

CARTER, SANDRA EFIRD, Ed.D. *Life Story of a Reluctant Leader (Identity Formation in Educational Leadership)* (2007)
Directed by Dr. Kathleen Casey. 147 pp.

The purpose of this study is to offer insight into the life of one ordinary person whose leadership persona exhibits both reluctance and confidence in varying educational settings. By presenting this woman's life story, I show the influence that culture, social experiences, and family traditions play in developing a person's leadership abilities as well as the role of compassion and reflection in the development of leadership qualities.

My research question is why this person exhibits both reluctance and self-confidence in different settings. The narrator in this study is a third grade veteran teacher of twenty-eight years. During 2007, I collected and analyzed this woman's life story in a rural North Carolina community. In conducting narrative analysis, I used selectivity, slippage, silence, intertextuality, and subjectivity to analyze her life story (Casey, 1993; Casey, 1995 -1996).

What I learned from this study is that compassion and reflection are components in leadership. The narrator exhibits leadership when she is compassionate about her topic, which promotes confidence in herself. The narrator's reflection was a powerful tool in gaining self-awareness and promoting confidence.

Future educational leaders as well as teacher and administrative induction programs will benefit from this study by providing narrative dialogue and reflection opportunities to seek leadership strengths within potential educational leaders.

LIFE STORY OF A RELUCTANT LEADER
(IDENTITY FORMATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP)

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2007

Approved by

Committee Chair

To my husband, Tony, and my children, Ashley, Matthew and Lindsey; thank you for supporting me with love and encouragement throughout this journey. I couldn't have completed this study without you.

To my mother and father, Doris and Roy, thank you for your love and for giving me strong family traditions. They have been my map through life.

To Karen Cole, you are a very special teacher, leader and friend.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude and many thanks goes to Dr. Kathleen Casey, my dissertation advisor, who gave many hours, including her Sunday afternoons, to guide and encourage me along my dissertation path.

Along with Dr. Casey, I also wish to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Lashley, Dr. Reitzug, and Dr. Gause, for your support as well as for an enlightening educational journey at UNCG.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Deciding to complete my doctoral studies with a research project rooted in the development of educational leadership seemed simple. After all, I'm a late bloomer. I've had years of experience in rearing three children (now adults themselves) along with a marriage of twenty-nine years. My career path has allowed me experience as an elementary classroom teacher, a high school assistant principal, and, currently, a middle school principal. Combined, I am a veteran of thirteen years in public education.

Throughout my forty-nine years of life experiences, I have become compassionate for the underdog. I root for the person who struggles to overcome obstacles, the child who carries more burdens than many adults and their ongoing plight to fight the odds. It is my Rocky Balboa mentality that steered me to this study. This is why I chose the subject of my dissertation.

Leadership is not easily described. It is a complex occurrence that involves a guiding person, supporters, and is determined by the circumstance. I became even more aware of the complexity of leadership during this study.

Within my research, I studied many dimensions of leadership. Based upon Karen Cole's (pseudonym) beliefs, I call attention to four dimensions of

leadership: The Moral Leader; The Caring Leader; The Spiritual Leader; and The Servant Leader.

I have learned that the dimension of the Caring Leader is concerned for others. Karen Cole is concerned for her students and colleagues. She builds a relationship with others and develops a *connected environment*. Educational leaders must operate in an atmosphere where relationships are fostered and where each person feels *cared for* (Grogan, 1998, p. 26). I believe Karen's heart-felt concern for people and their feelings of self esteem come from the social and cultural traditions from her life experiences.

The dimension of the Servant Leader evolves around the theory that true leadership comes from serving others (Greenleaf, 2003; Blanchard & Miller, 2004). Karen Cole was immersed in a childhood culture of neighbors helping neighbors. It is this embedded philosophy that Karen brings with her in the educational setting. Whether it is mentoring novice teachers, providing staff development, or advocating for a student, she is a teacher and leader who serves others.

I have learned that the dimension of the Spiritual Leader allows Karen to apply meaning to her life (Soloman & Hunter, 2002). To Karen, meaning comes from her faith in God. She was raised with a strong conviction for *God and kin*. She has compassion for her beliefs and when others are in need, Karen prays.

The dimension of the Moral Leader promotes the values and ethics in society. "They walk the talk, practice what they preach, and expect everyone

else to do likewise” (Gardner, as cited in Duffy, 2006, p. 137). Karen believes through a moral curriculum that every person should be treated with dignity, respect, fairness, and honesty. She reflects this desire through her daily actions.

What I have learned from this study is that Karen is compassionate. She is compassionate about her strong beliefs in God; in serving others; in promoting equity and dignity within others; and in letting others know that she cares. Her compassion has been the seed to her confidence, her confidence as a teacher and her confidence as a leader.

Myself as Researcher

Lessons Learned From Early Years

“Family values are the core of who I am.”

I was raised in a southern culture where church, family, and community were central to my life. Growing up in the North Carolina foothills of a small farming community, my childhood during the 1960's, had its advantages and disadvantages. I recall several memories that bring forth a host of emotions as to the struggles that my parents endured in an effort to maintain our family values.

My father was the sole provider. Yes, we lived on a small farm where we raised livestock and crops; however, in the hard economic times, it was impossible to live on the income of a small farm. As a result, my father also earned an honest living by working at a local lumber company.

It was at such an early age that I learned the value of responsibility. It was a responsibility not only for chores on the farm, it was to my family. Only until later years, did I recognize the influence these chores made in my life. I learned responsibility at an early age that would carry not only into my family, but eventually into my career of educational leadership.

Even though we worked diligently during the week, I still recall the Saturday evening rituals where I would sit in front of our black and white television set, usually watching The Lawrence Welk Show, as my mother rolled my hair for Sunday morning church. I would spend the rest of the evening helping my mother prepare for Sunday lunch.

Even though my family regularly ate our weekday dinners together, Sunday lunch was special. It wasn't just the meal, it was the time we spent together as a family after church. These are examples of the family traditions that were the focus of my childhood.

Growing up, everyone at church seemed to be my family. At our community church, I heard stories of how my great-great grandparents settled in the county and established the small German heritage church. As a child, I never realized how valuable the simple things, such as having a family meal together, going to church each Sunday, and chores on the farm, would influence my beliefs as an adult. These experiences formed the moral curriculum for my childhood and throughout my life.

Lessons Learned from Formal Education

“I didn’t know how lucky I was.”

My first day in elementary school was exciting. I loved the sight of the yellow school bus, the thrill of walking into the schoolhouse, and most of all, the smell of the new school supplies; a smell that was akin to Christmas in my memories. My parents had taught me so much before I formally began school; honesty, hard work, and respect for others.

My mother’s strong value of education played an important part in my elementary school years. In the evenings, she would prepare dinner while calling out spelling words, checking math, or listening to me read Dick, Jane and Spot books.

By high school, I had gained a greater awareness of my sense of self. I had a wonderful business teacher who suggested that I pursue my newly found idea to become a teacher. Even though high school was a joyous time in my life, my mother was always close at hand to patiently listen when I rambled on about some new teenager woe. As always, she listened and we talked, while doing something creative together such as canning vegetables, baking, or sewing. Reflecting back, I didn’t realize the *therapy* that my mother gave was a way of gaining confidence in myself, my character, and my sense of worth. “Self-esteem is the basis of any real democracy” (Steinem, 1992).

Lessons Learned from Independence

“My strong sense of family emerges in adulthood.”

As with most high school seniors, I couldn't wait to be on my own after graduation. Even though I loved my family dearly, I was ready to become a *girl of the world* in a university that was one and one-half hours from home. It took less than a month at college for my worldly visions to become dampened by homesickness. While my parents talked to me about the privilege of being in college, I wanted to go home. I lasted one year at college before insisting it wasn't for me.

Maturity followed after I left college. Looking back, my parents showed me *tough love* by not allowing me to completely move back home. My mother valued education and strongly insisted that I continue with some track in earning a higher degree. As a result, I subsequently enrolled in a community business college. Years later, as my high school friends graduated from four year universities and entered their professional careers, the value of education became clearer to me. Even though I clandestinely longed to be a teacher, I was happily married and expecting our first child within the year.

As with most young married families, we had our trials and tribulations. During these years, my husband and I reared three children. I felt that I had neither the patience of my mother nor the kindheartedness of my father; however, we managed to provide a family lifestyle that was as similar as possible

to those of my childhood. As the years swished by, we created our own sense of family values.

Lesson Plans

“My dormant dream came true.”

As my children entered elementary school, I also became active at school. I joined the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and became a classroom *mom*. The more I volunteered at school, the more a desire came to surface. As I saw the measurable variety in children, and their reflective home lives, I wanted to do more than volunteer, I wanted to teach.

What followed was a rush of reminiscences that came to the surface. Why didn't I finish college? What had I accomplished in my life? I wanted to do more. At school, I had observed many children in our rural community whose home life was mirrored in their low sense of self. It seemed as if I was receiving a calling. “A sense of vocation or calling must be nurtured on a consistent basis” (Brubaker, 2004).

These thoughts brought strongly forward my desire to return to college and become a teacher. This concealed desire, or sense of efficacy, I pondered several weeks before revealing it to my family. “It is the power of a dream of what is desirable and possible to accomplish” (Brubaker, 2004).

Three years later I fulfilled my dream. As a teacher my mission was to educate to the best of my ability. In doing so, I would use my moral curriculum,

while instilling valued character traits such as honesty, respect, and perseverance. These were the same traits that were embedded in me as a child. “Your journey through life, whether 20 years or 60 years, is in part characterized by learning history that tremendously impacts that uniqueness with which you were born” (McGraw, 2001).

Life’s Lessons: Shaping Who I Am

“My work ethics and determination are a reflection of my childhood experiences.”

After thirteen years in education, my relentlessness to teaching character traits, whether in the role of teacher or administrator, remains steadfast. Stemming from the values taught by my parents, I emphasize opportunities for students to express their concerns, respect differing opinions, and to make democratic decisions. These are values taught to me as a child and I feel it is my duty to teach others in our small, rural community.

Even more crucial is my hope that students gain a stronger sense of self-worth in themselves; a confidence that will become embedded in their emerging sense of self. Thinking about my hope for students, I reflect on a message from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “King believed that hope is indispensable but it must be accompanied by a realistic assessment of the situation, hard work and the giving of whatever resources that are at our disposal in order to meet our goals and our vision for self and the organization” (Brubaker, 1999).

As an administrator, I continue to emulate the same values taught in my earlier days as a classroom teacher. Whether a person is elementary school age or retirement age, respect, fairness, perseverance, and equity in education cut through all age barriers. These character traits are at the core of my existence as I work with colleagues, parents, and students from diverse cultures, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Gained from my life experiences of *God and kin* southern traditions, the significance of these values, these character traits, these work ethics, express who I am and the stance I take as a contributing member of our democratic society. These are the experiences that I carry with me as an educational leader and as a researcher.

CHAPTER II

THE RELUCTANT LEADER

Leadership: A Lonely Existence

Alone

*Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone,*

*Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know*

*Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
‘Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
-Maya Angelou, 1975*

Educational leadership is a lonely existence in a public place. It is an isolated mental state where diverse perspectives are evaluated and internal struggles are confronted; it's a place where a person's belief systems and philosophies are placed on the front line; a place where visions take shape. As leaders seek to provide direction and purpose to the educational setting through their *lenses*, my struggle with understanding educational leadership emerges.

Each person reveals belief systems and philosophies based upon their particular experiences. These *experiences* are not limited to formal schooling; I also refer to the life experiences that are unique to the individual in shaping their leadership traits. These experiences could possibly include elements of triumphs, tragedies, and traumas in a person's social and cultural life. My belief system in *God and kin* is cultivated from my past experiences and influence my current beliefs as an educational leader.

What influence do these many elements, these *informal schooling* experiences, have in defining a person's leadership abilities? These

experiences are the basis of my research.

As the words of Maya Angelou ring out, “Nobody, but nobody can make it out here alone,” I reflect on the life story of a former colleague whose nurturing and altruistic life has influenced so many people. As a twenty-eight year veteran in education, this soft-spoken, apparently submissive, elementary school teacher has a never-ending devotion to her students and concern for her peers that daily shines as bright as a beacon.

Giving direction and hope, her determination to make a difference in education is apparent to anyone who enters her classroom surroundings. It is this nurturing persona, with fortitude and humility combined, that brings teachers and administrators to her door at the end of each day. Her strength radiates clearly to her colleagues, but seemingly remains in darkness to herself.

She was neither born into a family of proclaimed educators nor to a family of modest means. Her life story travels a dusty road of hurdles and bruises, dotted with potholes of happiness and sorrow, but more importantly, she travels a forked road of choices. It is at the beginning of her long, arduous journey that her life story begins.

Who is the Reluctant Leader?

The narrator in this study is a third grade veteran teacher of twenty-eight years. For nine years this teacher and I, as colleagues, worked in the same school setting spending numerous hours with the multitude of teacher

responsibilities. On a daily basis I observed her decision-making abilities and fortitude during instruction in the classroom setting. Without a doubt, I witnessed first-hand, in the classroom surrounding of students, the same vision and determination that is exhibited in my ideology of self-assured leaders.

Outside of the classroom, I also observed her continuous giving of time to colleagues who sparked up quick conversations or stopped by her classroom to borrow a book or seek other tidbits of information. Without hesitation, she offered advice and guidance, educational materials, pats on the back, and warm, motherly smiles. As I reflect on my experiences, rarely do I recall a conversation not ending with this teacher's praise of her colleague's expertise in education.

I believe that selflessness and humility are character traits that are assets in an educational setting. Novice teachers as well as experienced educators often become overly occupied in the daily demands of education, such as paper work, deadlines, planning lessons, conferences, meetings, and other duties outside the classroom walls that can lead to a stressful and very often cantankerous nature. Through the unconscious behaviors of many educators, such as those of this *reluctant leader*, I am reminded of the influence that a warm, caring attitude has on the well-being and disposition of coworkers.

As her colleague, I was blind-sided to the school-level leadership traits that were hidden within this educator. It was not until I transferred to another school as an assistant principal, and moved out of the picture, that I reflected on the leadership capabilities of this educator. My reflection included instances,

such as staff meetings, parent meetings, or meetings involving a larger adult audience, that I observed a more reserved, reluctant person; one that was silent, passive, and seemed hesitant to assist in making school-level decisions. This is the same person whose demeanor reflected direction and purpose within the confines of the hallway or her classroom walls. It is the same person who provided comfort and pats-on-the-back to staff members on an on-going basis. Why does this teacher appear to be a self-confident leader in one setting yet a reluctant leader in other situations?

Based upon my reflections, I want to better understand this teacher's identity formation throughout her life as it relates to educational leadership. "Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). From dialogue with this teacher, I have learned of numerous hurdles and hardships in her history. It is a stone soup seasoned with family bonds, gender and social biases and flavored with elements of hope, failure and resilience. It is this teacher's life story that I would like to better understand as it molds her leadership traits. Elaborating on the relevance of life stories, Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) write:

How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned.
-as cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 2

The Purpose of the Study

Throughout the years, I have observed various leadership positions in the public school setting. Leadership, in this study, is not confined solely to managerial, administrative leadership, such as principal, district level director, or superintendent. Leadership within the school positions which I refer range from classroom teacher to media specialist to school counselor. As an experienced elementary school teacher, I have observed a spectrum of leadership traits. Typically, my reflections have stereotyped leadership as self-assured, empowered individuals who take charge and radiate assertiveness. Often in the public school setting, it is the self-assured leader whose vision is seen, and whose voice is heard. Nevertheless, I have also witnessed a reluctant leader.

In the classroom setting and informal settings with colleagues, this teacher exhibits strong, self-confident leadership; however, she displays hesitation and reluctance in more formal school-based or county-based meetings with colleagues and administrators. A common thread, however, is her ability to promote encouragement and support to those around her. The purpose of this study, however, is to examine the life story of this empowered leader, this nurturing leader, this reluctant leader.

Through her personal narrative, I show the role that cultural and social experiences play in developing a person's leadership abilities as well as the role that humility, submissiveness, and selflessness play in creating a nurturing and caring educational setting. As a result of this study, I have gained a clearer

understanding as to why she exhibits both reluctance and self-confidence in a leadership position.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Leadership

Leadership is not easily defined. It is a complex occurrence between a person, the followers or supporters, and is determined by the situation. Leadership researchers have defined leadership from varying positions, such as personality, relationships, and behaviors of a leader as well as how life situations mold a potential leader.

The many definitions of leadership include the following:

The process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner (Bennis, 1959).

Directing and coordinating the work of group members (Fiedler, 1967).

An interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to (Merton, 1969).

Transforming followers, creating visions of the goals that may be attained, and articulating for the followers the ways to attain those goals (Bass, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986).

The process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals (Roach & Behling, 1984).

Actions that focus resources to create desirable opportunities (Campbell, 1991).

The leader's job is to create conditions for the team to be effective (Ginnett, 1996).

The ends of leadership involve getting results through others, and the means of leadership involve the ability to build cohesive, goal-oriented teams. Good leaders are those who build teams to get results across a variety of situations (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994).

