ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' AND FEMALE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING PRINCIPALS WHO PROVIDE POSITIVE SUPPORT DURING EPISODES OF TEACHER STRESS

by

DEBORAH JAUDON MATHEWS

(Under the direction of John W. Schell)

ABSTRACT

The research answered the question "What principal support behaviors are occurring related to episodes of stress, and what do these support behaviors mean to teachers?" One principal and 3 to 4 teachers from 5 elementary schools participated in initial interviews, which were analyzed qualitatively using field notes and interview transcriptions. In follow-up interviews, each participant had the opportunity to clarify and to respond to new questions generated from a comparative analysis of the first round of interviews. In this way, the original data were verified, clarified, and extended.

Data on stress support by principals for teachers were grouped into 2 themes: protecting and caring. Protecting by the principal (shielding a teacher from harm or helping a teacher when presented with harm) included four categories: (a) insulating, (b) connecting, (c) relieving, and (d) representing. Caring by the principal (focusing on the individual or showing that the individual was valued) included four categories: (e) positioning, (f) listening, (g) giving, and (h) personalizing. Both themes related to the core theme of principal stress support.

Sixty-five distinct supportive principal behaviors were documented from the perspectives of both principals and teachers. The findings suggested that female elementary teachers do expect *protecting* support, but not *caring* support. However, *caring* principal support behaviors had twice the meaning for teachers as *protecting* principal support behaviors. Principals and teachers reported that the principal could probably do more to help if the stress originated from inside the work environment (IWE), but that it was also appropriate for the principal to be supportive when the stress originated from outside the work environment (OWE). Findings indicated that 2 definitions should be expanded: *principal support* and *teacher stress.* *Principal support* should not only address teacher instruction, but also teacher stress. Although addressing stress for the group of teachers by the principal was helpful, addressing stress for the individual teacher was also indicated. *Teacher stress* should no longer be viewed as only the work stress of being a teacher, but also should include the episodic stress with IWE or OWE origins that individual teachers experience on the job.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher, Stress, Principal, Elementary, Manager, Job, Occupation, Episodic, Women, Support, Qualitative, Interview, Family, Individual, Female, Environment, Qualitative, Caring, Protecting, Positive, Work

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*To my mother*

*Sadie Ruth Hale Jaudon*

*1919-1959*

*who vaccinated me with the love of learning*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

This study examined principals' and female teachers' perspectives of principal support during episodes of individual teacher stress. This introduction includes four sections. The first section presents a brief overview of the research and literature on stress. The second section provides a description of the study, including the purpose of the study, research questions, definition of operational terms, procedures for site and sample selection, and research design. The third section discusses the theoretical and practical significance of the study. The fourth section presents the limitations of the study.

## Research and Literature on Stress

### *General Stress*

Stress may be perceived as good or bad, depending on how a person is able to assimilate the stress or accommodate the stress. If the person is not able to handle the stress, the stress is said to be bad (Fletcher, 1991). Selye (1974) recorded physical changes in the body when the body is under stress and described these changes, naming the process and its concomitant changes in relation to stress the "general adaptation syndrome." Selye's books (*The Story of the Adaptation Syndrome*, 1952; *The Stress of Life*, 1956/1975; *Stress Without Distress*, 1974) developed the investigation of stress and provided a bridge between the erudite and the masses.

In writing for the public as well as for other scientists, Selye developed terminology related to the phenomenon of stress. For example, he noted that stress can be either the initiative that is needed for a person to be productive (hyperstress), the absence of what is needed for a

person to be productive (hypostress), or something that is too much for a person (distress) (Selye, 1975). Stress in the life of a person can be thought of as analogous to salt added to a basket of french fries: Some salt enhances the flavor of french fries, too little salt leaves french fries bland, too much salt overpowers the flavor of the potatoes, and an excessive amount of sodium chloride can debilitate, make one sick, or even kill.

*Female Stress*

Women differ from men in responding to stress. "They [women] seem to respond to stress—both chemically and behaviorally—quite differently from men" (Durden-Smith & deSimone, 1983, p. 139). In *Mind, Brain, and Behavior*, the authors stated, "Verbal and spatial functions appear to be more widely distributed in both hemispheres of the female brain, whereas they appear to be more rigidly segregated in the male—verbal on the left, spatial on the right" (Bloom, Lazerson, & Hofstadter, 1985, p. 226). Spielberger and Reheiser (2000) found gender differences in occupational stress. White (2001) suggested that men are better able to compartmentalize and segregate their lives between on-the-job time and off-the-job time.

Women tend to carry stress from one place to the other (White, 2001). Leman (1987) described the effects of stress in the lives of working women, suggesting that he often saw them when they had reached the exhaustion stage. Women tend to carry the stress until they can no longer put one foot in front of the other; in fact, cumulative episodes of stress and anger in women over time can be fatal (White, 2001).

Stress in women can be a function of many combined factors. Women tend to see their work in the context of their community, and they tend to consider, in relation to their work, such factors as the location of stores, support people, and the community services they will need (Kemp, 200l). Gilman (2002) listed the top 57 large cities and the top 143 small cities according

to various factors affecting women's stress level: low crime, health, education, economy, jobs, lifestyle, and child care. According to Gilman, the stress factors for women are more extensive and complicated than originally perceived.

*Teacher Stress*

Research on teachers' occupational stress includes examination of such issues as stress factors correlated to level of teaching and stress peculiar to subgroupings of teachers (Cooper & Marshall, 1980; Farber, 1991; Rousmaniere, 1997). A few factors remain constant for all levels, such as pupil discipline and paperwork (Broiles, 1982). Special subgroups such as beginning teachers (Schonfeld, 1992; Schonfeld 2000) and special education teachers (Embich, 2001) have been studied. While stress levels are not higher for subgroups of teachers than for the whole group of teachers, stress is manifested in different ways. Beginning teachers are in the survival mode, causing stress that is different from experienced teachers. Special education teachers often deal with the stress of feeling disconnected to the school faculty. This situation creates stress different from what a teacher without a special circumstance might experience. As Blase and Blase (1998) have suggested, perhaps the best solution for the occupational problems of teaching is to empower teachers to address their day-to-day problems collectively.

Elementary teachers are isolated for much of their school day from adult contact (Rousmaniere, 1997). Children surround an elementary teacher during the workday. Teachers would probably not look to children in their care for stress support. Solitary confinement is used as punishment for prisoners. Perhaps teacher isolation is a factor in the need for principal stress support. The amount and effectiveness of support by the principal in times of stress has been theorized as a possible mitigating factor (Farber, 1991; Markham, 1999; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Payton, 1986), but has not been examined in detail. It is acknowledged that

principals often have the flexibility in their positions to interact with teachers and can be instrumental in counteracting teachers' isolation.

A second-grade teacher described to the researcher the effect of episodic stress on teachers:

> Teachers keep their heads above water pretty well. They know it's a stressful job and they do it. It's just when one more thing is added that it just gets to be too much. It's like the straw that breaks the camel's back.

That straw, episodic stress, will be the focus of the research, not the regular stressful job of teaching. For the purpose of this research, the episodic stress that originates from inside the work environment will be referred to as (IWE), and episodic stress that originates from outside the work environment will be referred to as (OWE). Both will be considered as they affect teachers on the job.

Studies on the occupational stress of teachers have focused on teachers as a group rather than the effects of stress on individual teachers. Further, contemporary principals often rely on general knowledge that they have about teachers as a group rather than on specific information about individual stress and its potential impact on a teacher.

*Support of Principals*

A review of the latest edition of the *International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* yielded no research on principals who gave support during episodes of teacher stress (Leithwood, Chapman, Corson, Hallinger, & Hart, 1996). While Carpenter and Scott (1992) did not research principal support related to stress, they did state that staff development, stress management classes, and referral to an employee assistance program are common interventions at the disposal of the school principal. No research has been conducted

with regard to principals who give support as an intervention during episodes of individual stress.

The business world, however, has tried to target the optimal time for managers to intervene in individual employees' episodes of stress. It has found that managers who intervene earlier in a stressful situation can use a milder intercession at less cost, less loss in productivity, and less time expended in professional counseling (Golembiewski & Boss, 1992; Golembiewski, Hilles, & Daly, 1987). Stress does build over time and become worse, so that the person affected is less and less able to manage the stress alone. The skill level and price of the intervention increases proportionately. Psychologist Rae Sedgwick described the progression of stress and the critical timing for management:

> As change continues to accumulate without some form of management, the effect on the family and individual gradually increases from minor change to major crisis. Change becomes stress; stress becomes crisis; crisis represents itself as a major change in system function. Adequate management skills become inadequate; minor impact on the family becomes major. Where cumulative change reaches the crisis level, management skills that might be effective in situations of moderate change may be ineffective or inadequate. (Sedgwick, 1981, pp. 118-119)

It is known that principals can create stress for teachers (Blase & Blase, 2002) and that the perception by teachers of a leader's behavior influences teachers' performances (Blase, Dedrick, & Strathe, 1986). In this context, the positive effect of principles who offer support is a definite possibility. However, this has not been adequately researched. This study will attempt to add to the scholarly knowledge in this area.

## Description of the Study

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study was to explore support of elementary principals for individual female teachers during stressful episodes and the perceptions of those teachers receiving

administrative support. This study was open-ended and process-oriented, as is typical of qualitative research. Similarities and differences in the perspectives of principals and teachers were described.

*Guiding Research Questions*

The following are questions that guided this research:

1. What principal support behaviors are occurring when individual elementary female teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
2. What are individual elementary female teachers' expectations and opinions about a principal's support behaviors when they are experiencing episodes of stress?
3. What are principals' expectations and opinions about their own principal support behaviors when individual elementary teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
4. Does the origin of the stress (inside or outside the work environment) affect the expectations and opinions about principal support for individual female teacher stress?

*Definition of Terms*

For the purpose of this research, the following operational definitions have been adopted:

Stress: The shortened term for distress; "the damaging side effect of stress which results from the wear and tear of life" (Selye, 1976, p. xvi).

Teacher Stress: The stress that affects a teacher at work originating from inside or outside the work environment (unique definition for this research).

Symbolic Interactionism: A sociological perspective that emphasizes the social meanings people attach to the world around them. Symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises: (a) people act toward things, including other people, on the basis of the meanings these things have for them, (b) meanings are not inherent in objects, but are

social products that arise during interaction, and ( c) social actors attach meanings to situations, others, things, and themselves through a process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969).

*Site Selection*

Multiple research locations were necessary to obtain a useful sample of supportive principals. Five elementary schools were selected based upon each principal's outstanding reputation for being generally supportive of the school's teachers. All interviews were conducted during the summer of 2003 when school was not in session. With few exceptions, the interviews were conducted at the schools.

*Sample Selection*

Purposeful sampling as described by Patton (1990) was used in the selection of both principal and teacher participants. Purposeful sampling was used because the researcher wanted rich descriptions of the actions of supportive principals. The research was not about documenting whether or not the principals were supportive. Three of the participating principals were nominated by a member of the researcher's doctoral committee, and the remaining 2 participants had multiple recommendations from central office personnel in school systems. Attempts were made to insure that informants and the researcher were relative strangers so that the principals and teachers might feel freer to talk. "The interviewer and participant need to have enough distance from each other so that they take nothing for granted" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, as cited in Seidman, 1998, p. 36).

The researcher first arranged for an interview with the nominated principal. The principal then contacted three to four female teachers from the school and arranged for their participation in the study. The total participant numbers were 5 public school elementary principals and 16

female elementary teachers. Gender was not stipulated for principals. Gender was stipulated for teachers to be female in order to incorporate female stress research in understanding the individual stress episodes of female elementary teachers.

*Research Design*

The focus of this study was elementary principals' and teachers' perspectives of principal support during episodes of individual female teacher stress. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to collect data, analyze data, and generate themes concerning elementary principals' and teachers' perspectives of principal support during episodes of individual female teacher stress. Categories (or commonalities) were developed, and from the analysis of categories (abstract ideas generalized from the data), themes were revealed.

Specific data collection procedures included two face-to-face interviews with each participant. These interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and organized into five school binders. The interviews from the initial round of interviews following the Principal Interview Guide (see Appendix A) and the Teacher Interview Guide (see Appendix B) were analyzed before proceeding to the follow-up interviews with each participant (see Appendix C). This initial analysis developed ideas brought to the forefront by participants. In the follow-up round of interviews, all participants commented on ideas and rounded out missing information from their initial interviews. This process developed the Follow-up Interview Guide.

Documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) were furnished by some participants that were relevant to their perspectives. An Interviewer's Journal was created to house these documents and to record and organize notes throughout the course of the research. "Dialogue Accessories" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7) were noted in the observations made during the interviews and included clothing, gestures, body language, and sketches of the interview settings.

*Interviews*

Interviews were the primary data source for the study. Participants signed a research consent form before beginning the interview process (see Appendix D). The form outlined their participation in the research and also gave participants contact information in the event they had concerns during the process. According to Bogdan and Bilken (1992), an interview is a purposeful conversation used to generate descriptive data about how participants perceive and interpret their world. The interviews were structured with open-ended questions. Some narrowing questions were included in the follow-up interviews to illuminate the concepts. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. At the conclusion of the interviews, 2 participants did ask for copies of their transcriptions. No participant withdrew information, although the researcher was asked not to use two specific instances as detailed narrative examples. Demographic-gathering questions were asked at the follow-up interview when the participants were more at ease with the researcher and when the researcher had a better idea of what descriptors might be meaningful to illuminate the research.

## Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance of the study was to gather a rich description about elementary principals' and female teachers' perspectives of principal support during episodes of individual teacher stress and to document what principal support behaviors for stress were occurring. The focus emphasized the individual teacher and the meaning stress support had for individual teachers. This may lead to more teachers under stress being approached and supported in individual ways.

Presently, no studies were found by the researcher that have focused on principal support during episodes of individual teacher stress. Teacher stress has been researched and implicitly

understood to be the general stress resulting from the job of teaching. Female stress research has informed us that stress is complicated and that women tend to carry stress from one segment of their lives to another much more than men do (White, 2001). This study proposes defining *teacher stress* as the stress that teachers experience on the job, regardless of the source. It also addressed episodic stress rather than chronic stress. Few stress studies about teachers have included episodic stress. Episodic stress is distress out of the ordinary lasting for a period of time.

A review of principal preparation research during the last 20 years revealed that support of teachers is defined as instructional support rather than stress support (Leithwood et al., 1996). Two actions taken by principals as mentioned in textbooks are referral to an employee assistance program and referral to staff development courses on either relaxation techniques or organizing more efficiently (Carpenter & Scott, 1992). These two actions have not been verified through research.

Female teachers have seldom been specifically targeted, and no teacher stress study to date has intermingled female stress research with educational research in an attempt to understand female teacher stress. Female teachers are the majority of teachers, and the majority of teachers are elementary level *(Digest of Education Statistics 2002,* p. 80*)*. Therefore, the present research should be useful in understanding principal stress support for a sizable population of teachers.

## Limitations

The proposed research did not examine active individual female teacher stress episodes needing principal support. The research focused on past events and therefore suffered the twin

disadvantages of fading memory and the loss of immediate reaction. Advantages included the maintenance of confidentiality and noninterference with existing principal-teacher relationships.

The researcher chose not to include videotaping the interview, which could have given much nonverbal information through body language. This would have helped the researcher to note incongruence between verbal and nonverbal messages. The researcher attempted to compensate for this disadvantage by field notes. The advantage of not using videotaping was increased participant ease with the interview situation.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 presents the literature and research in the areas of general stress, female stress, teacher stress, and principal support. It further shows what is known and what is not known according to how research has been conducted. This chapter builds a foundation for the study and has four sections. The first section discusses stress in general. The second section discusses stress research related to women, who comprise the vast majority of teachers. The third section discusses teacher stress research, the facts that are known, and the ways this research has been conducted. The fourth section discusses the traditional support functions of principals and the specific research related to principal support.

## General Stress

Selye (1974) developed a theoretical framework to explain how stress is created and how the subsequent bodily symptoms develop. He coined the phrase "stress syndrome," which first appeared in an article entitled "A Syndrome Produced by Diverse Nocuous Agents" in the British journal *Nature* on July 4, 1936. Selye reported asking himself:

> Could it be that this syndrome in man (the feeling of being ill, the diffuse pains in joints and muscles, the intestinal disturbances with loss of appetite, the loss of weight) were in some manner clinical equivalents of the experimental syndrome, the triad (Adrenocortical stimulation, thymicolymphatic atrophy, intestinal ulcers) that I had produced with such a variety of toxic substances in the rat? (Selye, 1974, pp. 29-30)

Selye's (1976) later work proposed that there are three predictable, successive responses to stress: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. He termed these responses a general adaptation syndrome. Adaptation energy is something other than caloric energy that is used up when the

organism attempts to adapt, such as the eyes adapting when a person steps from the shadows into the sunlight. At first there is a time for adjustment, and then the person can see. The expending of adaptation energy explains how people reach exhaustion from a beginning state of stress.

Gmelch (1977) diagrammed a stress filter to describe the stress perception process for the individual and to show why stress manifestations are unique for individuals. This is theoretical support for the importance of inquiring about the stress perception of individual teachers rather than a group of teachers. The structure highlights the environmental stressors from home, personal, or private life affecting an employee at work. Gmelch envisioned stressor categories expanding from the person in concentric circles: personal, interpersonal, organizational, and environmental. He postulated that these stressor circles can float independently and that when they overlap or stack, stress develops. This is consistent with a constructionist viewpoint since it is the person's perception through interaction with the environment that defines the person's reality.

Research in the business world has gone further in examining organizational action in relation to stress. Golembiewski and Boss (1992) have investigated stress in the business world. They examined the integration that can occur between individual and group levels of analysis and reported:

> Separate spheres tend to exist for individual and organizational levels of analysis in change development, and the twain seldom meet. With the Myers-Briggs phenomenon for the designation of individuals, little use is made of this information as to how individuals relate within organizations. (Golembiewski & Boss, p. 116)

Golembiewski and Boss have two basic opinions about the individual level of analysis in organizational change and development: "(a) The organization does and should get dominant attention, and (b) the attention to the organization is overdone with a loss of precision in

targeting interventions as well as a diminution of in their impact" (Golembiewski & Boss, p. 116).

The expanded three-dimensional demand-control-support model predicts that workers with jobs combining high demands, low control, and low support from supervisors or coworkers are at the highest risk for psychological or physical disorders (Johnson & Hall, 1988, as cited in Dollard, Winefield, Winefield, & Jonge, 2000). Dollard et al. (2000) researched the key dimensions of the demand-control-support model in predicting levels of strain (specifically emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and job dissatisfaction) and feelings of productivity and competency (personal accomplishment). The sample was comprised of multi-occupational human service workers. They found that jobs combining high demands, low control, and low support produced the lowest levels of satisfaction in workers. Teachers have high demands, some would consider low control, and the key may be whether or not they have high or low support.

This study examined the individual stress situations within the organization and the relationship with the supervisor (principal) that connects the individual (teacher) with the goals of the organization (the school). Adams (1996) studied vocational high school teachers within the organization and discovered that it was not the students who were the larger stressor to teachers, but rather *systems* as she termed it. Supervisory support was considered part of systems.

## Female Stress

Females have been underrepresented in stress studies. Cooper (1983) noted that subjects of stress studies of heart disease and cancer were primarily men. He recognized that findings related to heart disease or cancer may not have been applicable to women and pointed to the need for studies of women in stress research as well as disease research**.** He also postulated that working women might be more prone to stress than women who do not work outside the home.

In studies that have delineated men and women, women, on average, have shown higher rates of depression and higher rates of depressive symptoms than men (Culbertson, 1997).

Dr. Kevin Leman (1987) gave clinical examples of wives and mothers who have been through alarm and resistance and have landed in the exhaustion stage of stress:

> During the Exhaustion stage, there is an enormous amount of wear and tear on the organs of the body. It is in the Exhaustion stage that we develop colitis, high blood pressure, ulcers, and even heart attacks. Many of the wives and mothers who come through my door are in the Exhaustion stage. (Leman, p. 29)

Many women are apparently letting stress progress without dealing with it or having help to deal with it at an early stage. It can be a serious heath threat if not addressed.

*Stress Hurts: A Wake Up Call for Women* aired March 10, 2001, as an ABC television special. Three working mothers' lives were videotaped from the time they got up in the morning through their sleep at night. The view was the effect of stress on the seamless life of the woman and whether the stress originated from the location of home or the location of work. The manifestations of stress discussed were: anger, sleep disturbance, and sexual disturbance:

> Men's stress hormones drop when they leave the office, but women's generally rise. Women are angry 30% more often than men. Mothers exhibit the highest levels of anger. Women are expected to suppress their anger. This is a cultural expectation. The hormone cortisol that fuels anger causes little nicks and tears in the arteries that feed the heart. If anger continues day in and day out and year in and year out, the repair doesn't take place. One bout of rage could trigger a heart attack.
>
> Women may have an inability to say goodnight to their daytime concerns. Sleep does not give women relief from stress. Women's minds tend to go back over the day or anticipate what has to be done in the coming day. The most common time for women to wake is between two and five in the morning. Women may wake up multiple times and perhaps look at the clock. This is a sign of not getting deep, restful sleep. [Their minds keep racing and the next day they go around feeling tired.] Some women wear fatigue like a badge of honor and the culture gives them admiration when they are super busy.
>
> Interest in sex drops as it becomes one more duty to perform and one more person who needs something from you. Sleep or just resting quietly is preferable. Lack of sex distances women from a possible person for emotional support. (White, 2001)

Stress from off-the-job sources can compound the effects of stress from on-the-job sources. Kasl (1983) compared Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend's 1974 and 1981 edited volumes on stressful life events. Over time, factors in the environment became very important in the discussion of stress in women. Bower (1989) investigated the effect of family circumstance on the work performance of Georgia Extension Service agents. He found that there were five conditions of off-the-job stress that negatively impacted on-the-job performance. All five conditions revolved around child care. According to Gilbert (as quoted in Kemp, 2001): "Many women choose where to live on the basis of access to family and friends and then look for jobs that will allow them to use these place-based social networks for support and help with child care and other needs" (p. 6). *Stress Hurts* reported: "Women tend to integrate their lives and carry stress from one place to another just as women's thinking tends to be integrated, using both sides of the brain simultaneously" (White, 2001). Female stress research compels the expanded definition of stress for women workers to include off-the-job stress as well as on-the-job stress.

