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# THE POWER OF CARE: AN EXPLORATION OF EMOTION AND ETHICS IN MALE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

by Edward L. Myers

## Abstract

Research findings from the past two decades have illuminated emotion's role in organizational performance. Furthermore, studies associated with the ethic of care have revealed the significance of affect in leader/subordinate relationships. In order to augment the literature, this paper will reveal the intentions, decisions, and behaviors of a particular male high school principal who subscribed to a philosophy of care-based leadership. The intent is to further the understanding of how ethics, emotion, and power manifest in male school leadership behavior and to offer insights on the potentialities and structure of care-based educational leadership practice. The study's findings offer a design of care that may be beneficial for empowering the school leadership process.

## 1. Introduction

*Listen to Edward L. Myers discuss the ethic of care and male educational leadership, Temple University.*

As Hartel, Zerbe, and Ashkanasy (2005) explained, prior to the early 1990's, "the study of emotions was, with a few notable exceptions, essentially next to nonexistent in the management literature" (p. 2). However, recent research efforts have illuminated the importance of affective experience in organizational life. In fact, distinct conceptualizations brought forth in the 1990's, including Weiss and Cropanzano's *affective events theory* and Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey's *emotional intelligence* construct, have provided a foundation for expanding the study of emotion as it relates to institutional behavior (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003). As a result, research findings have been produced within the past two decades that lend to understanding the significance of the affective domain on organizational performance.

Much has been written about emotion in relation to the moral domain. Concepts such as the ethic of care and servant-based leadership, which are central components of the leadership literature, aptly link the moral and emotional domains, and many theorists have expressed the necessity of school leaders to operate from a caring ethic and/or a

spiritual base (Dantley, 2003; MacGilchrist, Myers, & Reed, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sernak, 1998; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Strike, 2007). Gender-based perspectives of ethical behavior and leadership action have also been revealed in scores of texts (Fischer, 2000; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; Rebore, 2001; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Thiroux & Krasemann, 2007). However, research that aims to examine the affective domain in a way that integrates cognitive, ethical, and social concerns appears to be limited.

Furthermore, while much has been said in the literature about the importance of democratic/ethical leadership, emotional intelligence abilities, and the ethic of care leadership paradigm, limited research has been done that qualitatively explores the school leader's ability/willingness to match his/her leadership philosophy with the requirements of a job that includes a great deal of turbulence in the form of micro-level issues (day-to-day in-house happenings) and macro-level concerns (externally imposed organizational disturbances/changes). Therefore, the reasons and outcomes associated with the successes and struggles of leaders who endeavor to install an emotionally consistent, care-based form of leadership still needs to be explored. This is especially true of the male leader who: 1) may naturally lean toward a justice-focused rather than a care-focused leadership perspective and, therefore, may predominantly engage in autocratic and directive behavior that is emotionally limited (Eagly & Carli, 2004; Furnham, 2006; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988), and 2) has been widely ignored by "care leadership" researchers who have instead focused their studies on female leadership practices (Brunner, 1998; Cui, 2010; Dawson, 2004; Hooper Atlas, 2002; Kropiewnicki, 2000; Rico, 2009; L.K. Robbins, 2006; Zguris, 2007).

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the authenticity of a male principal's care-based leadership philosophy by exploring the lived experiences of the leader, subordinates, and stakeholders who were involved with the school organization. The focus was initially placed on gathering a description of the philosophy of a particular male school principal and then examining his actual leadership decisions and behaviors.

Specifically, the research question this study addressed was whether the emotional competencies, tendencies, and behaviors of a male school leader matched the aspirations of a care-based leadership philosophy. The perceptions of administrators, teachers, staff, parents, community members, and recent graduates were utilized to gather an understanding of the principal's leadership behavior. This process was set in order to generate an understanding of how emotional concerns and leader competencies relate to male school leadership practice that aims to be aligned with the ethic of care.

### 3. Literature on Care Based Leadership Practice

Researchers have described the importance of emotion in organizational life from diverse angles. C. Schultz (2007) revealed research that suggests successful leaders need to be cognizant not only of their own emotional well being, but also of others'. Fischer (2000) discussed the importance of the interpersonal process of viewing emotion as part of a relationship and using emotion-related talk as a way to conduct relationships. Wagner and Harter (2006) posited that emotional deficits in the workplace, including the lack of recognition and praise, are highly correlated with demotivation and ineffectiveness. Goleman (1998a) hypothesized that the higher the level of the job, the less important technical skills and cognitive abilities are, and the more important competence in emotional intelligence becomes.