-as cited in Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2006, p. 6

Other researchers, such as Duffy (2006, p. xii) define leadership as a continually changing role, where the responsibility of leader and followers is being transformed. Through this transformation, leaders can learn less vocal and more collaborative and cooperative qualities.

Authors of *5 Essential Skills for School Leaders: Moving from Good to Great* indicate that "successful leadership" for changing schools must possess the following five skills: (1) the ability to be insightful, (2) positive, strong interpersonal skills (including ability to delegate), (3) continually seeks self-growth, (4) is willing to be flexible, and (5) maintains in touch with the community (Langley & Jacobs, 2006). "Effective leadership also means having the ability to make an organization stretch to a higher level" (Langley & Jacobs, 2006, p. 17). According to the authors, the outcome from continually applying these skills will result in successful leaders, and hence, successful students.

Another defining quality of effective leadership is being astute to change based upon society's needs. According to Freire, educational models must change where new roles take place; where the leaders are learners; and where the students are student-teachers. This educational model promotes *authentic*

reflection as it examines people in relation to the world (2004, p. 81).

Educational leadership centered in reflection and action is necessary for change, necessary for meaningful dialogue. “Human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (2004, p. 88).

According to Bolman and Deal, “Wise and effective leadership is more important than ever, but it requires a complex array of lenses to distinguish traps and dead ends from promising opportunities” (1993, p. 31).

There are also models that define leadership. The most visible model of standards for leaders is the 1996 *Interstate School Leaders Consortium Standards* (ISLLC), developed under the guidance of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with personnel from 24 state agencies across the country. The intent of these standards is to “present a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances that will help link leadership more forcefully to productive schools and enhanced educational outcomes” (CCSSO, 1996, p. iii).

The six standards address a leader’s connection to vision, school culture, operational management, community, ethics, and collaboration with the larger political and social context. Each standard begins, “A school administrator is an educational leader who . . . ,” indicating a formal school leader, such as principal or assistant principal, should also be an educational leader.

Other researchers view postmodern leadership skills as effective and meaningful when viewed through the lenses of four paradigms: justice, critique, care and profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 6). Even though each paradigm is viewed as having equal importance, when utilized by leaders there is often a combination of the varying paradigms, such as with the ethic of care and the ethic of justice.

With the many descriptive definitions of leadership available in research, my starting point of study is a basic definition of leadership. For the purpose of my research, leadership is defined as a person's ability to influence others for a desired result.

With the numerous descriptions of leadership, I have increasingly come to realize the complex dimensions of leadership. Which theories of leadership can help us understand the narrative of the teacher who is the focus of my research? One way to understand Karen Cole (pseudonym) is the discussion of the formation of leadership.

The Formation of the Leadership Identity

The core of our existence, our beliefs, values, goals and commitments, changes during the course of a lifetime. We are continually, developmentally spiraling from socialization by our families, who we meet, and the paths we take during the course of our lifetime (Curry, 2000, p. 27). It is through a person's values, beliefs and goals that leadership decisions evolve. As I show elsewhere

throughout the dissertation, Karen Cole and I have values and beliefs rooted in our southern culture and traditions of *God and kin*. These elements (values, beliefs and goals), even though not the only fundamental elements in our presence, influence our decision-making throughout life (Curry, 2000, p. 22). Both Karen Cole and I have developed identities based upon our respective experiences in life.

Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one's meaning to oneself and one's meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life.

Identity is also a way of preserving the continuity of self, linking the past and the present. In its essence, identity becomes a means by which people organize and understand their experiences and share their meaning systems with others. What we choose to value and deprecate, our system of ethics – these form our sense of identity.
-Josselson, 1990, p. 10

In a three-year study of identity formation in eight women leaders, Curry noted a common thread in each person's story. Each person's leadership persona emerged from early life experiences. She indicated that significant adolescence experiences relayed by the women were not *leadership experiences* but each had constructed meanings of life experiences that cultivated adaptive approaches to their current leadership abilities (2000, p. 42).

Additional research connecting life experiences and leadership determined that challenges embedded in unexpected hardships were a key element in the

development of leadership. As with Karen Cole, she endured hardships throughout her life. The *hard knocks* aided in forming her leadership persona. “Often it is when leaders experience a personal hardship that they learn the importance of sensitivity toward others, become more aware of the fears and hopes of others, and decide to be more vulnerable” (Moxley & Pulley, 2003, p. 14).

Dimensions of Leadership

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss in some detail, theories of leadership that are particularly relevant in the case of Karen Cole. For the purpose of my research, I include the Caring Leader, the Servant Leader, the Spiritual Leader, and the Moral Leader.

The Caring Leader

*The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis,
but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for,
and deserted by everybody.*

-Mother Theresa (as cited in Beck, 1992)

According to the seminal work of Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring* (1971), the goal of caring is human growth and development. “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (as cited in Beck, 1992, p. 456). A person who cares does not demand a relationship of intimacy, rather, they honor the person’s dignity and hope for the person’s

enjoyment in life (Staratt, 1991, p. 185). Both Karen Cole and I were reared in cultural traditions of strong family and community bonds. We knew that others *cared* for our well-being and success in life.

Other research, such as Hollway's social policy literature divides *care* into two bodies of study: the *ethics of care* (caring about) and secondly, *care as an activity* (caring for) (2006, p. 4). The *ethics of care* (caring about) is often associated with women's oppression through feminist research such as the writings of Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984), Shakeshaft (1987), Collins (2000) and Curry (2000). *Care as an activity* involves the physical actions involved in caring for someone or something.

“Caring about” which involves social dispositions that operate at a personal level and assume a relationship between the carer and cared for, and “caring for” which involves the actual practice of caring, involving specific tasks such as lifting, cleaning and cooking, and does not necessarily relate to caring about.

-Skeggs, 1997, p. 67

Care as an activity is a crucial component for all personnel in the educational setting, such as overseeing children's safety, as well as the nutritional and physical needs of students while under the school employees' supervision. *Caring about* someone can motivate a caring action. Therefore, *caring about* is causal to *care as an activity*. For example, after conferences and observations, an educational leader may *care about* the well-being of an overstressed novice teacher. As a result, the educational leader may seek

workshops for first-year teachers or seek a cohort of novice teachers for on-going communication with the new teacher (care as an activity).

Caring about involves building relationships between the *carer* and the *cared*. The relationship between the *carer* and the *cared* is essential in a caring environment. Noddings, in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), places relationships as crucial in caring. According to Noddings, “Taking *relation* (emphasis added) as ontologically basic simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence. As we examine what it means to care and to be cared for, we shall see that both parties contribute to the relation; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring” (1984, p. 4). Educational leaders who operate in an environment where relationships are absent, will find themselves alone in a disconnected environment. Children cannot learn and prosper in a disconnected environment (Grogan, 1998, p. 26).

Noddings further contends that the connection of care (the relationship) between two people is also linked to their realization of “living fully as a person” (1984, p. 35). Through her research, Noddings describes a caring interaction and its enhancement of a person’s own self:

When I care . . . there is more than feeling; there is a motivational shift. My motive energy flows toward the other and perhaps, although not necessarily, toward his ends. I do not relinquish myself; I cannot excuse myself for what I

do. But I allow my motive energy to be shared; I put it at the service of the other.

It is clear that my vulnerability is potentially increased when I care, for I can be hurt through the other as well as through myself. But my strength and hope are also increased, for if I am weakened, this other, which is part of me, may remain strong and insistent. – Noddings, 1984, p. 33

The caring interaction thus precedes a caring action. “Our reasons for acting, thus have to do with the other’s wants and desires and with the objective elements of his problematic situation” (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). Noddings’ pointing out the objective element in a caring relationship is especially beneficial for educational leaders who consider both the subjective and the objective dimensions of leadership. “Effective administrators will consider both the subjective and objective dimensions and will formulate responses that recognize personal needs and situational and contextual demands as well as more overarching rules and principals” (Beck, 1992, p. 458).

Also noting the importance of care and connection in schools is Jane Martin’s *The Schoolhome* (1992). According to Martin, in addition to teaching the 3 R’s (academic curriculum), students must also be taught the 3 C’s: care, concern, and connection. In view of society’s demands for higher standards and test scores, educational leaders often leave to the wayside the motivational *whole child* aspect of education such as caring and concern for others as well as connecting/building relationships.

Martin's contends that *schoolhouse* denotes work/production as the outcome of education. This can be evidenced by the push for increased achievement testing, benchmarks, and other outputs to determine success. The coined term *schoolhome* places as additional emphasis on building relationships and creating a caring environment beyond output. (Dodd, 2000). "The first job of the schools is to care for our children. Caring is the very bedrock of all successful education . . ." (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 16).

Carol Gilligan (1982) also stresses that an ethic of care is a necessary underpinning for all educational and social work. "Gilligan's work argued not for a different morality for men and women, but that our moral domain as human beings should be extended to include care/connectedness, a feature strongly evident in the female population she studied, as well as justice/rights" (as cited in Henry, 1996, p. 124). Noting the increasing importance of the ethic of care in leadership, Roland Martin (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 18) wrote:

One of the most important findings of contemporary scholarship is that our culture embraces a hierarchy of value that places the productive processes of society and their associates traits above society's reproductive processes and the associates traits of care and nurturance. There is nothing new about this. We are the inheritors of a tradition of Western thought according to which the functions, tasks, and traits associated with females are deemed less valuable than those associated with males.

How can a leader promote a caring school environment? One answer is to lead by example. Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of

reference into that of another person. When we care we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves. (Noddings, 1984, p. 24).

Beck's *A Caring Ethic in Educational Administration* (1992, p. 462) indicates that care is an ambiguous term, and therefore describes care in terms of three activities: (1) receiving the other's perspective; (2) responding to the awareness that comes from this reception; and (3) remaining in caring relationships for an appropriate length of time.

The recent call for schools to earn higher achievement scores to promote excellence in education is grounded in a competitive style, principles of management, business ethic. Using the previous year's baseline to determine the current success of students (adequate yearly progress) is from earlier years' work force framework of leadership. It follows a "straightforward competitive ethic, for they assume that striving against a standard, persons, or group will produce high levels of achievement" (Beck, 1992, p. 474). Beck argues that promoting excellence based upon business management ethics is suspect. Citing from Johnson and Johnson (1989), Beck links the ethic of care with obtaining achievement.

Joint efforts to achieve tend to create caring and committed relationships. Caring comes, not from memos and announcements, but from the bonding that results from joint efforts. Correspondingly, long-term persistent, committed efforts do not come from the head, they come from the heart.

*Achievement is powered by caring and committed personal relationships (not tangible rewards or intellectual rationales).
- as cited in Beck, 1992, p. 476*

As a current administrative leader, I often monitor the school hallways and sometimes overhear the buzz of students in multiple group conversations. I recall often times hearing, *who cares* chime out from the student buzz. Even though I'm taking their comments out of context, in light of current research on the importance of creating an educational atmosphere where caring is a focal point not to be mistaken, I feel compelled to one day respond aloud, *I do*.

The Servant Leader

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

-Robert Greenleaf, 2003, p. 13

Servant-leadership is a leadership concept brainstormed by Robert Greenleaf from his reading of Herman Hess' *Journey to the East* (1992). In this story, a band of men take a spiritual journey with the help of a servant, Leo. Throughout the journey, Leo takes care of the group's menial chores while entertaining them with his song and spirit. When Leo disappears one day, the men fall into disarray without Leo and abandon the journey. Some time later, one of the men joins an Order and discovers that Leo, who was once his servant, is the wise and noble leader of the Order. Leo had been a leader the entire

journey; however, he was a servant first. *Servantship* was Leo's true identity.

"Leadership was bestowed on a man who was by nature a servant. It was something given, or assumed, that could be taken away. His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away. He was servant first" (Spears, 2004, p. 2).

The concept of servant-leadership is intended for profit and non-profit organizations, including public schools. The concept bases its practices on teamwork and community, involvement of others in decision-making, making decisions based in ethical and caring behavior, and improving the personal growth of workers while improving the quality of the institution (Spears, 2004, p. 10).

As demonstrated elsewhere in the dissertation, both Karen Cole and I were raised in families where we were taught to serve others in need, part of our neighbor helping neighbor tradition. I feel that community service is a strong component of leadership. It is my ideal of leadership and I also see it in Karen Cole's actions.

According to Greenleaf, there are ten essential characteristics that servant-leaders possess:

Listening
Empathy
Healing
Awareness
Persuasion
Conceptualization
Foresight

Stewardship
Commitment to the growth of people
Building community

Listening is a valuable component of the servant-leader. It allows the leader to identify with others. Listening not only involves what is being said, but what is not being said, as well. “Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one’s own inner voice and seeking to understand what one’s body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 17).

Empathy allows the leader to accept and recognize people for their uniqueness. “One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and does not reject them as people” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 17).

Healing is one of the greatest strengths for servant-leaders. Leaders are in contact with many people who have emotional hurts and sufferings. “Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to ‘help make whole’ those with whom they come in contact” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 17).

Awareness is both of others and awareness of self. Ethics and values are engaged through awareness and understanding of issues. “It (awareness) lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 17).

Persuasion is utilized by the servant-leader rather than relying on their position of authority. The servant-leader works to convince others, to build group consensus, rather than to coerce decisions. “This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 18).

Conceptualization involves leaders visioning beyond short-term goals. It requires one’s thinking to encompass a broader framework while connecting the big picture to current operations. “Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day, focused approach” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 18).

Foresight, closely related to conceptualization, is the ability to vision the outcome of a situation prior to its actualization. “Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision for the future” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 18).

Stewardship involves working for the good of all. It promotes honest, openness, and working for the good of all people. “Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 19).

Commitment to the growth of people assumes that humanity is valued. Each person possesses more worth than the product. “The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power

to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 19).

Building community involves promoting a sense of unity among individuals within a group. In the past, people worked and resided in their local community. Due to the increasing number of larger institutions and our global society, there is a lack of community among individuals. “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movement, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 19).

Even with the characteristics described in servant-leadership, how can one leader create change in the masses? The purpose of servant-leadership is not to change the world at once, but to change the world one at a time. As an example, Greenleaf describes an eighteenth century American Quaker, John Woolman, whose conviction was to rid slavery from the Society of Friends (Quaker) organization. Rather than begin a protest movement, Woolman rode the East Coast on horseback persuading Quaker slaveholders, one by one, that slavery defied their morality as human beings. This one-by-one approach to denouncing slavery resulted in the society’s forbidding slaveholding long before the Civil War (2003, p. 58).

Just as Woolman used elements of servant-leadership to create a more caring society, the same is true of today’s servant leaders. “Despite our massive

education (or, alas, perhaps because of it) we are desperately short of talent everywhere. We will recover from this by growing people, one person at a time, people who have the goals, competence, values, and spirit to turn us about” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 72).

Also centered in servant leadership is *The Secret* (Blanchard & Miller, 2004), where the authors reflect on what great leaders know and do. Using the SERVE model, Blanchard and Miller outline the five service characteristics of great leaders:

See the future
Engage and develop others
Reinvent continuously
Value results and relationships
Embody and values

Closely aligned to many of the same attributes as Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership model, *The Secret* reveals that true leadership comes from serving others. “Energy, passion, a teachable spirit, and most important . . . a serving leader” are necessary for effective leadership (Blanchard & Miller, 2004).

The Spiritual Leader

*As our world grows more chaotic and unpredictable,
we are forced to ask questions that historically
always have been answered by spiritual traditions.*
-Wheatley, 2002, p. 42

At first thought, the term *spiritual leader* seems misplaced in educational research where the separation of church and state in public education is carefully

scrutinized. Spiritual leadership is not taking one person's beliefs and imposing them on others. Spirituality in leadership should be understood as a *meaning system* for individuals. "Meaning systems are the answers people develop in response to existential concerns" (Soloman & Hunter, 2002, p. 38). Both Karen Cole and I have meaning systems that are engrained in our religious faith. Our strong family traditions of *God and kin* provide the foundation for meaning in our lives and in our role as leader.

Jerome Bruner, in his book, *Acts of Meaning*, argues that if people could not apply meaning systems to their life, "we would be lost in a murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as a species in any case" (as cited in Soloman & Hunter, 2002, p. 38). By applying meaning to our lives, we must look deep within ourselves, our inner self, which I refer to as my soul.

Before the concept of spiritual leadership can be discussed further, the term *spiritual* must also be defined. According to Webster, *spiritual* is described as having to do with the spirit or soul as apart from the body or material things (1996, p. 1065). One's spirit is one's inner being; who you are and what you believe. For some of us it is our religious beliefs of a higher being and our role in life, for others it may be gaining a deeper understanding of one's life in connection with the larger world. Spirituality may better be understood by what it is not. It is not a material item that can be easily dropped at the doorstep upon entering the school building each morning. It is not a visible item. It is a dimension of self; an inner core of who you are.