## Teacher Stress

Researchers have identified particular stressors in the field of teaching. Broiles (1982) surveyed preschool through high school teachers and found the following highest-rated stress factors in descending order: (a) lack of time to spend with individual students, (b) poorly motivated students, (c) individual students who continually misbehave, (4) students' poor attitudes about work, (e) the need for constant monitoring of students' behavior, (f) low status of the teaching profession, (g) difficult behavior problems, (h) large classes, (i) students who show a lack of interest, (j) too much paperwork, (k) trying to uphold/maintain values and standards, (l) inadequate salary, (m) students' general misbehavior, (n) too much paperwork, (o) ability groupings that are too wide, and (p) noisy students. Broiles broke the sources of stress into four

categories in descending order: (a) student misbehavior, (b) poor school spirit, (c) time pressures, and (d) poor working conditions. One of the items under poor school spirit was "attitudes and behavior of principal" (Broiles, p. 37). One teacher was quoted as saying, "I can handle a lot of stress if I'm made to feel that I'm doing a good job. I have received only one compliment from my principal in the 3 years that he has been my principal" (Broiles, p. 60).

There were significant differences in Broiles's study between male and female responders as to sources of stress. The other demographics were not significant: age, marital status, career length, grade level, and race. The frequently reported stress symptoms were: frustration, exhaustion, headaches, irritability, diminished pleasure in teaching, nervousness, anxiety, anger, tension, depression, and the feeling of being under stress. The large number of teachers surveyed served as a positive factor in the study by representing many individual voices. One of the teachers in the study commented about symptoms of stress: "I'm not sure all of these are due to stress. I have felt less stress the last couple of years. Much better this year. *A good principal is a great help*" (Broiles, 1982, p. 65). Particular stressors in the job of teaching are known, and there is some indication that a good principal can make a difference for a teacher in mitigating the stress.

Perception of stress is very individual for teachers. Brown (1983) researched a large group of elementary teachers and found that the majority of teachers rated the general profession of teaching as more stressful than their personal experience of teaching. The Southwest Missouri State University Stress Survey was developed as part of the study. Each elementary teacher was asked demographic information and perceptions of stress in the profession. The last section examined the personal stress of the teachers. Personal stress was defined as the teachers' personal perceptions of their on-the-job stress. It did not include the flow-over effect of stress

from their home and community lives. Forty severity ratings of stress factors in teachers' lives and 20 frequency of occurrence ratings of stress symptoms were used. The top-rated factors in descending order were (a) inadequate salary, (b) student values and/or attitudes, (c) discipline problems, (d) teaching children with a wide range of abilities, (e) poor student motivation, (f) parent values and/or attitudes, (g) work overload, (h) insufficient preparation time, and (i) lack of personal breaks. The top-rated symptoms in descending order were (a) exhaustion, (b) tension, (c) irritability, (d) anger, (e) headaches, (f) nervousness, (g) depression, (h) backaches, (i) need for medication, and (j) job dissatisfaction. This study contributes to the framework of studying the perspectives of stress by individual teachers. Although individual scenarios were studied, the numbers were added together to give a general picture of the whole of elementary teachers.

A homogeneous occupational group of teachers was studied qualitatively by Pajak and Blase (1984). They talked with individuals, both male and female. Pajak and Blase looked at the meaning of bar visits relative to the professional lives of the teachers. They studied the teachers' perspectives of a ritual bar visit on Friday afternoons after school and found that teachers compartmentalized their lives into either on-the-job time (professional) or off-the-job time (personal). The teachers further conceptualized that the two areas of their lives were never to intrude upon the other. The bar visit tended to be a pressure valve and transitioning strategy between the two realities for the teachers. Comments were reported indicating an awareness of the drift of stress. One example is the following:

> You come to O'Keefe's; you have a few drinks, and you loosen up. You release everything that's been bothering you all week. You forget about it. You have a good time. If you just stayed in, it would be bottled up. (Pajak & Blase, p. 169)

In a longitudinal study, Schonfeld (1992) found that working conditions did have an effect on newly appointed female teachers, particularly in relation to depressive symptoms. He

concentrated on work stressors. In a follow-up study, Schonfeld (2000) tightened his population, extended the number of women studied, and added the new factors of self-esteem, job satisfaction, and motivation to teach. For all factors studied, he found that negative working conditions negatively effected teachers. He looked at episodic stressors such as student fights, a threat of personal injury, or a confrontation initiated by an insolent student. Making his work longitudinal, including expectations, refining his earlier work, and including episodic stressors in assessing working conditions of teachers are significant contributions to teacher stress research.

## Support of the Principal

Historically, theorists have proposed autocratic supervision by principals to pressure teachers to do a better job of following what they are told to do. Principals solve large problems and teachers carry out the solutions. At the same time, teachers solve small problems in isolation and do not bother principals.

Intervention strategies have been based on the staff development model. Relaxation sessions, direct training in stress management, physical activity programs, and becoming more organized are typical themes (Farber, 1991). Long-term follow-up plans are not reported as part of the process. The principal's role in stress situations has been to provide the staff development training. The overall goal was to increase the teachers' tolerance level for stress rather than to relieve the load of stress. When a stress reduction consultant has been hired by the system to do a workshop, "teachers often feel as if they are being manipulated—that the consultant has been hired *to fix* teachers; so that they can work better" (Farber, 1991, p. 303).

Miller et al. (1999) conducted a survey of over 1,000 special education teachers in Florida and then followed up 2 years later. The goal was to determine factors that correlated with teachers leaving special education teaching so that these factors could be addressed and retention

in the field could be enhanced. Younger teachers and teachers scoring higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or the National Teachers Exam were found to be more likely to leave teaching. A level of high commitment to the profession and having a strong feeling of personal teacher efficacy were mentioned as possible mitigating factors. Teachers who felt isolated were more likely to leave. Teachers who stayed reported less stress and better school climate than teachers who left. "Support from building administrators" (Miller et al., p. 207) was one of the parts of the micro system examination. Miller et al. stated: "Because of the important role that school leaders will play in reducing stress and improving school climate, school districts and institutions of higher education will need to engage in concerted efforts to develop the collaborative skills of building principals" (p. 210). The authors asked the question: "Will teachers who left because of stress and poor school climate be enticed back to special education only if they perceive that stress is reduced and the school climate has changed?" (Miller et al., p. 218). Suggested interventions for the principal include providing staff development courses for needed skills, sharing vision, promoting collaborative relationships, sharing decision making, and prioritizing accountability demands for teachers (Miller et al.).

No studies examine other ways principals might intervene in an individual way to support teachers under stress. Norton and St. Paul (1985) pointed to the individuality of teacher reaction when they stated: "Recognize that each teacher has different individual needs. An incident that causes one teacher to react negatively might not seem important to another teacher on the same staff" (p.114). Teachers frequently feel the pressure of time in trying to cover all academic subject requirements plus develop creative projects or assembly programs that would enrich students. This pressure frequently results in stress and burnout for teachers. If the elementary school principal can help teachers manage their time more effectively, stress will be reduced and

productivity will increase in terms of getting more accomplished. The three ideas for principal intervention are (a) plan and set goals with the lesson plan structure, (b) prioritize instruction by scheduling critical teaching in the morning or in blocks of time free of interruptions, and (c) suggest team teaching methods for efficient focusing of teacher energies (Norton & St. Paul).

Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2001) discussed human resource development as an appropriate process concern for principals because it brings more quality, higher productivity, and greater satisfaction among employees as organization members. It is a function of an employee's knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the policies, structure, and management practices that constitute the system in which the individual works. The goal is to achieve the highest quality of work life for employees and to produce the highest quality of instruction and service possible for the school. The authors believe that every employee really wants to do a satisfactory job, but that everyone who begins a job is not necessarily suited for the job, either by personal disposition or by skill level. They doubt if every employee who wants to can obtain the necessary skill level, but also state that in most organizations, public or private, not enough is done to help people improve their performance. Less is done to help the individual understand their deficiencies and to help them find jobs outside the school organization where they might succeed. According to Ubben et al. (2001):

> Human resource development requires more than training programs, however, even though well-developed skills training events are a part of any program. The most important resource in an organization is its staff. When the staff is congruent with organizational needs, well trained, adaptive, and motivated, great things can happen. To achieve this requires attention to the variety of ways in which human potential can be realized and to the variety of needs that any particular person may have at any particular stage of growth. (pp. 241-242)

Ubben et al. (2001) did not mention how the principal might intervene in stress situations of individual staff members. The authors stated that the needs of individual staff members are not

addressed by staff in-service activities. They spoke of individual organization members as having varying needs and said that individuals have an impact on "the very nature and culture of the workplace" (Ubben et al., p. 264). By stressing the individual in the organization, the authors implied the need for addressing individuals in unique ways.

Markham (1999) conducted a qualitative study of English as a second language (ESL) teachers' individual and collective stress of the job. He was particularly interested in whether location of the school and level of teaching made a difference. He wanted to give teachers a chance to go beyond a survey answer. Stressors did not seem to vary across levels, according to location, or according to staff size. He found what he called "initiating structure" concerns. ESL teachers were not provided sufficient opportunity to integrate instruction and obtain support from the regular education teaching staff or regular education administrators. Of the 12 ESL teachers interviewed, all were willing to discuss their problems as a means of coping, but only half had spoken with a regular education teacher or administrator. The researcher mentioned that rarely was any interaction observed. Eight of the 12 suggested increasing interaction and support with regular education teachers and administrators. One of the 2 ESL teachers who did not report being under stress attributed this to taking an herbal mixture.

"Good intentions and 'receptivity' apart, teachers and principals may resist program opportunities that represent radical departures from their view of what being a teacher or principal permits or requires" (Little, 1986, p. 31). Training in how to implement participative decision making is not part of the typical principal's preparation program (Randall, 1991). "The emerging practice of U.S. schools is an expression of the restructuring movement in American education, which is redefining roles and responsibilities in schools" (Pajak, 1992, p. 127). One characteristic of principals in successful schools is strong support of teachers (Odden &

Wohlstetter, 1995). Blase and Blase (1998) have described a type of supervision by principals that is collegial and conversational, leading teachers to develop their potential.

A new, expanded role for the principal is emerging. The principal is a supporter, encourager, and facilitator to empower the teacher. Even the definition of success is changing from one of being in control to one who is able to mobilize the force in others. Consistent with this new role is the principal's concern about stress in teachers, and the principal may be considered as an actor to intervene more directly in individual teacher stress situations, other than to recommend the typical Employee Assistance Program or staff development for everyone.

An elementary teacher's job requires physical stamina coupled with tremendous emotional giving. "Teachers must comfort, console, and nurture children and still find a reservoir of emotional energy to meet their own needs. Most handle this challenge only if the environment in which they work supports their needs" (Jorde, 1982, p. 31). It is imperative that principals learn to function in a stress-support role, when needed, for elementary teachers.

Payton (1986) found that teachers perceived the principal to have significantly more control over identified sources of stress than did principals themselves. Both groups "strongly agreed" that the principal's successful implementation of the action, emotional, and technical support strategies (asked about from the literature to that date) would reduce teacher stress.

In "The Use of Teacher Input in the Evaluation of Principals as Viewed by Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents," Bland (1989) advanced the concept of a teacher's perspective of a principal's role performance. Role performance dimensions came from a review of the literature. The role performance dimensions are as follows: (a) emphasizes curriculum, (b) evaluates student performance, (c) communicates effectively, (d) provides instructional environment, (e) develops instructional plans, and (f) supports teachers. Under the dimension of

"supports teachers," the indicators (from literature) are (a) implements teacher evaluation, (b) uses results for staff development, (c) high expectations for staff development, and (d) maximizes instructional time (Bland, p. 93).

The concept of a principal's support activities concerning teachers was limited to instructional concerns, whereas Adams (1988) looked at the consideration and initiating structure subscales of the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (Halpin, 1957) when examining 39 principals and 10 of their respective teachers each in a statewide sample. He found that principals rated themselves higher than their teachers rated them. This was true especially in the consideration subscale. The teachers' combined rating of their principal was more consistent than a comparison of principal and teacher ratings, suggesting that principals need to examine the perceptions of their teachers for their own information. According to the questionnaire, consideration applies to behaviors indicative of friendship, mutual trust, respect, and warmth in relationship between, in this case, the principal and the teachers who work together. Initiating structure applies to the principal's behavior in delineating the relationship between himself or herself and the members of his or her group of teachers, endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, creating channels of communication, and finding ways to get the job done. "The findings supported previous studies which concluded that teacher morale, stress, and burnout were significantly related to a teacher's perception of their principal's consideration as well as initiating structure" (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Halpin, 1966; Huse & Bowditch, 1973; Stogdill, 1974, as cited in Adams, 1988, p. 91).

Principals who took the time to address stress were rewarded with less exhaustion in their teachers. The teachers took the Maslach Stress Inventory (Maslach & Johnson, 1981, as cited in Adams, 1988) as well as the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire. No significant

differences were found in teachers according to teacher's age, staff size, years of teaching experience, or pupil load, including perception of load. "Principals who reported ongoing school activities devised for stress found that teachers scored significantly lower on emotional exhaustion and significantly higher on personal accomplishment" (Adams, 1988, p. 90). Many teachers reported wanting more preparation time, and those teachers scored significantly higher on exhaustion.

Blase and Blase (1999) investigated the teacher's perspective of the effectiveness of principals' instructional leadership and also looked at the teacher as an individual with an individual opinion about what was effective for her. They found that teachers considered the principals' behaviors contributory to their effectiveness in the classroom. This was true for perceived positive, negative, or neutral (no action) principal behaviors. The behaviors of principals appear to be powerful for teachers.

Stone (1996) considered the job profile of the elementary principal implementing site-based management. She used the definition of management/administration from National Association of Elementary School Principals to be "managing the school's organization and fiscal resources, and in dealing with the multitude of political pressures and considerations that have an impact on the operations of today's schools" (NAESP, 1991, p. 14, as cited in Stone). This definition seems to emphasize management rather than support.

## Summary of Literature

General stress research suggested that individual perception is very important in defining stress. What is stressful to one person may not be stressful to another. Therefore, considering the individual perspective is more important than the group perspective when defining stress.

Female stress research suggests that women tend to be holistic in defining their lives and tend to carry stress from one environment to another much more so than men. Therefore, stress from all of a woman's life may affect her on-the-job life as a teacher.

Teacher stress has heretofore only been defined as the stress resulting from the job of teaching. The picture of stress for female teachers is larger than was originally conceived. Teachers do fine until there is an unusual stressful demand. When an episode of out-of-the-ordinary stress occurs, whether originating from outside the work environment (OWE) or inside the work environment (IWE), the principal can intervene early and give simple support. Principal behaviors are powerful for teachers.

Principal support has been traditionally defined as instructional support. Although some accounts exist of principals referring teachers to employee assistance programs and providing a faculty with staff development courses for stress management, research has not been done to see whether these and other stress-support efforts are, in fact, occurring. The discussion has been "What do you do for teachers?" rather than "What do you do for a teacher?" Individual approaches of principal support for teachers under stress have not been documented.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology chosen by the researcher and describes the philosophic positions and the relationship of these positions to the methodology selected. Further, details of the research methodology are explained and the research question, context, source, method, analysis, trustworthiness, and assumptions are stated.

## Philosophical Positions

The epistemology for this proposed research was constructionism. The focus of the proposed research was the construction of meaning from the perspectives of elementary principals and teachers with regard to episodes of individual female teacher stress.

> Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.... Meaning is not discovered, but rather constructed. (Crotty, 1998, p. 42)

The theoretical perspective for this research was symbolic interactionism. The researcher, using this perspective, endeavors to explore the perspective of selected participants (Seidman, 1998). "It is through significant symbols, language and other symbolic tools, that humans share and communicate. It is only through dialogue that one can become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (Crotty, p. 76). The selected face-to-face initial interviews and follow-up interviews allowed this dialogue to occur.

This research attempted to find out if principal support was occurring during episodes of individual elementary female teacher stress and to illuminate that support. The data were then

analyzed by "a process of constant comparison … necessary as the researcher seeks to develop an understanding that encompasses all instances of the process, or case, under investigation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-115).

> The basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research….to constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or documents and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. (Merriam, 1998, p. 159)

Categories were developed from the data collected. From there, categories were arranged in themes that were natural to the data. An overarching core theme was discovered that joined the two subthemes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research process ended when saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation is when no new data are apparent, the categories of data seem fully developed, and the relationships between categories of data are well established and validated. Theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher allowed for changes in the direction of the interview process. "Theoretical sensitivity is an ability to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the normal models of theory in general" (Glaser, 1992, p. 27).

> The features of [grounded theory] that we consider so central that their abandonment would signify a great departure [from grounded theory] are the grounding of theory upon data through data-theory interplay, the making of constant comparisons, the asking of theoretically oriented questions, theoretical coding, and the development of theory [when possible]….Yet, no inventor has possession of the invention.…We would always prefer…versions of grounded theory that are closest to or elaborate our own…but a child once launched is very much subject to a combination of its origins and the evolving contingencies of life. (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 283)

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe elementary principals' and female teachers' perspectives regarding principals who provide positive support during episodes of teacher stress. At the beginning of this research the specific questions addressed were:

1. What principal support behaviors are occurring when individual elementary female teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
2. What are individual elementary female teachers' expectations and opinions about a principal's support behaviors when they are experiencing episodes of stress?
3. What are principals' expectations and opinions about their own principal support behaviors when individual elementary teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
4. Does the origin of the stress (inside or outside the work environment) affect the expectations and opinions about principal support for individual female teacher stress?

## Context of the Study

The researcher began the study by reading extensive research on the topics of general stress, female stress, teacher stress, and principal support. In the case of principal support, the manager role in business as it applied to stress was investigated as a corollary area.

The setting of the study was the elementary school level of education. Five principals and 16 teachers at five schools located in a large Southeastern state were the participants. They told their stories and gave them meaning. "No prior reading is likely to match the individual stories of participants' experience, but reading before and after the interviews can help make those stories more understandable by providing a context for them" (Seidman, 1998, p. 32). Interviews were conducted during the summer at the schools. Four participants requested other settings during the 21 interviews, and these choices were honored: two homes, one vacant college classroom, and one vacant office at a board of education. In this regard, Seidman (1998) stated: "Interviewers must be flexible enough to accommodate the participant's choices of date, time, and place ... and both the participant and researcher should not feel resentful of the

arrangement" (p. 43). Convenience and comfort for the participant, privacy, and quiet were location criteria.

## Data

A purposeful sampling focused the research in schools where the principal was regarded as generally supportive of teachers. This allowed for the greatest possibility of documenting supportive behaviors.

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information rich cases* for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling*. (Patton, 1990, p. 169)

Five elementary schools were studied, with the principal and three to four teachers being interviewed at each school. In this way, cases or perspectives were collected.

> A collective case study is essentially what Robert Herriott and William Firestone (1983) called *multisite qualitative research*…. A collective case study is instrumental in studying a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition. (Stake, 1994, pp. 237, 245)

Teachers in this study were female elementary teachers. Female teachers were selected to the exclusion of male teachers because most elementary teachers are female (*Digest of Education Statistics 2002,* p. 80). Two known participant variables, sex of the teacher and the educational level of the setting, were controlled to reduce the variables and thereby guard against diluting the results. There was research that indicated that females differ from males in the way they handle stress (White, 2000). Also, from the perception of the researcher, the work setting for principals and teachers varies according to whether they are in elementary, middle, or secondary education schools.

The elementary teacher participant group had the similarities of duty and day. Schonfeld (2000) noted that his second study of anxiety in teachers was strengthened by controlling more

of his participant variables. The homogeneity of this sample, particularly the sex of the teacher, afforded a better understanding of a portion of the problem of supporting female teachers in times of stress.

The specific criteria for the selection of participants (principals and teachers) were the following: (a) elementary school level (principals and teachers), (b) reputation for being generally supportive of teachers (principals), (c) race inclusion (principals and teachers), and (e) female gender (teachers).

Although it was not stipulated that the teachers selected by the principal had experience with an episode of stress known to the principal, the principal did know that the research was about principal support for teachers under stress and probably selected teachers on that basis. Principals and teachers were free to refer to previous relationships in elementary schools outside of current principal-teacher relationships. By combining the samples of principals and teachers, this study gained multiple examples and perspectives of principal support during episodes of individual female teacher stress. Among the principals, 2 were males and 3 were females. No effort to control the variable of principal gender was made.

> Donnell and Hall (1980) concluded that male and female managers, based on their responses to the Style of Management Inventory, which measures managers' values and practices concerning task and social demands, did not differ in the way they managed the organization's technical and human resources. In addition, there were no overall differences in subordinates' perceptions of the leadership styles preferred by male and female managers. (as cited in Klenke, 1996, p. 148)

The predominant races in the Southeastern state where this research was conducted were Caucasian and African-American (*Statistical Abstracts of the United States 2002,* p. 26). Both races were included in principal and teacher samples in order to maximize the descriptive aspect of the research and to dilute possible cultural bias. Racial inclusion was directed by the researcher in the selection of principals who became participants because the sample was so

small. The selection of teachers was, however, indirect as the participating principal was asked to select the teacher participants from his or her school. Race was not specified. The researcher would have extended the sample of teachers if either Caucasian or African-American teachers had not been selected. Caucasian and African-American were the only races perceived to be represented in the population, and they were represented in both the principal and teacher participant groups.

## Data Collection Methods

The face-to-face interview was the basic method used in this research. Two interviews were audio taped with 5 principals and 16 teachers. Transcriptions of those interviews were printed and subsequently organized by school in five separate notebooks. The initial interview of the principal was followed by initial interviews with the nominated teachers at that school. Ensuing follow-up interviews of principals preceded follow-up interviews of the teachers. After each interview, field notes were written by hand. Field notes are "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of the collecting and reflecting on the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 74). Field notes, sketches of the interviews, and incidental documents obtained from participants were organized into an Interviewer's Journal.