Various theorists have focused on specific emotional and social competencies of effective leadership, and the term *leadership* in itself has been described as an emotion-laden process that requires a socio-emotional aptitude (including both the social and emotional domains) for creating emergent and successful leadership in general, and transformational leadership in particular (Bass, 2002; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; George, 2000; Goleman, 1998b; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Higgs & Dulewicz, 1999; Jordan, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2006; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009). Zeidner et al. (2009) revealed that transformational leaders are "said to be in touch with their own and their follower's feelings and 'lead from the heart'" (p. 270). Ashkanasy and Tse (2000) attributed the power of the charismatic leader to the leader's ability to exercise control over his or her own emotions, as well as controlling subordinates' emotions. George (2000) explained that, under differing scenarios, leaders could be either well served or hampered by certain types of moods and/or emotional experiences.

Goleman (1998b) argued that emotional intelligence is a necessary ingredient for leaders to possess, in order to perform well. Feldman (1999) reiterated this view, in stating, "emotionally intelligent leadership is about fully developing and applying our emotional and social skills to effectively influence constructive endeavors in others. It's the personal and 'people skills' that are crucial ingredients to effective leadership" (p. 4). In a review of leadership literature that relates to the emotional domain, C. Schultz (2007) revealed the widespread recognition that exists for emotional intelligence characteristics in effective leadership practice.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) connected the ethic of care, which contains the emotional element of compassion, with leadership while stressing the importance of considering moral conduct when making leadership decisions. In working within the realm of the ethic of care, Sernak (1998) asserted that care-based leaders "encourage and value cooperation as much as competition, interdependence as much as independence, and the situational and contextual as well as the generalizable" (p. 15), and connected the need for power and care by declaring that leadership and organizational structure needs to be reconceptualized as the leader "cares for the collective" and uses "power to effect a climate that fosters relationships that nurture

individuals and that stimulate community growth and harmony" (pp. 144-145). Similarly, Burns (1978) considered ethical leadership practice from the following standpoint,

The ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations to respond to the higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behavior – its roles, choices, style, commitments – to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values. (p. 46)

The results of specific research studies allow for further understanding as to why an emotion-based perspective may be well-suited for organizations in general, and the school institution in particular. Meyer and Allen (1997) found a positive association between affective commitment and work experiences that communicate an organization's support for employees and enhance employees' sense of personal importance. Kahn (1993) discovered that organizational leaders' acts of care giving, such as actively attending to employees' self-expressions and showing them empathy and compassion, make employees feel replenished and emotionally more engaged with others. Ozelik, Langton, & Aldrich (2008) found that leadership practices that facilitate a positive emotional climate in an organization have a significant effect on the organization's performance.

Specific to the educational domain, various researchers have discussed the well-established revelation that a relationship exists between leadership, school climate, employee commitment, and effective schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Durrant, 2009; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; McCroskey, 2007). As emphasized by Kelley et al. (2005), school principals may influence a school's climate a great deal if "they can develop feelings of trust, open communications, collegiality, and promote effective feedback" (p. 23). It has been shown that sustained one-to-one principal/teacher relationships and the communicative/supportive behaviors of the principal produce trust between the leader and teachers (Gimbel, 2001). Furthermore, the interpersonal skills of principals have been found to be significant in producing a school that is built on a foundation of collegiality, dialogue, and relationships (Sciarappa, 2007). Particular to the construct of emotional intelligence, Cook (2006) found that an aptitude in this domain has a positive effect on principals' leadership performance. In studying the development of emotional connection between principal and teacher, C.A. Schultz (2005) found that teachers highly value principal conduct that involves the tenets of optimism, empathy, and inspiration and includes a service orientation along with the ability to develop others.

From the perspective of the ethic of care, various researchers have directly revealed its strength in relation to effective school leadership practice (Bennett, 2008; Johnston, 2002; Kropiewnicki, 2000; L.K. Robbins, 2006; S.E. Robbins, 1998; Sernak, 1993; Thompson, 2005; Troy, 2009). In studying school capacity, Bendick (2003) found that a principal who leads out of the ethic of care is central to the development of an organizational relationship structure that successfully increases a sense of school community and institutional potential. Sagnak (2010) found a link between the dimensions of principal transformational leadership behavior and the development of a

caring organization that possesses a specific ethical climate of benevolence. Other research efforts have found leader benevolence to be a key ingredient for trust building in principal-teacher relationships and that the ethical principles of *mutual respect* and *care for others* are important to the principal's efforts in facilitating school improvement (Lewis, 2008; Wilson, 2008).

In summary, research has demonstrated that emotional attunement and the ethic of care hold substantial power in generating a positive organizational climate, a productive workforce, and highly functioning schools. Therefore, it may be suggested that in order to successfully direct a school organization, it is important for the school leader to consciously attend to the emotional and ethical domains in order to garner the potential of the faculty and staff while producing an environment that is concerned with the interests and needs of each of the school's employees.