Fred Stokley, a retired New Jersey school superintendent of fifteen years, stresses the importance of leadership rooted in spirituality:

Leadership is a relationship rooted in belonging to a community. Leaders embody their group's most precious values and beliefs. Their ability to lead emerges from the strength and sustenance of those around them. It persists and deepens as they learn to use life's wounds to discover their own spiritual centers. As they conquer the demons within, they achieve the inner peace and bedrock confidence that enables them to inspire others.

Leading is giving. It is serving. Leadership is an ethic – a gift of oneself to a common cause, a higher calling. The essence of leadership is not giving things or even providing visions. It is offering oneself and one's spirit. Leaders cannot give what they do not have or lead to places they have never been. When they try, they breed disappointment and cynicism. When their gifts are genuine and the spirit is right, their giving transforms a school or school district from a mere place of work to a shared way of life.

- Stokley, 2002, p. 4

Spiritual leadership can be found in educational leaders at all levels, superintendents, principals, and teachers. A principal can stand before a room of teachers at a staff meeting and spell out the needs of the students based upon test scores as well as relay the most up-to-date methods of teaching to achieve these goals; however, without a connection as to how these needs also address creating the whole well-being of the child and creating a sense of community, the spiritual connection is diminished. The same can be true of the educational leader who serves as a mentor to novice teachers. Yes, the knowledge base may have been taught and embedded in college, the techniques may have been verbalized and carried out, yet unless the teacher understands the importance of

relevancy and creating a deeper connection between the student and learning, the learning remains only factual.

Parker Palmer explains the spiritual dimension in educational leaders as “the abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos—with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive” (1999, p. 1). An example Palmer gives of this definition is his earlier childhood school years when taught about the Holocaust. According to Palmer, he understood the historical facts of the Holocaust, but did not connect it with his own life, his own inner being. Not until later in his life did he understand the disconnection between his understanding of the factual events of Holocaust and his life.

He was raised in a small town that practiced systematic discrimination against Jews. Palmer, himself, failed to recognize the little Hitler discriminations that had developed within himself. “Because my teachers remained objective at the expense of the subjective, factual at the expense of the spiritual, they failed to educate my mind or my spirit. I learned neither about the Holocaust as it really was, and is, nor about myself as I really am” (Palmer, 1999, p. 2).

Spirituality in education is also noted in Harvard Professor Howard Gardner’s research. Along with his multiple intelligences model, he also studied personal intelligences, including intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. Through intrapersonal intelligence, a person gains knowledge of one’s own

feelings. Through interpersonal intelligence, a person gains knowledge based upon understanding of and relationships with others. Subsequently, Gardner has considered additional intelligences, naturalist intelligence, existential intelligence, and spiritual intelligence an important to education (Stokley, 2002, p. 48).

How does an educational leader create a sense of spirituality in education? First, the leaders must be in peace with themselves. From this sense of peace develops a confidence in confiding in others and creating relationships that are trustful and open. “The spiritual leader must view those with whom he or she works in a positive light and not be judgmental or critical unless there is sufficient cause. This approach is empowering and builds confidence in others” (Stokley, 2002, p. 49).

There are various models of leadership embedded in spirituality. *Enlightened Leadership* developed by Stephen Sokolow (2002, pp. 32-36), a former school superintendent of twenty-four years, indicates that the eight principles (or spiritual truths) of *Enlightened Leadership* are spiritual elements of our inner being. Each principle already resides deep within us; we need to become more cognizant of their existence and move them to the forefront of our daily lives.

The common thread of enlightened leaders is that they spend most of their time and efforts making life better for those around them. “People naturally gravitate toward enlightened leaders because their energy field uplifts them and

makes them feel better about themselves” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 32). These eight principles; however, need to be surfaced in an effort to manifest divine wisdom.

The eight principles of *Enlightened Leadership* include: (1) Principle of Intention; (2) Principle of Attention; (3) Principle of Our Unique Gifts; (4) Principle of Gratitude; (5) Principle of Unique Life Lessons; (6) Principle of a Holistic Perspective; (7) Principle of Openness; and (8) Principle of Trust.

The *Principle of Intention* expresses our purpose in life or even in a situation. What we think, do, and say always has an underlying element, our intended purpose. By having a solid understanding of our inner being (our spirituality), we also have a better understanding of how we will react to different situations. “Enlightened leaders are aware of their intentions and naturally focus them on serving others rather than themselves” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 33).

The *Principle of Attention* focuses on how we choose to spend our time. Throughout the day we make choices as to what receives our attention and what must be put to the wayside. Attention is paid to the right things and done so for the right reasons. “Enlightened leaders have insights that guide them in deciding where best to turn their attention” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 33).

The *Principle of Our Unique Gifts* recognizes that each person is blessed with unique gifts and talents. Combining the unique gifts of the community, there is a connection creating a whole. Through this understanding, leaders not only recognize their own gifts and talents but assist others in recognizing hidden talents even before they themselves are aware of them. Not only are they (gifts

and talents) recognized but cultivated to share for the good of all. “Enlightened leaders strive to help others identify their own gifts and talents and then cultivate them, helping them find their place in the puzzle” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 33).

The *Principle of Gratitude* emphasizes that a person cannot be too grateful. An *attitude of gratitude* is both internal (thoughts such as thankfulness) and external (actions such as kind words or expressions). Gratitude manifests an energy that attracts and empowers self and others. When we appreciate others, they are more likely to appreciate us. “Enlightened leaders abound with gratitude for the honor of serving others” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 34).

The *Principle of Our Unique Life Lessons* stresses the importance of life lessons that are embedded in the trials and tribulations encountered throughout our life history. Challenges are not only looked upon as obstacles to overcome but also as life lessons upon which to learn and develop leadership skills. Life’s hurdles and roadblocks are ladders for acquiring leadership lessons. “Enlightened leaders try to look for the silver lining within every school and see life’s lessons as opportunity for growth and self-expression for themselves and others” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 34).

The *Principle of a Holistic Perspective* relies on the spiritual truth that we are part of a whole and that the whole is comprised of parts. Since we are part of a whole, our vision, our duty, should be devoted to shaping the world (the whole). Taking a microscopic look at the whole, we are also made of parts: the mind, the body, and the spirit. These three parts should be nurtured to create a healthy

being. A leader sees the connection between each part, including the connection between the well-being of the person to the larger well-being of the universe. There is an interconnectedness between everything in the universe as leaders continually work to understand the systematic connection between these parts. “Enlightened leaders help others recognize that they are part of something that is larger than themselves, but also that every part is vital and important to the success of the whole” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 34).

The *Principle of Openness* has no hidden agenda. Leaders appreciate the openness in themselves as well as the openness by others. Not only are leaders open to discussion from others, but they are also open to new ideas, new thoughts, and new direction. Often leaders in this principle struggle with fear of the unknown when changing direction. “Through wisdom, enlightened leaders learn to discern which voice and which information carry the highest truths and which carry lesser truths and untruths. It’s not easy because sometimes the truth is unpleasant or painful or it means we have more work to do, but enlightened leaders continually work at being open to divine guidance to pursue the highest good” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 34).

The *Principle of Trust* must be engrained in every word and action. Leaders must be trustworthy, which is gained through on-going actions and deeds of trust building. Leaders walk their talk. In addition, leaders themselves, must also learn to trust others as well as to put trust in the unknown. Not indicating trust with blindfolds, trust is accompanied with wisdom. Through

wisdom, trust is not given to the wrong people. “Enlightened leaders tend to trust more so than not and, when in doubt, they are more likely to choose to trust rather than choose not to trust” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 35).

Michael Dantley’s research on *Purpose-Driven Leadership* indicates the need for leaders to understand the community and the spiritual connection within the community. He deems that spirituality is part of each person’s life and it is through spirituality that we make meaning of the world. “Spirituality is the grounding for the values and principles we espouse that inform our personal and professional behavior” (2003, p. 274).

Particularly in schools populated by urban youths from communities of dehumanizing conditions, religion and spiritual context is a source of hope. It is their religious foundation that provides a sense of hope as well as resistance to the dehumanizing actions executed against them. An educator rooted in spiritual leadership goes far beyond academic achievement and students’ performance on standardized tests to measure achievement.

The spiritual leader views success from an ethical lens. “The purpose-driven educational leader clearly understands the vicissitudes of the American way of life and senses a compulsion to prepare students to demythologize American life through critical reflection and to propose strategies for resistance to the vestiges of race, class, and gender oppression that are in the warp and woof of American culture” (Dantley, 2003, p. 282).

To indicate the importance of the spiritual side of leadership, Herman Smith, a Texas Superintendent of twenty-five years relays a conversation by a minister who conducted his mother's funeral. The minister told him, "Never forget that you are a spiritual servant in your role as superintendent. You can have as much or more positive impact on the spiritual lives of others as those of us in the clergy" (cited in Hoyle, 2002, p. 18).

Hoyle, a professor of educational administration at Texas A & M University, notes the dire consequences of leadership without spirit, indicating that lack of spirit promotes schools with low teacher morale, larger numbers of school dropouts, incidences of unethical student accountability reporting, and increased school violence (2002, p. 18).

To avoid these detrimental outcomes, Hoyle indicates that spiritual leadership is *learnable* and provides strategies to teach spiritual leadership. They include: conducting spiritual discussions either with small discussion groups or with larger groups; create a spiritual self; develop a vision of the ideal self and strive to achieve that goal; assign reading on spiritual leadership; and share stories on great spiritual leaders in history (2002, p. 21).

The spiritual leadership research addressed in this research is only a portion of the increasing interest in the spiritual connection to educational success. Found within each of the models addressed; however, are the common factors to search within oneself and to provide inspiration. "Our souls offer the highest inspiration at every moment. We see chaos, but the soul knows that

order is more powerful than disorder” (Chopra, 2002, p. 10). A leader must look within for greatness.

The Moral Leader

Overall, the challenge of leadership is both moral and one of developing the characteristics that make us respected by one another.

-Louis Farrakhan

There has been a surge of interest in moral educational leadership and ethical decision-making in recent years. This increase is in response to administrators, researchers, and the public in general, becoming more sensitive to the values and ethical issues in today’s pluralistic society. Gardner indicates the importance of a moral leadership role indicating that “truly magnificent leaders embody the message they advocate – that is, they walk the talk, practice what they preach, and expect everyone else to do likewise” (cited in Duffy, 2006, p. 137). Karen Cole and I were raised in family values that taught honesty, respect, and dignity. Through decision-making as teaching strategies, I use these values, as Karen also demonstrates, in my daily role as leader.

Greenfield argues that morals are imperative to school leaders, stating, “School administrators have a special responsibility to be deliberately moral in their conduct, that is, to consider the value premises underlying their actions and decisions” (1995, p. 69).

According to Begley’s research on values in educational leadership, the increasing public interest in moral leadership runs parallel to the current

stereotype of administrative practice which indicates that administrators are more pragmatically and unreflectively focused on day-to-day matters (1999, p. 238). Begley indicates that values are essential in making moral decisions. But what are values? “Values are those conceptions of the desirable which motivate individuals and collective groups to act in particular ways to achieve particular ends. They reflect an individual’s basic motivations, shape attitudes, and reveal the intentions behind actions” (Begley, 1999, p. 237). This definition given by Begley indicates the strong influence that values play in daily decision-making by educational leaders.

According to values research by Hodgkinson (1978), there are four motivational factors that constitute a source for values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions in individuals. The four factors, or bases, are personal preference, consensus, consequences, and principles (as cited in Begley, 1999, p. 240).

Personal preference is merely a person’s conception of what is good. An administrator may think that students’ removing their hats when entering the building is good, which is certainly a personal preference. The second motivational factor, *consensus*, that influences a person’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions, is grounded in what other’s think. Consensus considers the experts’ opinions, peer pressure and what the majority, in general, think about the topic or action. The third factor, *consequences*, considers the likely outcomes of particular actions, the consequences, when making decisions. Think before you act. Finally, the fourth factor, *principles*, is considered by

Hodgkinson to be the highest level of the four-tier hierarchy of motivations for values. A leader's principles are the soul, the will, of a person. They are what you stand up for; the backbone in making decisions.

Educational leaders must have an awareness of their values in daily decisions as Heslep (1997) also argues:

Being committed to the principles of moral value, moral rights, and moral duty as the fundamental standards for their judgments, those engaged in educational leadership must not approve ends and means that are inconsistent with these principles.

What they necessitate is that in forming judgments those engaged in educational leadership appreciate the knowledge, freedom, purposefulness, deliberativeness, and so on of all affected moral agents, respect the rights of such agents in these matters, and be cognizant of the duties of all concerned to foster freedom and knowledge in leadership of that kind.

- as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 12

Starratt's research on moral educational leadership directs that the use of moral leadership is more than mere actions such as whether or not to retain a below average teacher who has political connections or to compromise with a pressure group. Starratt states, "The much more essential work of moral educational leadership is to create a school-wide learning environment that promotes the moral integrity of learning as the pursuit of the truth about oneself and one's world, however complex and difficult that task might be" (as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 18).

The outcome of moral leadership will allow students to gain knowledge, question, and critique the world in relation to themselves and society. Starratt further states that learning is a *moral search*, where each person seeks the truth as tentative, incomplete, and ever-changing as it may be.

Starratt's (1994) multidimensional ethical model for consideration by school leaders depicts two triangles, a smaller triangle inside a larger triangle. The inner triangle contains an ethic of moral leadership on each side. The three ethics are: caring, justice, and critique. The parallel sides of the outer, larger triangle pose questions for moral leaders based upon each ethic. Parallel to the *justice* side is the question, "How shall we govern ourselves." Parallel to the *critique* side is "Who controls," "What legitimates," and "Who defines?" Finally, on the third parallel side to *caring*, is "What do our relationships ask of us" (as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 19).

In a time when public scrutiny of schools focuses on adequate yearly progress and testing accountability, the root of any deficiencies may lie much deeper than classroom materials and curriculum guidelines. Research from Bolman and Deal "suggest that leaders have lost touch with some of these precious gifts, with what gives our lives passion and purpose" (as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 16).

As increasing research on moral leadership comes to light, the bigger picture for educational success may lie within each of us. Perhaps it is a quest for something greater. What passions, what principles do each of us possess

that are engrained in our inner being? These inner strengths, these driving forces, are what we, as educational leaders, must unlock in each of us and more importantly, within each child.

Karen Cole unlocked her inner force, through narrative, as she reflected her desire to treat others with dignity and respect.

*These interviews have been good for me, all this **self-analysis**. I guess all these things that I do **could be seen as things that leaders do**. All I want to do is what is best for the children . . . to **be fair and to treat them with respect** . . . to treat them like they are special . . . and they are.*

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain the framework for my qualitative research inquiry. I review the scholarly literature that offers insight into my research methodology. My selected research participant is described in this section as well as important elements of narrative analysis. As a researcher, my subjectivity is also discussed. Throughout the methodology chapter, I have boldface typed particular points for emphasis.

My method of data collection for this research is through narrative inquiry (Casey, 1995-1996, 1993, 1992; Riessman, 1993; Popular Memory Group, 1982). Unlike other research methods, narrative inquiry is not bound to a set of science methods proving reliability and objectivity, based on question and answer sessions. Validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardized procedures (Riessman, 1993, p. 68).

The purpose of narrative research is to see the way that individuals make sense of their lives through life stories. During narrative methodology, the focus is not on factual accuracy of a person's story, but on the meaning it has for the person recalling the story. "Oral history, read in all its rich wholeness, will illuminate conscious human activity in a way positivism never can" (Casey, 1993, p. 13).

Bruner (1986) recollected the mid-70's shift to narrative inquiry, "the social sciences had moved away from their traditional positivist stance towards a more interpretative posture: meaning became a central focus" (as cited in Casey, 1995-1996, p. 212). Through narrative interpretation, individuals recall previous encounters and actions that formulate their lives and claim identities. The teller takes the listener into a previous time and recalls events as relevant to his/her life (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). "Traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply to narrative studies, and validity must be radically reconceptualized" (Mishler, 1990, pp. 415 – 442).

Karen Cole (pseudonym) speaks of experiences in her life that she *chooses* to recall. She determines what is important to *her* life and chooses to reveal those experiences as her *truths*.

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences.

Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident.

We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them.

- Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p. 261

Listening to Karen Cole's oral history, I realize my connection to her life through our common southern traditions and beliefs. From this sisterhood, I, too, feel compassion for Karen's same ideals for life and leadership.

Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them.
- Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p. 261

Recognizing the importance of narrative inquiry in making sense of our lives, researchers Markus & Wurf (1987) contend that "we achieve personal identities and self-concept through the use of 'narrative configuration' and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding story" (as cited in Dhunpath, 2000, p. 545).

As an educational leader, I reflect on my life history, the obstacles and the achievements, to better understand my perspective on the multitude of experiences which I encounter each day. Through my lived experiences, which I narratively reconstruct, I can gain understanding and purpose using the lens through which I construct meaning.

People tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are.

These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities.
- as cited in Prusa & Sfard, 2005

Dhunpath coined the term, *narradigm* to "affirm the reality that our lives are intrinsically narrative in quality" (2000, p. 545). The past is a person's **selective reconstruction**. It is from life stories, patterns, discontinuities, what is reflected and what is missing that enables people to make sense of their lives and to better understand their perspectives and interpretations in society. "Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words. And in giving a past, it also helps them toward a future of their own making" (Thompson, as cited in Casey, 1993, p. 11).

