PLC endeavor, which is highlighted and

implemented bi-weekly. Every two weeks, a selected PLC meeting will specifically follow the

critical friends protocol and structure. This scheduled PLC event will be determined by the

availability of the PLC team and will be documented within the PLC's schedule and agenda.

During this specialized PLC, a pre-assigned PLC team member will hold the spotlight. This

means that this pre-determined team member will provide student data and or instructional data

to the rest of the PLC. This spotlighted teacher will not only present current data but will

verbally inquire and explain an authentic problem of practice. The other PLC members will then provide feedback and possible solutions to the spotlighted teacher's inquiry. Before the critical friends PLC ends, the spotlighted teacher and other PLC members will develop a series of next steps. These next steps will include the new strategy to be implemented, ways to monitor the strategy's impact, and specific details of the data to be collected. The next bi-weekly meeting will begin with a brief reflection from the previous spotlighted member. This reflection will speak to the member's progress and experience in engaging and implementing the feedback and possible solutions presented through the critical friends protocol. Such teacher driven inquiry could lead to not only the advancement of professional growth but could also help to support future student achievement.

The PLC Book Club

The second job-embedded professional development supports the creation and implementation of a PLC Book Club. Like the Critical Friends Protocol, the intent of this book club is to serve as an alternative to professional development and could also be implemented to support the work of the PLCs. Although the effects of professional teacher book clubs are not a topic that has been arduously studied. There has been research conducted by Blanton, Broemmel, & Rigell (2019) which investigated the effects of teacher book clubs and its support of professional development. This study, which lasted over a span of four years, included 12 teacher participants who were all a part of the special education department. Effectiveness of the book club was assessed through interviews, and the writing of blog entries and reflective summaries (Blanton et al., 2019). The results of the study defined themes such as companionship, a support network, fighting isolation, and collaboration (Blanton et.al, 2019).

Moreover, members of the research-based book club also experienced changes in instructional practice, as the results identified evidence in the implementation of new teaching strategies, the changing of how staff perceive students, and the changing about how teachers think about themselves and the teaching profession (Blanton et al., 2019). The work of Blanton et al. (2009) supports the transformation of many identified teacher challenges within RMS. Through this research and the implementation of a job-embedded PLC Book Club, there could be a newfound possibility to help and support the transformation of the identified RMS challenges. These challenges consist of the normalization of negativity, negative perceptions of school culture, teacher competitiveness, teacher cliques, the lack of overall support, and collaboration.

Another goal of this PLC Book Club is to create sustained professional development. This would be professional development which speaks to the needs that were revealed through this study's investigation. As stated in the results, such challenges as the staff's negativity, lack of teacher reflection, and lack of relational trust were greatly personified within the data results. Through sustained professional development and the implementation of the PLC Book Club, such challenges could be addressed, discussed, and grown. Research has projected that effective professional development adheres to the following: "focuses on instruction and student outcomes (Newmann et al. 2000), persists over a long period of time (Wei et al. 2010), ensconces teachers in supportive communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Stoll et al, 2006), is aligned with local goals (Penuel et al, 2007), and engages teachers in authentic problems" (Stein, Kintz, & Miness, 2016). To highlight the potential effectiveness of the PLC Book Club, the focus of thematic book choices will revolve around the identified successes, challenges, and essential dispositional practices that were identified through this study. To help the vision of the book club

come to fruition, the beginning development conversations, protocols, scheduling, trainings, and resources will come from the assistance of the TLT members. It is this book club's hope that as the PLC work continues, more teacher leaders will be willing to come forward to help with the book club's planning process. Continued training and resources will be offered both throughout and after the book club experience.

Research has proposed that effective professional development engages in consistent and extended periods of time (Smith, Ralston, Naegele, & Waggoner, 2020) and can span through larger time frames. As defined by Smith et al. (2020), a goal of this book club is to not only support teachers during our reading process, but to create sustaining avenues of teacher inquiry and growth. Smith et al (2020) stated, "This extended duration of the experience also allowed for the evolution of participants from cautious bystander to confident implementer" (p. 87). It is apparent from this research that engaging in professional development, which may be strategically implemented throughout the year, may provide more ample time for educator transformation and leadership growth. In recognizing the book club as an innovative form of professional development, RMS could create a yearly sustainable model of teacher growth and support. Therefore, the time span of the book club will span three quarters of the school year, beginning with quarter two and ending with quarter four. An ambitious goal of the book club would be to highlight one book per quarter. The order of read books will follow this cycle, understanding and acting upon reflection, researching and implementing effective dispositional teaching practices, and collaborating and sharing newly learned experiences through engaging in teacher leadership practices. The goal of the PLC Book Club loosely mimics the processes of a small action research project. In quarter two, the teachers will acknowledge reflection as a tool for identifying success and challenge. Teachers will engage in a book which highlights reflective

practices to evaluate potential problems of practice and potential problem solutions. In the third

quarter, teachers will dive into the knowledge of effective teaching dispositions. Teachers will

dive into the essential dispositional practices of building relationships with students and showing

student empathy. The book choice for this quarter will define effective strategies to help build

upon the most essential RMS teaching disposition. In quarter four, teachers will build upon their

leadership strategies. Within this quarter teachers will be guided through the sharing and

collaborative practices which will help scaffold their newfound knowledge to other teachers.

Elements of this quarter will include PLC protocols such as the Critical Friends Protocol, as the

final quarter of the book club is focused on the sharing and actionable implementation of the

knowledge gained. As the book club progresses throughout school years, the cycle will remain.

The book club will always include a quarter of reflection, a quarter of the investigation of an

essential teaching disposition, and a quarter of implementing a plan for continued sharing and

collaboration.

To engage in and understand teacher buy-in, research supports the significance of a

teacher's willingness to participate when efforts are regarding the successful implementation of

school reform (Turnbull, 2001). In examining the factors which support teacher buy-in, the work

of Turnbull (200l) revealed, "Teachers were most likely to 'buy-in' to their school reform

program when they had adequate training, adequate resources, helpful support from the model

developers, school-level support, administrator buy-in, and control over the reform

implementation in their classrooms" (p. 248). In developing the motivation behind teacher buy-in

for the PLC Book Club, the ideas of adequate training and resources, developed supports, and

teacher control will all be clearly defined elements of the book club structure. PLC members will

receive complete transparency, as the book club will be described as a PLC professional

development opportunity which could have an impact on the teacher's responsibilities in upholding school reform through teacher growth and possible increases in student achievement.