## 4. Methodology

This study focused on the concepts of emotion and leadership behavior in terms of personal and interpersonal realities and experiences. Therefore, qualitative methods were utilized for this study's purpose. As Hatch (2002) explained, "qualitative research is as interested in inner states as outer expressions of human activity. Because these inner states are not directly observable, qualitative researchers must rely on subjective judgments to bring them to light" (p. 9). Hatch's statement catches the essence of this study since the investigation worked to explore not only the impact that emotion has on the school leader's inner reality, but also to examine how emotion plays out socially, in the organizational sphere. Beyond this, *caring*, as a leadership behavior, was explored in the social sphere in order to determine the characteristics of a particular male school principal's decisions and behaviors, and to determine whether he was able to publicly put forth his intent of care-based practice.

### Sample

This study employed single site case study methodology in order to allow for in-depth analysis of the problem area. The site selection process involved critical assessment procedures that ensured a suitable location in terms of school principal philosophy, school principal tenure, school district characteristics, and stakeholder involvement. The chosen site was a semi-rural school district in southeastern Pennsylvania that met the study's requirements.

The school district involved in this study developed a strategic plan in 2002 that was aimed at school improvement. At that time, the district had planned to make vast improvements in its facilities, educational programs, and rates of student achievement. In 2004, the school district hired a new senior high school principal to lead the school of approximately 2,000 students through the change process. At the time, the principal was 33 years old with five years of previous administrative experience. The school

district and school principal concentrated on the school improvement project from 2004 through 2012.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection procedures for this study occurred over a five-month period. Data collection began with an in-depth initial interview with the school principal in order to acquire a description of his leadership philosophy. From there, the leader's actual behaviors were examined through researcher observation, document analysis, a series of follow-up interviews that investigated specific principal decisions and behaviors, and an exit interview. Additionally, school stakeholder perceptions of the principal and the school organization were gathered through a semi-structured interview format. For this purpose, a total of 30 administrators, faculty members, parents, community members, and recent high school graduates were selected for participation. The researcher utilized interview protocols in order to focus on gathering rich descriptions about the school leader's tendencies and behaviors and asked each respondent to provide details and clarification about past happenings and current events.

Triangulation of data occurred through on-site researcher observations and document analysis efforts that were centered on gathering an understanding of the school principal's communicative and behavioral tendencies. A discovery-oriented approach remained constant throughout the data collection process as participant interviews, on-site observations, and document analyses were conducted.

## **Data Analysis**

Throughout the five-month data collection phase of the study, the initial stage of data analysis occurred as I, the researcher, transcribed interviews, listened to the audio versions of each interview, wrote notes that revealed apparent connections, read and reflected upon my field notes, analyzed my thoughts about what I was hearing, seeing, and reading, engaged in preliminary thematic construction, and compared my data and apparent themes to related research literature.

At the conclusion of the 20-week on-site investigation, and after verifying the interview data with each participant, I advanced the process by developing categories and themes. Here, I employed both aspects of the cross-case analysis approach, which Patton (1990) discussed: 1) "grouping together answers from different people to common questions", and 2) "analyzing different perspectives on central issues" (p. 376). Beyond this, I progressed with Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) method, as I: 1) read through the raw text and extracted the relevant passages of each interview, while keeping the focus of the study in mind; 2) organized preliminary themes and grouped repeating ideas into coherent categories; 3) revamped and finalized the thematic construction process, by making sure each category could be properly filtered into a theme; 4) developed theoretical constructs by grouping themes into more abstract concepts consistent with the theoretical framework; and 5) created a thematic and theoretical narrative by retelling the participants' stories.

For validity purposes, I adopted Boyatzis' (1998) method of using labels, which constituted the categories, along with definitions of what the categories were concerned with while determining how they fit into the more abstract themes. To help in determining the degree of relevance of particular categories, I utilized a frequency chart that showed the number of participants who mentioned a particular issue or characteristic in their respective interviews. Since my research was concerned with principal leadership behavior, the categories were, in essence, characteristics of the principal's traits, conduct, and leadership style.

### **Methods of Verification**

I implemented several measures that supported and bolstered the internal validity of the study, which included: the solicitation of feedback, triangulation, collecting rich data, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checks, the maintenance of a case study database, use of quasi-statistics, a search for discrepant evidence and negative cases, and comparison. Each of these strategies has been mentioned as a specific tactic to allow the qualitative researcher to increase the credibility of conclusions (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

The timeframe reserved for data collection strengthened the verification process, as it allowed me to consider what might be pertinent to the study and offered a variety of activities and events to explore. Furthermore, this period allowed me to review and clarify participant responses with each interviewee and extend my dialogue with the school principal, as I worked to deeply explore organizational expressions, activities, procedures, and events with him.

## **5. Results**

This study's findings suggest the male school principal under investigation was able to authentically install a care-based philosophy of leadership. Furthermore, due to the magnitude and systemic nature of the school principal's behavior, the results of this study offer a particular framework of socio-emotional, care-based leadership practice. In the following sections, the school principal's leadership philosophy and practice will be revealed and then tied to pertinent literary findings that relate to ethical and effective leadership behavior.