On occasion, names of other individuals were given by informants as an artifact of the interview. To preserve anonymity, no names or other identifying referents were used in the discussion of the research findings. For example, if a teacher said, "my daughter," it was changed to "my child" so as to preserve anonymity. Other strategies for anonymity included avoiding data that were coded by school name.

The interview data for each school were analyzed in a varying sequence. Quotations were also selected and included in this manuscript without a discernable pattern to prevent identification by chronology. References to school names were indicated by [name of school] or [XYZ] school. Care was taken to obliterate the principal's name and pronoun gender references, e.g., she, he, her, and his, to maintain anonymity. The referent became [the principal].

For reasons of confidentiality and emotional distance, the researcher had not met any of the participants prior to the research. The initial meeting and interview with the principal was arranged by the researcher. The principal then arranged for the initial meeting and interview with each of the teacher participants to be held at the [XYZ] elementary school. One initial meeting was held at a teacher's home at her request. All participants were given a letter containing the human subject regulations and requirements of the University of Georgia, the purpose of the research, the reason for the follow-up interview, and the steps that would be taken to insure confidentiality (see Appendix D). The researcher introduced the letter and asked each participant if he or she would agree to a second interview, add a contact phone number, and sign the research consent form. The contact phone number was needed because the research was conducted in the summer.

The researcher recited the operational definition of stress for the research and gave the participant examples, if requested, of an IWE (inside the work environment) stress and an OWE (outside the work environment) stress. The researcher also clarified principal stress support if requested. The following definitions were provided to those participants who requested them:

1. For the purpose of this research, teacher stress is defined as stress affecting the teacher on the job, regardless of the source. The stress can originate from inside or outside the work environment, but affects the teacher on her job.

2. An example of an IWE stress is an angry parent.

3. An example of an OWE stress is going through a divorce.
4. For the purpose of this research, principal stress support is defined as anything that the principal does that helps with the stress that you feel in the situation.

When the participants were comfortable with the concept, had signed the consent form, and had looked over the interview guide, the interview began. Specifically, the principals were asked about their support behaviors for individual teachers who have experienced episodes of stress. Subsequently, teacher participants were asked about their principal's support during episodes of stress. Principals and teachers were free to recall previous as well as present principal-teacher relationships.

Each participant was asked to recall a particular personal incident when a principal supported a teacher during an episode of individual teacher stress. They were asked to describe the episode giving the origin of the stress (inside or outside the work environment), place, others involved, and severity of the stress (on a scale of 0-10). They were asked about the resulting effect on their personal state. Specifically, the researcher was interested in impacts on teachers' behavior, emotions, cognition, physical state, and classroom effectiveness. Also considered were the principal's expectations of workers and support behaviors when individual teachers were having episodes of stress. The meaning that the teacher assigned to principal support behaviors and the teacher's resulting feelings were obtained by asking probing questions when appropriate. Examples of probing questions might be, "How did you feel when the principal…" or "When the principal…, what did that mean to you?" Teachers were free to elaborate as much as they wanted. In this way, the participant led the researcher and the discovery of the data. Participants were also asked what they thought teachers and principals should know, before entering the profession, about how a principal should show support for a teacher when she is having an episode of stress. (See Appendix A for the Interview Guide for Principals and Appendix B for

the Interview Guide for Teachers.) After all of the initial interviews were completed, the researcher analyzed the first round of interview data. (A detailed discussion on data analysis is presented in the next section.) Following this preliminary analysis, the researcher called each participant either to schedule or to remind him or her of a second-round, follow-up interview. During the second interview, the researcher asked additional questions concerning the individual participant's first interview to verify, clarify, and to prompt the expansion of responses. This served as a validity check and as one method to address potential researcher bias.

Concepts raised during the initial interview process were added into the follow-up questions, so that a response could be obtained from each participant on a specific issue that was raised by a fellow participant. Participants were also asked to react to two neutral scenarios. One scenario described a situation of stress originating from inside the work environment, and one described a situation of stress originating from outside the work environment. Participants were asked what the principal could do in those cases to support the teacher in relieving her stress. The purpose of the neutral scenarios was to give a clearer comparison between participants in the principal support behaviors that they would choose for the situations. (The neutral scenarios are included in the Follow-up Interview Guide in Appendix C.)

## Data Analysis

After the interview, a duplicate tape of each interview was made for a transcriptionist. The original tape was retained by the researcher. Field notes, sketches made of the initial interviews, and documents such as participants' personal notes and references on stress relief materials were added to the Interviewer's Journal. As the interviews progressed, data were analyzed and new concepts where introduced into the dialogue. These new concepts were collected and became part of new questions to be asked of all participants in the Follow-up

Interview Guide. All of the interview questions and comment stimulators arose from dialogue with the participants in the first round of interviews. The emergent quality of the data and the patience of the researcher allowed the data to develop and define the analysis. For example, the concepts raised by participants in the first round of interviews were used to formulate the interview guide for the follow-up round of interviews.

The follow-up interviews were held as soon as the first round of interviews was completed and the first step of analysis had occurred. Unlike the initial Interview Guide, which had a separate guide for principal and teacher, the Follow-up Interview Guide was the same for both principals and teachers, with a few questions noted as being only for principals or only for teachers. The follow-up interview began for each participant by clarifying questions from the initial interview. Participants were encouraged by the interviewer to comment further. Two neutral scenarios were presented to participants to obtain their reactions and opinions about principal support in those situations to relieve teacher stress. In one scenario, the stress for the individual teacher originated from inside the school environment and in the other scenario, the stress for the individual teacher originated from outside the school environment. Some direct questions were asked. In total, 560 pages of transcribed interviews were analyzed. For both principal and teacher quotes, bracketed explanations were used to aid the reader.

Finally, a summary analysis was made of the findings yielding eight categories (commonalities) across the data. These categories fell into an organization of two subthemes. A core theme was found to span the two subthemes. Throughout the analysis, the unique individual response was valued and presented when feasible.

## Trustworthiness

In this section, the researcher attempted to establish trustworthiness by giving insight into her subjectivity and describing how she implemented a triangulation strategy during the research.

### *Subjectivity Statement*

"Qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect their own subjectivity may have on the data they produce" (Bogdan & Biklen 1982, p. 42). This was a particularly important influence in this study because of the way the researcher's prior knowledge or mind-set impacts the abstraction process. Established theories are always a part of any researcher's history. "All assumptions of preexisting theories are subject to potential skepticism and, therefore, must be scrutinized in light of one's own data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 292). In this case, the researcher attempted to let the data drive discovery, but the reader is cautioned to account for possible researcher bias. The subsequent background information may be useful to the reader in determining possible bias.

The present position of the researcher is as a counselor in a public school system, and she has had previous community mental health counseling experience. It was important for the researcher to guard against the provision of therapeutic responses to participants as they told their stories. Questioning in a way that led participants in the direction of thinking of how to solve their problems would have contaminated the data. The counseling experience was helpful in putting participants at ease through listening skills, memory for conversation, restating for clarification, and the established confidentiality reputation of counselors.

### *Researcher's Background*

The researcher's first position was on a psychiatric crisis team in a hospital. She subsequently worked as a group social worker in the vocational rehabilitation unit of a state

mental hospital. She worked as a teacher then director of a psycho-educational center. Her career as a teacher has focused on instruction for behavior disordered students. She has been a child development instructor on the technical school level and has taught human growth and development, philosophy of education, and educational psychology at the college level. Her master's degree program was interdisciplinary, i.e., sociology, psychology, and child/family development. Her specialist degree was in school leadership.

Therefore, the reader can expect the researcher to have an interdisciplinary perspective. Her interest in teacher stress was a result of mental health training and assisting teachers through her role as a school counselor. The researcher was likely to have a tendency to process data within a behavioral paradigm as a result of extensive behavior disorder training. The researcher's being female was an additional factor. She often guarded against assuming too quickly an understanding when listening to the experiences of female principal and teacher participants.

*Triangulation*

Triangulation is a process of collecting data from multiple sources, in multiple ways or in multiple forms to construct the truth. Diner (1994) stated, "Methods such as triangulation ... are means for judging [the] fairness and rigor of a research project" (as cited in Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 268). Miles and Huberman (1994) quoted Denzin (1978) to give the basic distinctions:

> We can think of triangulation by *data source* (which can include persons, times, places, etc.), by *method* (observation, interview document), by *researcher* (investigator A, B, etc.), and by the *theory.* To this we can add *data type* (qualitative text, recordings, quantitative). (p. 267)

One way that triangulation was accomplished in this study was by gaining the perspectives of both the teacher and the principal when collecting and analyzing data. As the lion in Aesop's writings said to the man, "There are many statues of men slaying lions, but if only the lions were sculptors there might be quite a different set of statues" (Tuchman, 1981, as quoted in

Miles & Huberman, p. 267). The construction of truth must take into account perspective. With individual perspective comes the probability of bias. Bias naturally comes from who we are and mental processes that we bring to the event.

Another way that triangulation was accomplished was by the variation of method and type of data utilized. The second interview was conducted as a member check.

> Once an interviewer writes a report on the interviews, he or she may share the report with the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to such sharing as member-checking, and they indicate that it contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report. (Seidman, 1998, p. 82)

New questions or issues on which to comment were posed at the follow-up interview for each participant. These questions came from points raised during the initial interviews. In this way, all participants had the opportunity to give their reactions to all issues raised. Rather than one or two viewpoints on an issue, multiple and inclusive viewpoints were obtained.

## Preliminary Assumptions

At the beginning of this study, several assumptions were made that allowed the researcher to go forward. It was assumed that principal and teacher participants were (a) representing their own perspective rather than recounting the perspective of someone else, (b) attempting to be truthful, (c) personally knowledgeable of stress episodes, (d) party to a principal-teacher relationship where the principal was in a supervisory capacity, (e) aware that the researcher was concerned with the concept of female teacher stress, and (f) probably not commenting on the same episode of teacher stress.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

This study examined elementary principals' and teachers' perspectives regarding principals who provide positive support during episodes of teacher stress and answers the guiding research question "What principal support behaviors are occurring related to episodes of stress, and what do these support behaviors mean to teachers?" Initially, demographic information is given about the participants. An outline with definitions of the subthemes and categories precedes the discussion (see Table 1). Quotes from principals and teachers are used throughout the chapter, and a summary is given at the end of each theme. Finally, there is a table addressing the corollary research questions and an accompanying discussion (see Table 2).

## Demographic Information

The participants were 5 principals and 16 female teachers from five elementary schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas of a large state located in the southeastern United States. The researcher observed the gender of the principals to be 2 males and 3 females and the race of the principals to be 4 Caucasians and 1 African-American. The gender of the 16 participating teachers was female. The researcher perceived the race of the teachers to be 13 Caucasians and 3 African-Americans.

The 5 principal participants reported their total educational experience (before and after becoming principal) to be 19, 23, 29, 31, and 32 years, making an average experience of 26.8 years. The 16 teacher participants reported their total educational experience to be 3, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 17, 18, 20, 20, 22, 22, 23, 26, 27, and 28 years. The average number of years' experience for

the teachers was 16.2. Of the 21 participants, 13 had advanced degrees past their undergraduate work, 13 had served formally as mentors, and 1 teacher was to be a mentor during the coming school year.

Of the 21 participants, 13 were currently married, 14 had children, and 1teacher was pregnant with her first child during the time of the interviews. Two participants described major caretaking responsibilities for an elderly parent. Three teacher participants stated that they thought they had a stress advantage over teachers who had children at home. They thought that they had more flexibility in their time to reduce stress. However, when teachers described a stress event that had its origin outside the work environment (OWE), personal children were mentioned only twice as a source of stress.

## Core Theme: Principal Stress Support

Two systematic face-to-face interviews were held with 21 participants. *Principal stress support* was defined as the help a principal gives when an individual teacher is experiencing an episode of stress originating from inside (IWE) or outside (OWE) the work environment. In this case, *teacher stress* was defined as a stress particular to one teacher rather than the stress experienced by a group of teachers. It was stipulated that teacher stress in this case was not about the usual job of teaching, but rather about something out of the ordinary and lasting for a period of time.

An analysis was done after the first round of interviews to determine areas to be explored in the second, or follow-up, round of interviews. At the conclusion of the second round of interviews, constant comparative analysis was used to group the data into eight categories: (a) insulating, (b) connecting, (c) relieving, (d) representing, (e) positioning, (f) listening, (g) giving, and (h) personalizing. These categories were arrayed under two themes: protecting and caring.

Table 1

*Array of Subthemes and Categories*

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|---|---|
| Theme 1: Protecting: principal shields the teacher from harm; helps in stressful situations | |
| Category a | Insulating: principal mitigates potentially harsh effects. |
| Category b | Connecting: principal links teacher to resources for assistance. |
| Category c | Relieving: principal removes teacher from source of stress; refraining from adding work or worry; reassures teacher. |
| Category d | Representing: principal speaks for teacher's best interest. |
| Theme 2: Caring: principal focuses on the individual; shows the individual is valued | |
| Category e | Positioning: principal uses physical proximity, visibility, or access cues to signal availability. |
| Category f | Listening: principal focuses on the individual teacher's message. |
| Category g | Giving: principal presents something of value to teacher. |
| Category h | Personalizing: principal recognizes and responds to individual uniqueness. |

The theme of protecting was defined by the participants as the principal shielding the teacher from harm or helping the teacher when she is confronted with a stressful situation. Protecting included four categories: (a) insulating, (b) connecting, (c) relieving, and (d) representing.

The theme of caring was defined by the participants as the principal focusing on the individual or showing that the individual is valued. The four categories within this theme included: (e) positioning, (f) listening, (g) giving, and (h) personalizing. Both themes related to

the overall support function of the principal and reflected the core theme of stress support. In the sections that follow, each theme and its corresponding categories are discussed.

## Theme 1: Protecting

The act of protecting occurs when the principal shields the teacher from harm or helps the teacher when she is presented with a stressful situation. An example of protecting occurred when a principal rerouted an angry parent to the principal's office to blow off steam before seeing the teacher.

Four categories, (a) insulating, (b) connecting, (c) relieving, and (d) representing, have been extracted from the data that represented this theme. Each of these categories is presented in the following paragraphs.

### *Category A: Insulating*

Insulating is mitigating potentially harsh effects. Principals and teachers described insulating behaviors such as creating a protective, supportive atmosphere at the school; keeping irate parents from intimidating teachers; and being the first to hear and interpret mandates for teachers. In one instance, as described by a teacher, a principal insulated a teacher from personal harassment.

All principals who were interviewed discussed the insulating support function in some fashion. For example, one described creating a protective, supportive atmosphere at school for a teacher who was just not very happy and had a lot of turmoil in her personal life at the time:

> She had a lot of personal things going on in her personal life, but she has always been a negative person. So what we have to do is make work a positive place for her. Just like a child who might be living in maybe an abusive situation at home, *this has to be a safe haven for them* [the teachers]. So we sort of look at it and use that as an analogy. It makes it much easier to work with people.

Another principal described insulating a teacher from a persistent parent:

> Yes, you make decisions for the school, but you are also a support person.... The parents were in a divorce thing and this father kept coming to her [the teacher] telling her he was going to call her as a witness to court and this kind of thing and this is not the teacher's responsibility to become involved in custody cases. And so, I went to the parent and said, "*Look, this is not going to happen*. Let's get our ducks in a row here." And he said, "Well, I'll call you to court!" And I said, "And the only thing I'll talk about is attendance and grades."

Supportive principals frequently help teachers when demands are made for changes in instruction or reporting systems. One principal described the process this way:

> We are working from a leadership perspective to place the right kind of pressure. I'm not telling you that you've got to do this or you're fired. I'm telling you to do this and see how it works. Give me some feedback. What can we do to change it or make it better? What can you tell me that will make it better? Or do we need to scrap it altogether.... We have *a lot of dialogue now*. We do have some things that we put in place that are going to happen regardless. But there are also ways to make it happen, and it doesn't mean it's just going to be this one way.... If you get results, I don't care how you get it.... Student success is our main idea, our main thing. To make them successful, we are going to do everything we can to provide the support necessary [for the teachers].

About half of the teachers mentioned the role of the principal in insulating as an important support function. For example, one teacher mentioned the procedures a principal used to protect her from personal harassment:

> When I came here, I had gone through a stalker situation for five years. I received threatening letters. I would move and then the stalker would find me again. When [the principal] heard about it, [the principal] was very upset and bothered. [The principal] wanted to call [law enforcement] right away, but I told [the principal] that I had already reported it. The principal will always remember this until it is resolved.... The principal was very supportive. I felt like [the principal] needed to know.... [The principal told the office staff who had to know.] You know, they [the office staff] knew that if a man came in asking for me to not tell him where my room is. [Beforehand] I would have to call and say if I was expecting anyone. If they didn't know the person, they would call me and say, "There's a Mr. So-and-So up here and he says he has a student in your room." Then I would say, "Yes ... he does." [And they would send the man down.] It was kept very quiet and I appreciate that. It was very respectful. I still don't know who [the stalker] was. I haven't heard from him since I've been here.

Another teacher talked about the principal supporting a teacher when irate parents threaten:

> [The principal needs to] *back the teacher up when the parents get here* [to discuss their child's behavior]. Because most parents will say there's some problem between the parent, the student, and the teacher. That is never true. I've never known that to be true. We treat them the same.... But I think it is important that ... [the principal] supports the teacher when the parents get here, explain the teacher's classroom rules and why they exist. They exist for the safety of children, period. And you can't have learning if [a] drama is going on.

In commenting on the creation of a supportive atmosphere, a teacher said after a traumatic incident: "[The principal] reached out to me ... in words by saying, '*It's okay ... and this happens ... and we're here."* Another teacher said, "I definitely think you need to have a supportive principal to kind of create that sense of community or sense of team or a family ... the principal being the head of the family."

A summary comment by a teacher fully addressed the insulating function:

> I think we need more of the stress support [rather than instructional support]. And I really see the principal's job as being *an interface to keep the world at bay* in order to provide me with … insulation from ... interruption and the threat of parents ... who come flying in ... hot to trot and looking for game.

One principal offered this rationale for giving teachers stress support, "If they aren't happy, they won't be productive." Another principal said that support that relieved teacher stress was important for reasons of efficient operations:

> What a principal wants is the most efficient operation in the school that you can possibly have. And if people are having traumatic stress of some type, somewhere along the line it [the efficient operation of the school] is going to suffer.

Still another principal said:

> We take that kind of interest because without it, it's just another job ... just another place to go. And if folks don't feel that they're cared about, they are not going to perform. They are not going to be comfortable.... I'm not going to treat anybody in this building any differently than I would treat myself.

Although all of the principals mentioned the insulating support function, only about half of the teachers mentioned it. It appeared that teachers working for supportive principals assumed

that principals would insulate. In fact, insulating teachers against harsh effects seemed to be a deal breaker for some teachers. The social contract is this: Teachers teach and principals protect them so that they can teach. "If they [principals] can't help you in this way, what are they here for?" Another teacher said, "I should not even know that [an upset] parent has been in the building until after she has been long gone. That to me is the principal's job ... handle hot parents; keep the board off our backs; protect us from interruptions; and safety, of course."

In summary, supportive principals are seen as protectors who insulate teachers from potential harm so that they can feel safe, do their jobs, and be productive. In some cases, the principal's behavior of insulating teachers against harm is expected or assumed by teachers. It may also prove to be critically important to effective principal-teacher relationships if it is not fulfilled.

*Category B: Connecting*

Connecting occurs as the principal links the teacher to other assistive resources. Principals interviewed cited examples of their connecting behaviors such as calling in the school's counselor, referring the teacher to the county's employee assistance program, obtaining medical assistance, and facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise. All of the principals interviewed discussed various aspects of the connecting support function. For example, one described involving the school's counselor to support a teacher:

> Our counselors are for the teachers as well as the students.... I felt like she didn't need to be by herself at that time.... She needed some direct support.... So I *brought in other resources as needed*.... Our counselor referred her to some good outside support in the community that's really helped her.

One principal talked about using the county's benefits for employee counseling:

> We have an *employee assistance program* in this county, and I have referred people to this program who were suffering severe stress from personal problems or financial

> difficulties [originating] from outside the school. I have no idea how effective it is [because] I have no feedback from it.

Another principal experienced a suddenly serious personnel situation at school:

> She got through most of the year okay, but she had just lost it that day. [I said,] "Let me carry you, *let me take you*…." [But she didn't want me to do that. I did get her to go to my office.] I got her to *call her doctor* [and] I called her husband. She went directly to the doctor, got some medication, and went home.... I would call her about once a week and check on her ... just to let her know that everything was going all right ... that the children were fine and that they missed her ... anything I could say or do to support her.

Interviewed principals often cited various experiences and skills that enriched their ability to do the job. This principal brought a background of emergency medical training that enabled the principal to notice the effects of stress and connect the teacher with medical assistance:

> I had a teacher ... with high blood pressure. I immediately *got her to the [school] nurse* and we checked it. It was high and we immediately called her husband and he met her at the emergency room.... The one thing we try to stress with our folks is [that] *your health and your family are first and then your job* ... in that order. I think you would hear that from the superintendent or anybody in management in our system. We try to treat people the way they want to be treated and the way we would like to be treated.

Another principal built teacher-to-teacher connections for stress support:

> If I notice that someone's in a particular period of stress ... I would probably go to that person's friend and say, "I feel like so-and-so is having a problem. Have you noticed that also?" And usually they will open up to me and say, "Yeah, I know what's going on."... And you try to *form kind of a support group*. "I think if there's a difficulty, if it's not school related, [then] it's none of my business, necessarily. But since y'all are such close friends … this person is in need of support." I generally find that to be pretty effective because people [teachers] tend to bond more with friends. Being a principal, there's just no two ways about it ... you're the boss. And whereas they may not open up as much to you, they will open up to a friend. So I have used that many times to help a situation.

This principal suggested the problem was experienced by others and helped the teacher build bridges for shared expertise with a group:

> Don't think you're out on a limb by yourself. There are [number] other people down your hall who are doing the same stuff that you are doing. *Let's get some people together* and talk about what you are having the problem with.... I'll bet you dollars to donuts that

> more than one of them is having a similar problem. Let's find a solution. It's not going away, but we can make it work better for you.