In holding true to the words of Dewey (1993) this the Critical Friends Protocol and the RMS Book Club was developed with the intent of providing a space for educators to reflect on their past experiences in hopes of creating a better understanding of what is needed to be an effective educator. As presented through the data of this research, relationship skills (Haberman & Post, 1998), or the act of building positive relationships with our RMS students, was deemed one of the most essential teaching dispositions for educators at RMS. Members of the PLCs and the RMS Book Club would be guided through the type of reflection that mirrors the participant journey of the TLT. This reflection would focus on our cultural perceptions and dispositional arsenals as educators to truly engage in what actions are successful and challenged when it comes to building student/teacher relationships. Like the previously discussed work of Maksimovic (2018), it is a goal of this study to use reflective practices to increase student well-being and to better provide a platform for the successful building of relationships. My hope is that through maintaining the structures of the PLC, leading through reflection, supporting peer collaboration, and creating a clear mission of teacher professional growth (Stoll and Louis 2007) members of the PLCs and RMS Book Club will embark on a journey of positive transformation.

The RMS Portfolio Project

Motivation must be influenced and supported by the TLT team and administration (Spillane, 2006). To help motivate teachers to buy-in to the Critical Friends Protocol and the PLC Book Club, the TLT and the building administration will have to come together to support these efforts. Together, there will have to be collaborative creativity used to motivate and engage

the RMS teaching staff. In doing so, the TLT and administrative team will develop an RMS

Portfolio Project. This Portfolio Project will allow RMS staff members to document their

professional journey of growth for the opportunity to be recognized at the end of the year.

According to Bullock & Hawk (2001) portfolios will provide administrative insight into the

growth and effectiveness of participating teachers. Although the use of professional portfolios is

a rather nuanced approach to formal teacher assessment (Lyons, 1998), these portfolios will not

be used to assess a teacher's degree of professionalism or standards of teaching. Rather, this

Portfolio Project will celebrate the efforts of teacher engagement, collaboration, and professional

growth that was developed through teacher led initiatives such as the PLC, the Critical Friends

Protocol, and the RMS Book Club. The Portfolio Project will honor the professional

development prowess of teachers who engage in job-embedded professional growth and staff

collaboration.

In assessing the staff buy-in of teacher incentives and recognition programs, research has

supported the idea that monetary gain is not necessarily at the forefront in influencing teachers

(Berry & Eckert, 2012). Two of the ideas developed from the implementation of the national

teacher turnover survey and discussed in the work of Berry & Eckert (2012) is the idea that

teachers are dissatisfied with "poor support from school administrators." (p. 3). As developed

from this study, two of the identified structural teacher challenges were a lack of overall teacher

support systems and lack of teacher empowerment. To help bridge these challenges, the RMS

staff members who complete the Portfolio Project would be honored at the end of the year by

administration through a type of ceremony. The ceremony could include a certificate, an

unveiling of a plaque that is displayed forevermore in the school building, a positive note in the

professional database, and or an increase of scoring in their end of the year review.

In further helping to promote the transformational change within RMS, the Portfolio Project could take the TLT identified challenge of teacher competitiveness and redefine the issue for the betterment of the teaching staff. Although not entirely designed to do so, the creation of a Portfolio Project as a recognition program could develop a bit of friendly competition amongst the staff. This positive spin on competitiveness will only support the growth and advancement of all peers and the school-wide culture. It is this Portfolio Project's hope to transform the negative competitiveness among the staff to a competitiveness that promotes positive change and professional learning for all.

The implementation of the Critical Friends Protocol, the RMS Book Club, and a culminating Portfolio Project, are significant steps in developing the transformation of the school-wide culture at RMS. Implications for the future support the development of an all-inclusive RMS community, one in which teachers and administrators partake in a shared mission and vision and work together to support the future success of all stakeholders and students. In addition to opportunities of professional growth, all three job-embedded programs align to the foundational elements of a distributive leadership model. The essence of these three professional developments is not only bound in teacher advancement but they are also developed to help foster and create active and effective teacher leaders.

Future Research

Other Stakeholder Perceptions

"We must radically dream" (Bettina Love, 2020). These were the words that Bettina Love used to describe how schools must re-open. If anything, I believe that my work in this

chapter has romanticized the ability to dream, as I further take the developed research and continue to expand upon the idea of the transformed RMS community.

The reality of the educational impacts of COVID-19 on RMS and its community are continuous, as students have not stepped foot in the building for in-person instruction since last March. Knowing that we will eventually return to school creates a sense of importance in developing a strong community of support, not only for our teachers and students, but for our larger community as well. Case and David (2018) state,

As districts and schools refocus their approaches to family partnership, it is becoming clear that families must have real opportunities to help define this work. At a surface level, this can facilitate buy-in to schools' goals and practices. At a deeper level, meaningful partnerships lead to better student outcomes while also permitting schools to become centers of democratic participation (Phi Delta Kappan).

Post Covid-19 should not be a transition back to educational normalcy. As defined by Case and David (2018) the partnership between families and schools strengthens the community and further helps to build the democratic structures of distributive leadership. As previously discussed, the work of Maxine Green (1995) supports the idea of democracy in education as she stated, "Democracy, we realize, means community that is always in the making. Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers" (pp. 39). In continuing to analyze this quote with multiple lenses, the community in the making is symbolic of the transformation of RMS. The emerging solidarity speaks to the network of support and collaboration that could be extended to the parent community. The sharing of beliefs calls for a mission and vision transparency, a method of informing the parent

community about where RMS has been and where we want to go. Last, the idea of remaining

open to newcomers could indirectly be referencing the invitation for the parents to join in on our

transformational journey. It is my belief that there is a calling for future research within our other

communities of stakeholders, as the perspectives of the community and parents also need to be

heard and supported.

Just this February, The Philadelphia Inquirer printed an editorial which expressed parent

views regarding the effects of COVID-19 and the continued Philadelphia School District shut-

down. Parent opinion was vast, as it expressed the educational challenges of the students and the

demands on family to adequately provide support for their students' education while having the

responsibility to report for work (Graham, 2021). Most notable was the parent's viewpoints

regarding the schools around them that have proven that re-opening could be safely

administered. One parent stated, "We need to come up with a solution, and just saying, 'This

other district has more resources' is not a solution," (Graham, 2021). Parents are aware of the

inequities of re-opening opportunities and are anxious for directives as to when their children

will return to school. These parents are also a bit hesitant due to the lack of relational trust and

the normalized feeling of disappointment that has been created by the public school systems

towards diverse families (Philadelphia Inquirer). Grounded in the ideas developed by Byrk and

Schneider (2002), relational trust is defined by the social respect that is developed and acted

upon across all members of the school community. Proposed research supporting the lack of

relational trust by parents in public schools is rationalized as to why Hispanic parents struggle to

engage with schools (Smith et al. 2008).