Emphasizing the importance of oral history in conducting research on progressive women activists who leave teaching, Casey (1992, p. 189) stresses:

The open-ended format which I have employed in my own research allows the interests of the narrator, rather than those to the interviewer, to dominate.

*The political relations of research are designed so that the voice of the teacher can be given equal status with that of the academic researcher. Thus the act of **interpretation is largely relinquished to the subjects themselves**, while the researcher concentrates on discovering the patterns of priorities in the narrative texts.*

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research study is to offer insight into the life of one ordinary person whose leadership persona exhibits both reluctance and confidence in varying educational settings.

My research question is why this person exhibits both reluctance and self-confidence in different settings. True to the nature of narrative research, the only question posed to the narrator was, "Tell me your life story." I was dependent upon the narrator for information. Because this was my first attempt at conducting narrative research, I was skeptical as to how much my interviewee would be willing to reveal of her life story.

Whether it was because she had never been given the opportunity to voice her thoughts or whether she enjoyed reflecting on her history, I was delighted with the abundance of experiences that she recalled from her past. Without my giving her structure, she was able to determine which historical moments and events were important to her recollected life story. Researcher M. White (1992) while discussing narrative analysis stated,

The stories that persons live by are rarely, if ever, "radically constructed" – it is not a matter of them being made-up, "out of the blue," so to speak.

Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationships have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions.

- as cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 65

Selecting the Participant

Only one person, Karen Cole (pseudonym), has been selected for this research study. The participant was selected based upon her leadership qualities, exhibiting both self-confidence and reluctance in the educational

setting. The experiences in her life story reflect numerous hurdles, hardships and happiness that may have assisted in formulating her current identity. It is the life story of an ordinary teacher, yet, in my judgment, a potentially extraordinary leader, who is the focus of my research.

My goal was to study a former teaching colleague whose leadership qualities enthralled those around to seek advice and encouragement. I also sought to understand why she appeared both empowered and submissive depending on the educational surroundings.

Unlike any group of educators with whom I have been involved, this educator exhibits leadership beyond those of the student-teacher relationship. I wanted to hear her interpretation of the life experiences that have molded her identity as a leader. "Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words. And in giving a past, it also helps them towards a future of their own making" (Thompson, as cited in Casey, 1993, p. 11).

Why Study the Ordinary Person?

After taking various research classes, both quantitative and qualitative, in graduate studies, I became interested in narrative inquiry as a means to hear stories from those rarely, if ever, told. I recall the exact moment in a graduate research class when I decided narrative research was the perfect fit for my study. The professor, Dr. Kathleen Casey, was giving an overview of narrative methodology, relaying the ideology of multiple and competing versions of history;

however, the majority of our history is written by the winners. It was at this point in time that my Rocky Balboa mentality took over. It seemed the perfect fit for my research. I wanted to hear from the underdog.

Karen Cole, in my opinion, sees herself as an underdog. She is an exceptional teacher, viewed by others as a leader within the school. She praises colleagues for their potential abilities and offers guidance and assurance throughout the school; however, she appears less confident in her own eyes as a knowledgeable, guiding educational leader.

Defining Terms

While many terms may appear self-explanatory they may also have dual meanings depending upon the context in which they appear. In this section I will explain terms to allow a clear meaning to my text.

A key concept to explain is the meaning of a **rural setting** as it relates to the social context of the participant. The participant grew up in the rural Piedmont region of North Carolina in a low socio-economic farming community in close proximity to relatives. Daily life in summer months included extensive gardening of vegetables to preserve for winter months as well as to sustain the family throughout the year.

The participant's family also grew their own livestock, cows, chickens and pigs, to sustain the family. Even though fields and woods separated many families in the community, the distance did not separate their socialization.

Siblings, cousins and extended family members worked and socialized together in the farming community.

Another term used throughout my research is **southern culture** and **southern traditions**. I use these terms interchangeably. *Southern culture* can be defined as shared beliefs, customs, practices and social behavior of a group of people from the south. *Southern traditions* are long-established customs, practices, beliefs and social behavior of a group of people from the south. Karen's southern culture is a result of her family's southern traditions. Their beliefs and customs have been passed from generation to generation. I possess many of the same southern traditions as Karen.

Many of the southern traditions found in Karen's narrative include strong family bonds, working together as a community, neighbors helping neighbors, regularly attending Sunday School and preaching on Sundays, Wednesday night church services, Vacation Bible School, family reunions, mealtime as a family, frequent visits with extended family members and working on the farm. These traditions are rooted in the philosophy of *God and kin*.

God and kin are embedded in Karen's southern culture. Christianity is revered and the Bible is the final word. Karen summarizes her grandfather's strong believe in his granddaughter's truthfulness saying, "Grandpa thought what I told him was the gospel." Every important event, baby showers, marriages, reunions, homecomings, and attendance at church and school involve family and

extended family. Family is a link with strong unyielding bonds where neighbors support neighbors when in need.

Moral curriculum is used throughout the narrative analysis to describe Karen's unwritten curriculum for her students. Moral curriculum is based on what someone's conscience suggests is right or wrong, which may differ from rules and regulations. Karen's moral curriculum is to teach her students what she had learned throughout her childhood; lessons learned from her grandmother. Her moral curriculum taught honesty, respect for others, respect for oneself, truthfulness, and perseverance.

What is Narrative Analysis?

During narrative analysis, I study Karen Cole's experiences in understanding her positionality. I work with the understanding that the past is a selective reconstruction. "A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world 'out there.' Narrativization assumes point of view. Individuals exclude experiences that undermine the current identities they wish to claim" (Riessman, 1993, p. 64). Individuals construct different narratives from the same event. There are multiple and competing versions of every event.

What is important in narrative analysis is not the accuracy of the event, but what and how the person has selected to reconstruct the event. In conducting narrative analysis, there were several major concepts to consider, including

selectivity, slippage, silence, intertextuality, and subjectivity (Casey, 1995-1996; Casey, 1993).

Framing of Narrative Methodology

Selectivity

In narrative analysis, selectivity is what the narrator chooses to reveal from his or her history, whether glimpses or details. “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15).

Throughout Karen’s narrative, she provides contextual meaning to her views of self. Under certain conditions Karen indicates she loses her self confidence, while under different conditions she recognizes her strength and influence. These examples are interwoven throughout her narrative analysis.

During narrative analysis, I examine Karen Cole’s story, how she chose to relay her life story, what sequence she chose to convey it in, and what details she chose to provide. Relaying events from her earliest memory to current day, Karen Cole spoke often of strong family and community bonds, particularly her maternal grandparents’ influence in her early life in a rural, farming community, located in the foothills of North Carolina. Karen’s childhood experiences are immersed in southern tradition. I share with Karen the southern culture of strong family and community ties.

*I don't have very many memories of my parents when I was younger. **All my memories are from my Grandmother and Grandfather Jones** (pseudonym), so I don't know if that's because they had such an impact on my life. I don't know why I don't have memories of my parents from being young. Uhmmm.*

*It was just so much fun with grandma and pa and all the things we did on Sundays. Thinking back, everything . . . **just about everything, we did at grandma and pa's had something to do with learning.***

Karen Cole's interpretation of events that solely involved her grandparents reflects the importance she felt her grandparents played in her early childhood development. Throughout her early age memory, she selected happier memories of life lessons and playing with cousins, giving details of particular events with her maternal grandparents and cousins.

Her life was surrounded with family and community. Family socialization was a common occurrence and an important link to their close bonds. Weekly family gatherings were reliable. They weren't planned, they happened. They were a part of Karen's culture. During these gatherings, family and community shared in happier times as well as in times of sorrow; each person knowing others cared, shared, and supported their ups and downs of life. Note the repetition of *every* in Karen's dialogue.

***Every Sunday**, I can remember **EVERY Sunday**, we would go to Grandma Jones' house for dinner and my cousins would come over and we would play, climb in the barn, and do all those fun things; have so much fun . . . fly kites.*

***Every Sunday** Grandpa Jones would give us a brand new pencil and it was suppose to be our lucky pencil for school. He would trim it with his pocket knife. That pencil was supposed to be our lucky pencil so we would make good grades all week. My Grandpa Jones wanted all of us to do good in school. I remember he gave all seven of us a lucky pencil . . . **every Sunday** from pa.*

Upon reviewing Karen Cole's interviews, it is important to note that even though I posed the open-ended question, "Tell me your life story," she selected to spend the majority of her interviews discussing the importance of her early childhood and teenage experiences with extended family. "Telling about complex and troubling events should vary because the past is a selective reconstruction. Individuals exclude experiences that undermine the current identities they wish to claim" (Riessman, 1993, p. 64).

Even as she discussed her current teaching methodology and her views of leadership, Karen Cole related these views to her childhood experiences.

*I don't want any student being made fun of because they are overweight. I don't want anyone being made fun of because of the clothes they wear or the shoes they have on their feet, or even wearing glasses. I start every year talking about the differences in people and how everybody is different . . . **equal whether they have money or not.** I emphasize that at the beginning of the school year.*

It doesn't matter how much money you have; its what's on the inside. I think that because of some of the things I came in contact with as a child has made me emphasize character traits to my students. Even before

*it was in our school system, I always **emphasized character traits**. I think a lot of the things I grew up experiencing helped me want other children not to go through those things.*

Silence

During narrative analysis, silence is determined by what the narrator chooses to leave out of her life story. Silences can be a very important tool in better understanding the narrator. For example, in reviewing Karen Cole's interpretation of her life history, she spoke frequently, and in great detail, of grandparents and extended family members such as cousins. She spoke only occasionally of her parents and their influence on her education. When briefly discussing her parents, Karen Cole recalled the hardships of her parents. Perhaps the sparse recollection of her parents in her early childhood reflects the hardships that her parents endured and she silenced. Karen Cole's silences could be a result of situations that were out of her control.

We were not middle class, we were just poor. I don't think I was poor, but as far as money goes, we were very poor. My dad had a drinking problem . . . he drank.

*If I stayed with her (paternal grandmother), she would always ask me a lot of questions about . . . did daddy do this, did your mama do that, did your mama work today, did your daddy come home drinking last night. If I would say yes, like daddy had been drinking, she would spout out all these scriptures. She would have me so upset as a child because I just knew that **my daddy was going to hell and that my family was going to be torn apart.***

There was also a silencing of her marriage. Karen Cole spoke only briefly regarding her husband. Even as she spoke of her husband of more than twenty-five years, the discussion was directed toward her grandparents while hinting to the challenges at home.

*So, now, because I'm working and (husband) is at home, I see a lot of my grandma's qualities in me. I'll tell (husband) that **he's been around the house all day long so you can mop the floors or clean the dishes.** I can't believe that I'm so much like her (maternal grandmother).*

Slippage

Slippage occurs when one part of a story contradicts another part of the story. I searched Karen Cole's narrative for contradictions or places that had changed from her previous interpretation. One such place was is the discussion of her paternal grandmother. During initial dialogue, Karen Cole indicated her struggle with understanding her paternal grandmother's impudent comments as well as the inequitable treatment of herself as compared to other grandchildren. I have bold-typed Karen's recollection of Grandmother Smith's **condemning dialogue** with Karen. She endured an on-going downward spiral of comments.

*Grandma Smith (pseudonym for paternal grandmother) seemed to always make me feel unimportant. I always felt inferior around her. **I was always told that I wasn't as good as so-and-so grandchild.***

So, I'd go from grandma's (maternal) house, where I was the smartest, the most important and could do everything . . . to her (paternal grandmother) house where I would be put

down. I wasn't as good as (cousin). I wasn't as smart as (cousin). I was fat. I couldn't do things.

Grandma Smith always treated me and (cousin) so differently that it caused a jealousy between us. *It gave me bad feelings. Going from one grandma (maternal) and feeling so special and then going to the other grandma (paternal) and always put down. One thing was my being overweight . . . and I wasn't pretty. I wasn't special at all.*

I don't know, I just didn't like going there. Every Sunday we would go to Grandma Jones' (maternal) and have such a good time and then we would go back by Grandma Smith's (paternal) . . . and . . . a lot of times I wouldn't even go in the house.

During initial interviews, Karen Cole indicated that her paternal grandmother was abrupt and demonstrated impartiality among grandchildren. She spoke of efforts to avoid the inferior feelings that were on-going throughout her childhood years.

However, during a subsequent interview, Karen Cole related to her paternal grandmother in a respectful, loving nature. Perhaps the difference lies in Karen Cole's spiritual beliefs, that a person who is Christian represents the good within.

I have bold-typed comments that reflect Karen's slippage, even her inner struggle, to respect Grandmother Smith's *word*. Karen's southern culture had embedded in her to respect others, especially your elders. To question the spiritual voice, even though condemning comments, of a grandmother would be considered **blasphemous** to Karen.

*Grandma Smith was **a good woman, a good Christian woman**. My Grandma Smith was very religious. She would always spout scriptures at you in one way or another.*

*I **never felt like she loved me**, but she was a **good Christian person**.*

Another contradiction in Karen Cole's story related to her feelings of self-esteem. Karen, at times spoke of herself with differing views of self-confidence. Demonstrating the complexity of human beings, she displays a duality of self-esteem, both reluctance and self-assurance. Speaking of herself as an effective teacher and leader, with Academically and Intellectually Gifted certification as well as National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification, Karen, at times, was positive with her self reflection.

*I feel like **I do make a difference** . . . all these things I guess all these things that I do could be seen as things that leaders do.*

Nevertheless, dispersed throughout her oral history, Karen continues to interpret her historical memories in terms of a **fragile** self-esteem.

I guess thirty years ago I wouldn't have thought that I would have been considered important enough to do that.

*I should have more confidence in myself. The one person in our school, Jessie, picks on me all the time. I don't know if she feels threatened by me or what, but she can take my self-esteem in one sentence every morning if I let her. I have to do all that I can to not let her **ruin my self-esteem**.*

Karen Cole's dual feelings, her slippage, of self-worth and worthlessness demonstrates the complexity of emotions in human beings. She recognizes the many *gifts* she has to offer to people; however, at other times she appears *worthless*.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the process of searching for patterns and themes within the narratives. Sociologist Bell (1988) states the importance of applying intertextuality to her narrative analysis studies:

By studying the sequence of stories in an interview, and the thematic and linguistic connections between them, an investigator can see how individuals tie together significant events and important relationships in their lives. The analyst identifies narrative segments, reduces stories to a core, examines how word choice, structure, and clauses echo one another, and examines how the sequence of action in one story builds on a prior one.

Importantly, the emphasis is on language – how people say what they do and who they are – and the narrative structures they employ to construct experience by telling about it.

- as cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 40

One such theme was **religion**. Embedded within the interviews, Karen Cole makes reference to the strong spiritual beliefs of her paternal grandmother.

*My other grandma (paternal), I think she has a lot to do with my **religious upbringing**. She would quote scripture. With her, when she told you something, she would always back it up **quoting the Bible**.*

*My **Grandma Smith** (paternal) was very religious. **I think I got a lot of my spiritual guidance from her.***

Even though Karen Cole doesn't verbally contribute her maternal grandmother, Grandmother Jones, with her spiritual upbringing, there is a pattern of religious activities embedded in various discussions of her maternal grandmother. I have bold-typed Karen's reflection on Grandmother Jones' importance of religion. Grandmother Jones demonstrated importance through example. She wore her *Sunday best* only for important *church worthy* occasions. According to the southern tradition of Karen's community, ladies dressed in their best for Sunday church.

*I remember **going to church with Grandmother Jones**, every Sunday. She would get dressed up with her dress . . . put on her **hat and gloves**. She always carried a pocketbook. I remember she told me, "A lady always covered her head with a hat and wears gloves to church."*

*She'd let me go with her to her **Sunday School class** with all the little old ladies. We would have chewing gum. It was the only time she offered it to me, chewing gum . . . while we were **at church**.*

Even during her high school years, Karen Cole reflects on the importance of religion in her studies as well as the religious influence of her maternal grandmother. During a high school poetry project, she, along with her maternal grandmother's encouragement, incorporated religion into the assignment.

We had to illustrate a book of poems. Grandma Jones asked me what I was doing. I said, "Grandma, I am working

*on this poetry project. She asked, "What is poetry?" I told Grandma what poetry was. She said, "I have a lot of old **bulletins that I've saved from church.**" Every bulletin she gave me I could use something in it.*

*I found this big abstract picture of **Jesus hanging on a cross.** I found a pair of **praying hands** off one of the bulletins and I cut that out and used it. Grandma said, "That picture looks terrible." I said, "No, no grandma, that picture looks so different I'm going to use it with one of my poems." When I got my project back I got the most encouraging remarks about my poetry book. She said it was one of the best Illustrations she had ever seen with the poem.*

*I showed it to grandma and she said, "What does it say? What does it say?" She thought my grade was her grade! **I can still see us cutting out that abstract picture of Jesus and putting it with that poem.***

During other interviews, Karen Cole spoke of her first college encounter with an atheist and the following summary of her experience. She summed up the experience as realizing commonality in physical appearance with Christians; however, she continued to hold firm to her belief in internal differences.