Three of the five principals interviewed specifically mentioned connecting the teacher experiencing an episode of stress with the school counselor. One principal said, "I've found the counselor to be an amazing source of support for people within the school." Another principal observed:

> In order to relieve pressure from within, we need to do some things. And one of the things that we need to do is to share it. You need to open up and let somebody know what's going on.... Individually, I tell them, "Yeah, *you need to talk to somebody*." And I'll refer them to the school counselor here.

Principals are often seen by teachers as pivotal problem solvers. Educational leaders often do not hesitate to connect to any resource might help the situation. A principal stated, "I try to leave *any and every avenue available.*" Another principal rhetorically posed questions such as "What kinds of solutions do you have? Who are you going to go to … to get solutions? *What expert can you call* to help you find solutions?"

Three fourths of the teachers interviewed mentioned the connecting support function of principals. They often described connecting support behaviors, such as facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise, offering staff development workshops, and offering written material to read that is pertinent to their problem. For example, one teacher recounted an incident when a fellow teacher died:

> [The principal] let all the teachers [at our school] that wished to *attend the funeral*. Another school that was close by *sent over teachers to cover our classrooms*. That was the nicest thing I've ever seen.... The school that sent over their teachers over, I don't know how they covered their classrooms [at the sending school], but somehow [they did].... They said, "This is important ... and we've got to do this."

Another teacher stated how her principal would rally support for a teacher experiencing a personal loss in her family: "Please keep that teacher in your thoughts and prayers … if there is some *way to get in touch with her*, send a card."

A teacher participating in this study speculated on why a principal needs to connect with others to provide teacher support:

> It's too much for one principal to be able to handle [everything about a stress situation], and so the principal should also be able *to delegate*.... It's not incumbent on the principal to handle everything [alone].

The last teacher quote about *connecting* summarizes several ways a principal might use connecting support. This approach was also mentioned by other teachers:

> They [principals] could offer encouraging words or some type of support or find you some outside source if they can't give you stress [relief] ... offer *some type of workshop* or get you some type of help.... Maybe say, "You need to *go talk to this teacher* because she has been through the same thing."... Or maybe give you *a book to read* on the subject.

In talking about how principals connect them to other resources in support situations, teachers also often mentioned *taking the initiative* to connect with other teachers for support. One teacher said, "If you don't have the support of your grade level, you can hang it out to dry." Another said, "There are teachers who ... step in at a minute's notice.... I would step in and do what I needed to do in that teacher's classroom." And a third said, "When I came back, they had everything done [getting ready for school]." Principals modeling supportive behaviors for teachers may be affecting teachers by modeling supportive behaviors for each other.

In summary, principals emphasized the connecting behaviors of (a) calling in the school counselor, (b) referring the teacher to the county's employee assistance program, (c) obtaining medical assistance, and (d) facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise. Teachers emphasized (a) connecting behaviors such teacher-to-teacher support and expertise, (b) offering staff development workshops, and (c) offering written material to read. Both principals and

teachers emphasized the importance of facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise. The connecting strategy appears to be dependent on the principal's support and belief in the power of teacher-to-teacher shared experience and expertise for stress support.

*Category C: Relieving*

Relieving is defined as removing the teacher from the source of stress, refraining from adding additional work or worry, and reassuring the teacher that the principal understands. All of the principals commented on *relieving* and described relieving support behaviors. Examples included briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, making long-term arrangements for the class, and refraining from assigning additional work that might add stress. One principal added a hug to the reassurance:

> She was out of control.... She was not able to bring herself back in ... even with the crying, that's not bringing yourself back in.... She just dissolved. So *I hugged her* and I told her that it was going to be okay and not to worry about school and ... the children.

Sometimes teachers are so stressed out that they are in shock and are not thinking about anything but getting the job done. In this case, the principal directed the teacher in what she needed to do:

> I've had teachers who had automobile accidents on the way to work and they come in and they are completely frazzled and bombed out. You say to the teacher, "You've got a problem. Go take care of it. [We'll] cover your class. We need to get you back to the point where you can teach."

The following incident illustrated how one principal analyzed the situation and briefly covered the teacher's class, thereby removing her from the source of stress:

> I actually went to the teacher and basically told her that you need to get out of here for just a few minutes. I'll stay with the children and we'll cover your class. Don't worry about it. Go down to the lounge and *take a few minutes* and get yourself together.

One principal gave this account of the teacher opting to stay at school and continue in her routine even when offered the choice of going home for the day:

> As far as I could tell, she was in a state of depression ... a lot of things going on outside of school and then here. I suggested she go home, but she wanted to stay here. She did not want to leave the building. She felt secure here. She told me so.... I think she felt that if she got back into her routine that this would help. I suggested she take a little time to compose herself.... *She got herself a Coke* and told me that she felt better ... and then she went on.

Another administrator talked about the dilemma principals often face in offering temporary relief for extreme student classroom disruptions:

> Some teachers say, "Just give me a break for a couple of hours." Others [other teachers] say, "Get him [the student] out of the building for two days." *Principals get caught in the discipline* ... the child may not have been a discipline problem before and what he did can have varying degrees [of disruptive behavior]. Did he cuss at the teacher, throw a desk, smack another kid ... or did he just have a screaming fit and couldn't get control of himself? Sometimes they [the teachers] even tell the child, "You're going home!" So we try to support the teacher with using appropriate and fair discipline.

This principal talked about long-term relief for the teacher in a way that did not add to her worries:

> At her request, I focused on her class and how to keep things going on an even keel.... I offered her my support beyond the classroom ... any way I personally could help her. I assured her that there was *no need to worry* about the program and that we could keep things going ... to focus on herself.

One principal gave a rare insight into what a principal might be thinking and feeling when arranging for long-term class coverage:

> You can't ask someone to sacrifice their family ... just so they can be in the classroom. Plus, I think we can cover for them pretty well. It's an inconvenience ... it takes me off task ... I try not to show that.... I try not to get frustrated ... and I try not to look bothered.... Because, if you've got a personal problem ... that you need to deal with, *I don't need to add to it* by making you [the teacher] think that you're putting undue stress on me.

Another principal gave insight into handling relief situations where an extremely stressed-out teacher was responding negatively to the principal:

> If they are in a stressful situation and start responding inappropriately, you try to remove them [the teacher] from that situation. Or ... you redirect the discussion *so that she doesn't sink herself*... so she doesn't hurt herself any more.... All of her peers observed

> her in just that short period of time that she was responding negatively.... That put her in a negative light [with her peers], which does not build relationships at all. They [the peers] tend to pull away. You tend to pull away from people who are negative.

All of the principals, when asked directly, stated that they would take a teacher's unusual stress into consideration when delegating *additional school responsibilities*. One principal said, "Of course, I would. If a teacher is going through a divorce, it might not be the best year for her to be doing the talent show." Another said, "I would have chosen her for the school council, but she has too much on her plate right now." These supporting principals do tend to look at *the whole teacher* and the totality of her life as far as they know it.

All teachers mentioned the *relieving* support function of principals. Teachers described relieving support behaviors such as briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, making long-term arrangements for the class, removing out-of-control students for a period of time, giving teachers reassurance, relating to teachers with empathy, and one case of moving a staff member within the building at a teacher's request. One teacher gave a situation in which the principal support behavior was simple, calmed the person down, and conveyed respect:

> I think a principal really needs to start out with something positive to help calm that person down before they enter into what's actually happening right [at the moment].... I have been in a situation where [the principal] just handed me a glass of water, just gave me time to ... settle down ... *talked to me in a positive way*. Because [the principal] knew that I was doing what I was supposed to do, [the principal] addressed it in a positive manner ... letting me know that I handled it professionally.... I think that if it is something that is happening in the classroom, [the principal] should *move you away* from where the situation is actually happening. I think that makes a very big difference.

This principal scored big in this teacher's estimation when the principal personally offered to take her class for stress relief:

> [It struck me as] just incredible that my principal would say, "*I'll take your class*." [The principal] has done this on a couple of occasions. The first time, I was really floored. It made a very good impression on me.

The principal in this incidence removed an out-of-control student for stress relief:

> *They kept the child,* which was the key factor. I did not want that child back in the classroom. It was for his sake, the sake of the others, and for any learning that might try to go on. So I really appreciated that. I gave them enough of the scenario to know what happened and they took it from there. So I was able to return to the classroom, which greatly took away any stress because he was gone.... The class could easily settle down again because they are familiar with him and we got back to the lesson. Now, if they had said, "Sorry, you take him with you," my stress would have been extremely high and no instruction would have really occurred because I [would have] had to keep an eye on him constantly.... I'd rather have a principal who says, "I don't care how many times I have to take this kid out of the classroom, suspend them, or in-house [them]."... If you [the principal] have discipline under control, then they [the teachers] can teach.

One teacher expressed empathy for the principal's position when she said, "There's so much support you can give, but only so much you can do. The kid's got to be in school." This teacher makes the point that long-standing behavior problems can deteriorate the relationship with the principal and suggests some safeguards:

> If you're going to move the child [for permanent placement in another teacher's room], the *teacher needs to be validated* that it's not because of her.... If the principal can do anything to keep the teacher from feeling alienated against [the principal], that's key.... If I were the principal, I would make some kind of *big move earlier*.

In these instances, each teacher had a stressful situation that originated from outside the work environment and affected her work. The principals' support actions were *relieving*.

> [The principal] expressed her sympathy and just told me *not to worry about a thing* and just to let [the principal] know if there was anything that they could do here at school to help. Just ... that seems to be just immediately what you need ... just somebody saying, "I'm not going to fire you because you have to take some time off. Take the time that you need." I don't know if they can or need to do much more at that point.

> I was still very stressed, but I think it didn't add stress [when I went to talk to the principal]. Because initially I think I was worried about having to go to her and explain the situation and ask for the time off. I guess it did relieve a little bit of the stress, but mostly it *didn't add stress* and then I could deal with what I had to deal with at home.

> [I felt] great appreciation! That's the main thing ... *just relieving me.* I mean, [the principal] could have said, "It's the middle of [a month]. Do you have to go right now? How fast can you come back? Do you have this, this, and this all lined up?" [The principal] could really have put some things to me, but [the principal] said, "Fine. Go."

> And I told [the principal] I had things all set up ... I didn't just take off. [The principal] had total support and appreciation for the situation. And that was the best thing I could have, literally. I did not have to sit and worry and *add the stress of school* to the other situation. I really did not.
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> One particular incidence was when I was going to need to take some time off because of health reasons for my [child]. The principal told me that when the time came that I needed to go and be with [my child], just to leave ... not to worry about anything. That was the most important thing and *just to leave*. And <u>that</u> reduced a lot of stress to know that I had that support. [The principal] understood me and [the principal] knew the value of family and familial relationships.... Sometimes principals will be supportive when it comes to school-related things, but they will be so involved in their profession that they think everyone should have their profession as their number one priority. So it's very refreshing when you find principals who know that *family has a higher priority than any kind of job*, personally speaking.

These teachers made suggestions for preparing for leaving and keeping the principal informed:

> If I know anything is going to happen that will disrupt my teaching in any way or I need to leave, I always prepare the students and my coworkers. I try to have everything done in advance, so that *if I have to leave, things are handled*. And I always make the principal aware of what's going on, especially if it's going to involve my work.
>
> I think it always helps to *keep the principal informed* ... not every detail of your business ... but informed. For example, someone going through a divorce, having a tough time at home, [suffering] a child on drugs, or [reeling] from an accident. Tell the principal so that they are aware and in most cases will be sympathetic. You still have to do your job, but they can be a lot more understanding if certain things come up and you have to leave or a phone call comes in that normally doesn't and you'd like to take it.... Keep them informed so that if something escalates, they are aware of it.

This teacher had a family schedule change and it caused her to run late two days of the week. This went on for weeks, and each day she felt guilty. The principal demonstrated *empathy*:

> I walked up to [the principal] and very casually said, "I'm really sorry. I've been running late on these two days of the week. My husband can't help me these days and it's just a balancing act I'm having to juggle." And [the principal] said, "No problem. Don't worry about it."... I felt relaxed, like this is one less pressure that I need to put on myself.

One teacher contrasted this perspective by giving a good example from a past principal that demonstrated a lack of *relieving* principal support:

> I came back to school and they knew that my [parent] had passed away. And the principal said, "You need a note from your doctor." I said, "For what?" [And the principal said,] "Well, because you were out." I said, "I wasn't sick. My [parent] was dead." [The principal said,] "Well, you still need a note from your doctor because it has to be an excused absence ... or *you can bring me an obituary*." That is what *not* to do! I thought that was the most ridiculous thing. It said that they didn't trust me. When I said my [parent] had passed away, I just went on vacation for a week?... It also said it wasn't important.

This teacher came to the principal and wanted the principal to *guess what was wrong* and to then go ahead and solve the problem without her having to say that she was having a problem with a paraprofessional in her classroom.

> I didn't know what could be done. I was really stumbling. Sometimes you get so stressed that you are just stumbling. I wanted the problem solved, but I didn't want anybody hurt in the process. [This was a very severe stress for the teacher. She was dropping weight and her hair was falling out.] I knew what I wanted, but I could never come out and say, "Could you please get [the paraprofessional] out of my classroom? The [paraprofessional] is driving me crazy!"

It is very difficult for a principal to help if the teacher does not state the problem. After this discussion with the principal, the teacher lingered with the problem and then finally got someone else to go tell the principal exactly what the problem was. The principal moved the [paraprofessional] out of her room. The teacher said, "I thanked [the principal] several times ... because [the principal] made my life so good again." The teacher added that she would clearly state the problem the next time.

Teachers had many comments and examples of principal's relieving support behaviors. It was the most *plentiful with examples* category for teachers. One negative case was given from a previous school situation.

In summary, principals described *relieving* support behaviors such as briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, making long-term arrangements for the class, and refraining from adding additional work or worry. One principal added a hug to the reassurance.

All of the principals, when asked directly, stated that they would take a teacher's unusual stress into consideration when delegating *additional school responsibilities*.

Teachers described relieving support behaviors as briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, making long-term arrangements for the class, removing out-of-control students for a period of time, giving teachers reassurance, relating to teachers with empathy, and one case of moving a staff member within the building at a teacher's request. The most consistent principal support example for both principals and teachers was not to add worry and to give reassurance when a teacher must leave for a personal [originating from outside the school] stress situation.

*Category D: Representing*

For the purposes of this research, *representing* is defined as when the principal speaks for the teacher's best interest. Two of the five principals commented on representing and described representing support behaviors as making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences and helping the teacher in resolving differences with staff.

This principal spoke on behalf of the teacher with a parent:

> I've had many teachers come to me and say, "This parent is really causing me difficulty and I don't seem to be able to communicate." So, in that case, you pull the parent in and try to *do some mediation* kinds of things.

Another principal intervened on behalf of a teacher who had other teachers gossiping about her regarding another staff member at school:

> I told her [the teacher], "Regardless of what people say, focus on the positive; let the negative bounce off."... There was a situation that I had to call a couple of people in my office ... without getting into matters of confidentiality ... I addressed some things that I was concerned about ... that I saw was happening. [These were] good teachers, very supportive of the school, never had problems with, but you know sometimes people can just get caught up in all of the gossip and all the things that are going on and I had to let them know, not here, *not in this place*! Their attitudes began to change. I won't say

> 100%, but a lot of the little things that they were doing stopped because they knew that I would not sit by and let that happen.

The principals in these situations endeavored to protect the teacher by representing the teacher's best interests with parents and with other staff members. It did not appear that the principal was seeking to be less fair to the parent or to the other staff members by representing the teacher's best interests.

Over three fourths of teachers commented on *representing* and described representing support behaviors such as making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences, helping the teacher in resolving differences with staff, supporting the teacher in meeting central office directives, and supporting the teacher's position with a disruptive student.

One teacher received a letter from a parent in which her abilities as a teacher seemed to be questioned. She took the letter to the principal:

> [The principal] read the letter and just supported me ... not only with the words [the principal] said, [but with] a plan of action ... gave me options and put them in my court so I could chose ... and would be there with me *by my side* for support.... I think [the principal] really reads people well and [the principal] knew that's what [the principal] should do is support [the principal's] staff in whatever they need.... [The principal] completely backed me up ... *made me feel like I'm worthy* ... that helped.

Another teacher had a phone call from a parent which ended with the teacher saying:

> "I can no longer talk with you on the phone, but we could set up a conference."... So [the parent] hung up on me. And before I could get from the teacher's lounge to the principal's office, [the principal] was on the phone with her [the parent had called]. [The principal] motioned for me to come in. I just stood there. I heard [the principal] on the phone with her [the parent] and [the principal] was very supportive.... I was upset after talking with the parent, [but] after [the principal] being supportive, I calmed down. [The principal] set up a conference.... At the conference, [the principal] said, "Mrs. So-and-So [the teacher] is a strict teacher and she does A, B, C, etc. In order for your child to continue to come to this school, he's *[the child] going to have to get in there and do* what Mrs. So-and-So is requiring him to do."

This teacher had a situation where the teachers who were supposed to help her put on a program were not helping her:

> The principal] came to me and said, "Those teachers were not helping you.... This is not going to happen again." [The principal] went and *talked to those teachers individually* and told them, "Whatever personal problems you have with [the teacher] are not going to be accepted in a place of work. I expect you to do your job while you are here." It was good. It did help.

One teacher gave two examples of her current principal and a former principal supporting her when she was trying to comply with the directives of a higher authority than the principal:

> [The principal] said, "I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll cancel your classes for two days, how's that?" And then [the principal] said, "I'll *call over to the Board office* and say you'll have it for them Monday ... that you can't possibly do it by tomorrow."

> The school system out there [a previous school system] required everybody to dress professionally and wear nylons and heels. I'm pregnant at this point and we don't have the money to go out and buy professional clothes. [The principal] was *really* supportive. [The principal] said, "Don't worry about it ... and then [the principal] *hit this big button*, *[Super] Power*, and said, "I can handle that!"

This teacher gave her opinion on how the principal should handle different interpretations of what went on according to the teacher and a disruptive student:

> I think the first thing and the main thing that the principal has to do is to let the teacher know that he or she is *on the same side*. Because ... I've seen in that situation, the teacher feel like the principal doesn't believe that this child is who they are.

Teachers who were interviewed mentioned four situations in which principals could represent them: with parents, with other staff, with educational personnel higher than the principal, and with disruptive students. They seemed to be definite that *representing* was a support function of the principal.

In summary, principals described *representing* behaviors as making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences and helping the teacher in resolving differences with staff. Teachers described *representing* behaviors as making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences, helping the teacher in resolving differences with staff, supporting the teacher in meeting central office directives, and supporting the teacher's position with a

disruptive student. Proportionately, fewer principals than teachers described representing behaviors. Furthermore, supporting the teacher in meeting central office directives and supporting the teacher's position with a disruptive student were *representing* behaviors only described by teachers.

## Review of the Protecting Theme

Protecting by the principal was defined by principals and teachers as shielding a teacher from harm or helping a teacher who has been exposed to stressful circumstances. Included are four categories: (a) insulating, (b) connecting, (c) relieving, and (d) representing.

*Insulating* is when a principal mitigates potentially harsh effects for a teacher. All of the principals and teachers commented on insulating support behaviors on the part of school principals. Both principals and teachers described insulating behaviors such as (a) creating a protective and supportive atmosphere at the school, (b) keeping irate parents from intimidating teachers, (c) being the first to hear and interpret mandates for teachers, and (d) a principal's insulation of a teacher from personal harassment. The implicit social contract is that teachers teach and principals insulate (protect) them so that they can teach.

*Connecting* occurs when the principal linked the teacher to outside resources for assistance. Principals described connecting behaviors such as (a) calling in the school's counselor, (b) referring the teacher to the county's employee assistance program, (c) obtaining medical assistance, and (d) facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise. Three fourths of the teachers mentioned the connecting support function of principals. Teachers described connecting support behaviors such as (a) facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise, (b) offering staff development workshops, and (c) offering written material to read

pertinent to their problem. Both principals and teachers emphasized facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise.

*Relieving* occurs when the principal acts to remove the teacher from the source of stress, refrains from adding additional work or worry, or reassures the teacher. All of the principals and teachers commented on *relieving* principal support. Principals described relieving support behaviors as (a) briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, (b) making long-term arrangements for the class, and (d) refraining from adding additional work or worry.

All of the interviewed principals, when asked directly, stated that they would take a teacher's unusual stress into consideration when assigning additional responsibilities at school. Teachers participating in this study described relieving support behaviors such as (a) briefly covering the class for the teacher so that she can leave, (b) making long-term arrangements for the class, (c) removing out-of-control students for a period of time, (d) giving teachers reassurance, (e) relating to teachers with empathy, and (f) one case of a transfer of a difficult staff member at a teacher's request.

*Representing* is when the principal speaks for the teacher's best interest. Two of the five principals described representing support behaviors as (a) making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences and (b) helping the teacher to resolve differences with staff. Over three fourths of teachers interviewed commented on *representing* support behaviors as (a) making the teacher's position clear in parent-teacher conferences, (b) helping the teacher in resolving differences with staff, (c) supporting the teacher in meeting central office directives, and (d) supporting the teacher's position with a disruptive student.

Principals' behaviors that protect teachers from work stress are significant because of the *meaning* that these behaviors have for teachers. Some of the quotes about the meaning of

protection were: "[The principal] completely backed me up ... made me feel like I'm worthy ... that helped;" "I guess it did relieve a little bit of stress, but mostly it didn't add stress and then I could deal with what I had to deal with at home;" "If [the principal] has the discipline under control, then you [the teacher] can teach;" "It made a very good impression on me;" "I was upset after talking with the parent, [but] after [the principal] was supportive, I calmed down;" "I think it makes a very big difference;" and "I thanked [the principal] ... several times, because that made my life so good again."

## Theme 2: Caring

*Caring* was defined by the principals and teachers who participated in this study as the principal focusing on the individual or showing that the individual is valued. Caring as a theme included four categories: (e) positioning, (f) listening, (g) giving, and (h) personalizing.