Building the relational trust could be created through the authentic community

collaboration. This community engagement opportunity could serve as a starting point in

developing relational trust with the parent community. As we all eventually transition back to a newly transformed RMS, the relationship with the outside school community could provide the needed assistance and guidance to not only continue the research regarding school cultural perceptions and essential teaching dispositions, but to create an avenue of connection between both school and the parent community.

In establishing relational trust and parental community engagement, future research could be generated using a social media platform. Current research regarding the significance of increased technology in school is abundant. Research conducted by Stelitano et al. (2020) discusses that over 50 million students within the United States public schools were forced to transition to online learning due to COVID-19. Using RMS as an example, prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, we were not a one-to-one school. Previously, computers were assigned to carts, and team teachers rotated the computer carts based on need. Currently, RMS has supplied each student with their own computer, as the need and continuation of virtual learning has been the consistent schooling structure of this year.

Although there is much conversation about the increase in school technology, there is little research developed about a school's use of social media for the benefit of parent engagement. However according to Kizgin, Jamal, Dey, & Rana, (2018) social media is transforming the way organizations support and communicate with each other, as such a tool is increasing engagement creativity in a rather concise manner. With a social media platform, there is promise of an increase in the number of RMS parent users. For example, both the millennials and people in the age group of 30-49 make up close to 84% of all Facebook users (Smith, 2016). Within this social media platform, RMS could engage in monthly initiatives which may include the sharing of important information, surveying of community and parent opinion, as well as

aiding continued knowledge through support videos, educational articles, parenting strategies, and opportunities to volunteer within in the school. This social media platform would be specific to RMS, its staff, students, and family members, and would focus on continually nurturing the culture and community of the school building.

If future research were to occur, the perceptions of stakeholders would be essential in continuing to build upon collaborative community as well as essential needs. Involving the perspectives of stakeholders such as parents and community members will continue to clarify how to best support the mission and vision of RMS. Additionally, continued research could focus on the effects of social media implementation as a platform to increase parent engagement and community building.

Inquiry Support Impact

Future research could also include the investigation of action research impact on study participants. For example, future research could revolve around a study's impact on the professional development of inquiry support participants. Throughout this journey, I always wondered what the TLT team thought of their involvement in the study. I wonder if they took the codes of Haberman and Post (1998) and evaluated and reflected upon their own teaching dispositions. After the study, two TLT members made a point to express their reactions to being members of the inquiry support team. Both responses were significant in that both teachers revealed how their involvement in the study effected how they personally viewed their own teaching skill set and dispositional practices. Both TLT participants spoke of how they analyzed their own practices in efforts to further identify dispositional strengths and weaknesses. Although I believe that regret is a strong word. I do wish that I had taken the time to follow-up with all

members of the TLT team. The curiosity of how the studies participation effected their won

practice is worthy of investigation. Therefore, further research could examine the effects of study

participation on teacher dispositional practices within the classroom.

The Impact of The PLC Book Club

Another area of future research could be identified in the impact of the RMS book club.

An evaluation of participant growth, especially in evaluating first year buy-in to later years could

be pertinent in examining the effectiveness of the book club. For example, this summer I will be

piloting the book club as voluntary professional development. Teachers will have the opportunity

to willingly sign up for a four-week professional development opportunity, which I will lead and

facilitate. Future research could focus on not only the growth of book club members form year to

year but also the effectiveness and impact of the book club process. For example, this summer

we are focusing on a book which introduces research and strategies on classroom management.

Future research could examine the effectiveness of book club participation by evaluating a

teacher's growth in sustain a positive and successful classroom environment.

Limitations

The purpose and goals of my dissertation action research called for me to strategically

select the Teacher Leadership Team as participants. With that being said, I am also a member of

the TLT and have strong professional relationships with all other members. Therefore, there is a

chance of participant bias due to my positionality to both the school and these participant

members. Also, due to the selective involvement of the TLT members, there is absence of

perspective and voice when it comes to other stakeholders.

Since this action research project is based upon the perceptions and experiences of educators at RMS, these findings cannot be generalized with confidence to other urban middle schools. The data collection and analysis are specific to the experiences and structures of RMS.

Effects of Covid-19 included a challenge for TLT and inquiry support collaboration. The nature of this virtual novelty made time scarce. Many of the meetings and debriefings needed to be recorded to ensure that TLT members could engage and participate when able. Since in-person instruction has been suspended since March 2020, a great amount of time had spanned since teachers were in the building. When responding to questions, there were multiple redirections, as this study specially investigated teaching dispositions for in-person instruction.

Conclusion

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

-Maya Angelou

This year, I had the opportunity to teach about Maya Angelou, and as I investigated in her work, this quote resonated with me. I believe that these sixteen words easily sums up the purpose and efforts behind this entire dissertation project. I do not believe RMS is an urban middle school that does not do its best to support our students and community. On the contrary, I believe the opposite. RMS does try its best, yet we lack the reflection to know better. It is my hope that through the investigation of TLT perceptions and essential teaching dispositions through purposeful reflection that I have started a movement to know better. It is only when we evaluate where we have been, where we are, and where we want to be with a critical lens that we can finally begin to transform and do better.

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Appendix A

TLT Second Round Interview Questions

TLT1

1.When asked about the student culture, you took a long pause and then began to talk about the dynamics between RMS before it became grades 5-8. Do you believe that the RMS staff were prepared and trained for the new change for the school year?

2.You said that this was a tough question because the CMS kids did not identify with the school yet, and they were kind of like thrown in there. How could the staff have helped to create a more seamless transition for our students? Do you think the staff hold some responsibility in helping to create student culture whether positive or negative?

3. When asked about teacher culture, you talked about the cliques or pockets of teachers. How do these cliques positively and negatively add to the teacher and entire school culture?

4. You briefly talked about the teachers who complain, and that some of them want to blame the kids. What effects does this blaming of the kids have on our school?

5. You say you always try to look to a silver lining? Do you think this is common practice for our staff?

6. When asked about RMS being a difficult school to work in, you stated that teaching is tough everywhere. Specifically, for RMS what are some of the larger challenges of our school?

7. Why do you believe that your job is so rewarding?

8. Do our teachers show empathy towards their students? Why or why not?

9.What does cultural responsiveness look like at RMS?