### **Care-Based Leadership Philosophy**

This study's male school principal possessed a three-pronged care-based leadership philosophy that was based on the following: 1) dyadic engagements with school stakeholders, 2) authority powered by care, and 3) cultivated connections. The principal held the belief that there is special value in building personal, trusting relationships with his colleagues and subordinates. Privacy in conversation was key in his attempt to communicate support, criticisms, and/or expectations. From the principal's viewpoint,



authenticity and appropriateness marked this process, which was often centered on setting and/or resetting certain cultural expectations. As the school principal explained, *care* was one particular expectation that was a requisite for working in the school:

I want every teacher to be like our best teacher. And inevitably, that's the person who cares the most about kids and communicates that and cares about his or her colleagues and I really don't want anybody else different from that...I can't accept any less. And I've seen the results of it. You have great teachers, you'll have a great school.

Along with the foundational expectation of care, came the associated dyadic encounter: "I take every opportunity to celebrate other peoples' accomplishments in personal notes given to them after I've walked through their classroom or after they've done something well. If there is any kind of constructive criticism, its very private." Furthermore, support and understanding came with the criticism:

By being behind people, part of it is supporting them when they've made mistakes...It is showing some empathy toward people. It might be me saying I made the same mistake before...empathy is the key piece, knowing where they are, the difficulty of their job, where they are coming from, and supporting them when the chips are down. So, I take those opportunities to teach, to give a second chance.

The dyadic process naturally led to the school principal's second philosophical tenet, which was based on *authority powered by care*. While the principal reserved the right to correct problems, confront inadequate work, and communicate expectations, the principal sought to

maintain an underlying current of support for well-meaning work:

[The task is] to guide people, to keep people on track toward our vision. And, I'm ok with a lot of ambiguity. But, to set the vision, to get people to take risks and play around until we get it right. And, my feeling is that we are on the right track, regardless of how we do it, as long as we are moving in the right direction.

However, while guidance was fundamental to the process, the school principal also focused on clearly establishing his expectations. As he explained,

I feel more committed than I ever have in my career to how important excellence is in teaching and how I need to support [teachers] to get there. The most important thing I can do is ensure that the best teachers are in front of kids in the classroom every day. That has more impact than anything else I do. So I've had some difficult conversations around that, where people may get the clear impression that they're not meeting my expectations. But, I give a lot of positive feedback. I think I'm understanding. I think I have very high expectations, but I come with very high support. That comes back to breeding risk taking. And, I let people know it's okay to make mistakes.

The third philosophical realm, *cultivated connections*, stemmed from the school principal's desire to reap the rewards of his efforts in building positive relationships through authentic dyadic encounters and the proper use of authority. In his view, the connectivity between him and his subordinates grew through a mindset of leadership that suggests the practice is ultimately about "working with others, not doing to them."

By connecting the literature with this principal's leadership philosophy, a particular connotation of the ethic of care is brought into focus. As Held (2006) explained, there are multiple "ethics of care" that conceptualize caring practice in different ways. In this case, rather than creating a boundary for care, by limiting it to one-to-one relationships, the school principal desired to take the practice of care into the wider organizational realm. In doing so, power was combined with care, as the ideals and values of the school were considered and supported. In this way, the principal's philosophy aligned with K. Sernak's (1998) conclusion that the nature of school systems requires an interrelationship between caring and power, and rather than considering them as dichotomous constructs, it is necessary to execute a particular "caring power", where power enhances caring (p. 17).

### **Care-Based Leadership Practice: Turning "Intent" into "Action"**

The data collected for this study's purpose of determining the authenticity of the male school principal's care-based leadership philosophy involved collecting the perceptions of 30 school stakeholders through semi-structured interviews, engaging in multiple field observations, and reviewing various private and public documents that pertained to the principal's leadership practice. Regarding stakeholder perceptions, each interview was transcribed and combed for data that pertained to the school principal's conduct. This process revealed a total of 334 data points that were labeled and categorized according to established definitions, which were based on the experiences and explanations of the study's participants. Of the 334 data points, 322 were care-based in nature, with 12 being of a non-care nature. Twenty-nine of the 30 participants held overwhelmingly positive views of the school principal's leadership conduct, while one participant held a negative view, in regard to his ability to install a care-based form of leadership. The results of the study revealed particular traits and tendencies of the male school leader that reflected his inclination to operate from a socio-emotional, care-based angle.

This study's findings revealed specific principal leadership behaviors that related to six distinct themes: 1) Personal Encounters and Positive Engagements, 2) Presence, 3) Programmed Care, 4) Activating the Team and Elevating Others, 5) Asserting Cultural Norms, and 6) The Engaging Personality.