### *Category E: Positioning Behaviors*

For the purposes of this study, positioning behaviors are defined as principals who use physical proximity [nearness], visibility, or access cues to signal availability. Principals interviewed for this study described positioning support behaviors such as (a) being available to provide the customary support of family, (b) sitting beside a teacher when talking, (c) having a literal open door policy, (d) moving around the school, (e) taking the time to structure a working relationship, (f) using body language to signal a support position, (g) attending a funeral important to a teacher, and (h) follow-up with teachers in order to be available for additional support. These principals took the stance of availability with physical proximity and verbal access cues:

> You can't assume that somebody's got the kind of support system that maybe you would have ... in her situation. So you [the principal] need to ask and you need to make *yourself available if you're needed*.

> I think the principal should probably be the one who makes it clear that support is available, that you are not on your own. The principal should list the possible avenues of support that are available. And then the principal should create a climate in which the person *feels at least comfortable with seeking assistance* or seeking help ... be observant too.

In one instance a participating principal used verbal access cues and physical proximity to convey membership on the same team and that the teacher's actions were positive:

> "You're not a whiner or complainer or a tattletale ... I don't think this of you." I try to help them understand that my position is that I must know about everything possible; so that I can take care of problems. "If I don't know about things, I can't do anything about them." I don't stay behind my desk. I try to *sit side by side* to them and try to keep them at ease. I just talk to them a little bit. I try to talk with them in a very gentle way.

This principal gave a policy statement as a verbal access cue, put it in writing, and paired it with the visual cue of a literal open door:

> First of all, everyone here on staff knows that I have an *open door policy* and that anytime that they feel they need to come and talk with me, that I am here for that.... At the beginning of the year, it is put in writing.

Other principals concurred:

> You have a *completely open door policy* ... and you're out in the building all the time. You're very visible. It would be an unusual and ineffective principal who would go in the office, close the door, and be totally oblivious to what's going on.

> Usually my door was always open and people just kind of appeared at the door and said, "I need to talk to you." If they came at a time that I was in a meeting, my secretary would let me know and I would immediately go see that person. I have never been one to set up meetings [for later]. If it's important enough for them to come to the office door, it's *important enough to talk about [right] then*.

This principal moved around the school building which often put [the principal] in physical proximity to problems:

> I went around to the classroom. [The children were not there.] I really went to ask her something, but *I found her sitting on the floor*. I knew something was wrong. I walked her down to the office and talked with her. I told her that she had to get a hold of herself.... There were a lot of things on the outside and then coupled with difficulties [here], and it just took her over the edge. I offered encouraging words, and sometimes that's all people need to hear, to know "Yes, I can get past this."

A principal accepted *morning bus duty each day*. Teachers passed by [the principal] as they streamed into work. This strategic positioning allowed the principal to notice changes over a period of time with a teacher who indicated mounting stress:

> She had always had a relaxed, happy, smiling look. But for some reason, her physical countenance, how she carried herself, began to change. The expression on her face was like she was deep in thought. *She would not even notice that you were there*.... She was easily irritated. That's when I knew that something was wrong. I was just checking in [with her] and I noticed she looked like she felt real bad [worse than usual lately]. And I just said, "You know, you don't look like you feel good. You need to get out and go take a break ... and don't worry about your class."

Participating principals often gave access cues about willingness to engage in open communication when another staff member needed help:

> Sometimes a teacher will just come to me and tell me, "So-and-so is having a real tough time. *You need to go and talk to her*." I'll slip right down the hall and call them out of class or send somebody to cover their class and have them come to the office.

These principals talked about body language cues that convey access:

> I guess just being visible, having a smile on your face. Asking that person, "How's your day?" Just showing some interest. To me the body language speaks *so* much louder than words. And I think people *judge you more by what they see you doing* rather than by what they hear you saying.

> I think body language a lot of times is an important part of support. I've had faculty members who have been in a period of stress. I've put my arm around them. You have to be careful about that kind of thing.... I have in the case of a death of a family member, *sat with the family at the funeral home*. In just about any instance, I would do that.... I wouldn't delegate that ... it's part of the job to be supportive of your faculty. Be it a cafeteria worker, teacher, or a custodian, I always would go there if there was a death in the family. That would be a form of support and a much appreciated kind of thing.

One participating principal made the effort to go to the funeral and in doing so was in a visible position when the teacher needed support:

> I've attended funerals of employees and their families. And again, it's just being personable and *letting that person know that you care*. When they come back, let them know that we're glad that they're back ... that we've missed them. I'm here for you ... if there is anything that I can do.

This principal *positioned* with time as a cue during the employment interview to establish a good working relationship:

> *My interviews are very long*. It is a time to get to know that person and for that person to get to know a little bit about me and my expectations ... and in a broader sense, how we function as a school. I think for any applicant, it is important that they know if this is the right environment where they can work, ... grow, and be successful.... You can't do the kind of job you need to do if you don't feel happy ... comfortable with your work environment.

This principal also used a touch-back positioning strategy as a cue of availability for employee support:

> Usually if you realize that a faculty member is having a problem ... or some stressful event ... it's not necessarily going to go away in a day, especially if it is a high degree of stress. So you would do *a touch back kind of thing*. I had a faculty member who had gone through a very painful divorce [that] we talked about initially, but then if I noticed that she looked like she was having ... not a good day, I would go back and touch base with her over and over again.

All of the principals and teachers mentioned the importance of positioning support functions. They described such positioning support behaviors as being available to surrogate the customary support of family, sitting beside a teacher when talking, having a literal open door policy, moving around the school, taking the time to structure a working relationship, using body language to signal a support position, and reconnecting with teachers to be available for follow-up support.

One participating teacher remarked about the way the principal was available and provided support similar to a surrogate parent:

> My principal is very, very friendly; so [the principal] is *like a second {parent]*; so it is easy to go and talk to [the principal] about what it is I am going through. [The principal] is very understanding ... very open.

This teacher commented about the visual cue of the principal sitting beside her when she was having an episode of stress:

> I think [principals] should be people persons, number one ... speak well and identify with other people [teachers]. Because, I know when this situation occurred, [the principal] sat down right next to me. [The principal] didn't sit down behind a big desk. [The principal] sat right next to me and held my hand and said that it would be okay.... That meant a lot that [the principal] was *on the same side as me* instead of standing behind that big desk. It felt more comfortable.

Another teacher could understand teachers having mixed feelings about the principal dropping by their classrooms:

> We [teachers] are very isolated. We are away from the office. You know, it's "No news is good news." You know, "If you don't see them, then everything is okay." So you kind of hide out. I got so used to [the principal] when I was a grade level chair and [the principal] was in here so much. *It doesn't bother me at all* when [the principal] pops in or needs to see me.

These teachers indicated that they liked for the principal to come into their classrooms:

> They can be supportive by coming into your classroom, observing in that classroom, taking charge of that child who may be disruptive [taking them] outside of the room. [The teacher said] "*B*e *encouraging rather than critical*." [When there's a problem], say "What can we do to help?" and "How can we work together to make this better ... to make your classroom grow?" It's so positive. You just come back in the building and even if you don't get along with someone, they seem better to you because you are feeling better. You've had that support from the principal and I think that just makes everything better. It makes ... your whole attitude better so that other things go well for you.

> They [the principals] need to be in the classroom more so that they know what's going on; so that we can be comfortable when we speak to them.... We're there to instruct and we are there to support [the children], and we need their [the principal's] support. When the principal is in the classroom, walking around, sitting with the children, is that instructional support? [No,] I don't think so. That is *support of an emotional nature*.... [The principal] is showing [the principal's] support of me, [the principal] is showing [the principal's] support to them [the students]. I think the principal could easily spend half [the principal's] time in the teachers' rooms ... and the other half of [the principal's] time on paperwork, curriculum, and books.

> I think that it's wonderful when a principal is highly visible ... when they drop by the classroom ... when they make it a point to see the teacher ... to have some positive and encouraging comments to make. I think it's very important that a principal is sincere. If they are not sincere, they might as well not do anything or say anything ... a teacher doesn't want it. But if they are sincere, then it means a lot. Maybe just write a little note ... and be specific. Stop and ask how things are going. [Say] "What can I do to help you?" And be sincere about it ... really mean it. It's so encouraging ... so encouraging.

These teachers had strong opinions on an open door policy for supportive principals:

> I think new teachers should be checked on more and it needs to be made clear to them that the door is always open. You know, "You're in your room and we trust you to do what you need to do." I would expect to be checked on at least once a week ... even if it's generic email to all new teachers, "How's everything going? Have you checked with your mentor? If there's something I can help you with, *my door is always open*." I think that would mean the world to a new person. I really do."

> The first thing is to have an open door policy; so that you know [the principal] is available when you need them. [At another school] I have gone and my friends have taken a child to the office and the door is locked and shut ... [the principal] was in there, but it was locked and shut. It was a known thing, if it's shut, don't bother [the principal]. [At our school] somebody at all times is designated. Teachers need to be made aware that the principals are willing to help with discipline.... It's something you pick up on after going to the office so many times and never getting any help or the opposite scenario where you go and just leave the child there. They don't have to say any more. It's just that you know that they're there for you. They don't ask, "What did you bring him here for?" They don't ask that. It's like, "If you're up here, you have a good reason." And that to me is very important.

One teacher who participated in this study would like the support function of the principal to be formalized and put in writing in the faculty handbook:

> If you are dealing with stress, make sure you *come to me and talk with me.* Include it in the handbook or say it at a meeting.... Let them know that you are there to be supportive, because sometimes teachers think that the principal is out to get them or catch them doing something wrong.

Another participating teacher gave an example of a principal who was judged to be nonsupportive because of [the principal's] unavailability. Even so, the teacher had a clear mental structure of who to go to during the principal's absence:

> More often the assistant principal or counselor are actually in the school building; so if something happens with a student or if there is an emergency type of situation, that's who I have gone to before because the principal is either busy or unavailable because they are out of the building in a meeting [county level] or something like that.

This teacher informant talked about getting to know the social/emotional position of the principal even before accepting a working relationship:

> You might ... get to know the personality of the principal in the interview, what they are like ... are they *getting to know their staff* or are they just there to get a job done? Are they asking you scripted questions [or do they want to get to know you]? And if you answer a question, do they pull off of your question [that suggests] that they really want to get somebody in here as opposed to just your skills? I think that's a good thing.

Another teacher talked about the working relationship as far as approaching the principal when you need to talk with [the principal] about an episode of stress:

> I appreciate a principal who's not always negative, always bothered about something, high maintenance, and stressed out ... someone who's not always bringing up stress-related things. You know [like], "Mrs. So-and-So, I'd love to talk with you, but I've had 15 parents in here this morning." And if it's every time I come in, then, that's your job [to me].... And what they don't understand is *how much it takes for us to come in.* It's a big deal. We don't just walk in here everyday to vent. And if we come, it's a big deal.... We rehearse it in our heads to get it right and I know exactly what I want to say. And then I get up here and he or she is in a bad mood. I don't think that is productive.... I think it makes us nervous, anxious, and less likely to approach that principal. We may go to someone else. I haven't worked for anybody like that. I'm speculating.... How they [the principals] do definitely affects the puzzle. Affects us as a whole. A lot of new teachers model themselves after the principal.

At times negative cases involving a principal's body language and availability cues for support were found:

> If I go in and I need to talk to the principal, but [the principal] looks like [the principal] is real busy or just with *body language that it isn't a good time*, I'll just wait or I'll say, "Can I set up an appointment whenever it is convenient with you?" And if you [the teacher] had a little background, it would help.… "What's the matter with [the principal]? Why is [the principal] so nasty? Why is [the principal] doing it?" [Then I would think] "Oh, that's what happened...."

This teacher commented that her present principal always apologizes when [the principal] has answered short or has made a mistake. This humbleness was an encouraging cue to her:

> I certainly have worked with principals who never wanted you to see that there might be a mistake ... they couldn't say ... or that they had veered off in the wrong direction. Definitely, I've worked with principals that had a *perfectionist tendency* and it certainly inspires you to have that perfectionist tendency too. But if you're not someone that has that, then that causes unbearable stress on people, teachers.

This teacher noted that when a principal takes time to support a teacher experiencing an episode of stress, that it is a signal in their professional relationship:

> I know they're [principals] are busy, but sometimes just taking the time [even] if they don't have the time right that minute. If you say, "I need to talk to you about X." Then they could say, "Oh, well, let's talk about it at 2:00 p.m. this afternoon." And *make that time.* Don't just say, "Well, I'm busy" and walk away. That's one of the worst things that will shut the door.... I'm just going by my own experience ... it can change your whole way of thinking about someone. [When they support you in a situation] even if you already like the person [principal], it gets you [to the point] where you would recommend to another teacher to go talk to the principal, because you can say "I did that and [the principal] did so-and-so for me. It's okay to go to [the principal] and tell [the principal] how you feel."

> A lot of times, I put a note in the [principal's] box and say, "I need a moment of your time. When can we meet?" and maybe a little bit about the stressful situation. And sometimes that's better if you are emotionally charged ... [rather] than face-to-face. It's better too because they have a chance to sit down and think about it and then *get back to you in a timely fashion*. When [the principal] writes you a note back to tell you when, you'll know that [the principal] is actually paying attention.

> I would *write the principal a letter*, if it were a principal I wasn't sure of [if they were or were not approachable] ... if I hit them with this, how they would react.... My choice would let them peruse it, think about it, and maybe they'll give me more a balanced response. If I had not had an approachable principal, I would still have dealt with it, but in a less personal way.

These teachers talked about how sometimes they only want the principal in stress situations:

> I would go to the principal [not anyone else]. I just believe in *the chain of command*.... I just don't want anyone to think that I am going to someone else because maybe [the principal] wasn't accessible or because I didn't think I could talk to [the principal].

> I think they [the principal and assistant principals] all hold the same kind of weight, but I guess it goes back to the relationship that you have with each one. I would still prefer to go to the principal, *because of the relationship* I have with [the principal] as opposed to the others.

As part of a working relationship, this teacher stated the need for trust and the need for the principal to have structured a plan for disruptive students even if the principal is not there:

> The secretary says, "[The principal] is not here." I think: Well, what do you want me to do? So what's the plan?" I want to be greeted with, "I'll take the child right off your hands. Obviously, we trust that if you are bringing this child to us, it is because it has come to the point that it is not manageable. *We trust you*." I don't want to be questioned. (a) I want you to trust me, (b) know that I had no other choice, and (c) there's still going to be something done even if [the principal] is not there ... there is a plan of action.

In these cases, the amount of time between presenting the problem to the principal and the principal responding with support was significant to the working relationship:

> The *sooner* [the principal] gives support the better the situation is. That's because the person will know that [the principal] is understanding their problem. But if [the principal] waits, [the teacher] is kind of doubting whether they are really supportive or not.
>
> If that child is not taken care of *immediately*, which is the timing, then that would definitely increase my stress and impair instruction, all that type of thing. So the timing is extremely important. It has to be, in some cases, immediate. Don't throw the child back in the classroom or say, "Hey, don't bring him down here. I'm busy. Bring him later." That's not going to do it. So the timing is extremely important.

One teacher suggested removing the evaluation part from the supporting part of a principal's duties and this would help with positioning themselves socially and emotionally with their staff for stress support:

> They have this ... team approach. Why doesn't this principal go evaluate over at another school [and have another principal come evaluate here]. What would it take? It wouldn't take anything. Principals could just agree to do that. Because then, you really could feel like *you could go to a principal with a personal problem*.

These teachers commented on the body language of principals and the cues that are given that relate to availability of support for episodes of stress:

> I just felt that instant connection, not because of what [the principal] said necessarily, but because [the principal] used a lot of body language ... [the principal's] posture, the [principal's] carriage [conveys confidence], the smile on [the principal's] face, and looking at me when I was talking. When we were sitting there, [the principal's] body language didn't speak like [the principal] was closed off. [The principal] kind of faced me, turned [the principal's] body toward me ... we weren't across a table ... like we were on the same team ... *always on the same side as I am*.... I mean it's facial expressions ... there's an openness and there are certain ones where you know not to tread. [The principal] has one of those expressive, open faces like [the principal] really wants to talk to you and cares about you as a person [and] not just as a teacher.

> The [principal's] carriage, friendliness, speaking and communicating with everyone, to the teachers; then it carries on to the students. It really helps.
>
> [The principal] smiles at us sometimes ... *winks at us through the classroom window* if [the principal] sees the kids ... you know, having fun. Just about every morning, [the principal] will check on us ... not looking [to see] if we are doing our jobs ... just wanting to make sure we are all right.
>
> You can tell right off if they can listen technically, but it may take time to see if they care. I guess the way they say things, inflections in the voice, how they say it, and their body gestures. [The principal] *hugs me all the time*. That helps a lot. The way you look at someone or if you turn the other way or if you're still typing on the computer while someone is trying to talk to you ... it's kind of hard.

These teachers commented particularly on the body language of going to the funeral when there was a death in the teacher's family:

> I know a friend [teacher] who's mother died and the principal came to the wake and that just changed [the teacher's] whole impression of [the principal] ... that the principal cared enough that [the principal] came to the wake and the funeral ... *to be there*. For me, it would mean a whole lot.
>
> I think that when there's a death in the family [of a teacher] that the school send a flower or plant ... from the principal, I think a personal note or a card. I think it really speaks highly if the principal or someone from the school *attends the funeral*. I think that speaks volumes and it's practically never done. Also, go by the home or for visitation. I think that's very important. [If the principal can't] they could say, "I wish I could [come], but I have a conflict. But I wanted you to know that if there was any way to be there, I would be." I think the larger the system, the more impersonal it tends to be, but at least the principal could write a note.... You know, little things go a long way. We think sometimes that the person won't even notice; that it won't make a difference, but it does make a difference and they [the teachers] do notice.
>
> Maybe the principal should ask if it's an open funeral or a closed funeral. It would mean a lot if the funeral had been local and the principal had shown up ... that [the principal] cared about me as a person, not as an employee, but as a human being ... that I'm a valuable member of the team to them ... friendship, not just a working relationship. And it's *just a respectful thing to do.* I think they should try to make the effort, but there is an exception to every rule. I mean there is probably somebody that would not want their principal to show up. Some people are very private. You're liable to fall apart ... not be in control.

This teacher thought that it was more important for the principal to be available to listen if the teacher wanted to talk at school rather than attend the funeral. "I think the most important

thing [for the principal to do] is to just be open and available if the person wants to come in and talk about things [the death in the family]."

These teachers had examples of the principal moving into the proximity of the teacher to offer follow-up support by body language sometimes paired with the spoken word and sometimes body language saying it all:

> I have had an incident where [the principal] or [assistant principal] came back to my room and asked how things were going ... within a week.
>
> After you've gone and expressed your stress ... [the principal] the next day or in a few days walks by just to make sure everything is running smoothly. [The principal] will peek in at the window ... not necessarily to say anything, but [just] *showing face*. Just showing face to see if everything is okay.

These teachers had varying views as to whether there was more follow-up for episodes of stress originating from outside the school as opposed to stress originating inside the school:

> [The principal and assistant principal] tend to be *more informal* when it's an outside stress. When I go to them about a parent or student problem, it doesn't come up again unless I bring it up myself. When it's school-related, they're *more business-like*. If I go to them about a personal thing, they will always ask you, "Are things better this week?" or Did you get that resolved?" or "What can we do?"
>
> [The principal] *always has a follow-through* whether it's personal [outside originating] or school-related [inside originating]. Work related ... [the principal] will usually have some paperwork involved for you to fill out [to see] if things are getting better. And then [the principal] tends to be very good about follow-through on the personal side. [The principal] will call down to your room, catch you in the hallway, or [the principal] will stop by your room. "How are you doing? Are your feeling better?"

Some teachers may not want to be reminded of an incident. In this case, the teacher had been frightened:

> [The principal] didn't bring it up again. [The principal] was real cool about it. And it was good, because when I thought about it, I worried. It's always in the back of my head, but I would forget about it.... [I knew] the principal was available.

Teachers participating in this study often described the support behaviors of physical positioning. They cited behaviors such as (a) being available to surrogate the customary support

of family, (b) sitting beside a teacher when talking, (c) having a literal open door policy, (d) moving around the school, (e) taking the time to structure a working relationship, (f) using body language to signal a support position, and (g) reconnecting with teachers to be available for follow-up support.

Participating teachers spoke often about reading the body language of principals that included where the teachers were physically in relation to where the principal was physically. The open door of the principal's office was seen as literally important and figuratively important. Timing of support was identified by two teachers as significant in positioning. For the purposes of this study, positioning is defined as when the principal uses physical proximity, visibility, or access cues as a supporting behavior. Both principals and teachers referred to these behaviors. Principals frequently mentioned the importance of body language. Teachers had numerous comments in these areas: (a) sitting beside the teacher, (b) attending funerals, and (c) the open door of the principal's office. Participating principals and teachers described two additional ways of positioning that often overlapped and could not be clearly separated: (d) social/emotional positioning, and (e) physical/space positioning. An example of social/emotional positioning is when a principal is available to provide surrogate support usually provided by family members. Another form of social/emotional positioning is when the principal takes time to add structure to a working relationship. An example of a principal's use of physical/space positioning is when a principal sits beside a teacher when conferencing in the principal's office or in the teacher's classroom.

Examples of social/emotional and physical/space positioning together are seen in these principal support behaviors: (a) having a literal open door policy, (b) using body language to signal a support position, and (c) reconnecting with teachers for the purpose of being available

for follow-up support. In many instances, positioning support behaviors of principals are often a combination of (a) physical proximity, (b) visual cues, and (c) access cues that let teachers know that principals are available to support them when they have episodes of stress.

*Category F: Listening Behaviors*

Listening was defined by principals and teachers as the principal focusing on the individual teacher's message. Principals described *listening* support behaviors for different purposes. These purposes are to learn how the principal can improve, to learn how the school can improve, and to relieve the stress of teachers. One principal stated that the power of not listening to gossip is a way to avoid sanctioning gossip.