10. Do you believe that teachers at RMS use reflective practices to guide their teaching or relationship building?

11. How much autonomy do teachers at RMS have?

12. How are all levels of teachers supported at RMS? The newbies? The veterans? Is this support

adequate?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in

public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed

skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do

you possess?

TLT2

1.When asked about the student culture of the building, you said that 85-90% of the students

don't value education. That they enjoy being in the building, but it is not enjoyable for education

purposes. With such a large percentage of students who undervalue education, do the teachers in

our building add to this culture of undervaluing? And if not, how do they help to support the

valuing of education?

2. You also stated that the students don't value their education, but they value their teachers.

What specifically do these students value? And is that student to teacher value a norm in the

building?

3. When asked about the teacher culture of the building, you said that 75% of the staff works

hard. What does working hard look like at Redwood Middle School?

4. When asked about our school being difficult to work in, you state, "I think it's the deal with

the students. Maybe the maturity level, they get lost in the building and like on purpose to do

some negative things. But I don't know if they would be that way. If the teachers didn't already

establish the fact that our building is impossible. Like if we change the culture of the team of the

teachers to, um, you know, all our students matter to us and not just our own personal students

that are on our rosters matter to us, I think we'd see a lot of change." How do the 75% of the

teachers get these 25% teachers to change their ways? Do other teachers have a responsibility in

trying to transform other teachers?

5.You state that you "have no problem working in there" but there are other teachers who would

say the opposite. What are the differences between your outlook on the school and theirs?

6. When asked about the quality or skills essential to be a teacher in our building, you talked

about knowing your material. You said that "There are many people who are hired, who don't

know their content, but they are a body, so they are hired." Whose responsibility is it then to help

these novices or struggling teachers? How does this type of reality challenge and or help our staff

culture?

7. You talked a lot about showing compassion for our students, and that this is essential is being

able to teach here. How do you show compassion for your students?

8. You also blurted out "creating positive school culture" after thinking hard about prioritizing

the essentials. How do teachers in our building create positive school culture?

9.Explain what a walnut tree looks like at RMS?

10. Regarding ideal PD, you brought up Transformational Growth. Why was that PD so

important?

11. You also talked about a team-building PD, and specifically focusing on building our teaching

crafts. What teaching crafts does our staff need to work on?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in

public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed

skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do

you possess?

TLT3

1.In describing the student culture you used words and phrases like, rowdy, intense, gang affiliations, and conflict. What role does the teacher play in helping to create a positive or negative school culture?

2. When asked to describe the teacher culture, you talked about the positivity of your department and that your culture is awesome. But overall, you said that the culture of the teachers is very "disjointed." What did your department do to create such positivity?

3. You talked about the lack of "trust" for some teacher groups. Would you consider RMS a trustful staff?

4. You ended your description of the student culture by talking about the new teachers and how they are "believing in the process." You then followed up with "but I wouldn't say that I was welcomed when I got here." Can you elaborate on your experience of when you started at RMS? Do you believe that there is a clear welcoming process for new teachers at RMS?

5. How are teachers supported at RMS?

6. You state that part of the difficulty of teaching at RMS is that the procedures are not clear, and because of that people are not on the same page. What do you find most difficult to navigate?

7. In discussing what skills are needed in the classroom, you stated that "you have to be able to see the kids' perspectives or you will not be successful." What does seeing your students' perspective look like in the classroom?

8.You talked about your first year and how your classroom management revolved around telling the kids that you loved them, and that your skill set was limited. How does a teacher increase their classroom management skill set from the first year of teaching?

9. When asked about your top 3 teacher dispositions you said grit, flexibility, and positivity. Can these skills be taught?

10. When discussing ideal PD, you talked about demo classes that highlighted classroom management. You also talked about teachers "having to connect with kids every day." Do teachers at RMS prioritize connecting with the students why or why not?

11. You talked about the science behind the way that we must care for our kids, most specifically understanding the psychology from trauma-informed care and that you didn't think people understood this science. Would staff training benefit from this type of topic? Why or why not?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do you possess?

TLT4

1.When asked to identify the student culture at our school, you talked about cliques, students acting older, possible gang affiliations, being bad news bears, prevalent bullying, and students running amuck. Sometimes you were afraid of even going up to the eighth-grade floor. Do we as teachers and the active adults in the building hold any responsibility in upholding this culture?

2.You also told a short narrative of a student who expressed to you that she has to act a different way in the hallways, but that many of your students feel safe in your classroom. What do you do to create a safe classroom?

3.You described our teacher culture as very divided, and you painted a picture of two sides. On one side you have the teachers who are "there to make a difference" and on the other side you have teachers who "are there to collect a paycheck and complain." For these teachers who are trying to make a difference what do they do?

4. What needs to happen for the teachers on the "dark side" to come to the "good side?"

5. You said, "I think that is where a lot of teachers struggle in our school because they don't know how to adapt." What are some things that teachers at RMS might have to adapt to?

6. In talking about the difficulty of working at RMS you said, "I would tell them they are 100% correct. I think it's not for everyone hands down. Some people have it, some people don't." What is "it?"

7. You end this response by saying RMS is "a completely different monster." And that you "wouldn't want to be our principal." Is it possible for the teachers at RMS to take some of that pressure off our principal?

8. When asked about the skills or qualities needed to teach at CMS, you talked about listening and relating to the kids. You state, "And I think that's one thing that works really well for me is

I'm so different from a lot of the kids, um, that were, I've taught with the farm and you know, I raised pigs and then I eat them and they're like, um, so me sharing my stories and my experiences of life and then listening to theirs, even though I don't understand them and they don't understand mine because we've never lived that way. I think it creates some type of bond or even those kids in the hallway that drive you absolutely bonkers."

How important is it for teachers to talk about and share their differences with the students and vice versa?

9. Why do you think that some teachers at RMS struggle to make connections with their students?

10. You changed your third prioritized skills to being creative and fun, and you told this amazing story about shaving cream and ration conversions. How do you teach those teachers who struggle with creativity to in fact be more creative?

11. When asked about ideal professional development, you talked about training on different classroom management strategies. Specifically, what elements of classroom management would need to be focused on? And why do you think classroom management is a challenge for teachers?

12. You talk about your time in Puerto Rico and how the staff there looked out for and cared about each other. You called it the "perfect community." What would it take for RMS to be a perfect community?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do you possess?