The first theme, *personal encounters and positive engagements*, reflected the school principal's tendency to show attentiveness and give support, build relationships, be responsive, recognize the work of others, and be accessible. Such actions were illuminated vividly in school stakeholder accounts. As one teacher revealed:

He gave me a lot of attention and support and was there for me a lot in that first year...so, I've just known from early on that he believed in me as a teacher and so there wasn't any of that "Oh, geez, here comes the boss." There was a certain amount of comfort that I knew he knew what I was doing and was willing to give me some slack to try things and do things. He's very good at complimenting staff. You do something just because you're doing it as part of your job, the next day you get a little note in your mailbox, just a little thank you note from [him].

Another teacher concurred with this account:

I've gotten a number of personal notes on school stationery over the years from him. I [did an extra project] last year and open it up to teachers across the district. There were probably fifteen teachers across the district that wanted to [be involved]. I got a note from him about that. "Thank you very much for taking the initiative and doing something that you were very passionate about." I appreciated that.

One teacher explained how the school principal's positive support extended to the students:

when the students were doing something special, a special project, there was a note in my mailbox, not to me but to me and my students, thanking them for the great work that they were doing. So, that was just a nice little personal touch. I couldn't help but read it to the class when that letter came out.

This attribute was picked up on by the students themselves, as explained by a recent graduate of the school:

Whenever I did something as a favor to him or something as a favor to another administrator or something, he always wrote a tiny little thank you card and made a point of making sure that I got it. It was never like this big long massive letter you had to read, but it was always like "I really appreciated you helping me out with this. Thanks a lot..." It's just like that nice personal touch that shows he does actually appreciate when kids do certain things.

One teacher described her relationship with the school principal, which was based on attention and support:

the relationship is a very supportive one. It's always been very welcoming. The support is immeasurable. I know that all I have to do is just ask... there's never been a time where I've been turned away. There's never been a time where my issue, when we were talking about it, wasn't the most important thing that's on the table, and trying to find the best way to deal with the issues and keep it all together has been just such an amazing experience.

The study's second theme, *presence*, refers to the school principal's visibility and the spontaneous engagements that he initiated. His visibility, due to his presence

throughout the building, allowed school stakeholders to engage with him when necessary. In turn, a sense of principal involvement was created throughout the organization. The school faculty appreciated this effort, as revealed by one teacher: "I like the fact that he is comfortable enough to come into the room, not for any particular reason other than to just visit and see what is going on." Another teacher explained how the principal's presence provided an avenue for communication and awareness of the school's happenings:

He tends to wander a lot and stick his head in the door just to chat and so, in that way, if you do have a concern you can get out to him. He also tends to be able to feel the pulse of the school pretty well because he does that. He's not one of those isolation-type of principals that put themselves in the office and have three layers of people to get to them.

Such views were not limited to faculty. As one community member explained, the principal made an effort to be present across multiple venues: "He's at the concerts, the plays. He is not showing partiality to any group. But, I think he's trying to play that balancing act ...and so, he's involved. People think he cares." Parents, too, agreed with the assessment:

He's always at many of the events and you see him everywhere, not only a sporting event, but you see him at a band concert, whatever else is going on. He's always around. He's a pretty high-energy guy so he's always in overdrive.

He's involved in everything and the reason why I know so much about him is that I'm involved in everything too. I'm always there at the meetings or whatever he offers. He'll do some seminars at night on different things. Like orientations, orientations to high school and that kind of thing for parents at night. So, I think he tries to really work with people and educate them.

The school principal's tendency to be involved was also part of the student perspective:

He was friendly. He knew everyone's name. He made an effort to come to the classrooms. He would come in and say hi, see what everyone was doing. He was always in the cafeteria. He would talk to students. I would see him walking through the hallways a lot. He made the announcements every day. He made sure everything happening in the school was known, if there was like a dance or a blood drive or something like that, the announcements would be made every day; everyone would know what was going on. He was very involved. He came to a lot of the school functions. You would see him at concerts and plays and musicals, and he would make appearances on the school TV show. He likes to get to know people. He's very interested in who people are as a person. He knows your name. He gets to know things about you. I saw this most often in the lunchroom. He would come up to my lunch table and would ask how sports were going, how the lacrosse team was playing. He would go to someone else and ask how the musical was coming along. He knew who did what, who was involved. He knew a lot about everyone.

*Programmed care*, the study's third theme, exposed the school principal's strategic efforts in engaging students and parents in the communicative process, while also showing recognition for the talents and contributions of others. One student described the principal's efforts during the student of the month celebrations:

he takes a guy and a girl from each grade every month, based off of teacher voting and other faculty recognition of student achievement, not necessarily academically, but overall, and invites all those kids down to the conference room in the office and then explains like, "Congratulations, you guys were picked among the teachers that you've done outstanding work and we want to honor this with the breakfast at the beginning of next month." Then, he actually puts together a breakfast for no other reason than to just thank the students for doing a great job and they get to bring one teacher with them, each student. He shows up to every single one. He has every single teacher that the students brought introduce their student and explain how they know them and what they love about that student...And then, [he] always ends with the statement of how proud he is of the kind of students he's able to be the head of.