*My mom had always told us what an atheist was; a person who didn't believe in God. Well, I had a picture in my mind of an atheist as a monster with two heads! I don't know why, I guess from the Bible, Revelations. But **he was a regular guy, but didn't have a heart.***

Subsequent interviews reflected Karen Cole's current deep-rooted religious beliefs, all a part of her southern culture of *God and family*, while guiding novice teachers at school.

I'm also passionate about new teachers getting started out with help. I remember being thrown in like a hunk of meat to the wolves! That is why I'm a mentor.

*I love to help new teachers. **One of the first things I tell them to do is pray . . . pray for wisdom and guidance.** Often we pray together. As a team, we pray before testing. Our third grade team met this year and prayed. We asked for success to do our best to meet the needs of God's children. I have told teachers that **God will solve problems.** All they have to do is ask for his guidance.*

Another common pattern throughout the narrative was Karen's use of the word *special*. She discussed how she felt *special* as a child growing up with her maternal grandparents. Throughout the course of interviews, Karen Cole referenced **special thirty-nine times** within her text.

According to Encarta Dictionary, *special* means to regard with particular affection or made for a particular purpose (2004). Karen Cole, throughout her oral history, reflects her childhood emotions of feeling *special* and *not special*, seeking affection.

The imperativeness of feeling special continues today as she desires her students and colleagues to feel special, for each person to feel purpose in their life. This is the core of Karen's educational moral curriculum.

*. . . grandpa would hold me and tell me I was his **special girl** . . . I was so **special**. I was his **special girl**.*

*One thing was my being overweight . . . I wasn't pretty; **I wasn't special at all.***

*So, it was always so much more **special** on the other (Jones) side.*

*She was always an encouraging person . . . she was very **special** to me.*

*All I want to do is what is best for the children, to be fair and to treat them with respect. To **treat them like they are special . . . and they are.***

Interpretive Traditions

Interpretive traditions refer to the vocabulary, customs, and everyday way of life by persons with similar experiences. Throughout her narrative, Karen Cole speaks of lifestyles and rituals of her family and community. Her collective-subjective oral history interprets her memories as related to her family and community. (Collective-subjective is when voices come together from people who are part of a community.) Karen Cole is an ordinary person within her community. Her reflective memories are based upon the southern culture of her community.

Karen speaks of weekly family gatherings, playing with cousins, going to church, and learning through hardships of life experiences. Her oral Southern traditions of *God and kin* are also reflected in her modesty; in her civility; in her politeness; and in her reluctance to take credit for her accomplishments.

This is Karen Cole's way of life; the cultural framework which shapes her story. It is from this framework that storytellers draw their experiences as they remember it. It is from these similar experiences of *God and kin* that I also draw my identity. Even though Karen's narratives reflect her life experiences, there are parallels between our stories.

Both Karen and I are immersed in family traditions; we attend community churches where members are relatives and neighbors; church members who you know their life history of hardships and successes. Both Karen and I were reared in families where parents labored hard for their family, where parents and grandparents wanted more for their children and grandchildren. We were both raised on a moral curriculum to be thankful for what we have and to lend a helping hand to those less fortunate. We have a commonality in our respect for others. We are connected by our Southern culture.

Subjectivity: Myself as Researcher

In narrative research, subjectivity refers to the researcher's emotions, values, and life experiences as related to the life story of the participant. Because of the various underlying passions and experiences a person holds within, they cannot be disbarred during research. During the interviews, I maintained an awareness of my subjectivity in many areas: teacher, colleague, southern traditions of *God and kin*, as well as a strong commitment to moral education.

Nelson, while conducting a research project on earlier teaching experiences, stresses the importance of subjectivity in research, realizing the depth of questioning brought by different interviewers. Utilizing numerous college students as interviewers, she found differing results based upon the interviewer's subjectivity. "These divergent attitudes toward the work could not

have been ascertained by looking at the occupation from the outside. To fully understand the meaning of work we have to ask the workers and let them speak for themselves” (1983, p. 20).

According to Webster, subjectivity is based upon a person’s feelings or thinking (1996, p. 894). A person must be cognizant of their personal thoughts about a subject, topic, or situation as well as how those feelings might influence their research. “Whatever the substance of one’s persuasions at a given point, one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (Peshkin, 1998, p. 17). Peshkin further contends that *Subjective I’s* need to be uncovered during research, not afterwards, in order to be aware of its “enabling and disabling potential” (1998, p. 18).

Based upon my knowledge of the teacher-leader whose life story will be told, I must be cognizant of my feelings as a past teacher and current administrator, my *Educator-I* subjectivity. “We cannot achieve immersion without bringing our subjectivity into play” (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 19).

Also reared in a rural setting within a family of strong bonds with religious roots, I maintain attentiveness to my subjectivity of, *Southern traditions-I*. “Our identities and life experiences shape the political and ideological stances we take in our research” (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 10).

I must consider who I am and what I believe in prior, during, and after collecting research for this study. “This approach (narrative analysis) brings into view the interpersonal context: the connections between teller and listener that

are the bedrock of all human interaction including research interviews”
(Riessman, 1993, p. 40). “The story is being told to particular people; it might
have taken a different form if someone else were the listener” (Riessman, 1993,
p. 11).

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the narrative of Karen Cole (pseudonym). Reared in southern culture in a rural farming community in North Carolina, I first study Karen in relation to family. Her strong belief in *God and kin* is rooted within her culture. Her experiences and interpretations reflect her deep commitment to family and community.

In section two of this chapter, I study Karen Cole as a student. Her childhood and young adult life experiences are riddled with hope, disappointment, and resilience. The results of these experiences are embedded in Karen's current moral curriculum.

In section three, I study Karen as a teacher. Her stories reflect pedagogy that demonstrate Karen's beliefs as to what is important for all children to learn; all rooted in her southern traditions.

Throughout section four, I analyze Karen's role in relation to teacher of teachers through her interpretation of meaningful experiences with colleagues.

Section five analyzes Karen as a leader of leaders. Through her reflective memory, I explore her role as leader.

Who am I in Relation to Family?

*I have learned that success is to be measured
not so much by the position that one has reached
in life as by the obstacles which he has had
to overcome while trying to succeed.*

- Booker T. Washington

As I studied and pondered over the many stories of Karen Cole, I continued to reflect back to her childhood era as well as to the stories of her grandparents' earlier years. Throughout her stories, Karen Cole refers to the influences of her grandparents, particularly those of her maternal grandmother. As I read of Grandmother Jones' hardships, I reflected on the ongoing social upheaval taking place in America during the early 1900s through the 1960s, and the struggle for women's rights during her years of childhood to maturity.

Born in 1906 in the backwoods of North Carolina, Grandmother Jones was a young woman in the midst of social change. Even with turmoil brewing in America, her father's obsession of women's oppression did not reflect any change in lifestyle that equated those erupting in society.

Based upon her childhood oppression, Grandmother Jones' struggles reflect the same issues as the 1900s Women's Suffrage Movement. Was she, a female, of little value as insisted by her father? What were her thoughts as she heard mention of changes in women's rights during her grueling days at the mill? I wonder her thoughts in 1920 as she learned that women were granted the right to vote under the 19th Constitutional Amendment (Barber, 1998).

Did she know of the on-going law suits during the 1930's through the 1960's advocating women's rights to birth control? In 1963, as she was still working diligently in the mill at age 57, I can only guess what went through her mind as she heard of the Federal Equal Pay Act. It became illegal for employers to pay a woman less than what a man would receive for the same job (Imbornoni, 2007).

Karen speaks of her **grandmother's strong will**, her **boldness**, throughout the narrative; however, only once speaks of Grandmother Jones' physical appearance. Karen recalls seeing a picture, for the first time, of Grandmother Jones as a young woman. It is a picture that portrays an outward appearance of Karen's grandmother as the daring young woman. Prior to seeing the picture, Karen had only experienced her grandmother's boldness through actions; strong, confident and admired actions of a much older woman.

*I have a picture of my grandma when she was, probably, in her twenties. I saw it for the first time after my grandpa passed away. I don't know why, but I was surprised when I saw the picture. My grandma was dressed in a roaring twenties **flapper** outfit! She looked so confident, like she could handle anything. She had on a coat too. It had fur all the way around it. She looked so pretty and dignified. I was more surprised that she was wearing such a nice outfit because I know they were poor. But, I **wasn't surprised** that she would wear it.*

Even though surprised by seeing the outward boldness of her grandmother's clothing, Karen and her family saw the **boldness** of her grandmother through everyday actions.

*Mama and daddy didn't like my hair cut short, but they didn't argue with grandma. **Nobody argued with grandma.** She was one of those people who had that tone of voice and could cut her eyes at you. When she cut her eyes at you and changed her tone of voice, you didn't argue with grandma. Grandpa even knew that. Grandpa would argue with grandma, then grandma would **cut her eyes** and **change her tone of voice** and pa would shut up. That was so funny. You know, they didn't argue much.*

From Karen Cole's narratives, Grandmother Jones wanted more in life; perhaps she felt value and self worth regardless of her father's gender-bias. Perhaps Grandmother Jones knew that if she could not make a difference in her own life, she would make a difference in the lives of her future generations. Yes, she had experienced a bad childhood, but *she* wanted more for her granddaughters. She would seek the "good" for them. It would become Grandmother Jones' legacy.

Grandmother Jones, had she not been illiterate, may have enjoyed reading Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which attacked the then-popular idea that women found fulfillment solely through motherhood and homemaking. Freidman called it, "a problem that has no name" in current society (1963, p. 20). Grandmother Jones wanted more; she wanted more for her granddaughters, especially Karen.

Bold-typed words, from Karen's narrative, indicate grandmother's strong will as a woman in a man's world. Her grandmother was a driving force to seek independence and self-worth within her granddaughters.

*Grandma never pushed the boys, but **she pushed us girls**. She always said that a man could make it, but **a woman had to be stronger**.*

*Grandma Jones **always voted**. Even though grandpa tried to tell her how to vote, she would mark her own ballot. Grandpa would go into the voting booth with grandma and read it to her, but **she'd vote the way she wanted**.*

Karen Cole's emergence of self occurred from 1955 throughout the 1960s, within the years of desegregation. Public schools in the 1960s, from Karen's southern view, saw the slow metamorphosis taking place in classrooms across America. She encountered varying degrees of gender and class bias; however, she also reaped the triumph of teachers who saw value in each person regardless of gender, social status, or race. The value of women as productive citizens was slowly, often at a snail's pace, coming to light.

Little did this vulnerable young student realize that she, growing up each day in a southern, small, rural farming community, was in the midst of such a monumental social change taking place in American society. Even from the small corners of southern rural America, the plight of women's rights and equity in education was peeking through the shadows within this little girl. She possessed a glimmer of self worth that was surfacing from a grandmother's desire for more.

In the narrative analysis that follows, I assess the influences of Karen Cole's family members, particularly those of her grandmothers, and childhood teachers that are embedded in her philosophies as a current educator. From

these experiences, I delve deeper into Karen Cole as a teacher, as a colleague and as a leader.

Influence of Family

Karen Cole grew up in poverty. In her words, they were materially poor but rich in other ways. “We were not middle class; we were just poor. I don’t think I was poor, but as far as money goes, we were very poor.” Due to impecunious financial hardships, she and her parents lived her early childhood years with her maternal grandparents (Jones). They lived in a rural North Carolina farming community where extended family members were neighbors who worked together, communed at church together, and socialized together.

She recalls the strong family bonds strengthened by the weekly Sunday family reunions and joyous play times with her cousins. I have bold-typed the highlights of Karen’s thoughts of her family and community. During each event, Karen portrays a picture of strong family bonds, playing together with cousins, story telling as a means of passing heritage, and the community coming together. All of these “events” reflect Karen’s deep rooted **southern traditions of God and kin**. Even though these were regular, weekly practices for Karen Cole’s family, these types of activities have become increasingly rare as Karen indicates in her narrative. Note the repetition of *pretend*.

*We would “string up” tables outside and everybody would bring food. We would have a big party and have pictures made, run in and out and have **a lot of fun. People don’t***

have family reunions anymore. Everybody in the family would come every Sunday and we would put out tables for food under the big tree.

We had all kinds of **pretend play** that children don't get now. We played a lot as children. **Children don't play much today.** We would get a quilt and go under the tree in the summer. We didn't stay in the house like kids do now. We'd put up the quilt and **pretend** we were Indians or camping out. **We had imagination.** We had a swing set and would **pretend** that we were astronauts. We had all kinds of **pretend play** that children don't get now. We had the most fun playing.

We'd play school. I'd take rocks and write on the tin. I was always the teacher. My cousins would come over and we would play, climb in the barn and do all those fun things; have so much fun . . . we'd fly kites. **I felt important** when I was playing with my cousins.

I remember Thanksgiving every year because all the **neighbors would come over** and we had what was called a **hog killing.** Grandpa would take the rifle out and the big butcher knife. I remember him getting the big butcher knife out of the drawer. I remember grandpa saying that all the children had to stay in the house. We would hear a gun shot and then a squeal. They would kill the pig and then cut its throat. I remember that was so devastating because we had played around those pigs, fed them corn all year long and that day they were dead. Later that afternoon we were eating pig for supper. I remember hog killing as a child.

I have a lot of **good memories** with Uncle Ben and Aunt Penny because we lived behind their store and would run down there. Aunt Penny would **tell us stories of long ago.** We'd get a penny to buy a Coke or cracker at the store. Plus my great-grandma lived across the woods and I remember picking strawberries at her house. That's where I would meet my cousin Betsy.

Sunday family gatherings, holiday gatherings, playing with cousins, and community *get togethers* were as commonplace and routine for Karen Cole as going to school. With paternal grandparents (Smith) and their extended family members also living in the community, Karen Cole was immersed in family communion. She lived in **financial poverty** but lived within the **richness of family bonds**.

Influence of Maternal Grandparents

In this section I will discuss the influence of Grandmother and Grandfather Jones in Karen's life. I look at the numerous lessons taught through life experiences with her maternal grandparents and how these experiences influence Karen's educational goals, religious beliefs, and sense of self.

From living with her Grandmother Jones, who could neither read nor write, Karen Cole ironically learned the value of an education. Living in poverty, while working lengthy hours at the mill, Grandmother Jones had to decide between frugal and frivolous spending. She lived a life without lavishness. Some might see *Little Golden Books* as a luxury. **Grandmother Jones saw the books as a necessity.**

During those early childhood years, Karen recalls how, on numerous occasions, even though money was scarce, her grandmother would buy *Little Golden Books*. Regardless of her grandmother's illiteracy, they would look at the pictures together and create their own stories. It was during these special

bonding times together that Grandmother Jones would often tell her granddaughter that one day Karen would teach her to read. To this day, Karen Cole remembers the value and special care that her grandmother took with literature, carefully boxing picture books away after use, referring to them as precious items not to be destroyed. Books were important to Grandmother Jones and she taught her granddaughter to value them as well.

Even though her grandmother was not formally educated, she had the wisdom to encourage her granddaughter to value the importance of an education, teaching her that it was a gift that could never be taken away. Perhaps the larger gift from her grandmother was the unspoken gift of independence and self-worth.

I have bold-typed Karen's comments related to her grandmother's strong influence on literacy at an early age; that literature is essential for overcoming the boundaries of illiteracy. Note-worthy is the strong verb Karen uses to relay her grandmother's desire, *determined*. No matter the cost or financial hardship, she was determined Karen would read.

*Reading was the most important thing to my Grandmother Jones because she couldn't read . . . and so, each payday, which was every Friday back then, she would go to Mr. Thompson's store. Mr. Thompson always had Little Golden Books. She was **determined** that I was going to **have books very early**. She would turn the pages and kind of tell me stories because she couldn't read the words on the pages. I can remember sitting on her lap as just a little, tiny child and her turning those pages and telling me the story. That was **Grandma Jones' big thing, that we all learn to read**.*

She wanted all her grandchildren to read because she didn't know how to read . . . Grandma Jones could not read and she wanted me to go to college to be a teacher and to teach her to read. I never got to do that, but that is what she wanted me to do . . . to teach her to read.

Visits with her maternal grandparents taught Karen Cole valuable life lessons. Grandmother Jones' wisdom taught her granddaughter the importance and worth of literacy and independence. In a wavering society filled with increasing awareness of gender and class bias, Grandmother Jones, in her small, rural corner of America, was preparing her granddaughter for a brighter future. She had lived a harsh reality of gender unfairness as a child and young woman and was now conquering those inequities through her granddaughter.

From Grandfather Jones, she not only learned educational skills, but life lessons in general. Even though Karen Cole indicates that her grandfather had a tendency to be lazy and her Grandmother Jones' steady, ardent work at the mill provided their needs, she made numerous references to her grandfather's significance in her education.