TLT5

1. You identified the student culture at RMS into two subgroups; academically and behaviorally. The behavior culture identified appeared to have many more negative descriptors, as you alluded to student gang affiliations, condoned violence, and the "astronomical" amount of trauma that our students have experienced. With that being said, does the teacher hold any responsibility in creating student culture? How do teachers at RMS add positivity to the student culture? How do they negate it?

2. You used a comparison in defining our teacher culture and that was the use of "prison gangs." Can you expand on that idea?

3. You paint this elaborate picture of the "good old days" and a time when Redwood was a top-ranking school, and now as you said it times are "different." What caused this change?

4. You also say that "some (teachers) have retooled and figured it out." What did this retooling look like? What did they need to figure out?

5. You talk about the non-tenured staff and the vast numbers in our building? How does such a new staff help and or challenge our culture?

7. You describe teachers as having a toolbox. What is in that toolbox?

8. You predicted that by Christmas a lot of teachers would resign or simply become complacent with doing half of the job? Do you still believe this and what can be done to ensure that this does not happen?

9. You agreed and said that RMS is a hard place to work, and then you went into many of the teacher duties. Do you believe that RMS is more difficult to work in than other public schools?

10. The three skills you identified a teacher to have to become successful at RMS were

resiliency, caring, and showing interest in your kids. How do you show these three qualities?

11. Think of two professional development topics or titles, these could be made up, that our staff

is in dire need of.

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in

public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed

skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do

you possess?

TLT6

1.When asked about the student culture, you talked about the year before COVID and how bad it

was. You said "we couldn't teach because of the students' perception of exactly what they came

to school to do, which was to talk, smack, fight, get things, aired out and stuff like that. It wasn't

a learning place for us. So honestly, this past year, the year of COVID was the leaps and bounds

better." What changed to make the next school year so much better?

2. You said that depending on who the students interact with that completely changes the culture

in the building. Does this possible shift in student perception add or challenge the building?

3. How does RMS support all students?

4. About the teacher culture, you stated that when you have a consistent goal in mind and you

work towards it, it leaves more positive thoughts and perceptions. Do you think there are

consistent goals among the staff at central middle school?

5. If you could give teams that are not as positive and productive as yours some advice, what

would you say?

6. You talked about the leadership in our building.. You said there's no hiding it. Some were

better than others. Does this inconsistent leadership affect the students and the staff?

7. Do you believe that the teachers at other local schools and the teachers at RMS share the same

necessary skill set to reach students?

8. So when asked about the necessary teacher traits to be successful at RMS, your first answer

was resiliency. What does the staff at CMS need to be resilient to?

9. So if teachers do voice their ideas and opinions, is it valued by those above them?

10. If you were given the choice to create two PD topics that you thought were necessary for our

staff, what would they be and why?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in

public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed

skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do

you possess?

TLT7

1.When asked to describe the student culture at RMS you had a very positive outlook. You stated that they were "jokey, it almost never seems that they are malicious to each other, and that there are not a lot of issues that you have seen." In conducting these interviews, your perception has been the minority. Why do you think that your lens is so much more positive than others?

2. When describing the teacher culture, you explained that RMS is a welcoming population, and that you felt very accepted and welcomed. Do you feel as though the majority of new staff had a similar experience as you? Why or why not?

3. You talked about the competitive side of teachers, and how teachers need to be more uplifting of each other. What do you think needs to happen to create a more supportive teaching staff?

4. You stated that RMS is not a difficult school, it is just a different school to work in. You specifically said that once you are there teaching, you just have to be responsive and flexible. What are some instances in which you had to be both responsive and flexible?

5. What is your classroom management philosophy? And can that be taught to others?

6. One of your top 3 teaching skill sets was to have a growth mindset. What are some topics of growth that are important for our staff to consider?

7. How have you built connections with your kids?

Extra: 2020 has been one of the most life-altering years for many, especially for those of us in public education. Thinking of 2020 in review, how has this year affected the role and needed skill set of the teacher?

Extra: Why were you asked to be a member of the Guiding Coalition? What leadership skills do you possess?

Appendix B

TLT Reflective Narratives

TLT1

Early in my teaching career a student confided in me that she thought she may be pregnant. I distinctly remember feeling both shocked and nervous. I was surprised that a student so young was facing the possibility of a pregnancy. And, I was also unsure how to react to this news. I didn't want her to regret confiding in me by reacting in a negative way but I also didn't want to celebrate it - both seemed like bad options. I wasn't even sure if she was excited or scared. She shared the news so matter of factly. I think I initially said something like, "Oh, wow. Ok. I think we should get you down to the nurse."

I can't remember the entire conversation that day but I will forever remember something that she told me. She said, "Miss, education is not important. Family is important." She explained her parents would be happy if she were in fact pregnant. Again, I didn't know what to say. I hadn't prepared myself to talk to students about pregnancy. And, even if I had prepared, I would have never imagined talking to a young student who was excited to tell her parents about it.

For days after this interaction it kept replaying it in my mind. I couldn't understand why a young intelligent girl would willingly jeopardize her future by becoming a young mom. I was even more perplexed that her family would be happy about the pregnancy. She had great grades and she was outgoing and friendly. She was a student that I assumed would attend college and have a successful future. My own parents would have been furious and disappointed to say the least. Growing up, my parents talked to me about the importance of education and going to college.

After some reflection, I realized that not everyone grows up like I did. Not all families and cultures prioritize the same things or view success in the same way. I mean, I always *knew* those things to be true but I didn't truly *understand*. My eyes were opened to my own preconceptions and bias. I started questioning what I was doing as a teacher - what was my purpose? Everyday I was standing in front of students who were different from me and I hadn't taken the time to learn about their families, their cultures, their priorities, goals, etc.

I felt a little dumb to assume that my students thought anything I was teaching in history had any importance or relevance to their lives. I failed to get to know what was important to them and incorporate those priorities in my lessons. I recognized that even though this particular student didn't grow up like I did, she certainly could have an amazing future ahead of her, with or without a child of her own because she had a supportive family who loved her and would ensure her success.

Today I am thankful for the experiences that I have had in my career that have opened my eyes to the world. They have shaped me as a teacher and even more importantly, as a person. It is true that teachers learn as much from their students and their students learn from them!

TLT2

There are so many separate events that have molded my beliefs of what is needed to be an effective educator at Redwood Middle School, so choosing one event has proven difficult. It is incredibly important to be a dynamic teacher in our district as societal shifts seem to have a massive impact on urban education centers, which is why I believe choosing one event is extremely challenging. In an effort to convey what I believe is the most important part of making our building a success story, I will share the story about a student who was not mine, but was in my classroom on a weekly basis.