This principal reflected on the value of listening to personal criticism as a reminder to self-monitor:

> Sometimes I think you get so busy that you forget to self-monitor. And that's when you have to remember to *listen to any kind of criticism.* I think if you start hearing criticism, then you had better go back and give yourself a check.... If you don't listen to all criticism and think about it, you start making excuses.
>
> Someone on my leadership team may come to me and say there is some problem or something is not going right and *those are the people I know I can listen to* [they are telling me the truth] and I appreciate them so much.
>
> This principal wanted to listen to why a teacher was leaving and taking another job:
>
> I say [to the teacher], "I'm sorry you've come to this decision. Is there something that I can do? Was it something that I did? Was it something that happened in the school that has made you come to this?" I want to *find out why they're leaving*. I may not beg the teacher to stay, but I do want to find out why she's leaving. Sometimes you get the truth and sometimes you don't.... I also say, "Who knows [that you're leaving]? I'm not going to tell it. It needs to come from you."
>
> This principal gave a rationale for listening to teachers:
>
> If a teacher is going through a stressful period, I know that she cannot perform at her maximum potential, so I get involved without really getting too personal unless that teacher is wanting to share personal things with me. I just try to make sure that I let that person know that I am here for them if there are some things they are going through; that

> *I am here to listen*. I cannot and will not solve their problems for them, but I am a good listener and my concern is that they are able to come to work, feel comfortable, and are able to carry out their responsibilities.

This principal described some roles taken in the course of being a principal that utilize listening in their function:

> You [the principal] need a little knowledge of being a counselor. In fact, I am a counselor even though I am not licensed or certified. I am a counselor, behavioral therapist, marriage counselor, parenting consultant ... and financial counselor. My experiences in education and other work experiences help me to understand some of these things.

This principal relieves the stress of teachers by listening:

> The most important thing is just to listen ... get the person to open up to you and then listen to what they say. Oftentimes, [teachers] tell me, "I just feel better [after] having talked with you." It's just *feeling understood and getting it off your chest* that helps so much.

The following is a case of the principal not listening to gossip:

> I don't believe in gossip and I tell my staff, "I don't get into gossip pools. If you come to me with gossip, *I'm going to stop you before you get started."*... I believe that you don't get [gossip] if you don't allow it to be discussed in your presence.

Three of the five principals commented on listening. Principals described *listening* support behaviors for different purposes. Those purposes are to learn how the principal can improve, to learn how the school can improve, and to relieve the stress of teachers. One principal stated that the power of not listening to gossip is a way to avoid sanctioning gossip.

Almost three fourths of the teachers commented on *listening*. Most of their comments were about how they could tell when the principal was listening, i.e., picking up on the teacher's tone of voice, paying attention to the depth of the teacher's feeling, listening before asking teachers to listen, asking a question related to what the teacher is saying, letting the teacher vent, coming up with creative solutions with the teacher, talking in conversations with teachers, being able to finish the teacher's sentences, validating what the teacher is saying, maintaining eye

contact, reiterating what the teacher is saying, staying on the subject begun by the teacher, keeping from other busy activities while listening, and bringing teachers back up coupled with encouraging them to move forward. Several teachers mentioned that the quality of caring was not necessarily indicated by listening skills, but most teachers felt that listening was part of the process of caring.

This teacher thought that the principal had grown in listening ability over the years and that she, in turn, had started listening to the principal better. She further stated, "[The principal] seems to listen to *the tone of my voice* ... that this is something [important]."

This teacher stresses that the depth of the listening by the principal is critical to assess stress early:

> When a teacher comes to a principal with a problem, before starting off, the principal should listen and get a *feel for the depth of the problem*, the seriousness of it, and how it's affecting that teacher. And it might strike the principal as really minor or petty, but the principal had better listen because some of those things can exasperate a teacher [and] build, build, build until it's way out of proportion.

This teacher described the effect of a new principal listening:

> [As a new principal,] listen to the people in your building. Most of them have been there longer than you ... and know what's going on. [The new principal] will hear some good things and some not good things. I think [that] the principal who comes in and *listens to what's going on* rather than first telling you what's going to happen will get people to listen to [the principal's] idea about how something should be done.

This teacher talked about how the principal acted when coming into her room, "[The principal] was in my room every week ... *listening and asking a question*."

These teachers talked about how a principal can get ready to listen:

> Call [the teacher] in, let her sit down, and just vent or tell you about [the episode of stress].... If you're not open and honest, the principal can't rise to the occasion to help you.... We have lots of opportunities to be *open and honest and real* with each other at this school.

> Listening is a big thing ... *just listening to me vent* ... and then after I've vented, coming up with some solutions to the problem.... If something is going on at home, like a divorce situation, they may not be able to help you there, but they can be aware and give you an ear or a shoulder to cry on.

This teacher expressed great confidence that her principal listened because of the solutions that were generated:

> "I think our principal really listens to our teachers. We try to come up with *creative solutions to every problem*." When asked if she would tell the principal if the solution didn't work, she replied, "Yeah, sure." And when she was told that all teachers did not have the same situation where the teacher could say that it didn't work, she said, "I'm not going anywhere [else]!"

These teachers describe what indicates to them that a principal is a listening principal

> I would just go and tell [the principal] that I needed to talk. [The principal] is *very talk-able* and [the principal] will listen.

> [The principal] indicted that [the principal] was listening carefully to me in my initial interview by *being able to almost finish my sentences and validating what I was saying*. I can tell from [the principal's] questions and the flow of the conversation.... I would say that *if they care enough to listen, that makes them a little more caring*.

> Listen. That is the key thing. Listen to what the teachers have to say.… Principals indicate that they are listening by *constant eye contact and reiterating* what the teacher has told them ... *staying on whatever the topic is about* and not trying to change the subject or move on.... The principal has to do like I do with the child in my classroom, e.g., I give the child respect but yet help him solve his problem ... [as opposed to] listening and then having an "I don't care" attitude" … just go back in the classroom and get it done." You can tell right off if [the principal] can listen technically, but *it may take time to see if they care*.

> When a principal is *looking at you in the eye* while you're talking and isn't doing some other job or straightening [the principal's] desk [I think they are listening]. One time I had this *principal that took notes* all the time of everything I said. I thought, "Ooh, this is cool ... [the principal] is going to refer back to these notes [to do something]."... [The principal] never referred back or did anything. [This principal] was one of the worst principals that I ever had.

This teacher talks about the principal listening to assess her situation when she is having an episode of stress:

> [The principal] has always been very supportive ... and kindhearted ... that helps too. I feel like [the principal] is a good listener. [The principal] *listens well to assess* what is

> really going on; so that [the principal] can make suggestions or whatever is appropriate. [The principal] *brings you back up as well as giving you ideas for going on.*

This teacher brings up the point that a teacher should offer to listen to the principal as well as expecting the principal to listen to her:

> We always bring our problems to the principal to help us solve a problem, [to] make things better, or to make a decision. I think we need to let them know that we [as teachers] are *ready to listen if [the principal] needs you.*

Almost three fourths of the teachers commented on listening. Most of their comments were about how they could tell when the principal was listening: picking up on the teacher's tone of voice, paying attention to the depth of the teacher's feeling, listening before asking teachers to listen, asking a question related to what the teacher is saying, letting the teacher vent, coming up with creative solutions with the teacher, the principal being talkative and a conversationalist, being able to finish the teacher's sentences, validating what the teacher is saying, constant eye contact, reiterating what the teacher is saying, staying on the subject begun by the teacher, not doing something else while listening, and bringing teachers back up coupled with encouraging them to move forward. Several teachers mentioned that the quality of caring was not necessarily indicated by listening skills, but most teachers felt that listening was part of the process of caring.

In summary, three of the five principals commented on *listening* and 11 of the 16 teachers commented on listening. Listening did not have as many comments as some other categories, such as *positioning* and *relieving*. Principals mainly commented on listening related to the *purpose of listening* and teachers mainly commented on listening related to *how listening was indicated* by the principal. This divergence in perspective is unique to this category among the other categories reported. A theater analogy concerning perspective may be relevant to the analysis. Both the principal and teacher may see the principal as the director of the play and the teacher as the actor in the play taking direction. The director is more concerned with purposeful

action and the actor is more concerned with taking cues from the director. In education, the principal directs the actions of the teachers in the school and the teacher takes her cues from the principal. Teachers are as vigilant in reading the principal as actors are in reading the director.

*Category G: Giving*

Giving is defined as the principal presenting something of value to the individual teacher. All of the principals mentioned *giving* support behaviors: inquiring; using encouraging words or words of appreciation, validation, and belonging; giving trinkets; writing notes; telling a joke to brighten the mood; serving refreshments; bereavement considerations such as giving the teacher time with the family; the principal visiting the family; sending a card; or attending a funeral.

This principal who participated in the study *inquired* about the teacher as a way to give support and to show concern:

> If I can tell somebody's behavior is a little different from what it normally is, *I might ask* them, "How are you doing today? Is everything okay?" I just try to show them that I care. As the leader of the school, I think it is important for the employee to know that [the principal] cares.

> I want [teachers] to feel secure and I think they will once they are able to determine how they are going to resolve a situation. Sometimes just *encouraging words* are what teachers need to hear ... that they can get past the situation. I guess my role is more of a counselor, just talking with that person and trying to reassure that person ... that they have a support base that is here for them ... so that they don't feel alone and that nobody cares.

This principal stated that [the principal] tried to give each person *the feeling* that "they are needed, their work is appreciated, and they make a difference." We try to buy little trinkets ... little tokens we call them ... and put them in their boxes from time to time just to say, "I appreciate you." Other principals had giving support behaviors to communicate the same message:

> Did I tell you that I wrote notes to every single teacher in the school? It took me hours. I did two thirds one night and finished it up the next night. The response I got was incredible! One teacher, who I felt had not liked me, wrote me a note back saying that she

had to stop her car when she read it because she was crying! I should have remembered how much I value the notes the superintendent writes to me. I'm going to do a lot more of it. It's very powerful.

With No Child left Behind, H. B. 187, and Annual Yearly Progress that make us so much more accountable, it's easy to forget to make someone's day brighter, to be there for somebody, or to tell a funny joke ... to do something to brighten the attitude.

The first thing you need to have is compassion ... you have to care about the people who work with you. If you don't have a *genuine caring of people*, you're probably in the wrong field.

This participating principal stated that refreshments are often given and the refreshments "have come to be expected because that's the way it's always been":

I'll never forget, one teacher work day, I didn't have refreshments and [the teachers] came to me and said, "Well, where are the *refreshments*? You always have that. What happened this time?"

This group here loves to eat. One way I can win their hearts is to provide them something to eat ... subs after testing, pizza at semester ending faculty meetings.

These principals expressed what they gave when there was a death in the family:

All I could do was give her my condolences and let her know how *sorry* I was ... not to worry about school ... anything I could do to help at school ... not to worry about school ... you take the time that you need [the principal makes this work] ... be with your family and know that my thoughts and prayers are with you.... I try to follow up with a plant from the school as well as from myself.

Our school is so family oriented, we get meals together and we *visit*.... I always *send a card* and although I think it's important to go to the funeral, I don't always do that. I feel like I need to be here, but I know I also need to be there.

All of the principals who participated in this study mentioned giving support behaviors. Inquiring about a teacher's well-being was mentioned most often and this would be termed *the gift of inquiry*. Most surprising was the impact of the written note that one principal reported giving.

All of the teachers mentioned the support behavior of *giving*: inquiring; using encouraging words or gestures; writing notes or sending cards conveying appreciation,

validation, and belonging; time spent with the principal; bereavement considerations; candy and trinkets; providing a way out in confrontations; and morale boosters that sometimes included refreshments or prizes.

This teacher talked about time coupled with the *gift of inquiry*:

> When I was going through my divorce that was a very stressful time for me. And I think [the principal] was very supportive. Really, [the principal] came by and spoke in the morning just *to see how my day was going*. And I know that normally [the principal] didn't have the time to do that, but it just meant a lot that [the principal] came.

This teacher talked about a time when there was an [unpleasant] Friday meeting, "[the principal] *called me* at home Saturday morning to see if I was all right."

Another teacher remembered a time when the principal *inquired* about her health in a caring way:

> When I had my surgery ... [the principal] *called me* on several occasions ... just to make sure [I was okay] ... it was an extended time and [the principal] wanted to make sure I was really ready when I came back. [The principal] told me to make sure that I did whatever the doctor told me to do. [The principal] was supportive of that.

A teacher remembered a time after a death when the principal asked how she was doing.

> The principal goes to the funeral. I think that's just good manners. I don't think [all principals] would go, but I think it's good manners to go.... [The principal] visits with the family and says to take as much time as you need. [The principal] is very supportive ... always supportive of a [close] death in the family. [The principal] usually tries to see you the first day you get back *just to see how things are going*, anything you need ... just let [the principal] know. The principal and the assistant principal are real good about that.

A responding teacher said, "[The principal] always comes back and says, 'How's everything going? Did it work out? Do you need anything? Everything okay?" The following informing teacher thought that remembering to follow up with an *inquiry* was a gift:

> Principals all have access to calendars on the computer.... The principal could make an entry like, "Spoke with Mrs. So-and-So today about personal situation." And the principal could even put a forward on it, "*Ask her about this a month from now*." Or just go to a month from now and make an entry. So that would be a gift ... not an expectation, but a gift.

These teachers talked about the relationship with the principal and how the principal conveyed knowledge of her working hard and gave *encouraging words*.

> We [the principal and I] had a relationship ... [the principal] knew that I was working hard. [The principal] would pop down here and say things like, "You're doing an awesome job! The parents are real pleased." One time, [the principal] said, "It is your class I would want my child in." And one time, [the principal] *gave me a note* saying, "I know what you're doing and I appreciate it."... A gift is great, but when somebody *takes the time* to write a note or says, "I really appreciate what you're doing," then that really helps you toward not being so uptight with yourself.
>
> I think it just comes natural ... that reinforcement [the principal] gave me [in this stress situation] ... like, " *You're doing a great job. It's not you*." That was what I needed and I didn't tell [the principal] that ... but that was what I was feeling. I was thinking, "Was I doing something that I shouldn't ... or not enough of something I should?" I didn't tell [the principal] that, but I think [the principal] just sensed that was something I needed. [The principal] is able to read people ... has got a great way with people ... just has that personality.
>
> It was very, very stressful. We talked to [the principal] about it. [The principal] was very open. If we needed to stay after school and practice and study, [the principal] *came in and cheered* us on: "I know you are going to make it;" "We've already heard good things about you; so I wouldn't worry about it; I wouldn't stress;" "You are doing the correct things in the classroom; you are practicing in the classroom." [The principal] was very, very helpful. [The principal] was very *confident in us.* [The principal] gave us nothing but *praise*, so that helped.... It *calmed me down* ... it *reassured me* that I could do this and I didn't worry as much ... *I could sleep* ... because if you have someone behind you 100%, saying you can make it, how can you fail?... I would never leave [this school].
>
> I immediately got a headache after looking at that [list] ... new things were on there that we had never seen before. [The principal] was wonderful and just kept saying over and over that we would make it and we were going to be okay. [The principal] just kept saying that over and over how well we had always done ... that there was really nothing to worry about ... that [the principal] knew that we were going to pass.... I felt much better ... quite a bit relieved. Then I was better able to focus on what I could do in the remaining amount of time ... focus on just what was new on the list. What [the principal] helped me with more than anything was to *restore my confidence*; so that I could sort through the situation better and not panic.
>
> [The principal] talked with me [after the ordeal] and gave me *words of confidence*: "You know you're going to make it;" "It's going to be all right;" and "Let me know what you need.... I'm here for you."... It meant the world to me. Although [the principal] couldn't take sides, I knew that [the principal] knew that I was hurting. [The principal] was there for me 100%.

This teacher who participated in the study said that she used a lot of gestures with her kids, so *gestures* were something the principal gave that were important to her: "like eye contact ... passing in the hall ... a smile ... a lucky wave ... just extra talking with [the principal]. What meant so much to me was just that pat on the back from the principal [after I was better]." A teacher at another school said:

> [The principal] would reach out and just *pat* me on the back or on the shoulder, or just give me a *smile* afterwards when [the principal] would pass by me in the hall ... just to say, "I'm thinking of you ... I'm checking in on you."

This teacher said that words might not be necessary:

> I think nonverbal is just as important as verbal support ... just a *smile* or a *nod* ... or just *touching* your shoulder ... letting you know that [the principal] is supportive ... and they *might not need to say anything*.

After school was out, [The principal] had sent a *card* with encouraging words through the mail to a teacher. The teacher had the actual card on hand and it read:

> Dear [first name of teacher], I just wanted to tell you how much I *appreciate* the initiative you took this year in developing a plan to increase your children's success with sight words. You are truly a *great* teacher and I am *honored* that you teach at [XYZ] school. You have *always* given 110%. Sincerely, [first and last name of principal].

Two teachers interviewed for this study talked about the principal *giving time* in such a way as it seemed a gift. One teacher said that her principal found out about her graduation and surprised her by attending the ceremony. Another teacher said:

> I'm very comfortable going to [the principal]. I sometimes let the principal know by email or a note. [The principal] is really good about making *time* to see me. And it's rare that [the principal] can't see me when I have to be seen.

This teacher expressed how much it meant to her to have the principal talk one-on-one with her when there was a death in the family:

> Just talking one-on-one with the principal ... *hearing the principal's voice*. And the principal letting your family know that they are here for you. [It means so much] just knowing that you have support ... and telling you not to worry about your class.

This teacher was remarking that when she is stressed, the principal usually gives her a *peppermint* for support. Or, if the principal has created the stress, the principal gives *a way out*.

> [The principal] is so sweet. [The principal] doesn't talk down, regardless of what it is, but [the principal] will be honest with you. If [the principal] thinks that something is wrong, [the principal] may say, "You may not want to hear this, but this is just something that needs to be said to you ... and *here is how we can make it positive*."

This teacher talked about playing a morale booster game from The Fish Market (2001) where teachers look for paper fish hidden around the school, find the fish, and then exchange them for prizes: "an hour or half hour [time] away from the school, a *book gift certificate*, a bag of *candy*, etc." Another teacher talked about "morale boosters ... parties and picnics and little things for teachers for Teachers' Appreciation Week." The teacher went on to describe the *gift of participation and listening* when [the principal] changed plans for having an appreciation activity for teachers on Halloween to a more convenient day for teachers.

This teacher described a morale booster that happens once a month:

> The last Friday of the month is Stress-Free Friday. We don't have to pay to wear jeans [like we usually do for a Cancer Society fund-raiser] and we go down to the cafeteria after school for *ice cream and cookies* ... these big cookies that are so good! Each cookie weighs about a half pound! We just sit around and eat. [The principal] instituted these Fridays. [The principal] is a very supportive and *caring* person. I think [the principal] sets the tone [for the school] and it trickles down.

This teacher described rewards for teachers being like rewards for children in the classroom: "*Cards, mints* ... whatever ... even *intangible rewards* ... when you get a reward, it makes you feel better ... smiley inside. You know, they are noticing me ... aware that I am here.... You get validated."

Inquiry about the teacher's concerns was mentioned quite often and was considered a *gift* because it was not an expectation. Written words of encouragement, validation, and appreciation were monumental in meaning for teachers. The spoken word was also valued, but the written

word was more powerful. This may be because the written word is *lasting evidence* of the principal's positive regard that can be shared with others. Again, it was not an expectation and that seemed to add to the value. Giving considerations at the time of a death in the family was a much appreciated support action on the part of the principal. This may be because the teacher is especially in need of support during this time, and the principal's attention may increase her sense of value in her extended family setting and in her work setting.

In summary, all of the principals and all of the teachers talked about *giving*. Giving is defined as the principal presenting something of value to the individual teacher. *Giving* support behaviors took many forms. One principal mentioned *telling a joke* to brighten the mood, a subtle support behavior that was not mentioned by the teachers. Teachers mentioned *time* with the principal, hearing *the principal's voice*, *one-on-one conversations* with the principal, and *being given a way out when they were in the wrong* as supportive gifts. The attitude was, "What can *we* do to make it better?" These behaviors were not mentioned by the principals. Trinkets seemed low on the *meaning scale* for teachers. *Written words of encouragement or validation* were seen as powerful by both principals and teachers.

*Category H: Personalizing*

Personalizing is the principal recognizing and responding to the uniqueness of the individual. All of the principals commented on personalizing as a principal support behavior. They talked about building individual relationships, addressing the issue of fairness when individualizing, and being prepared for the fluctuation of stress-support needs with individual teachers.

> I think every principal should be able to relate to their staff if they *care* about them.... You have to value the person as a teacher and also value that person as a person ... *care* about their well being.... Over the years, I have had practice with [counseling teachers]. I think a lot of it has to do with knowing your people and understanding your people ... the

> people that you work with.... [In this particular situation], it meant a lot to me to be able to help her. It was important to me because I saw her as more than just a teacher in this building. I *saw her first as a person* ... a really nice person ... someone I liked.
>
> Some people need more emotional support and some people need more instructional support. You've got to *find a balance for each individual*.... It's an individualized thing. It's day to day ... maybe not minute to minute ... but day to day and week to week.... Like the person that we talked about, at that time she needed 100% stress support and no instructional support. Now later on, I came back and we swung the other way. It's got to be *fluid.* You're hard-nosed and cold [as a principal] if you stick to a formula.
>
> Without a doubt, every teacher is different. Some teachers need more instructional support than others. Some need more stress support than others. I think that the need for [school] stress support may go down as instructional support increases. The *percentages change* [for instructional and stress support] from teacher to teacher and from year to year. It's not scientific.

In trying to explain the fairness issue to teachers, this principal said: "We do have rules, policies, and procedures ... but we have individual people with individual problems. I will *treat each one of you as an individual* and do what is best for you." [The principal] continued:

> If a situation occurred, I would try to provide as much support as I possibly could. I can't say specifically what I would do, because *each situation is different*.... Support for a teacher under extreme stress would be immediate and of a kind needed in that situation.

Three other principals who were informants for this study talked about the issue of fairness:

> I think that in your relationships with *individual human beings* that you [the principal] are justified in doing what you can for the individual as long as you are not tearing down the goal of the vision of the school. I have had it happen where if you make an assignment that will help a person, that some people say, "Why is she getting the light end of the load?" However, I think that [teachers] are individuals and that they are valuable and that you [the principal] do what you can for people. A lot of times with teachers, it is just gossip. I don't have a lot of time for gossip. I'm going to do what is best for the school and what is best for the individual.
>
> When it's a health issue, which stress is, I put my foot down. If a teacher said to me, "Why did you let So-and-So go home?" I would say, "Well, first of all, it's none of your business." And I'll have to be a little firm about that. *I know a lot of things that most of them don't know.* But I might add, "If you had a similar problem, I would give you the same courtesy."