*My grandparents were such a big influence on my value of life long learning. Grandpa Jones thought it was **his responsibility to teach me things too**. He always wore bib overalls and had a pocket watch . . . one of those big, old, round things. It would fit in a little pocket on the overalls and he would pull it out and we would talk about time. He would let me listen to it tick and he would talk about how many seconds it would tick in a minute and how many minutes in an hour. I can't ever remember not knowing how to tell time. I was pushed . . . not really pushed, but encouraged to always keep learning.*

***He taught** me about newspapers and what they were about. He was a phonetic reader. Even though I learned to read from grandma pretending to read the Little Golden Books, I learned to phonetically read from a newspaper from my grandpa. He would go, if he didn't know the word, for example, "double" he could go . . . "d" "o" "dou" "ble."*

*My grandpa thought it was **important for us to write**. So, he made sure that we had a **new pencil every week**. I tell you . . . just learning to do things with them was so much fun.*

*My grandpa lived for ninety-seven years. He was buried in his overalls. I'm having a pair of his **overalls and his pocket watch framed**. They mean so much to me. He thought anything I told him was the absolute gospel; I'm the one educated and the one who knows everything. My Grandmother Jones lived ninety-one years. She died on Christmas Eve. I miss her so much.*

As with Grandmother Jones, her grandfather taught educational skills, but he also taught valuable life lessons. Throughout the interviews, Karen Cole made on-going mention to the lessons learned from her grandparents; lessons that were instilled from their values. From her grandparents' humble resources, she learned the importance of life, that it was precious and not to be wasted.

I have bold-typed one life lesson, part of the **moral curriculum**, learned by Karen at a very young age.

***Grandpa Jones taught us a lot of life lessons.** I'll never forget one Sunday my cousins and I had caught turtles and put them in a basket. We forgot about them and they died. The next Sunday, when all seven of us came over, Grandpa Jones set us down in a row. He brought those turtles in the basket to show us and talked about how life was precious and that we needed to be more careful when we played. I never will forget crying and crying over killing those turtles, even though*

*it wasn't on purpose. **Grandpa wanted us to know that you don't take a life unless it is necessary.** It wasn't too long after that he killed a turtle and we ate it for supper!*

Grandmother and Grandfather Jones always wanted the best for their grandchildren. They had scant finances, but had an abundance of determination. They had determination to see that their grandchildren have success in their lives. They demonstrated their desire in their *teachings* and also in their daily lives. They taught their grandchildren to be thrifty, that food was not to be wasted, and to make the most of resources.

*I remember my grandpa had caught a turtle in a trap. He and all the daddys loved turtle. My grandpa killed that turtle and I watched him clean that turtle. Now that was more than I could hardly take, but I guess that was part of the **education too, learning how people eat.** Then we had to hear about how the Indians ate turtle and used the shell for this and the shell for that. Grandma, bless her heart, she cooked turtle for my pa; she would make turtle soup.*

Even at mealtime, whether family or extended family dinners, **southern culture was demonstrated in their food.** Southern culture directed the meat at dinner, often wild life rather than domestically raised animals. Living within their means, dinner was often not the food of choice for the grandchildren; however, was substantial and plentiful in their rural farming community. Nevertheless, Grandmother and Grandfather Jones wanted more for their grandchildren. They wanted their grandchildren to **taste the good** life; serving *barbeque* and *chicken* to their grandchildren. Through her grandmother and grandfather's wisdom and

resourcefulness, Karen never felt as though she was missing anything in her life, saying, "What I ate was good . . ."

*One Sunday, grandma knew what grandpa was doing, but she didn't say anything, just looked at us and grinned. He said I got some new stuff for you to try today. There were two bowls of meat and one of them was kind of a black looking meat. Grandpa said, "I want you to try this **new type of barbeque**." Come to find out someone had **killed a raccoon and barbequed it** and that was raccoon barbeque! Oh Lord!*

*Then in the **other pot was this wonderful chicken** with cornflake crumbs. It was softer and a little more greasy, but it was really good. When we had eaten, grandma said, part of it was chicken, but part of it was turtle. What I ate was **good**; I thought it was white meat chicken, but I think I ate a piece of turtle too.*

Emphasizing the imperativeness of education, Grandparents Jones celebrated educational accomplishments with their grandchildren. Formal education was a milestone for the Jones' grandchildren. It was a time when *Graduating from First Grade* was an important event, parallel only to Christmas and birthdays. Both maternal grandparents, especially Grandmother Jones, symbolized the important step in learning by not only addressing it with a name, *Graduating from First Grade*, but also the importance was symbolized by dressing the graduating grandchild in their best Sunday clothes and providing each child with scarce money. They would signify the event with wearing their *finest clothes* for the *finest occasion*. Even though it was warm outside, Karen

Cole's *finest* was a little white sweater which Grandmother Jones insisted she carry on the trip.

Grandmother Jones was celebrating her own triumph over illiteracy through her granddaughter. Dressing her granddaughter in her Sunday best clothes and driving to another town for a shopping spree must have **paralleled to a triumphal march for women's rights in the mind of Grandmother Jones.** Her granddaughter would not encounter the chains of illiteracy as did Grandmother Jones.

I have bold-typed the rewards and *special treatment* as Karen Cole recaptures the significance of passing first grade.

*My Grandmother Jones called it, **Graduating from First Grade.** I remember all of us . . . when we graduated from first grade you went shopping with Grandma and Grandpa Jones one Saturday in Salisbury. You would get to **spend five dollars.***

*I never will forget grandma in Salisbury on my **special day.** Grandma Jones got me up and dressed me in my **black shinny shoes and a little red dress.** Grandma had given me a little white sweater for Christmas and for some reason, **I had to take that little white sweater with me** even though it was somewhere around June.*

*I remember my grandma and grandpa holding my hand going down to Salisbury. One on one side and one on the other and I was skipping in between them. I held her hand all day in the stores while I spent that five dollars. **She was so proud of me for learning to read.***

***I thought I was so special that day.** I came home and told Billy, because he was a year behind me. I said, "You better make good grades and pass first grade because you get to go to town with grandma and grandpa." I remember telling him all about it. I said, "You better learn to read or*

*grandma won't let you go to Salisbury if you don't learn to read." **Grandma just made it special about school and how important it was.** Everyone of us passed first grade, all seven of us, and we all got to go to Salisbury with them.*

The importance of education did not end with the maternal grandparents after first grade. It continued throughout high school and into college. Karen Cole's grandparents remained steadfast in their determination to free their granddaughter of the binds of illiteracy and low self worth. It was once again, a lifting out of the submissive hole from Grandmother Jones' childhood.

I have bold-typed Karen's remembrance as to her grandmother's persistence to keep her focused in reading. At age fifteen, Grandmother Jones continued to transcend Karen in an educational path.

***Grandmother Jones insisted that I read every night** before I went to bed. I even remember at age fifteen, she insisted that I read every night!*

High School Graduation was an occasion beyond the jubilant scope of Graduation from First Grade. Grandmother and Grandfather Jones endured hazardous weather conditions and nightfall to attend the auspicious occasion. Dressed in their finest, weather did not dampen the joyfulness of their success, a triumph seen in the graduation of their granddaughter. This event, for proud Grandmother and Grandfather Jones, marked another spiral up in the **transcendence** from first grade through high school. Stressing ever, Karen

reflects the enthusiasm of her grandmother. It was a *dream in the clouds* that was becoming a reality for Grandmother Jones.

*I still remember graduating . . . when I graduated (from high school) Grandma and Grandpa Jones came to my graduation and **she was so proud of those honor robes**. She and my Grandpa Jones, **they drove in pouring down rain that night**.*

*Nobody in my Grandma Jones' family hardly ever graduated from high school. I was the **first person to go to college, EVER** and **she was so proud of that**.*

Throughout financial hardships during college, the bond of family, pulling together resources, and the sustaining hope from Grandmother Jones, gave Karen Cole the strength to keep alive her dreams, and the dream of her grandmother, to become a teacher.

As noted by educational scholar Maxine Green, "The world can only be renewed if the silenced can speak, if there are new names. Naming, people interpret; they confer meaning on what others had taken for their own (1997, p. 5). Unbeknownst to her, Karen Cole was on the front line of her grandmother's fight against women's oppression. Perhaps it was a fight that Grandmother Jones, herself, did not outright declare.

Bold-typed are the *it takes a community to raise a child* endeavors as family and community pitched in to help Karen succeed in college. She would be *their* success story, but more importantly, Grandmother Jones' success story. To Grandmother Jones, Karen's graduation from college would allow her to surpass the current blockades encountered in illiteracy as well as women's oppression.

*The summer before I went to college I held down a full time job trying to earn money for college. I had gotten one scholarship and a grant. I still lacked money for tuition and to pay for my books. I knew that my mom and dad wouldn't be able to afford it . . . but **Dad had done some outside work** and earned enough to pay for my books.*

*I didn't get to stay on campus because I didn't have enough money to do that. We didn't have an extra car so **mama paid a lady to let her ride to work** every morning so I could drive the car . . . but **Grandma Jones, she had been saving money too**. She would hide a little money back for me. She was so proud that I was going to college.*

*On Fridays in college, it was my own **special day**. I had late Friday schedules and a break between classes. My grandparents didn't live too far away. **Grandma would cook lunch for me so I wouldn't have to pay for it**. She would have homemade biscuits coming out of the oven and vegetable soup when I got there. Then **she would slip me money** for gas so I could go back and forth.*

*She would say, "I can't help you study, but tell me what you're studying and I'll tell you about it. It was so funny . . . she would **want to know what I had learned that week**. If I had projects in college she would give me the money to go to Roses to get what I needed like poster board and things. **Even though she couldn't read to me, she was providing me with supplies that I needed for college**.*

Grandmother Jones was seventy-two years old when Karen graduated from college. Throughout those numerous years, many celebrations of births, weddings, and community events had occurred. Not one of those events equaled the monumental importance of the day Karen graduated from college. "It was the happiest day of her life."

As with Graduation from First Grade and High School Graduation, Grandmother and Grandfather Jones dressed in their Sunday finest to attend graduation. It must have felt surreal to Grandmother Jones as Karen's *finest hour* occurred, as she accepted her college diploma. The *dreamlike* experience for Grandmother Jones **transcended Karen further up the spiral** to end women's oppression.

*Graduation from college, I think, was the **happiest day of my Grandmother Jones' life**. My Grandmother didn't go to a lot of occasions, but I **recall her buying a new dress** and coming to graduation. It was the **highlight of her life** . . . to see me graduate from college and to become a teacher.*

*My Grandfather Jones brought her that day and he was very excited that day too. He never wore a suit, but **he did wear a suit the day that I graduated from college**. The first thing he did was make me a paddle for my classroom! That's what he gave me for graduation . . . a paddle! I remember Grandma Jones saying **she wanted her picture made with me with my cap and gown** . . . I remember she told me that all that hard work had paid off . . .that I was graduating from college. I graduated in three and a half years. It was the **highlight of her life**.*

"It was the highlight of her life," said Karen, knowing graduation had just as important of a meaning to Grandmother Jones as it does for Karen. Once again, Grandmother Jones had triumphed, through Karen, a small advocacy for women's rights.

Grandmother Jones was a Christian woman who embedded those values in her granddaughter. Karen Cole spoke frequently of Grandmother Jones' religious actions within her narratives. Even though she did not recite religious

scriptures throughout her daily encounters as did Grandmother Smith, Grandmother Jones' actions spoke loud and clear of her religious commitment.

I have bold-face typed events that Karen recalls that exemplify the importance of attending church, all part of their **God and kin southern culture**. Grandmother Jones taught Karen to reach for a *higher life*. Karen never understood why her grandparents attended the community church where wealthier people attended, but remembers, according to Grandmother Jones, the *proper* dress for a lady. This is another example of Grandmother Jones wanting more for Karen, she wanted Karen to know *the good life*.

*I remember going to church with Grandmother Jones every Sunday. She would get **dressed up** with her dress . . . put on her hat and gloves. She always carried a pocketbook. I remember she told me, "A **lady always covered her head with a hat and wore gloves to church.**"*

*She'd let me go with her to her Sunday School class with all the little old ladies. We would have chewing gum. It was the **only time she offered it to me, chewing gum** . . . while we were at church.*

*Other times I remember going to church and Grandma Jones getting out an **envelope to put money in it**. More of the wealthy class of people went to Grandma Jones' church so I never could understand why she went there . . . because she and pa were not wealthy at all.*

Karen Cole reflects on the religious influence of her maternal grandmother during her high school years, efforts which often incorporated her unwavering push for literacy. Longing for her granddaughter to teach her to read, Grandmother Jones assisted her granddaughter in the best possible means;

incorporating religion with her assignments. Grandmother Jones **insisted** Karen read every night; once again, her strong desire for Karen to obtain a better life, through education.

*Even at that age (fifteen years), my Grandmother Jones **insisted** that I read every night before I would go to bed. The only thing she had around the house much to read were . . . the books they sent every month from the church, My Upper Room . . . and the Bible. So, **I learned to read the Bible early and I learned to read the Upper Room.***

Grandmother Jones cherished her Christian beliefs. She also valued education. By **incorporating religion** into school assignments, Grandmother Jones must have thought there was **no greater means of helping** her granddaughter. Karen Cole speaks of her grandmother's assistance in a high school language arts project.

*We had to illustrate a book of poems. Grandma Jones asked me what I was doing. I said, "Grandma, I am working on this poetry project. She asked, "What is poetry?" I told grandma what poetry was. She said, "I have a lot of old **bulletins that I've saved from church.**" Every bulletin she gave me I could use something in them.*

*I found this big abstract picture of Jesus hanging on a cross. I found a pair of praying hands out of one of the books and I cut that out and used it. Grandma said, "That picture looks terrible." I said, "No, no grandma, that picture looks so different I'm going to use it with one of my poems." When I got my project back **I got the most encouraging remarks** about my poetry book. She said it was one of the best illustrations she had ever seen with the poem.*

*I showed it to grandma and she said, "What does it say? What does it say?" **She thought my grade was her grade!***

I can still see us cutting out that abstract picture of Jesus and putting it with that poem.

From Grandmother Jones' perspective, Karen's grade was her grade. Karen's success in life would be her success in life.

Throughout the hardships, Karen maintains her determination at the forefront, keeping in mind that life's hardships are also life's lessons. It's another lesson taught from her grandparents. Karen reflects that **life's lessons have the ability to transcend a person from the depths of hardships**. All of which are part of a bigger plan.

*I guess you have to go through so many trials and tribulations and make sure that you still follow your dreams and make sure that you make them reality. I think that everything happens for a purpose and reason. I look at it now as **God's plan for me**.*

The 1920s Constitutional Amendment giving women the right to vote, and the on-going fight for women's rights, must have been at the forefront of Grandmother Jones' thoughts as she and her mother were verbally degraded by an abusive father as being worthless and without merit. To have endured these mental attacks, Grandmother Jones must have engrained a strong desire to overcome the shackles of oppression; igniting an inner flicker of fire that burned brighter each day. She was fighting to leave the bad life behind and to search for the good life, one free of oppression.

Noteworthy is Karen's interrupted thought as she initially told how girls couldn't work on the farm. Mid-way through the sentence, she redirected her sentence to "well, they thought girls couldn't." Grandmother Jones' views are instilled in Karen. Her words echo the thoughts of her grandmother as she clearly detested the unfair treatment of females. Bold-face typed are Karen's unyielding opinions based on the unequal treatment of women.

*My Grandmother Jones grew up hard; **girls were treated like dirt back then.** My grandma had been disowned. Boys were treated very, very special back then. The more boys you had . . . they could work on the farm and cut wood. Well girls couldn't . . . well, they **thought** girls couldn't.*

She left at eighteen and came to this county to work in the mill. She worked there until after she was seventy years old. She would have worked longer had Dickson (mill supervisor) not made her retire at age seventy. She resented that.

*She worked on the spinner. My grandmother had hair all down her back. **She sat on her hair because it had never been cut her entire life.** Well, she wore it braided and the spinning machine grabbed her hair and got caught in the machine. She almost got pulled into the machine. If it hadn't been for someone standing nearby she would have probably been killed.*

*My grandmother went and got a haircut the next day and got her hair cut real short so it couldn't get caught in the machine. Well, she got on the train to go back home for the weekend. When my grandfather saw it . . . it was such an **indignity to get her hair cut that he disowned her!** He told her that **girls weren't worth anything** anyway, the only thing girls were **worth was the hair on their head!** He disowned her and she didn't inherit any of the property, anything, because of that!*

Did the belittlement and worthlessness embedded by her father only give Grandmother Jones the strength to seek a better life for her future granddaughters? Living her own battle for women's rights in the backwoods of rural North Carolina, did the young Grandmother Jones know that she would become a catalyst in educating a future generation? She would advocate an education based upon Christian values and formal schooling. She also educated her grandchildren through life lessons, making the most of resources and providing lessons that taught worth and value in all human beings, especially women. She made her granddaughters feel *special* and to embed within themselves a sense of self-worth.

Karen continually uses *special* and *determine* throughout her narrative when discussing how she felt in the presence of her grandmother.