The young man that I am speaking about was on another team within my hallway. I saw him all the time, because he was rarely in the classroom and would do his best to elope from class every day. I started to ask him questions about himself, and his interests. He was on the basketball team so when I would go to the games, I'd make sure to cheer for him and talk to him about his efforts after the game. Of all the games I went to, I did not notice any adults cheering for him that were his. He was typically waiting for a ride after the game. It was during this time that I made a deal with him. If he could stay in his classes for the day, he could come to my classroom at the end of the day during the remediate and extension period. We would talk about basketball and I found some books and magazines on basketball for him to read during the SSR time.

He would be in my class two or three times a week for RAE and he seemed to be doing better in his other classes. Then there came a point that he would come to my class to get help with content that he was struggling with. The deal needed to change up a little bit, so that he didn't start escaping to my class everyday, so we made a goal that he could come to my class only on days that he got permission and it had to be conducive to my class schedule as well.

This was not an easy task. I picked up a very academically and emotionally needy student. It was extra work for me, extra planning and extra communication with staff members that were not on my direct team. The point being, I, as a teacher, had to make a decision to add a student who was "not mine" to my list of students. This solidified my belief that we need to look at our students as ALL of our students. We need to be aware of the students we come in contact with daily even if they are not on our class lists. We need to be educators of all children, not just the children that count towards our evaluations from test scores.

TLT3

It was one of those afternoons- kids were coming back from lunch all crazy and high energy. I opened the windows and turned on some music- giving them a moment to transition. Jazz tended to chill them out. Students were sitting in groups (mostly- there's always that one kid moving around) and we picked up where we left off working with a prime factorization task. I pulled a small group of students that were absent yesterday. I glanced around for the roving student.

"Victor, can you come over here? I need your help." He ambles over, touching two students along the way. "Victor- can you show these guys what we did yesterday? Then I can get them started on the task."

"Miss, really? You want *me* to show them?" I honestly know he can't resist getting a chance to draw on the whiteboard.

"Yup- I do. You know what you are doing and I'd like to check in with the groups real quick." I had been working to increase his confidence especially in math- as he appeared to think he was 'dumb' because he couldn't read.

"Nah, Miss. No way."

My eyebrows rose as I said " Yes, Victor, you can. You've got this."

And he did- my student with the most SDIs on his IEP- stood and explained to five peers exactly how to find the greatest common factor and the least common multiple using a Venn diagram. And he beamed, he took it seriously, as some of these peers were the 'smart' ones. But he *had* gotten it. He was the one at the table in the front, always near me (my request, not his) so I could give him lots of reminders. The peers whom he taught were so encouraging too. All "wow, man, thanks" and "ohhh, I totally get it now."

This was not a kid who got his work done, he was often in the halls, late to class, a joker.

But we had formed a relationship. Every time he participated or stayed on task he got tons of

positive feedback- mostly smiles and jokes from me - but still, sometimes that was enough.

So watching him as he explained this process, and factored his numbers successfully, was just so

incredibly awesome. His confidence went up a mile- I could tell he was proud of himself.

And the way his peers responded to him- it's like they all knew that this 'trouble-maker' didn't

get to feel successful very often, and all of the students knew I made a VBD (Very Big Deal, we

called it) when I heard a student say negative things about themselves.

It was a moment that helped me see the influence of positive thinking and flexibility on

the classroom climate. I am certain that most of those students knew that I truly believed in them

and would work with them, to the best of my ability, to meet them where they were- to accept

their imperfections- and help them be their best selves.

TLT4

It was two weeks before winter break. The usual hustle and bustle of the holidays had begun and you could feel it. Students were restless and ready for break while teachers were frantically trying to fit in every last bit of the curriculum and obtain order in the classroom. I had already experienced this, before the holidays, stress and I thought I was ready.

It was a Thursday, the day started out normal as the students filtered into school. However, as the day progressed, you could feel the tensions rise among the students. The lesson I tried to teach on fractions, that I had stayed late the day before cutting extra pieces for, wasn't nearly as successful and I had hoped and I realized something wasn't quite right. Students who were normally good listeners were distracted while others were tense. I continued to push on but eventually became frustrated with the lack of student response and jumped routinely into stations. In the back of my mind I thought, maybe if I could get the students into smaller groups I could figure out why things were so weird.

While waiting for group one to gather at the back table I pulled one student to the side and asked what was going on. She said, "Miss it's just drama." Then she went to her station. I continue to make my way to the table, sharpening pencils, getting a new box of tissues and giving dojo tickets when I catch another student off guard with the same question. He replies, "It's all good miss, don't worry". I shake it off for a moment and finally make it to the back table when the phone rings. I get up and walk over to the phone while constantly scanning the room keeping my eyes on whatever situation is developing. I try to listen to the counselor on the phone call for a student. I send him to the office and make my way back to the back table, calling out students to get focused on their station work.

At the back table I again attempted to teach fractions. While we rotate through math stations I play detective with each group of students trying to piece together what might have conspired at lunch. We got through math and tensions still seemed a bit high. But now I was concerned with getting to my coverage and waiting for the specialist. When the teacher arrived I gave my kids the spiel to please be good and kind and listen and that I would see them soon. Then, against my better judgement I skirted out the door. On my way out I made the teacher aware something may or may not be happening. He assured me had a fun relaxing holiday themed activity and everything would be fine. I felt relieved and went to my coverage.

When I returned to the classroom I first peaked in the window and saw the specialist was not pleased and shaking his head. I took a deep breath, tried to put on a smile and entered the room. Immediately kids came running up to me needing to tell me what happened and the specialist was anxious as well. After turning out the lights and getting everyone to sit quietly in their seats I talked with the teacher in the hallway, I got the story: pencils were thrown, words were said, security was called, students removed, 2 in the bathroom, and chaos. Great, I thought to myself, took another deep breath and went back into my classroom with lots of upset kids for various reasons.

There were a million things running through my head at that moment: We have a science lesson to do, I can't fall behind, break is so soon I thought we could make it, I knew I shouldn't have left, I had to leave, stupid coverage, is it 3:30 yet?! I took another deep breath and decided not to yell or address any issues at that exact moment because it was relatively quiet, the lights were out and I had to think of my next move and take attendance before I was sure to forget. I told the students that everyone needed to take a break and stay quiet, they could put their heads

down or pay attention but they had to stay silent. I then played a five minute video about the

science lesson we were supposed to start and took attendance.