> I try to remind my leadership team that an important part of their job is to go out and to talk to people and tell them, remind them, that there may be reasons and issues [in a particular situation] and that they do not see *the whole picture*. I think that's important and it can never be said enough to remind people. I say to teachers, "Try not to judge me too harshly. I do have to look at the whole picture. And there are a lot of things that I might not be able to share with you." I think that's just an honest comment rather than an excuse.
>
> Building *personal* relationships is very, very important. And personal relationships are built on trust. That doesn't come right away, even if you like somebody. It takes time and expressing yourself when someone could judge you that you aren't doing a good job. In a personal relationship built on trust, you don't have to be perfect.... We can all get better.

This principal said that [the principal] would not hesitate to intervene if the stress were severe even if the teacher did not acknowledge the need for help and it was effecting the classroom situation. [The principal] said that [the principal] would always try a soft approach first:

> Inquiring when someone looks like they are under stress should not be a problem. It could be, but it probably won't be because most principals stay in contact with their staff on an *individual basis*. Asking "Are you doing okay?" or "Is there anything I can help you with?" should not be unusual.

These principals commented how they are mindful of the differences that are natural among teachers:

> Everybody wants the best possible world for themselves.... One of the jobs of a principal is to keep a school running at peak efficiency considering [the fact] that everyone has their own set of problems to deal with. If a teacher is having traumatic stress of some type, whether or not they are still doing a good job, somewhere along the line the school as a whole is going to suffer. In a school, you have [a large number] of people working together. Everybody is at *a different place in their lives* all of the time.... On any given faculty, you have a myriad of teachers who are just out of college and you have very old teachers who are ready to retire. And everybody comes in *with their own baggage*.
>
> You have got to understand that *personalities are different* and you can't say that the teacher shouldn't feel the way she feels. It frustrates teachers if you say that kind of thing. I may think to myself, "Why is this such a problem for this teacher? It's not to me so why is it to them?" But what I have to do is always give myself time to think through it ... to try to see it from the teacher's point of view.

> Some teachers are *more high strung than others*. The teacher we just spoke about is relatively low-key. I've never seen her pushed beyond her means. But there are others in the building that don't handle stressful situations as well as she does and you can see it in their faces ... little things worry them more than other people ... type A and AA personalities.
>
> Some teachers have more feelings than others. I've had a teacher come in and cry about a stress situation and another teacher come in and talk about the same kind of situation and not cry. I've had a teacher come in and talk frankly about a stressful health situation and another teacher who was apparently embarrassed not come in, but send a third party to tell me. The way I handle a stress situation isn't a formula. *It's got to be adjusted*. If the teacher needs a hug, I'll give her a hug. If they need to sit across from the desk and tell me and get up and walk out, then that's as far as I go. I don't want to ever infringe on anyone and their personal space and their personal issues. If they want me to know, they will tell me. Now like the teacher that we talked about, I've known her for years. I've seen her at her best and I've seen her at her worst. I could ask her, "What is wrong?," and she would tell me. Somebody else, I couldn't ask that question.
>
> I have covered a class myself, asked if I could drive a teacher home, and followed a teacher home, just to make sure she got home okay. I've taken a teacher to the airport who needed to fly out to attend a funeral. I just base [the amount of support I give in a personal situation] on if a teacher has no *support system at home*. If a teacher is single and pretty much alone in the world, then I would provide more support than I would for a teacher who has her own built-in support system like a husband and children.

Almost all of the teachers commented on personalizing as a principal support behavior. They talked about the principal building individual relationships, addressing the issue of fairness when individualizing, and being prepared for the fluctuation of stress-support needs with individual teachers. One teacher talked about the importance of personalizing praise. Two negative cases were cited from previous schools [employment before the present school] where there was a lack of personalized support on the part of the principal.

This teacher described the principal building a personal relationship with individual teachers:

> I think having a really great boss who *really knows you*, cares about you, and wants you to be successful makes a big difference. If you don't have that, you could go be a nurse or a bank teller [and get out of there].... There was another principal that I had in another school, [the principal's child] was running wild in a wheelchair around the school for weeks on end. Nobody would approach the principal and say how much of a problem this

was. I had never had a conversation with [the principal]. It was a boot camp atmosphere for most of us. I think the reason why teachers sometimes don't approach the principal is that they don't know them. It's true too that sometimes teachers don't want to get to know *the boss.* This principal had never been in my classroom. [The principal] didn't know me ... really didn't know what I did ... didn't know my schedule. So who was I to presume that I could go to [the principal] over a concern I had about [the principal]?

Everyone has a different personality. Some may not be as sensitive as others. They may not want a hug. They may need just, "Yeah, you can do it ... go to it!" A principal would have to be more aware of her teachers and their personalities. [The principal] would have to *get to know each and every person* on [the principal's] staff; so that [the principal] knows how to handle them [in stress situations].

Some teachers are laid-back and some teachers fly off the handle. Teachers should take stock before they fly off the handle. That may be a *personality issue*. Teachers should stop and think where [a directive] may be coming from. It may not be coming from the principal at all. If it's from the state, then we just have to do it. The principal has no control over that. If it is from the principal, then [the principal] can definitely help. Some teachers may be taking [the directive] personally, like "Why are they doing this to me?" when it isn't about them at all.

I think what might be appropriate for a principal to do would depend on the individual teacher. What is *appropriate for one teacher might not be appropriate for another* teacher. So I think it is important for the principal to know [the principal's] staff intimately ... more than just your name and what room you're in. I think it's important because some people do not like touching. They don't like it, they're very standoffish and that would not be appropriate in a moment of stress.

These teachers described their feelings on the issue of fairness when the principal dispenses personalized stress support:

We all handle stress differently.... *You can't compare people* [and the support they receive from the principal] because people are different. Overall, I think principals try to be fair.... I think a lot of how you are treated is related to how you approach the principal when you are under stress. I think once you cross the professional line in attitude, you don't deserve to be treated fairly.

I feel like there should be a consistent policy, but I can see where *certain allowances* may have to be made for certain things [in stress support]. I'm an easygoing person that can deal with almost anything ... irate parents, a bad child ... but some teachers can't take it.

Personally, if somebody [a principal] was dealing with my situation, I would want it to be *handled as an individual*. But as a faculty member, you do kind of sit and wonder why a person is not at faculty meeting or the [parent-teacher organization] meeting. I guess as adults we should know that there is some underlying thing. We want to all be working so

> that we feel like a team, but if I were on the receiving end of somebody going by procedure, it might not be what I needed at the time. So, I still think for the sake of the person, the teacher, that things should be handled on an individual basis.
>
> Everybody requires *different amounts of support*. If a teacher needs more support and the principal gives it to them, then that's great. If some other teacher doesn't need a lot of support and the principal realizes it and lets her do her own thing, then that's good too. You can't have black and white lines worked out for everything.
>
> Fairness could probably be an issue for some teachers. They could think, "You're not treating me fairly because you [the principal] did this [accommodation] with her and not with me. But you have to be adult enough to think that *every situation is different.* And if you're not adult enough to think that then ... it's not fair and life's not fair and nobody said that it was. The principal could say, "I'm sorry you feel this way, but there other places out there if you want to go there and work." I think it's something the principal is going to have to suck it up and do. Or the principal could say, "I'm sorry, you don't know the *whole situation* and I'm sorry you're feeling unfairly treated. If there comes a time that you need [the accommodation], please let me know and we'll decide."
>
> There's got to be some kind of *balance* and you've got to be sensitive to those around you.... Some teachers are more sensitive about fairness and would make an *issue* of it. But what do we do with our students? We individualize more ... more than ever before. Principals need to *individualize* for teachers too. We've got to find that balance, but just like our students, we need to meet their needs as well.

This teacher described a specific situation where the principal was prepared to personalize for the individual teacher:

> The principal needs to know *what is going on in our lives* to a certain extent, so that [the principal] can understand emotional outbursts that may happen over nothing. This teacher had a lot going on ... one family member was dying and another family member got cancer ... and she had the class from you know where ... all in one year. I don't think principals are told or any of us realize that *life can come down in real big chunks*. The principal was very supportive of her and took disrespectful talking from her that [the principal] wouldn't take from me. I don't see how the teacher made it through the year. Within one year, she lost two family members.... Everyone handles the five steps of the *grieving process differently,* and a close death may take longer to get over. It takes time.

This teacher was thinking that *personalized praise* would have more meaning for teachers than general comments when she said, "It is better to be *more specific than broad* when [a principal] is praising a teacher, because if it's too generic it sometimes can seem insincere. Talking about [parts of it] is better than just saying it was good."

This teacher talked about a *negative case of personalizing* when an incident happened at a previous school between teachers:

> I don't think [the principal] ever picked up on the extent of it, but when things escalated some of us went to [the principal] to say that something needs to be done. I don't know that [the principal] cared. I hate to be so unfair, but I don't know that [the principal] cared other than [the principal] did not want the reputation of being in charge of a school with this going on. But I don't think that [the principal] cared about *how it affected us personally*.

This teacher reported the principal *related to her on a personal level* and that helped with the support that she needed:

> My [child] had been born with a medical condition and of course I kept thinking maybe if I had done something differently during my pregnancy that this wouldn't have happened. A couple of days after I found out, I called the principal at her house. I said I needed to talk with [the principal], [the principal] said, "Okay," and I began to cry. [The principal] told me to settle down, that it would be okay. [The principal] said, "If you need to be with your [child], if you need time off ... (just whatever I needed)." [The principal] just kind of talked to me parent-to-parent and [the principal] didn't use any fancy kind of terminology. It was just like talking to a friend or [sibling] about something in the family. [The principal] was able to *switch roles for me* a little bit.... I appreciated the different manner. It was very helpful that [the principal] understood that my [child] came first, then my students, and then the school after that. When I came in the next day, [the principal] was kind of checking with me during the day to make sure my [child] was okay. But, of course, everything looks better in the morning and I didn't end up taking any time off. I did have to periodically leave early to go to the doctor with my [child] and that was always understood. It was a very stressful situation, but it was made much easier by the fact that I knew [the principal] *supported me as a mother and then as a teacher.*

In summary, all of the principals and almost all of the teachers described how principals personalize stress support for teachers. The thoughts of both principals and teachers were congruent in that they talked about building relationships, working through fairness issues, and being prepared for fluctuations in administering personalized stress support. In the teacher discussion, one teacher mentioned personalizing praise and two negative cases from other schools were cited. The teachers gave a great many comments and insights on the fairness issue and were overwhelmingly supportive of principals making allowances in individual cases.

## Review of the Caring Theme

Caring by the principal was defined by principals and teachers as focusing on the individual or showing that the individual is valued and includes four categories: positioning, listening, giving, and personalizing. Principals and teachers described the principal support behaviors of *positioning, listening, giving, and personalizing* that were used to *care* for teachers.

*Positioning* is the principal using physical proximity, visibility, or access cues to signal availability. All of the principals and teachers described positioning behaviors and described these behaviors as being available to surrogate the customary support of family, sitting beside a teacher when talking, having a literal open door policy, moving around the school, taking the time to structure a working relationship, using body language to signal a support position, attending a funeral important to a teacher, and reconnecting with teachers to be available for follow-up support. *Positioning* principal support behaviors are often a combination of physical proximity, visual cues, and access cues that let teachers know that principals are available to support them when they have episodes of stress.

*Listening* is the principal focusing on the individual teacher's message. Three of the five principals commented on *listening* and 11 of the 16 teachers commented on listening. Listening did not have as many comments as some other categories, such as *positioning* and *relieving*. Principals mainly commented on listening related to the *purpose of listening* and teachers mainly commented on listening related to *how listening was indicated* by the principal. This divergence in perspective is unique to this category among the other categories reported. A theater analogy concerning perspective may be relevant to the analysis. Both the principal and teacher may see the principal as the director of the play and the teacher as the actor in the play taking direction. The director is more concerned with purposeful action and the actor is more concerned with

taking cues from the director. In education, the principal directs the actions of the teachers in the school and the teacher takes her cues from the principal. Teachers are as vigilant in reading the principal as actors are in reading the director.

*Giving* is the principal presenting something of value to the individual teacher. All of the principals and all of the teachers talked about *giving*. Giving is defined as the principal presenting something of value to the individual teacher. *Giving* support behaviors took many forms. One principal mentioned *telling a joke* to brighten the mood, a subtle support behavior that was not mentioned by the teachers. Teachers mentioned *time* with the principal, hearing *the principal's voice*, *one-on-one conversations* with the principal, and *being given a way out when they were in the wrong* as supportive gifts. These behaviors were not mentioned by the principals. Trinkets seemed low on the *meaning scale* for teachers. *Written words of encouragement or validation* were seen as powerful by both principals and teachers.

*Personalizing* is the principal recognizing and responding to the uniqueness of the individual. All of the principals and almost all of the teachers described how principals personalize stress support for teachers. The thoughts of both principals and teachers were congruent in that they talked about building relationships, working through fairness issues, and being prepared for fluctuations in administering personalized stress support. In the teacher discussion, one teacher mentioned personalizing praise and two negative cases from other schools were cited. The teachers gave a great many comments and insights on the fairness issue and were overwhelmingly supportive of principals making allowances in individual cases.

Caring principal support behaviors are significant because of the *meaning* that these behaviors have for teachers. Some of the quotes about the meaning of caring were: "[I] feel comfortable with seeking assistance;" "It felt more comfortable;" " It makes ... your whole

attitude better so that other things go well for you;" "It's so encouraging ... so encouraging;" " I think that would mean the world to a new person;" "That to me is very important;" "I think that's a good thing;" "It can change your whole way of thinking about [the principal];" "You would recommend [the principal] to another teacher;" "You'll know that [the principal] is actually paying attention;" "[I] am trusted;" "The principal cares about me as a person, not just as a teacher;" "It really helps;" "I think that speaks volumes;" "It does make a difference and they [the teachers] do notice;" "[T]hat [the principal] cared about me as a person, not as an employee, but as a human being ... that I'm a valuable member of the team to them ... friendship, not just a working relationship;" "[I knew] the principal was available;" "I just felt better [after] having talked with [the principal];" "[This] will get [teachers] to listen to [the principal's] idea about how something should be done;" "I'm not going anywhere [else]!" "It just meant a lot that [the principal] came;" "So that would be a gift ... not an expectation, but a gift;" "That really helps you toward not being so uptight with yourself;" "That was what I needed ... that was what I was feeling;" "It calmed me down ... it reassured me ... I could sleep.... I would never leave [this school];" "I felt much better ... quite a bit relieved ... better able to focus ... restored my confidence;" "It meant the world to me.... I knew that [the principal] knew that I was hurting and was there for me 100%;" "What meant so much to me was just that pat on the back from the principal;" "I'm [the principal] thinking of you ... I'm checking in on you;" "[It means so much] just knowing that you have support ... and [the principal] telling you not to worry about your class;" "It makes you feel better ... smiley inside ... they are noticing me ... aware that I am here ... validated;" "I think having a really great boss who really knows you, cares about you, and wants you to be successful makes a big difference;" and "I appreciated the different manner ... it

was very helpful that [the principal] understood ... a very stressful situation ... was made much easier [by the principal]."

This chapter presented the findings of the research with a core theme of principal stress support. Two subthemes under the core theme were described with supporting categories. The protecting theme had four categories: insulating, connecting, relieving, and representing. The caring theme also had four categories: positioning, listening, giving, and personalizing. Rich description was presented in quotes from interviews with principals and teachers to answer the question "What principal support behaviors are occurring related to episodes of stress, and what do these support behaviors mean to teachers?" The principal support behaviors were detailed under each category and the meaning was given as part of the review of each theme.

The next section will address the findings in a different way, i.e., by the four research questions.

## Analysis According to Research Questions

The following are questions that guided this research:

1. What principal support behaviors are occurring when individual elementary female teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
2. What are individual elementary female teachers' expectations and opinions about a principal's support behaviors when they are experiencing episodes of stress?
3. What are principals' expectations and opinions about their own principal support behaviors when individual elementary teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?
4. Does the origin of the stress (inside or outside the work environment) affect the expectations and opinions about principal support for individual female teacher stress?

Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 and the following discussions summarize the significant findings of this study as they are arrayed by each research question.

*Research Question 1*

There were more than twice as many comments about caring principal support behaviors noted than protecting principal support behaviors. This is surprising since teachers had a strong expectation for protecting and a weak to nonexistent expectation for caring. Since protecting was expected, it may have lessened in meaning when it occurred. It was a deal breaker though, and it was a social contract for teachers: *principals protect so that teachers can teach.* Teachers did not have much regard for a principal who could not or would not protect her. There was another implicit social contract: *principals take care of large problems and teachers take care of small problems.* Teachers felt that they should take care of small problems and not bother the principal until they had a large problem. When they did have a large problem, they expected the principal to help in protecting situations. (See Table 2.)

Table 2

*Research Question 1*

| What principal support behaviors are occurring when individual elementary female teachers are experiencing episodes of stress? |
|---|
| Theme: Protecting<br>Example findings:<br>▪ Creating a protective, supportive atmosphere at school.<br>▪ Keeping irate parents from intimidating the teacher.<br>▪ Facilitating teacher-to-teacher shared support and expertise.<br>▪ Supporting a teacher's position with a disruptive student.<br>▪ Refraining from assigning additional duties. |
| Theme: Caring<br>Example findings:<br>▪ Surrogating the customary support of family as needed.<br>▪ Taking the time to structure a working relationship. |

- Using body language to signal a support position.
- Writing a personalized note with specifics.
- Keeping from other busy activities while listening.

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Table 3

*Research Question 2*

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What are individual elementary female teachers' expectations and opinions about a principal's support behaviors when they are experiencing episodes of stress?

Theme: Protecting
Example findings:

- The principal completely backed me up; made me feel worthy; that helped.
- Mostly [the principal] didn't add stress; relieved me so that I could deal with home.
- I felt quite a bit better; better able to focus; restored my confidence.
- If the principal has discipline under control, then you can teach.
- It made a big difference … made my life so good again.

Theme: Caring
Example findings:

- It can change your whole way of thinking about the principal.
- The principal cares about me as a person; not just as a teacher or employee.
- It calmed me down; reassured me; I could sleep; I would never leave this place.
- The principal understood; made a very stressful situation much easier.
- So that would be a gift … not an expectation, but a gift.

---

*Research Question 2*

There were more than three times as many statements of meaning from teachers concerning caring than protecting principal support behaviors. Caring support behaviors were not expected, and principals showed much diversity and creativity in demonstrating their caring for individual teachers. Principals may be surprised at how much their caring behaviors are noticed and appreciated. Although caring behaviors were not expected and were considered a gift, teachers rarely reported conveying their appreciation directly to the principals. Principals who

did learn of their caring actions being appreciated seemed to be spurred on to be more creative and resourceful in demonstrating caring for individual teachers experiencing episodes of stress. Teachers reported confidence in the *trickle-down effect* of stress support. Protecting and caring behaviors on the part of the principal seemed to be a teaching model for teachers protecting and caring for each other. The teachers also thought that the principal eventually affected the demonstration of protecting and caring for students by teachers and by students for other students. (See Table 3.)

Table 4

*Research Question 3*

What are principals' expectations and opinions about their own principal support behaviors when individual elementary teachers are experiencing episodes of stress?

Theme: Protecting
Example findings:

- Protecting individual teachers seemed right to the principals.
- They did not seem to gather personal meaning or satisfaction from their actions.
- They sometimes felt restricted by policy and law in protecting teachers.
- Successful actions were noted and expanded in their repertoire.
- Principals were creative and completely open to whatever was necessary.

Theme: Caring
Example findings:

- Caring for individual teachers seemed right to the principals.
- They did not seem to gather personal meaning or satisfaction from their actions.
- One felt conflicted in delegating time between the individual and the organization.
- Successful actions were noted and expanded in their repertoire.
- Principals were surprised at the strong impact when teachers expressed appreciation.

*Research Question 3*

Principals had an unlimited expectation of themselves to provide whatever support was needed in individual teacher stress situations. An exception was a principal who said that [the principal's limit was not to actually deliver the baby]. All of the principals had examples of leaving the school campus to deliver support, i.e., for seeking medical care, for attending a funeral, for going to a teacher performance, and for taking a teacher to the airport in a family crisis situation. Some participants talked about social cues especially in funeral situations, i.e. closed to family or public funerals, distant versus immediate area funerals, the death of a regular relative versus the death of a dear relative, and what gesture of support would be most appreciated by the family. This seemed to be an optimal time for expressing caring. Principals reported giving staff time to attend the funeral, if they were close to the teacher; attending the funeral themselves; attending at the house or funeral home themselves; giving a note, a call, or a plant; or facilitating a gesture to be done for the teacher by the staff. Principals described thinking through these situations. Principals often relied on a teacher at school who was close to the teacher in question to provide the answer for what the bereaved teacher would prefer. One principal described being torn between wanting to go to the funeral to support the individual teacher and staying at the school to keep the total school running smoothly. (See Table 4.)

Principals did not express that supporting teachers in individual stress situations had much meaning for them. They seemed to expect a lot of themselves and didn't give themselves any particular credit for whatever they did. They viewed principal support for stress as natural as principal support for instruction. Their stress-support abilities with people seemed to come from personality or from experience [family of orientation, training in other disciplines, varied personnel history] rather than their leadership training, which had emphasized management. In

situations where teachers did express appreciation, principals were often surprised at the meaning teachers experienced. Principals routinely made a mental note to repeat those behaviors.

Table 5

*Research Question 4*

| Does the origin of the stress (inside or outside the work environment) affect the expectations and opinions about principal support for individual female teacher stress? |
|---|
| Theme: Protecting<br>Example findings:<br>▪ There is no expectation when arising from a personal harasser, but it is appreciated.<br>▪ School-related stress can arise from outside the work environment, such as parents.<br>▪ Principals and teachers see appropriate any stress affecting the teacher on the job.<br>▪ Principals can only affect the stressor when it is within their sphere of authority.<br>▪ Principals can help the teacher in handling her stress. |
| Theme: Caring<br>Example findings:<br>▪ Principals did better with follow-up when the stress originated from outside.<br>▪ Principals were more creative when the stress originated from outside.<br>▪ Principals and teachers agreed principal support was appropriate for both origins.<br>▪ Principals and teachers saw the teacher as a composite of personal and professional.<br>▪ Teachers felt that principals should be informed of any great stress affecting them. |

*Research Question 4*

The principals and teachers perceived that *inside* the work environment, the principal would have authority to affect people, environment, time, and resources in such a way as to bring about a change. When the stress originated from *outside* the work environment, the principal could not affect change, but could only react to soften the stress effect on the teacher.