*My grandmother . . . I think when I was born and I was a girl, it was just, **I was really special to her.** I think she was intending for everyone to know that **girls are special.** Girls could do anything that they want to do, the only thing they need to have is **determination.** I think she instilled in me very quickly that learning was important and also having the **determination** to do what you want to do. **She was determined to live her life** after that. He disowned her and she never went back.*

Noteworthy is Karen's memory of her grandmother's reaction to being disowned by her father. She was *determined* to live her life . . . she absolutely *hated* long hair. Her grandmother was fighting for self respect and worth as a female. She was fighting for Karen too.

*My Grandma Jones, she really valued . . . **she really valued us girls.** I had long hair as a child, all the way down my back. I was spending the week with grandma and she took me with her to the beauty shop and had the lady cut off my hair. It was a pixie haircut, cut short all the way around my head. My mama and daddy didn't like it. They got angry, but they didn't argue with grandma. Nobody argued with grandma . . . **grandma absolutely hated long hair.***

Grandmother Jones was *determined to live her life* after being disowned as a worthless daughter. She was also determined to live a life of betterment, but to also open the doors to a better life for her granddaughters. By cutting Karen's hair, in her own way, Grandmother Jones was making a statement. She was challenging anyone to dare her granddaughter of being unworthy. Once again, she was saying **good riddance to the bad life** of years past and **securing a good life** for her granddaughters.

Influence of Paternal Grandparents

During this section, I will discuss Karen Cole's paternal grandparents, Grandmother and Grandfather Smith, and their influence on educational expectations, religious views, and Karen's sense of self-worth.

A **sharp contrast** to the strong educational influences of her maternal grandparents, Karen Cole speaks briefly of her paternal grandparents. Particularly, her story told **disparity between the two grandmothers.** She spoke of coming to terms with the internal struggles from being held to high

expectations from her maternal grandparents to the harshness of shortcomings and low self-worth when visiting her paternal grandmother.

I have bold-face typed Karen's **diminishing self-worth**, a descent down her spiral of self-esteem, when in the presence of her paternal grandmother.

Note Karen's descriptive memory, using *inferior*, *unimportant*, and *put down*, to reflect her contradictory feelings in the presence of Grandmother Smith.

*She (Grandmother Smith) seemed to always make me feel **unimportant**. I always felt **inferior** around her. I was always told that I wasn't as good as so-and-so grandchild. So, I'd go from **Grandma Jones' house, where I was the smartest**, the most important and could do everything . . . to her house (**Grandmother Smith**) where I would **be put down**. I wasn't as good as (cousin 1). I wasn't as smart as (cousin 2). I was fat. I couldn't do things. That was when I was younger.*

*As I grew older, my Grandmother Smith began to respect me. When I turned sixteen and could drive her somewhere, she liked me to take her to town, she started to respect me then. Until about age sixteen, she would put me down all the time. I didn't like to stay with her. **I never felt like I was loved.***

Karen Cole spoke of her monumental educational milestones, graduating from high school and from college. Recognizing that these were important events in her life that were attended and supported by her maternal grandparents, she quickly recognizes the **lack of encouragement** from her paternal grandparents. Karen continues to feel her paternal grandmother's lack of confidence in her academic achievement. Karen felt no support, reflecting that her Grandmother Smith thought she wouldn't make it.

*I still remember when I graduated from high school; Grandma and Grandpa Smith did not come. Graduation from college was the happiest day of my Grandmother Jones' life. I remember my Grandmother and Grandfather **Smith didn't come. I don't think she (Grandmother Smith) thought that I would make it.** She knew I was going to attempt it, but she didn't think that I was going to make it.*

It is clear to Karen Cole that expectations in others can bruise or heighten their self-esteem. She felt *special* when visiting her maternal grandparents who held high expectations for their granddaughter. However, within the same day, she would fall to discouragement in the presence of her paternal grandmother. A harsh life lesson to learn, Karen Cole remembers these lessons in later years. "There were so many life lessons that happened to me that have helped me become a better teacher."

Grandmother Smith was revered by the community as a strong and faithful Christian woman. She and Grandfather Smith regularly attended worship services and were influential in constructing their community church. Karen recognizes the **religious values** of her paternal grandparents; however, she speaks only briefly of examples of their religious influences in her life. Even those influences associated a negative conviction. In contrast, Karen Cole reflects often of *church memories* with her maternal grandmother. It is ironic that Karen Cole indicates she received her religious upbringing from her Grandmother Smith, but speaks of many religious memories with her maternal grandmother, Grandmother Jones.

I have highlighted the staunch wording Karen uses when demonstrating her paternal grandmother's religious demeanor.

*I think I got a lot of spiritual guidance from Grandma Smith. (church name) is where my Grandma and Grandpa Smith went to church. They were some of the **founders of the church** and helped build it. My Grandma Smith was **very religious**. She would always **spout scriptures** at you in one way or another . . . She would ask me all kinds of questions.*

*If I would say, yes, daddy had been drinking, she would spout out all these scriptures. She would have me so upset as a child because I just knew that my daddy was **going to hell** and that my family was going to be torn apart . . . she seemed to always make me feel unimportant.*

*She was **a good woman, a good Christian woman.***

Karen Cole considers both her grandmothers as religious women. Grandmother Jones' religious beliefs were evidenced in her daily actions and loving nature. Raising Karen as a Christian and incorporating her religious literature into Karen's assignments, Grandmother Jones assisted Karen in the best means possible, by loving example. Grandmother Smith and her steadfast commitment to religious rules and regulations was, what we could call, the **keeper of the commandments** versus Grandmother Jones' the **giver of love**. Both women hold important roles in Karen's eyes.

Grandmother Smith had a strong influence on Karen Cole's sense of self worth and self-esteem. It was a powerful, **demeaning influence**. Karen Cole's on-going references to her paternal grandmother's lack of confidence in her

granddaughter quickly embedded feelings of insignificance and even created jealous rivalry among cousins.

I have boldfaced the inner feelings Karen reflects toward her paternal grandmother. But also highlighted is another hint toward the struggle in Karen as the granddaughter of two women, both role models, who had completely different views of Karen and her value in society.

*Grandma Smith was always putting us down. She made me, (sister 1) and (sister 2) feel inferior to others in the family because our daddy would drink and because we didn't have a lot of money like others in the family. Grandma Smith always made me feel that I wasn't important; I wasn't intelligent; I wasn't pretty; **I wasn't special at all.***

*Grandma Smith always treated me and (cousin) so differently that it caused a jealousy between us. It gave me bad feelings. Going from one grandma (Jones) and feeling so special and then going to the other grandma (Smith) and being **always put down.***

*One thing was my being overweight . . . and I wasn't pretty . . . **not special at all.** I don't know, I just didn't like going there. Every Sunday, we would go to Grandma and Grandpa Jones' and have such a good time and then we would go back by Grandma and Grandpa Smiths' and . . . **a lot of times I wouldn't even go in the house.***

Throughout her childhood years, Karen Cole struggled with her paternal grandmother's disparagement. Reflecting on a Christmas memory, Karen Cole tries to come to terms with her Grandmother Smith's coldness. While reflecting, Karen Cole points out that she often spoke her mind as a child. This curse, or

blessing, depending on which grandmother's view is taken, may have been the catalyst of Grandmother Smith's criticism toward her granddaughter.

Karen reflects on her memories and feelings of surprise when Grandmother Smith treated her as an equal to her cousins.

*I remember the Christmas my Grandma Smith gave every one of us grandchildren, the girls, a doll. They were in plastic cases. I got a doll just as pretty as anyone else. **I didn't think that I would get a doll**, but I did. I thought she would give one to everyone but me, but I got one like everybody else. I still have my doll. I don't know if my cousins have their dolls, but I still have mine. I didn't think she'd give me one but she did.*

Note that Karen interprets that her sometimes audacity as a child was looked upon as impudence by her paternal grandmother. Continuing to demonstrate her culture of respect for *God and kin*, Karen respects her religious grandmother, dismissing it as *alright* because she was a good, Christian woman.

*I guess I just wasn't one of her favorite grandchildren. It may have been because I talked too much . . . Sometimes, if I didn't agree with something, I'd say so. If I thought something wasn't right, I'd say so. My Grandma Smith didn't like that; but if I thought something wasn't fair, I'd say so. **I don't think she liked my opinions** . . . but that's alright. She was a good woman, a good Christian woman.*

Karen Cole searches for answers to her unhappy childhood with her paternal grandmother. Clearly stating she values her paternal grandmother as a good woman, she questions her own behavior as a child. Nevertheless, having

spent the majority of her childhood with her maternal grandmother, Karen Cole's self perception was, in contrast, emerging as one of independence. She learned to participate in discussions and to judge equity in situations.

Grandmother Smith; however, chastised Karen Cole for the very same reasons that were celebrated by Grandmother Jones. The granddaughter of two women, both important role models, brought Karen contradictory and confusing views of women's worth in society.

Community as Family

Karen Cole's world is **engulfed in community**. She lives in a world that evolves around trials, triumphs, and tragedies. Throughout each encounter, immediate family, extended family and community members prove steadfast in providing the support and encouragement needed to climb out of the trenches of distress. She lives in a **southern culture of the traditions of God and kin**.

Karen Cole speaks of the many hardships that were overcome for her to attend college. There was the financial strain of tuition and textbooks, having only one family car for transportation, and the heart attack of her father.

I have boldfaced the struggles, hardships, and sacrifices as family and extended family members pitched in to help Karen succeed in college. They performed worthy acts of kindness, but the acts were a common thread of their engrained community tradition of *God and kin*; Karen's **southern culture of neighbors helping neighbors in times of need**.

*I remember my first year, in November, thinking that I wouldn't be able to finish. My dad had a massive heart attack. Tuition was going to come due again in December to go back in the spring semester and I knew there was no money for books. I thought, **Oh Lord, where is the money coming from?***

***It must have just been meant to be**, because Mrs. Lee, she was a **community person, offered me a job** at Roses working during Christmas. She let me work after Thanksgiving and I earned enough money to pay for books. Mrs. Moore at (college) said come in and talk to me because I know your daddy is sick and everything . . . her sister-in-law worked in the office where my daddy worked. **Mrs. Moore found me a student loan** that I could pay back later. I got to stay in school.*

*I found out later that my **uncle wanted me to stay in school** so much that **he had gone to work** and was helping daddy and mama pay their bills so that they wouldn't have to worry about me. He ran the local gas station. Gas was rationed back in the seventies and I was a day student so I drove back and forth everyday. He (uncle) would put two dollars in the tank, then he would roll it back so that it wouldn't look like I was getting more than two dollars.*

*He ran a charge account for my parents so daddy could pay him as he could for my gas going to school. It was **just meant to be for me to go to school. Grandma and Grandpa Jones would slip me money every now and then.***

Even the help from extended family and community members were part of what Karen views as God's bigger plan. Through perseverance Karen could achieve her goals in life, to graduate from college and become a teacher.

Karen Cole lived in a family that was poor in material items but rich in compassion and concern for their fellow neighbor. Even with scarce money, outreach wasn't questioned when others were in need. She grew up in a

community of **neighbors helping neighbors** in times of trouble and need. The sense of outreach infused in Karen Cole during her childhood years remained entrenched through adulthood as she commits to serving others.

She recalls the hardships of her cousins who spent their summers with her family. Even during their troubles, self-respect through appearance was taught, all part of Grandmother Jones' **moral curriculum**. It was *respectable* to have haircuts. There was a continual search to seek the *good* out of the *bad*.

*Poor Timmy and Tommy, their life was so difficult. Mama shared with me some things lately and I didn't know that their life was so bad growing up. I just knew that when they came over in the summer, **the first place they would go would be the barber shop**. They would get a summer haircut.*

*When we took them back home at the end of summer, the night before school started, **we would always get them shoes**. They would have the same shoes on at the end of the school year when they came back . . . even if the shoes were crunching their toes.*

Karen interprets her current practices as a teacher a result of her grandmother's moral curriculum. Her childhood experiences assist Karen in better understanding the diversity of her students.

*They always cried when they went back; they wanted to stay with us. They were so unhappy. I didn't realize that they didn't get other things like we did and that **made me think a lot**. **It helped me to understand children who don't have a lot of things**, because I didn't grow up with a lot of things.*

Throughout her teenage years, Karen Cole continued to learn life lessons. Her father insisted that she work in the mill to appreciate a college education. Even at the mill, extended family members watched over her. The experience not only aided Karen Cole with her expenses, it allowed her to gain respect for others whose work demands exhaustive physical labor.

Highlighted are memories of lessons learned from Karen's **moral curriculum**. Karen's father wanted her to learn that **honest hard work breeds respect**.

I will never forget my dad . . . he wanted me to appreciate college. He said, "You're going to go to work in the mill." Well, my two aunts worked with me. Lord have mercy! I was under a microscope all the time and had to be on my best behavior.

*My **daddy said that I was going to appreciate my education** because I was going to work and earn money over the summer.*

*I learned how hard a dollar is to come by when I worked at the mill. I think that is one of the reasons that **I respect people who have worked in the cotton mill** . . . because it's a hard job and I have worked there. I know a lot about that and I have respect for people who earn a living in the cotton mill.*

Who am I as a Student?

Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.

-Langston Hughes

Karen Cole, through the love and support of family and community, overcame harsh obstacles as a child as well as a college student. She possessed all the ingredients for failure: living in poverty, on-going degrading comments of physical appearance and mental capability, and role models who offered criticism rather than optimism. It is understandable that her self-esteem would plummet based solely on these daily encounters.

Had it not been for the hope and encouragement of family and community, especially her maternal grandmother, who saw potential and worth in her granddaughter, as in all her grandchildren, Karen Cole may have succumbed to helplessness and felt destined to labor in the mill. Karen Cole's story indicates the negative experiences she encountered from a paternal grandmother but also from teachers.

As clear in her mind as if they just happened, she speaks of her loss of identity and of a judgmental teacher she encountered during her vulnerable elementary school years.

I thought my name was special . . . and I got to first grade. There were five Karens in there and I found out that Karen was not such a special name after all. So, immediately my name was changed to Sue. They took my name away! That was one kind of slap in the face. I lost my identity.

*I hit another obstacle in fifth grade because my teacher was of the high society people, who didn't like people who didn't have a lot of money. She sort of **treated me differently**. I always made A's and B's. I could never understand why she put me with the slow kids.*

Karen's words emphasize the disconcerted grief she felt when confronted with the callous elementary school teacher.

*That was the first time that I noticed that people would treat others differently by how much money they had. I was **terrified every day at school** that I would get a spanking from her. She loved to square dance. So in her room you had to square dance. Well, I have two left feet and can't dance.*

She didn't like me.** I was the same size as some of the other girls in the room. I've always been overweight . . . and I remember she would weigh us in class and say our weight in front of the whole class. I remember these two twins that she loved . . . **they weighed more than me, but I was fat, they weren't.

Through her fifth grade year, Karen Cole endured the cruel reality of social injustice based on status. Engrained at such a crucial year in her life, she recalls the exact moment she decided to become a teacher for reasons other than to teach her grandmother to read. She wanted to become a teacher to encourage others and provide fairness and equity in the classroom. That moment is highlighted within her text.

I remember it was getting cold outside and I was still wearing flipflops to school. Mama and daddy didn't have enough money to buy me a pair of shoes. We had to go to school on Saturday that

year because we had missed so much school. My mama came to pick me up because she wanted to take me to get a pair of new shoes.

*I will never forget that teacher. She said, "Just where are you taking her?" Mama said, "Well, I'm taking her to town to get some new shoes." I remember that teacher looking at mama and saying, "It's about time you get her some new shoes!" I remember thinking that **teacher didn't care about me personally**, she just didn't care. You know the poorer you were the less attention you got from the teacher. I remember thinking that if I ever grow up, **I'm going to be a good teacher.***

Sadly, Karen Cole encountered a similar teacher during her high school years. Each teacher attacked her self-worth; her elementary school teacher viewed her as insignificant compared to other students, while her high school teacher **attacked her capabilities of career success.**

*I had a teacher in the eighth grade tell me . . . as I was trying to find out about the college track, that I would never . . . never . . . be able to pass college. He said that I would never be able to make it in college and that I might as well go through the easiest way that I could to get out of high school because I would never be able to pass math in college. I listened to him. So, I took what they called economic math and went into those . . . he told me that . . . he squashed my dreams to be a teacher. **He told me I would never be a teacher!***

Just as Karen Cole had a maternal grandmother who was her *saving grace* during early childhood years, she also was fortunate to encounter a teacher who saw the potential and worth in the crushed young student. It is noteworthy that Karen chooses *encouraged, faith, and wonderful* to describe the

positive teacher. All included within Karen's framework of southern traditions of *God and kin*.

*I would love to see Ms. Kent and tell her how important it was that **she encouraged** me to get on that right track in math. She was so important in my life as a teenager, getting me on the right track so that I could become a teacher some day. **She had faith in me**. She told me that one day I would make a wonderful teacher and she was a **wonderful person**. I hope that if all that I have been able to do is encourage children like she did, **I will be happy**. She was always like that, just an encouraging person.*

Who am I as a Teacher?