When the video was over I turned on half the lights and addressed the class, but the class

had already begun to talk. So instead of getting angry I waited, and looked on my bookshelf. I

knew there was zero chance of me teaching science today. Not yet at least. I have to address this,

we can't function this way. So the kids continue talking and I am looking for my book. I notice

my gold star students are just watching me in silence waiting to see what I am about to do next.

Then I sit on my desk and breathe, yes kids are talking, yes some are bickering, I am sure I just

heard a curse word, and I count and breathe and then there's the "SHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

She's waiting!" from the audience.

The kids finally look at me sitting on my desk and I am holding the children's picture

book, The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew Daywalt. I get their attention and start reading. They

are all listening, it's a miracle. I use a different voice for each crayon and some kids are laughing

at me while others roll their eyes. I continue, after a few pages I stop and ask the question, "What

is this crayons problem? I take an answer or two and continue. I continue to stop at each page

and ask feeling questions and why questions throughout the whole book that has nothing to do

with science. By the end 95% of the students are totally engaged in the picture book. Students

that were missing in the beginning of class for the drama, came back into the room quietly and

perplexed about what was going on in science class.

When the story was finished I summarized the message and we just continued to talk

about feelings, problems, challenges, relationships and communication. It was a beautiful

organic conversation. Was it perfect? No. Some kids were surely checked out and on their cell

phones trying to be sneaky, one or two may have fallen asleep because the lights were off and

there were definitely a few kids drawing but still listening. But I was ok with all that. We needed this, I needed this.

As you can imagine this took most of the class. With about 20 minutes left in the period, the overall mood in the classroom went back to warm and calm. I said we really needed to get to science now and I pulled out a low key activity for them to work on that went along with the video clip from the beginning of class. I negotiated with students that they could listen to music after they rewatched the video and completed their work. They were dismissed table by table to retrieve the computers and everyone worked independently.

Now I had 15 minutes to check in with students before the bell rang and they went to their next location. I went to the hallway and sandwiched my body into the threshold so I was literally half in the room and half out. I started calling all the students I could think of one by one into the hallway that were involved in the drama and I calmly asked each of them to please tell me what happened. After checking in with everyone I felt I needed to, I made the announcement to clean up chromebooks and if anyone needed to talk to me after class I would be available. Sometimes kids just need to be heard. The mood was now calm, students were cleaning up, the bell rang and I collected papers, out the door they went, back into the hallway of chaos. Some kids gave me a hug, others a nod and that was that. My advisory class started to come in and I was exhausted.

I made it to the end of the day and grabbed my coat to walk out the building with the students. Some kids from my math and science class waited for me and we walked out together and they said thank you, and that they liked that story and had never heard it before. We talked some more, said our salutations and the day was done. I thought for a moment, how am I going

to squeeze in that science we missed today? Then realized, it didn't matter, we would get it done. Today we learned what the students needed.

I think that's what it's all about. I think that's what it takes. To make it in Redwood Middle School you must trust your gut, listen to your students and not be afraid to forget about the lesson plan and address students' needs. If you can't be flexible and address the "drama" at times, make connections and listen to your students' needs, it's going to be difficult to make it at Central.

As a follow up, the following day was Friday and the students were not perfect but they did have a much better day than the day before, and that's what it's all about. Everyday is about getting a little bit better than the day before. Sometimes we fall behind and sometimes we're completely off task but there's always something to learn.

TLT5

I was ill-trained to be a teacher! My education program was titled as an Urban Education

program, but I did not learn what was needed to be effective. I am not even sure that I am

effective today, and know that I could be more effective each and every day. I do not have the

skills that it takes to be "highly successful", but that being said I get by. People say that we learn

from our students as much as they learn from us, for me, this was true. I get by with a little help

from my students, and it all started with an 8th grade student in crisis no less.

I came to education later than most. I was approximately 30 years-old, had worked in

other fields, and had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. While attempting to navigate my

future I thought back over what I enjoyed in life. I realized that working with kids had always

been part of my life. It was then that I decided to go back to school, to become a teacher.

At the culmination of my education program, I procured my first student teaching

placement which was to be at One High School and was assigned a placement in Reading

Northwest Middle School and. I left this first placement sure that I would end up back at

Wyomissing High School, and in fact I left with a tenuous job offer. You see, I went into

education believing that I would work with honor students, the best of the best, those students

that will go on to change the world. In the end I would be right, but not the way I initially

thought.

I entered my second placement at Two Middle School, believing all I needed to do was

survive this experience, graduate, and then return to One for a satisfying career. I definitely

enjoyed my time at Two Middle School, but it was not until my experience was close to ending,

that my future plans changed.

When asked, I decided to help out with their Cabaret-style School Show. This was a student performance, teacher directed show. During one of the rehearsals, I was in the wings watching the students perform and I noticed, we will call him Omar, sitting and watching the other students perform. He should have been onstage. When I sat down with him to ask why he missed his entrance, he explained that he had too much on his mind. He informed me that his caregiver, his nineteen-year-old brother, I just been sentenced to prison. He told me that his 16 year old girlfriend just told him that she was pregnant. Omar way too much on his mind, to be out on stage singing. We just sat together and talked about life. Over the next few weeks Omar opened up to me. Through these conversations he told me about the everyday difficulties he experienced just making it to the school. Through these conversations I was also able to see his many successes, experience him changing his outlook on his life, and change his outlook on his future. It was not until two years later, when Omar came back to Two Middle, when I learned how he turned out. Yes he found me still there, I turned down the job possibility at Wyomissing, and decided to work with the Omars of the city. He told me about his life, and that our conversations, and our relationship through that last third of his eighth-grade year, was what he credited with his success. I do not agree with him, it was not me, it could have been anyone. I believe that it was having SOMEONE care about him and listen. It was not having a relationship with me, it was having a relationship with someone which made the difference for him. To be a successful teacher, I believe that we have to care for our students. We need to create relationships with my students and always invest in them with unconditional positive regard! I believe that at times, and for some students, it is these relationships that help create space for growth and learning, and ultimately success for our students. Is this not what it means to be a

successful teacher? Thank you Omar for teaching me what is needed for success teaching in the

city of Redwood.

TLT6

Let me take you back in time a few short years ago. (click me). Oftentimes at RMS students there were especially difficult for one team to be moved to another team by individuals who struggled to work with them, this is the case for this story. My team received word that we would be having a new student join our team, and like most new additions no real information was provided by the counselors or administrators. I was approached by the team leader of the other team and was provided with a lot of, let's call them, opinions about the students. I was told that the student refused to do work, that he would take the chairs in the classroom and make a bed out of them and sleep during class, that he refused to wear dress code and that his father agreed with him and also brought that fight to the superintendent himself. There were several other so-called issues with this student that painted him in a very poor light. So I sat and listened to the teacher vent about the perception of this student.