One assistant principal provided details about a student run program called the Link Crew, and explained how it was created at the school:

that's probably the most visible place where it [care] comes out. And that's helping kids make the transition from middle school to high school... And, again, seeing the genesis of that is [the principal] empowering [his assistants] to go get trained on this. ...And, they get trained on this, and now they roll with it...its all the research that makes high quality high school education, being a successful transition from middle to high school, establishing good peer role models and good adult role models and life made incarnate in these organizations and in these clubs...So that's a credit to years of development of those kinds of programs.

Another assistant principal discussed the planned social gatherings for the faculty and staff and explained how such events relate to the principal's and assistant administrators' leadership practice:

We have a Thanksgiving feast and we have a back to school bash and we have different social events throughout the year. We have a Sunshine Club. We get together at a pub after school and things like that, which probably happens in most schools around the U.S., but those little pieces are an opportunity for us to learn as leaders who you are, what makes you tick, what makes you happy and then as we're filtering through where we're going...maybe they would be a good person for this, for this role, and then in all that you elevated their strengths to the point where they're feeling complete fulfillment, enjoyment, and that's a rise in education. It totally is a rise.

The fourth theme of the school leader's behavior, *activating the team and elevating others*, speaks to principal's growth mindset. As explained by one teacher:

There are a lot of really smart people on our administrative team that all have special strengths and what [the principal] does, instead of taking ownership, for one thing he delegates and taps the strengths of each of his administrators. He does the same thing really well with his teachers. When he knows he has a teacher that is really strong in a particular area he taps into that teacher and some principals that I have worked with and some bosses that I have worked with just take you to "I am the boss", so the power is with them. I think that [he] is able to delegate and look at what he has and tap those resources, empower those people, make those people powerful and ultimately that funnels right back to him. And, it's really a great way to lead and it makes people feel a part of the team. That's ultimately what this is, it's a big team and he's the head of the team, he's the captain of the team, and I think he is able to disburse power or disburse power ultimately to get us to where we need to be. An administrator described the process from a highly personal standpoint:

[We] have a shared leadership role because each one of us, each assistant principal, is kind of like their own boss of the areas in which they're assigned, but yet we report to [the principal] who is the ultimate boss. But, he's very good in hearing you out, supporting you through it and then monitoring and adjusting. And, he does that from the start. You know, anytime anything comes through his inbox, he's instantly filtering it to whomever and plays off their strengths and we know that, so we know that from the start that whatever is coming our way is coming our way for a real purpose. And, I think that also gives me a purpose in what I do. He knows that I need a purpose. I need to know that I am making a difference and I need to know that he hears me and supports me...And that's something that [the principal] has nailed right on the head, how to empower people to make a change organizationally. You pluck on their heart strings. You get them involved with you, build on their strengths, and the only way you can do this is to know their strengths so you have to have a kind of culture of knowing who they are.

Thick descriptions regarding the principal's willingness and ability to activate the team and elevate others were woven throughout the participants' responses, with comments such as: "he tries to make it seem like we're all in something together", "he defers to people that have been here for a while", "[he's] open to revision and certainly open to an awful lot of listening along the way", "he's engaging, he's welcoming and he's very good at giving credit for ideas, not taking ideas as his own."

The study's fifth theme, *asserting and reasserting cultural norms*, was described from a visionary standpoint by many participants, as they discussed the school principal's focused intentions. According to one parent, such intentions were apparent from the beginning:

you know where he's coming from. He came in with a lot of new ideas. He's a very forward thinking person. And you could see as the years went by, he's had a vision, always had a vision for the school. And goals. Like he wanted to move it to the next level.

Another parent talked about the key cultural norm that was set by the principal:

Everything he does means well. Whether it works out or not, it's always started with the end goal of what is best for the students, the staff and the school, even the community. What's best for us.

One administrator explained that the principal's vision and assertive mindset sometimes led to corrective behavior:

If someone does a breach of protocol...they will be checked in with, but the bigger fault is when there is a breach of the cultural norms. That's where [the principal] reserves more emotion... if someone is so disrespectful to a kid or a family, then that is a breach of the organization. So, therefore, such a teacher or staff member will be addressed fairly directly on those types of situations. And, it is done generally one-on-one as a conversation.

However, as another administrator pointed out, the principal works in the opposite way when actions are consistent with the organization's mission, which tends to be a key connective piece: "He's the first one to stand there and say...I believe in this person, this person is competent, this person cares, and this person is doing his job. When you're talking about trust, that's a big piece of it."