Whether the stress originated from *inside* or *outside* the work environment, principals and teachers expected the principal to have protecting support behaviors for teachers. Caring support behaviors were not expected whether the stress originated from *inside* or *outside* the work environment. (See Table 5.)

# CHAPTER 5

# SITUATION, APPLICATION, AND IMPLICATION

This chapter begins with situating the present research into the body of relevant research. This is followed by a discussion of applying what was learned in administrative practices. The chapter ends with implying the need for future research.

## Situation of the Research

There are three areas of relevant research to which this study can contribute: (a) female stress research, (b) teacher stress research, and (c) principal support research.

### *Female Stress Research*

It is possible that the findings of this research may be true for male as well as female teachers; however, only female teachers were studied, due to the findings of prior research. Research literature indicated that females tend to integrate their lives (personal and professional) to a greater extent than males, who tend to compartmentalize their lives (White, 2001). This is much the same as a female's brain tends to use both sides simultaneously, while a male may tend to use one side at the time (Bloom, Lazerson, & Hofstadter, 1985). One neurological pattern is not preferable to the other, but the patterns do appear to be different for women. Given this context, it was projected in the professional literature that all stress, whether it originated from inside or outside the work environment, was relevant to the stress experienced by the female teacher on the job. Bower (1989) looked at the effect of family circumstance on the work performance of both male and female cooperative extension agents. This was helpful because it considered the life experience outside of work to have an effect during work. Pajak and Blase

(1984) interviewed male and female teachers in bars, examining this transition strategy when going from the professional to the personal self. This work further documented the drift of stress, this time of transitioning from work to home. Leman (1987) suggested from observations in his clinical practice that women tend to carry stress from one place to another. Spielberger and Reheiser (2000) found gender differences in occupational stress. Kemp (2001) and Gilman (2002) stated that the stress factors in women are more extensive and complicated than originally perceived. The next logical step was to examine the stress transition effect from a purely female perspective, since female stress research indicates that integration between personal and professional may be stronger for females.

Female stress research (White, 2000) indicated that women carry their stress from one environment to another. The research was not tied to one occupation. The present research about female teachers only examined the effect of stress at school. The participants stated that stress from inside the school as well as stress from outside school was appropriate for principal support. This is especially true when the episodes were severe enough to affect the teacher's job performance. The results of this study contribute to the body of female stress research because it documents a fundamental understanding of the complicated picture of stress for women teachers.

*Teacher Stress Research*

Teacher stress research has focused mainly on the occupational stress factors of the job of teaching to the exclusion of other factors. The usual stressful day-to-day job of teaching was not addressed here. Blase and Blase (1998) have suggested that perhaps the best solution for the occupational problems of teaching is to empower teachers to address their day-to-day problems collectively.

It is well understood that teaching is a stressful job, as are most jobs that deal with people. Teachers are seen as totally responsible as to whether the student is safe or is not safe; does learn or does not learn; passes or does not pass. Teachers are seen as accountable to parents, their principal, the system, and the community. Everyone thinks that they know something about teaching because they were once in school themselves. Teachers are totally responsible, but not totally in control. The product of their labor is inside a messy (complicated), moving child who must regurgitate and affirm what he or she has learned on a test.

Studies on the occupational stress of teachers have focused on a group or groups of teachers rather than on the teacher individually (Rousmaniere, 1997; Cooper & Marshall, 1980; Farber, 1991). Broiles (1982) found that two constant stress factors in elementary and secondary teachers were pupil discipline and paperwork. Schonfeld (1992, 2000) studied the stress for beginning teachers, and Embich (2001) studied the stress for special education teachers. They discovered that although the stress was not higher for the subgroups, it was different. A high stress factor for beginning teachers was to survive, while the high stress factor for special education teachers was the feeling of disconnection from the general education faculty. To break it down further, stress experienced by the individual teacher may be very different from teacher to teacher. What may be perceived as stressful by one teacher may not be perceived as stressful at all by another teacher. The teacher may be stressed out one day or part of a day and then be fine the entire next day. The teacher may have several stressful episodes in a year or one or none. This research contributes the method of looking at the perception and experience of stress by the individual teacher rather than looking at the collective experience of stress by teachers.

The term *teacher stress* usually refers to the stress of teaching (the stress of the job) rather than to the stress experienced by the individual teacher on the job. This research did not

focus on the stress of the job, but rather on episodic stress of moderate or severe levels that required principal stress support for the individual teacher. As one teacher who inspired this research said, "Most of us know that teaching is a stressful job and we keep our heads above water pretty well, even if it's sloshing around our noses. It's just when that big wave comes that we feel like we're drowning." That big wave can originate from outside the school environment or inside the school environment. This research documented that teachers are affected on the job from stress originating *inside* and stress originating *outside* the work environment. The episodic stress teachers experience is out of the ordinary and is an opportunity for principals to lend stress support to individual female teachers.

*Principal Support Research*

Golembiewski and Boss (1992) found that interventions early in the progression of stress can be simple and cost effective rather than interventions later, when more complex and cost-prohibitive steps must be taken to halt the progression of stress. This research documented 65 principal support behaviors that are perceived as meaningful by teachers. The principal and the teacher are comparable to the manager and the employee in the business world. According to the present research, early and simple support is perceived as effective and helpful by both principals and teachers.

Like Schonfeld (1992, 2000), this research used episodic stress as the central focus of the stress research rather than chronic stress. Principals and teachers reported that it was only in moderate to extreme stress circumstances that they asked for principal support. Principals and teachers interviewed seemed comfortable discussing the concept of principal stress support for individual teachers. Principals and teachers talked freely about principal support for individual

teacher stress. Such support has been occurring, and to both principals and teachers seemed like a natural part of the job, but until now it has not been documented.

This gives credence to recreating the definition of how principals can provide meaningful support during episodes of teacher stress. Sixty-five separate stress behaviors were documented and were occurring long before they were documented. They are actually what principals are doing as a real part of their responsibilities. The meaning that these stress-support behaviors can have is now documented. This level of support can be quite important and can coexist with instructional support. The findings of this present research contribute strong evidence that including stress support alongside instructional support would more accurately portray the real work accomplished by an effective principal in an early childhood education setting.

## Application for Practice

### *Supporting versus Managing*

Managing people often implies that you are attempting to control people to go in a particular direction. For example, management by objectives (MBO) basically involves setting performance objectives for organizational planning (Knezevich, 1972). "Management objectives make explicit how the goal is to be accomplished," (Glickman, 1990, p. 215). When managers support employees, they are often attempting to empower people to maximize what potential they have. Effective principals can do both managing and supporting. Support often has been researched and discussed as it applied to the instructional realm. In that area, the principal gives the teacher the financial and material support she needs to get the job done in the classroom. In the same way, the principal can support the teacher during times of stress to give her the emotional support that she needs to move forward. One principal who participated in this study said of a workshop on leading school improvement:

> We never focused on the people aspect as much as we focused on what you do to manipulate and get people to follow your lead.... What [trainers] don't take into consideration are all those extraneous things that come into play when you're trying to lead change.

Perhaps, when good management practices are combined with compassionate support during times the teacher is feeling stress, the teacher is able to maximize her potential and be productive. The management is like the structure of rooms, and the support is like the furniture within the rooms to rest upon. The furniture is not much good without a room, and a room is not very livable without furniture.

*Instructional Support versus Stress Support*

There is only so much of the principal to go around. The question was asked of participating principals and teachers as to what percentage of the principal's time is ideally portioned for each type of support. The proportion was fairly balanced, with principals reporting slightly higher need of support for instruction and teachers reporting slightly higher need for support during episodes of stress. This shows that in actual practice, the principals who participated in this study are doing a great deal of stress support in the forms of protecting and caring. Both instructional support and stress support were confirmed by participants as needed in the principal support function. It was expressed by some participants that the balance of a teacher's need for instructional or stress support could vary with regard to the amount of time required of the principal … within a day, from day to day, from month to month, or from year to year. Comments were made by participants stating that the stage of a teacher's career or her current family circumstance could affect her need for instructional or stress support. All of this suggests that the stress picture for individual female teachers is complicated, and this finding is consistent with female stress research.

*Individual versus Group*

The researcher observed from her own leadership training that principals tend to be trained in a sociological orientation and are taught to think of teachers as a group rather than to be trained in a psychological orientation and to think of teachers as individuals. Two books that illustrate the sociological orientation are *The Handbook of Organization Development* (Schmuck and Runkel, 1994) and *Supervision of Instruction* (Glickman, 1990). Both psychological and sociological orientations could be presented as a balanced approach. This study found that principals are giving stress support for individual teachers in individual ways as well as giving stress support to the group of teachers in group ways. One of the criteria for a principal to be selected to be part of this research was that the principal had an outstanding reputation of being generally supportive of teachers. It could be that principals who are generally supportive teachers are open to being individually supportive of a teacher.

When a teacher is having an episode of stress that does not apply to other teachers, the principal could be equipped with a repertoire of actions to give individual support. For example, in this research, teachers reported 15 separate principal stress-support behaviors that indicated that the principal was listening. Principals need to know what those behaviors are and incorporate those behaviors into a working repertoire for selection. The principal may in fact be listening but not communicating to the teacher that listening is occurring. Listening is one indication of caring, and in this research, caring behaviors generated twice as much meaning for teachers as protecting behaviors, although protecting was a deal breaker contract.

The repertoire of stress-support strategies could be greatly expanded for principals past the 65 separate behaviors that were identified by principals and teachers during this research. This list could serve as a beginning for discussion and interaction with other principals in

training. One principal said that a training session the principal had attended on individual stress presented by a psychologist had been helpful in learning to identify and cope with stress personally, so that the principal had become sensitized to recognizing stress in individual teachers. Several principals mentioned that instruction and discussion led by a psychologist would have been helpful in their principal training. School systems could add this to their staff development plans for principals.

Several principals and teachers suggested that groups of prospective principals be given scenarios of situations requiring individual stress support and have to come up with strategies to help in those situations. The principal's choice and implementation could then be discussed by the class. It was suggested that a panel of experienced principals would be helpful in this exercise or that the panel of experienced principals could answer questions by the class, who would propose their own scenarios.

One teacher said that sometimes a lot of support is needed and at other times no support is needed. She said that principals need to know that sometimes "life comes down in big chunks." It may be that within one year one teacher may require an out-of-the-ordinary amount of stress support in relation to the needs of the total group of teachers.

*Teacher Training*

Teachers need to know how to work with principals successfully in episodic stress situations. Teachers need to be educated as to the range of possible principal stress-support behaviors for episodic stress. Sixty-five separate principal stress-support behaviors were identified in this research, and that number is only the beginning of the discussion.

Teachers could be given examples of timing in requesting the need for stress support, with examples given of the efficacy of informing the principal sooner being better than

informing the principal later. Several teachers mentioned the importance of keeping the principal *informed* when the teacher might have to leave the job suddenly or might be under unusual stress to the point of the stress possibly affecting her on the job. Teachers could discuss ways to approach the principal and practice presenting their problems in constructive ways. Several teachers remarked that the manner in which the principal is approached should be professional, but at the same time, teachers should have the assurance that is it perfectly appropriate and part of a principal's job to be supportive of teachers. One principal and one teacher mentioned including this declaration that teachers are expected and welcomed to come to the principal when they need support in the faculty handbook. Teachers could tell principals the meaning that their stress support has for them and also think of reciprocally supporting their principal when the principal experiences an episode of stress.

There were many participants who had been mentors. One teacher reported that she, as a mentor, had set up weekly visitations with the principal to desensitize the new teachers to going to the principal. The mentor knew that the mentee would need to go to the principal someday; so she rehearsed the new teacher for a time that would surely come.

Another teacher suggested that prospective teachers be trained to closely scrutinize the principal for compatibility and support possibilities when they interview for a faculty position. The principal's knowledge about what she would teach and harmony of educational philosophies were mentioned as good indicators of compatibility. Listening skills, how the teacher was positioned for conversation in the principal's office, interest in the potential teacher as a person, and how the principal interacted with students were all mentioned as good indicators of a supportive principal.

## Implication for Future Research

New directions for future research were indicated in many areas. Perspectives on the prevalence of supportive principals versus nonsupportive principals could be collected on a broad scale. An in-depth study could be made of principal support for stress within one school. Principals and teachers involved could be observed and interviewed in real-time stress situations that they shared. Other educational levels could be studied in the same qualitative way as the elementary level. A whole small school system could be studied in the same manner, incorporating the elementary, middle, and high school levels to see what differences there were in principal support for episodes of stress at varying levels. School systems could be compared for levels of principal support.

Principal support for instruction or stress could be studied with a larger sample to obtain a broader base of opinion. The principal support (instructional support and stress support) could be studied as to how it might vary with one teacher across time: within a day, within a year, or within her career. The number of stress episodes affecting the teacher on the job could be tabulated per teacher during a school year. The stress episodes could be noted as originating from inside or outside the school environment that affect the teacher on the job. The profession of teaching could be compared with other professional, people-oriented occupations according to descriptions of stress-support behaviors given by managers.

The path of stress could be studied from the teacher to the child and the reciprocal effect of the child to the teacher. The path of support or stress could be studied from the superintendent to the principal to the teacher to the child. The stress flow from school to home and in reverse could be studied. The family of procreation's (the teacher's family after marriage or other support) effect on moderating the stress of teachers could be studied. The importance of follow-

up and the process of stress support could be studied. The effect of stress originating from community responsibilities of teachers could be studied. The family of orientation's (the principal's family when a child) effect on the principal as far as support skills and attitudes could be studied. Other training and experiences that contributed to the people skills of supportive principals could be documented. Supportive and nonsupportive principals could be correlated with the test scores of their schools.

The method of the study could be replicated so that the individual's perspectives are emphasized more than the averages of opinions and comments. Teacher stress research could have a new area of teacher stress research: the individual teacher in individual situations rather than *teachers* as a generalized category. Although the focus of the study was principal support for episodes of stress, general support for stress flooded around the focus. It can be reasonably inferred that principals who are known to be generally supportive of teachers will be actually supportive of individual teachers in episodic stress situations.

*Policy Making*

If excessive stress, distress, can be debilitating (Selye, 1974), then the greatest productivity cannot be obtained from a teacher experiencing moderate to severe stress on the job. Policy makers always want a productive return on the resources they invest for the people. Policy makers could accept principals including individual stress support for teachers as well as individual instructional support for teachers in documenting implementation of plans for school improvement and productivity.

Policy makers should also consider removing the principal from evaluating his or her own teachers. One teacher suggested that principals could trade evaluating each other's teachers within a system grouping, so as to facilitate teachers going to their principal for stress support

and individual development as a teacher. Removing the evaluative aspect could facilitate the supportive aspect. It could break up the codependent relationship of the "no news is good news" undercurrent. In this situation, the teacher does not want the nonsupportive principal to find out her shortcomings, and the nonsupportive principal does not want to find out either because then it would be a situation that required addressing and mean more work. In the new suggested paradigm, the principal and teacher could work together to have her perform well when evaluated by another principal. Both the principal and teacher would, in this case, have a vested interest in floating all debris to the top, where it could be addressed.

When asked directly if increased loyalty would result from the principal's stress-support behaviors of individual teachers, all of the principals and teachers interviewed answered positively, except one principal who remarked, "Maybe, but people tend to have short memories." One of the teachers remarked, "I'll never leave [this school]." Another teacher said, "I'm not going anywhere." And a third teacher said, "I've just stayed where I feel comfortable." When there are teacher shortages, it may be advantageous to the state to retain teachers at their present school. This loyalty to the school (or principal) may also translate into giving extra time on the job or taking fewer days off of the job. In the first case, one principal reported a teacher happily working late and in the second case, a teacher reported coming to school even when she did not feel like coming, because she felt so good about how the principal regarded her. The researcher observed teachers being interviewed working extra days in the summer without compensation. When the chips were down for each teacher who chose to work extra hours, her principal had been there for her ... *protecting* and *caring*.

## Summary Statement

The problem was that much great work in individual stress support was being done routinely by principals, and these behaviors had not been documented. Principals were working outside the box of instructional support, the only support for which they got credit. Now principals have some credit, and other principals have their support behaviors to examine for their own. Principals have a glimpse at the meaning that these stress-support behaviors have for teachers. Teachers reading this research may have a better idea of what a supportive principal can be like and how they can contribute to a supportive relationship with their principal. Differences in expectations, orientations, and opinions between principals and teachers have been highlighted.

Utilizing female stress research and business management research has been helpful in directing the research and in understanding what is appropriate to be done. The researcher hopes that teacher stress research will continue in the direction of the individual teacher, that episodic stress will remain a research area, and that definitions will be expanded for both *teacher stress* and *principal support* to reflect more accurately the teacher's experience and what principals are doing in practice. If one principal who has not done so before supports one teacher in an individual way when she is having an episode of stress, and that teacher goes on to be productive and more satisfied within the profession, then this work has not been in vain.

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# APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS

How do you decide if you are going to take supportive action when a teacher is having an episode of stress? _____

How do you find out that a teacher is having an episode of stress?_____

Tell me about a time when you supported a teacher who was having an episode of stress. The stress could have originated from inside or outside the work environment.

Description of episode: ___time ___place ___others involved ___severity of stress (1-10)

Origin of stress: ___inside work environment ___outside work environment

What were you able to do?

Actions of the principal: _____

What did this mean to you? _____

Effects on principal's: ___actions ___beliefs ___values ___overall effectiveness

What kinds of things do you think are appropriate for a principal to do when a teacher is having an episode of stress?_____

Speaking about the profession, what do you think *principals* should know about supporting a teacher when she is having an episode of stress?_____

Speaking about the profession, what do you think *teachers* should know about principals supporting a teacher when she is having an episode of stress?_____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

How do you decide if you want the principal to know that you are having an episode of stress?_____

How do you let the principal know that you are having an episode of stress?_____

Tell me about a time at school when you were having an episode of stress and the principal did something supportive for you. The stress could have originated from inside or outside the work environment.

Description of episode: ___time ___place ___others involved ___severity of stress (1-10)

Origin of stress: ___inside work environment ___outside work environment

What did the principal do?

Actions of the principal: _____ How did this affect you?_____

Effects on: __behavior __emotions __cognition __physical __classroom effectiveness

What kinds of things do you think are appropriate for a principal to do when a teacher is having an episode of stress?_____

Speaking about the profession, what do you think *principals* should know about supporting a teacher when she is having an episode of stress?_____

Speaking about the profession, what do you think *teachers* should know about principals supporting a teacher when she is having an episode of stress?_____

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions to clarify from first interview:

Name of college(s) for training:_____

Years in education_____ Years at school_____ Tenure_____ Mentor_____ Grade Level_____

Married_____ Children_____ For principals, how many years as a principal?_____

For teachers, do you think principals need support for episodes of stress?_____

For principals, would you consider a teacher's stress level when making extra assignments?____

What % of elementary principals do you think are supportive principals?_____

Do you think that principal support for a teacher's episode of stress inspires loyalty?_____

Please comment on the following related to principal support for a teacher's episode of stress:

Male or Female gender of principal_____

Inside or Outside work environment source_____

Fit of principal support/total context of school support_____

Administrative team versus principal as support_____

Nonverbal forms of principal support_____

The follow-through for stress support_____

Fairness issue for teachers_____

Isolation in elementary classroom_____

Stress trickle down to children_____

Feeling calm and the effectiveness of teaching_____

Please mark the proportion (%) of principal support needed: instructional……...stress.

You will now have two reaction scenarios described to you that have different origins of stress. In the first scenario, the stress origin will be from inside the work environment (IWE) and then in the second scenario, the stress origin will be from outside the work environment (OWE). In each case, describe what the principal could do to support the teacher during her episode of stress.

IWE

In this case, a child has gotten upset in the classroom. He has really lost it and can't settle down. He is not a special education child, but he has a history of acting out. Nothing the teacher did seemed to help. Classroom instruction has been shut down. It has all been very upsetting to the teacher. She takes the child to the office to see the principal. What can the principal do that would support the teacher in handling the stress that the teacher is feeling in this situation?

OWE

In this case, there has been a death in a teacher's immediate or close family. The teacher doesn't find out about it at school, but she comes by or phones the principal to let the principal know what has happened. What can the principal do that would support the teacher in handling the stress that the teacher is feeling in this situation?

# APPENDIX D

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' AND TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPAL SUPPORT DURING EPISODES OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHER STRESS" conducted by Deborah Jaudon Mathews from the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia (542-3343) under the direction of Dr. Jo Blase, Department of Educational Leadership, University of Georgia (542-3343). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to find out what principal support behaviors are occurring in relation to individual female teacher stress episodes and what these behaviors mean to principals and teachers.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:
1) Be interviewed in person about principal support behaviors in regard to stress, which will take 30-60 minutes.
2) Agree to a follow up interview which will be conducted in the same manner 4-6 weeks later.
3) Agree to keep notes on principal support behaviors in regard to stress that happen in the intervening time period between the initial and follow up interviews.
4) Agree for audiotapes to be made of the interviews.
5) Agree that transcriptions will be made from the audiotapes for analysis. Tapes will be erased immediately after transcription. Transcriptions will be destroyed after the dissertation is accepted.

I will receive no compensation for participation in this study other than the researcher's gratitude. The benefits to me are that positive principal support behaviors during episodes of individual female teacher stress will be documented along with the meaning these behaviors have for principals and teachers.

No risk is expected since the purpose of this research is to document positive principal support behaviors. No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except the dissertation advisor, the transcriptionist, and in the case it is required by law. I will be assigned an identifying code and this code will be used in all transcriptions and in the dissertation.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of this research project (478-474-5388).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Deborah Jaudon Mathews<br>Telephone: 478-474-5388<br>jaudon419@aol.com | | |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

**Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.**

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.