The very first thing I did, as I do with every new student, was I greeted him at the door with a formal introduction and a handshake. Upon him identifying himself to me I asked him if he had a minute to talk in the hall before class started, and he politely obliged. I started the conversation by informing him that I had no interest in why he was moved from his previous team to ours, that I had no idea who he was as a person and the only impression that I would have of him was the one that he decided to make. I also asked him what his math grades were like and he told me that he had F's. I asked him if he wanted to fail math for the year and he said no, so I told him if he seriously wanted to pass for the year he would have to work hard but that I would be there every step of the way. We both acknowledged that I welcomed him to my class and he entered the class, sat down and was ready to learn. That is how it began.

He joined us right after interims and carried over an F so he did have a lot of work to do to get a passing grade. I was very clear and upfront with him that since he did not complete a lot of work previously to showing up on my team, that even if he worked hard there was a real possibility that he could still fail the 2rd quarter but that would set him up for success moving into the 3rd and 4th quarter.

As a team we also addressed one of his biggest concerns with dress code. We made him aware that we would follow the proper protocol for not being in dress code, as long as he followed them too without making a big deal about it. We understood where he was coming from, but explained that we had to adhere to the consequences of him breaking the rules. We made sure not to make a big deal out of it, but addressed it right away and that took the stigma away from it and from day one it was not looked at as a big deal. He knew the routine early on, we didn't even need to tell him to get in line to go to the AP he just did it. We took the questioning and arguing out of the conversation and it made it a non-issue. He knew he would get detention after so many days and he dealt with it, he felt it worth the price of wearing whatever he wanted. We in turn were okay with it too.

Now don't get me wrong this student did have normal teenager issues, he would get frustrated and get mad and would walk out of class, but we had a system in place for when that happened. He had a good relationship with one teacher from his previous team, so when he got to the point of exploding he would leave and go to her classroom, and this was the system we used early on. This became a bit of an issue after a while because he would socialize with students from his old team and disrupt class. I sat with him and asked if there was someone else on our team that he would like to go to in the event he needed to leave his class out of frustration and I explained the impact it was having on the other teacher. After that conversation he knew

that if he was having an issue in any of his other classes he was then to come to my room, and my room only, not to roam the halls or anything else like that because I could not keep him from getting in trouble if he was anywhere but in my room. He also had his teacher picked out if he got frustrated in my classroom and needed a break. This gave him and the team the peace of mind that getting frustrated was allowed as long as it was dealt with appropriately. When he realized that we were not out to get him when he got upset, it happened less and less and he handled it the correct way when he got to the point that he felt he needed to get away from the situation without getting himself in any real trouble. This was one of the biggest growing moments for this student.

Over the next month or so the student worked hard in math and despite his efforts still failed math for the 2nd quarter. I did sit and have a conversation with him about this and reminded him of our previous conversation. I asked if the amount of work that he did was overly difficult and he said no. I then asked if he thought he could work at that level for the entire 3rd quarter, and he said yes. I told him that if that was in fact the case, that he would pass the 3rd quarter, and you know what spoiler alert, he did. He also passed the fourth quarter despite his eighth grade-itis, and math for the year, this was a huge turn around from when he showed up on our team.

Him and I had built a high level of trust, he came to me when he had issues in his other classes and I just listened to him vent to calm himself down. We then discussed if there were better ways to handle the situation, sometime he said there were and sometime he said there was not. He took the conversation that we had on day one of meeting to heart and created his the image of him he wanted me to see, and it looked nothing like what I was told he was going to be. That for me is one of the easiest ways to have students be more cooperative than in previous

years, I had that same conversation with the students on day one in my classroom, clean slate make of it what you want. I had built such a high level of trust with this student that I got him to do the unthinkable. I got the student who had never dressed in dress code come to school in not only RMS dress code, but in a full suit with tie and all.

The connection I made with this student went beyond just him and I. I have had people reach out to me about how to approach him and talk with him from the high school, knowing and hearing about the connection we had when he was with me. This is the approach we need to take with all of our students, and we have to follow through with it, because if we do there is no telling where they can get themselves.

TLT7

When I started to think about my most profound teaching moment, I had a difficult time coming up with one specific instance that helped solidify my beliefs. My mind was a swirl of the many different times that my kids have made me remember why I chose teaching as my career. Despite having a difficult time isolating one moment, I did notice a pattern; each of them didn't involve any actual content teaching or learning. Every profound moment came from more personal interactions with my kids.

Sometimes the personal interactions are highly positive; like helping with script reading for the school musical, or working on footing for boxing training. On the other hand, some moments were not so great; like holding someone while they cried about losing a family member. Good or bad, all of the moments that have stuck with me over time have been those that have connected me with my students on a personal level. I feel so lucky that there are so many different moments that have impacted me in this way!

Thinking back on all of these instances, all of them have helped root my major teaching beliefs even deeper. For me, teaching is not just about communicating the content (although it IS great when you hear "oh, I get it now!"), it is about helping the kids grow as individuals. I believe that teachers and their relationships with students have a huge impact on how those students grow into adults. Positive relationships and interactions help foster positive and resilient mindsets in those students. We hold the future of our society in our classrooms every day. Personally, I try to accomplish a few goals regarding the personal growth of my students throughout my time with them. One thing I try to do is instill a sense of responsibility in them, in and out of our school setting. We frequently have discussions about what responsibility is, what

it means in different situations, and how responsibility is connected to consequences (good or

bad) of their actions.

Another quality I try to focus on with my kids is empathy. During times of disagreement

or lack of understanding, I try to have the kids put themselves in someone else's shoes. I like to

use these situations so students can gain social knowledge and open their eyes to others'

potential struggles. We talk a lot about how it's okay to make mistakes, as long as you make an

effort to fix them or improve the situation.

Having these positive, personal relationships with my students is what keeps me coming

back for more every single day. I like to think that each of my kids leave my class as better

human beings, and that they will remember the time we spent together and the personal lessons

we have learned. I love the content I teach, but I love the students I teach even more. I pour my

heart and soul into what I do, because I truly believe that these relationships are important.

Having a teacher who listens and understands helps students have a more positive mindset and

keep them moving forward through not only school, but life, in positive ways.