One teacher talked about *care* from the perspective of the organization's culture and declared the principal served as the staple in creating the school's existing environment:

I think that if it doesn't come from the administrator, then you don't have it [care and connection]. I've been in many different buildings and I've seen many different administrators. And I haven't really seen anything like this. I just know that not only is a hand extended, but you get the feeling that it's really meant, it's not just you know, you're in my thoughts. It's, I'm going to reach out to you and I'm going to let you know that I'm continually thinking of you.

The study's final theme, *the engaging personality*, speaks to and extends each of the first five themes as it denotes a principal who, according to the study's participants, has "incredible energy", "is never satisfied", is "very forward thinking and is always looking for ways to improve", knows "how to propel the students" and, according to one teacher, "make us the top of our game." According to one former student, it was the principal's charisma that allowed him to create meaningful, productive engagements with the school's stakeholders:

He's very charismatic. He knows how to get up and talk in front of people. He definitely gives you a sense of confidence that he knows what he's doing. He's very composed, which is a good thing. I think he's just very good at answering questions and being in the spotlight, taking the heat. He doesn't seem nervous. He doesn't really allow for the opportunity for someone to come in and shake him up and get him off balance and then throw more attacks or more questions at him. He's very focused. And, you got the sense

that he cares about the school and he wants [the school] to be recognized as a good school and to be the best environment possible.

Another former student agreed:

He knows what needs to get done and he gets it done. He's very good at motivating groups of people, groups of his staff, especially holdovers from previous administrations. In the small group setting, he could get a group of people on board with something and get something done, be it students, staff, or teachers... just the way he worked, the way he talked, in sort of the leading-by-example fashion; he did that all the time, in everything.

Taken together, the six themes of the study suggest this study's school leader was able to generate a particular energy through purposeful action, high expectations, an engaging presence, and a caring demeanor. Due to such behavior, this study's participants overwhelmingly viewed the school principal in a positive light and expressed appreciations for his leadership style and actions.

## 6. Discussion of Findings

In order to produce greater meaning of this study's findings, it is necessary to align certain segments of socio-emotional, care-based leadership theory with the results of the study. To begin the process, it is advantageous to utilize the lens of Goleman et al.'s (2002) *primal leadership theory* in exploring the meaning behind the school principal's work.

According to Goleman et al. (2002), the power of an organizational leader resides in his or her ability to create *resonance*. This state, which involves the generation of positive stakeholder emotions, is derived from the leader's ability to produce enthusiasm within the group while making supportive emotional connections (p. 5). On the contrary, "leaders who drive emotions negatively...spawn *dissonance*" (p. 6). Accordingly, "whether an organization withers or flourishes depends to a remarkable extent on the leaders' effectiveness in this primal emotional dimension" (p. 6).

As suggested by these theorists, there are various ways that a leader may direct an organization through either resonant or dissonant activity:

Leaders give praise or withhold it, criticize well or destructively, offer support or turn a blind eye to people's needs. They can frame the group's mission in ways that give more meaning to each person's contribution – or not. They can guide in ways that give people a sense of clarity and direction in their work and that encourage flexibility, setting people free to use their best sense of how to get the job done. All these acts help determine a leader's primal emotional impact. (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 9)



Primal leadership theory offers six leadership styles that consist of sets of coordinated activities. As mentioned by Goleman et al. (2002), "typically, the best, most effective leaders act according to one or more of six distinct approaches to leadership and skillfully switch between the various styles depending on the situation" (p. 53). Specifically, these styles include the following: visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and commanding. Accompanying each style is a clear definition: visionary - frames the collective task in terms of a grander vision and defines a standard for performance feedback that revolves around that vision (p. 57); coaching - involves one-on-one engagements and is concerned with the understanding, rapport, and trust that is developed through the process (p. 60); affiliative - a collaborative competence that is concerned with promoting harmony and expanding the connective tissue between people (p. 64); democratic - builds on teamwork, collaboration, conflict management, and influence (p. 69); pacesetting - holds and exemplifies high standards of performance and demands more from low performers (p. 72); commanding - demands immediate compliance with orders (p. 76).

According to the study's participants, the school principal had a strong, consistent tendency to show attentiveness, give support, be responsive, recognize the work of others, utilize the strengths of others, celebrate success, engage in planned activities, build trusting relationships, routinely be visible and accessible, and establish cultural norms. These activities are directly related to primal leadership theory's four "resonant styles": visionary, democratic, affiliative, and coaching. By using these styles, the principal was able to build a certain amount of *emotional capital* within the school environment. Through consistent application and effort, the principal was able to set a vision, inspire his faculty and staff, coach for improvement, generate positive school energy, establish cultural norms, and demonstrate care and compassion for his workforce. Taken together, the school principal's actions, to a high degree, exemplified the essence of resonant leadership.

In a more limited fashion, the principal utilized primal leadership theory's two dissonant styles: pacesetting and commanding. Goleman et al. (2002) explained that the improper use of these two styles may produce negative organizational energy and results, but particular circumstances may call for either one. From the principal's perspective, pacesetting was used to set and manage organizational standards and expectations, while the commanding style was reserved for high crisis situations. Overwhelming, the results of the study suggest the principal was successful in maintaining a positive atmosphere due to a particular *leadership artistry* that reserved dissonant leadership practice for discrete episodes that necessitated such behavior.

From the standpoint of *care*, the results of this study offer a "design of care" (Figure 1) that shares characteristics with each of the socio-emotional, care-based leadership conceptions that have been promoted in the literature, including: charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, resonant leadership, relational leadership, compassionate leadership, moral leadership, and servant leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Bass, 2002; Blanchard, 2003; Boorum, 2009; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005;

Burns, 1978; Congo & Kanungo, 1998; Greenleaf, 1977; Jordan et al., 2006; Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzlim, & Kakabadse, 2002; Lennick & Kiel, 2005; Raelin, 2003; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1999).

According to Held (2006), the ethic of care is based on relationships and connections that are developed through demonstrations of concern and connection with others. The ethic deals with listening, observing, and responding to others. It is concerned with giving attention and support, encouragement, being willing to discipline, and "prodding" in a way that benefits the other, over time (Shapiro & Gross, 2008, p. 28). From an educational leadership perspective, administrators guided by the ethic "encourage collaborative efforts between faculty, staff, and students" (Beck, 1994, p. 85), while promoting interpersonal interactions, deemphasizing competition, facilitating a sense of belonging, and increasing individuals' skills as they learn from one another (Beck, 1994, p. 85).

The ethic of care is aligned closely with moral leadership, which Sergiovanni (2005) declared to be central to the human spirit, since spirit responds to values, beliefs, moral dimensions, and standards. From a moral leadership perspective, certain questions arise from the leader-follower relationship, including: How credible is the leader? Is the leader honest, forthright, and sincere? Does the leader model beliefs, live purposes, exemplify standards? In essence, what does the leader represent, and does this representation symbolize something of value to followers? (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 18). The results of this study provide 31 specific leadership actions that were shown to "tap the spirit" of followers. These actions successfully generated emotional responses in the schools' stakeholders, to the extent that they felt they were being cared-for. Therefore, in some way, each of these segments served as a function of the ethic of care, which has been described in terms of creating and/or providing "welfare", "affection", "protection", "regard", and "enhancement" (Noddings, 1984, pp. 23-24). Furthermore, the results suggest the school principal's leadership practice was aligned with some of the finer points of the ethic of care, which include: 1) being centrally focused on "attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others" (Held, 2006, p. 10), 2) valuing emotion, rather than rejecting it (Held, 2006, p. 10), 3) seeing persons as "relational and interdependent" (Held, 2006, p. 13), 4) honoring the dignity of each person (Starratt, 1991, p. 195), 5) focusing on "attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need...and cultivating caring relations" (Held, 2006, p. 15), and 6) having a desire to see that persons "enjoy a fully human life" (Starratt, 1991, p. 195). Under these terms, and in relation to the results of this study, it may be argued that the ethic of care is best suited to serve as the foundation for school leadership conduct.

In a broader sense, the application of the form of leadership highlighted in this study's results embraces Sernak's (1998) conceptualization of "caring power", which:

allows for envisioning a framework in which power is used to bring about a milieu in which persons nurture and support one another in order to create a caring community. This not only allows individual potential and goals to be cultivated, but the good of the collective to be sought and sustained. In this sense, caring power is understood in the

context of community, rather than solely as acts between individuals. Caring for a collective, then, requires reconceptualizing leadership and organizational structure from the perspective of using power to effect a climate that fosters relationships that nurture individuals and that stimulate growth and harmony. (pp. 144-145)

## 7. Conclusion

The results of this study suggest the male school principal under investigation had a strong leaning toward care-based leadership practice. Furthermore, the results suggest that emotion, on part of both the school leader and school stakeholders, played a strong role in developing the leader-follower relationship and allowed the school principal to thrive as a leader. The discussion section explained the actions of the school principal in terms of his use of specific leadership styles and exposed the emotional underpinnings that were formulated in the organization through his thoughts, intentions, and conduct, which positively influenced the organization. Here, a particular leadership competency was present, which allowed the school principal to maneuver between various leadership styles that accentuated care and concern for individuals and the school organization as a whole. Overall, the study's findings suggest that the ethic of care, in the form of a particular caring power, is well suited for serving as the foundation of school leadership conduct. Such an ethic recognizes the power structure that exists within school organizations, and calls for the modeling of caring behavior by the school leader along with the formation of processes that promote caring action by others. The study's findings suggest committed leadership behavior in this realm may set the stage for further caring behavior, to be enacted by other school stakeholders. In this way, school leadership may serve as a conduit for care, to be picked up on and extended through the school environment by others. The philosophy and behavior of this study's school principal may provide useful insights for school leaders in developing a school culture that is grounded in the ethic of care.

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