I think tolerating a certain degree of failure-not because it's good for you but because it's a necessary part of growth-is a very important part of the message that leadership can give.
-Howard Gardner

Rather than sweep under the rug her obstacles of the past, they have become Karen Cole's platform upon which she teaches. Her **moral curriculum** embeds elements of care, self-worth, dignity and fairness that are taught to every student that enters her classroom. It is more than a curriculum to Karen Cole; it is her triumphal means of reaching out to all students.

*I don't want anyone being made fun of because they are overweight. I don't want anyone being made fun of because of the clothes they wear or the shoes on their feet, or even wearing glasses. I start every year talking about differences in people and how **everybody is different, equal whether they have money or not**. I emphasize that at the beginning of the school year. It doesn't matter how much money you have, **its what's on the inside**. I think that because of some of the*

things I came in contact with as a child has made me emphasize character traits in my students.

I love to sing with my students. Music builds self-esteem plus every child can sing. When a child sings, they relax and are able to be successful. In a lot of my teaching, I create songs. It helps build rapport with the children; it teaches so many skills, listening, memorization, time. Children relax and are happy when they are singing; everybody usually smiles. I teach a lot with songs, vowels and different reading strategies.

Character education is not solely taught within the confines of the classroom walls, Karen Cole practices what she *preaches*. She involves her students in community services projects. It is interesting to note that the community service projects which Karen mentions involve reaching out to grandparents. This, perhaps, is Karen Cole's legacy to her *special* grandparents.

These activities are part of Karen's **moral curriculum** for her students. Neighbors help neighbors. This is part of Karen's southern culture. The community in which Karen works is *her* community, *her* kin. Not only are the students being taught moral responsibility, Karen is teaching them the same sense of community she was taught as a child. Help your family when they are in need.

I also do a lot of community service projects with my students. We practice Christmas songs and visit nursing homes during the holidays and present a concert. It is so much fun. The students enjoy it too and it makes the residents feel so special. Many of the residents are great-grandparents of my students or related to someone they know. It teaches them so much when we go to the nursing homes . . . compassion, responsibility . . .

*I've planned something new this year. I plan to have the children write **thank you notes** to parents and grandparents for helping them with homework and other things . . . like if they come to PTA or curriculum night or math and science night. They'll write to their parents, grandparents, extended family, and sometimes even cousins come.*

Karen brings the community cultural traditions into her classroom.

Stressing the importance of embedding character traits within her curriculum,

Karen says the students *need to learn*. This is Karen's **duty** to do what is best for her students, to teach them life lessons as she was taught by her grandparents.

*I also have the children invite their grandparents each year for our **Grandparents' Tea**. The students practice songs and make gifts for their grandparents. It also builds **character traits** in the students. They **need to learn** the traits . . . like **service to others** and **responsibility**.*

*During the Grandparents' Tea, the students and I make an **invitation to the grandparents** to come to class. Sometimes they help with projects. I had one grandparent come and do a holiday project with the children. I want to make them **feel welcome**. I try to go the extra mile to make them feel welcome.*

Karen remembers throughout her narrative the insensitive comments made by an elementary school teacher who degraded her appearance and sense of self. As a child, she vowed outside the door of her fifth grade classroom, to be a good teacher. Karen makes every effort to fulfill her vow; she daily **encourages her students through praise**.

*I personally **welcome** every child into my classroom every morning. I make it a point to tell each child that I'm glad they're there, glad they're assigned to me. I'll tell them, "I'm really glad you were **handpicked** to be in my homeroom." I also think this has helped with attendance in my room too.*

*I **praise** their clothes and hair all the time. I'll say, "I love that outfit, I wonder if they have it in my size." It builds **self-esteem**. It makes them see that I am personally recognizing them and they have my **full attention**.*

Karen wants her students to have ownership and pride within their community. In keeping with her moral curriculum, she stresses the importance of community workers to her students. She accomplishes this goal by inviting the community into her classroom to visit with students. Boldfaced are topics which Karen interprets as important to her students' curriculum.

*We talk a lot about goals and **setting goals** and how to reach those goals. Every year, I invite Miss (county) to talk to the students. She'll read them one of their favorite books and then talk about her platform and how **personal appearance** is important and that you must take care of yourself too.*

*I invite community workers into the classroom. One person that visited was a beekeeper. He talked to the students about how beekeeping was his hobby, but it also helped the **environment**. He told things like . . . being part of a community is to help **take care of that community**. The children really enjoyed him.*

*I always have someone for our county's Environmental Health Agency visit. Since a lot of the students have well water, she talks about water purity and how she chose a **job that helps the community**. She brings tools for the students to pass around; they like that.*

As Karen Cole speaks fondly of her classroom activities with her students, she weaves a common thread within the moral curriculum. She wants her students to be **connected to their community**. She wants them to feel needed, but to also feel a need to help others. Taking care of each other, your family, your extended family, and your community are all part of Karen's **life lessons** learned from her maternal grandparents. **God and kin** are embedded within Karen and within her moral curriculum.

Who am I as a Teacher of Teachers?

*Leadership should be born out of the understanding
of the needs of those who would be affected by it.
- Marian Anderson*

Karen Cole integrates a moral curriculum into everything she teaches, whether formally or informally. Reaching out beyond the confines of the classroom walls and her students, she spreads the message of self-worth and encouragement among her colleagues. She accomplishes this heartfelt endeavor through mentoring novice teachers, providing staff development to colleagues, offering on-going daily advice and words of praise to others, and most importantly, through her actions.

I have highlighted Karen's chosen words where she expresses her commitment to building students' self esteem.

*I still think that **encouragement** just makes so much of a difference with teachers. I just want to prove that there are people out there that I could gladly say that's a teacher*

*who believes that **all children can learn** no matter what the color of your skin or who your daddy was or where your mama came from, or how fat you were or how skinny you were.*

*I think that all teachers need to see where their students live, where they come from each day. It can open your eyes. One thing that I think all teachers should do is ride the bus routes. **If you see where your students live, sometimes it helps to better understand them.***

To demonstrate her passion for moral education and its importance in the development of students, Karen Cole discusses a county workshop where she presented her ideas. Not by chance, the workshop promoted building self-esteem in students. Her commitment to teaching students and teachers to *treat others as you want to be treated* continues to be the focal point of Karen's curriculum.

*Some time ago, I gave a workshop for teachers on children's behavior. I used the example of a paper cup of sand and how that is our student as they come to us each day . . . filled to the brim! But if we **berate or belittle, it's like a nail punching the cup and a little sand leaks out.** If the next person they meet does the same thing . . . bad grades or tells the child that they are stupid . . . then another hole is punched in the cup of sand. If this continues throughout the day, by the end of the day all the sand leaks out. They're empty.*

The metaphor of sand to a person's self-esteem is apparent as Karen remembers her own scars. Her scars are from a paternal grandmother's disparity and from discouraging teachers. Years later, Karen's scars remain. It is Karen's moral obligation to teach colleagues to fill cups. It is a legacy of Karen's maternal grandmother.

Just one band-aid (the band-aid is something positive like kind words or a caring attitude) we can patch up some holes and we can put in more sand. But I reminded them that the scars always remain . . . scars remain. **I told them that we, as educators, should fill cups.** Even the prettiest and best dressed child in school can have “hole punches” from home. I feel that is so **very important** for all teachers to know.

As Karen recalls another teacher workshop she conducted on building students’ sense of self-worth, Karen parallels her own childhood years to her knot analogy. As Karen self-analyzes her years compared to the knot story, her victory is apparent with two ending words, **I did.**

*I gave **staff development** to a group of teachers some time ago on **self esteem**. I taught them a lesson with a rope; the rope had counting knots on it. I told them to think about all the knots on the rope. One of the knots might be child abuse, one knot might be no breakfast, another knot might be because they are putting themselves to bed at night. Each child comes to school with a rope full of different knots. I held up a knotted rope and then tied a knot at the end of the rope. I told the teachers that we, as **teachers, are the last knot on the child’s rope**. It is up to us to help the child use that last knot to **hang on to their dreams and to make them feel special. I did.***

Karen’s compassion and sense of community are apparent as she reflects on a student’s hardship.

*I’ll always remember a few years ago at the end of the school year, I had a child cry and cry. I thought he was crying because he would miss coming to school. I told him that we’d be right here when he returned after summer. **What he said really made me think.** He said he wouldn’t get any more good food until he came*

*back. I thought about how much food I throw away. Sometimes people talk about free lunch, but sometimes **that's the only meal a child might get for the day.***

Karen Cole compassionately speaks of her commitment to assisting new teachers in understanding the importance of their profession and the influence it embeds in young lives. Realizing the stress that novice teachers succumb to during their first few years of teaching, Karen Cole provides nurturing and caring support throughout the school year.

Karen supports her mentees by being positive and listening to their views. She hopes to keep them from being *gulped up* by the endless requirements and expectations of a novice teacher. Karen parallels her experience as a young, vulnerable teacher to a *hunk of meat*. Karen vows to not let her mentee, her community *kin*, be food for the vultures.

*I try to **be positive** with my mentees. I like to **listen** to their thoughts and try to guide them from a positive standpoint. I'm also passionate about new teachers getting started out with help. **I remember being thrown in like a hunk of meat to the wolves!** That's why I'm a mentor. I love to help new teachers get started.*

*I remember one day my mentee was so **upset**. She was excited about starting the new school year and getting her room decorated for her students. Since she's a new teacher, she had workshops to go to the first couple of days of school. Our principal came around to the classes after only a couple of work days and told my mentee that her room was drab! It **upset** her so bad.*

Helping others in need is Karen's bedrock of southern tradition. As Maya Angelou's poem, *Alone* (1975), spells out, "nobody, but nobody can make it out here alone," Karen knows her responsibility as a neighbor and friend. Her **mentee is not alone**. Karen will be there, every step of the way.

*She always has such high spirits and that **one comment brought her down so much**. I told her not to worry, that I'd help her and we'd work on her room all day, that **she wasn't alone**. If it affects her, it affects me. Students aren't the only ones that can be hurt by comments.*

Within every school, there seems to be someone who brightens each day; a person who makes every effort to lighten the load for those around. Whether a smile or encouraging word, the simple gestures promote harmony and high spirits. Karen is this person. Once again, it is part of her **cultural tradition**; help your neighbor when they are in need. Note the boldfaced words. They are Karen's interpretation of her acts of kindness and how they affect her colleagues, her neighbors.

*There are some things I do around the school for others that I don't talk about. They're like . . . they're **little acts of kindness**. I try to **listen** to the teachers and assistants, and everybody. If they're having a bad week, I'll put a card in the mailbox with a little **encouraging note** in it. I don't sign the note, it's anonymous. It's fun to do and it makes them feel better to know that **someone cares** about them and how they feel.*

*I gave my mentee a matching **planner and bag**. It made her feel good to know that **I care** and that I want her to do well.*

*I also bring **snacks** and put them in the teachers' lounge*

*sometimes. I try to sneak them in without anyone seeing me. I like hearing someone open the door and say, "Oh, look what someone did for us." It makes **everybody feel better**. One thing I do is make muffins. It's a morning "pick-me-up" for the staff. It makes everybody smile. Sometimes I'll make banana ones. **It's contagious**. Now other people are bringing in things and leaving them in the lounge for everybody to eat. Somebody brought in a cake one day. Nobody knows who brings them.*

*Sometimes I cut **coupons** out of the Sunday newspaper and put in teachers' boxes at school. If I know they like something and I see a coupon, I'll cut it out and put it in their box. It doesn't cost me anything and it makes them **feel good** that somebody knows what they like.*

Karen's simple acts of kindness parallel to her grandmother's random acts of kindness. Once again, these actions are embedded within Karen, all part of her **cultural curriculum** of taking care of others.

*I guess I got it from my **Grandmother Jones**. She was always giving something away. She didn't have much money, but they always had a big garden and she'd **give away corn and beans**, or bake something and send to somebody in the neighborhood. **She'd sneak around too so they wouldn't know who sent it**. When we had a hog killing, she'd always give some away.*

Bringing her religious heritage into the supposedly secular school setting is viewed by society as incorrect in terms of religious freedom; however, Karen Cole knows the small, rural farming community in which she lives and works. She knows the southern heritage of her neighbors and the homogenous traditions within her community, such as Sunday morning church services, yearly revivals, Vacation Bible School, and congregational gatherings on Wednesday

evenings. These are part of the **southern traditions** of her community. It is a culture which brings religion into the school setting.

*I love to help new teachers. **One of the first things I tell them to do is pray . . . pray for wisdom and guidance.** Often we pray together. As a team, we pray before testing. Our third grade team met this year and prayed. We asked for success to do our best to meet the needs of God's children. I have told teachers that **God will solve problems.** All they have to do is ask for his guidance.*

Her colleagues are neighbors and friends. As the actions of Grandmother Jones are embedded in Karen Cole, she also helps others through her best possible means, prayer and a helping hand. These are lessons learned from Karen's own life experiences.

*All the grief that I had along . . . I look at it now as **God's plan** for me to learn to **build self-esteem.***

There are on-going episodes of internal struggle within Karen Cole. She strives to bring out the best in colleagues and her students but still cannot seem to find assurance within herself. Her low self-esteem continues to haunt. Colleagues openly acknowledge her commitment to students, her educational expertise, and her service to others through moral character.

However, Karen Cole, in some places, cannot shake loose her on-going lack of self-confidence. In other places, however, she continues to express herself as an accomplished educator. Note the words in boldfaced type which demonstrate Karen's struggle with feeling confident as an educator and leader.

*I feel like I do make a difference. **I should have more confidence in myself** . . . I had a colleague, not too long ago, say that I don't believe in myself as much as I should because I am a great teacher. She said that **I always put myself down** and I was a great person on the staff and to stop putting myself down. She'd tell me, "You need to have more confidence; you need to have more self-esteem because you're a good teacher!" That meant a lot to me to have a fellow worker say that to me . . . especially one that doesn't give out compliments very often.*

*It's nice to be sent e-mails from the county office saying we want you to serve on this committee because we feel you have a lot to offer in this area. I guess thirty years ago I wouldn't have thought that I would have been considered important enough to do that. **It's nice to know that someone values what I do** and what I could do everyday for a living.*

Reluctant to brag, part of her **southern culture**, she does not dwell on her accomplishments very long. Karen only briefly mentions her certification as an Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) teacher as well as her status as a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certified teacher.

*I'm one of the first group of teachers who was **AIG certified** for the AIG program in classrooms. Research says to teach to higher standards and it will bring up more kids. I feel strongly about teaching all children at a high level.*

*When I went through my **national boards**, I incorporated a lot of my beliefs in the importance of teaching character education to students.*

Throughout her narrative, Karen mentions various workshops and committees on which she serves, all of which are demonstrations of her

commitment to transcending herself to a higher level of teacher. This, of course, is in an effort to make her students feel *special* and to build their sense of self-worth.

*I served on a **county committee** to revamp the standards for Summer Academy. We wrote the rules and regulations for the county. The state did not have guidelines so we drafted the county's guidelines for kindergarten through second grade students.*

*I've served on the school's **climate committee** every year. I like that committee because I like to do for others. Our **committee works with the community** too. We do a lot of activities that bring the community into the school, like tutors and buddies for students who need a positive role model. It makes them feel **so special** to have someone come to just see them. I like that.*

Who is She as a Leader?

*True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers,
not the enrichment of the leaders.*

- Robert Townsend

Who is Karen Cole the leader? I searched for this answer while reflecting on her life story; heartaches of humiliation; strength gained from a wise grandmother; close family relationships; strong community bonds; faith; and her firm belief in keeping steadfast to one's dream. I pondered over how these life events could evolve into a leadership style. She is viewed by her peers as a leader whom they seek honest, trustworthy advice and guidance.

I also reviewed the scholarly literature where I sought the perfect match to her leadership style, a box within which she could be neatly placed. I found

caring leadership traits. Karen Cole cares about people and their feelings of self-worth. She creates a school environment where students and staff feel a mutual relationship based of care. “As we examine what it means to care and to be cared for, we shall see that both parties contribute to the relation; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring” (Noddings, 1984, p. 4). Karen Cole is a **caring leader**.

As I examined the characteristics of moral leadership, once again, I found pieces of her puzzle. Karen Cole practices what she preaches. She treats those around with dignity and respect, the way she, throughout her life, has longed to be treated. She respects and values the opinions of others. Gardner stresses the importance of a moral leadership indicating that “truly magnificent leaders embody the message they advocate – that is, they walk the talk, practice what they preach, and expect everyone else to do likewise” (cited in Duffy, 2006, p. 137). Karen Cole is a **moral leader**.

Reviewing spiritual leadership, I understand the deepness of Karen Cole’s desire to seek the value and worth in each person. This is the foundation upon which she stands and teaches. Spirituality in leadership should be understood as a *meaning system* for individuals. “Meaning systems are the answers people develop in response to existential concerns” (Soloman & Hunter, 2002, p. 38). Jerome Bruner, in his book, *Acts of Meaning*, argues that if people could not apply meaning systems to their life, “we would be lost in a murk of chaotic

experience and probably would not have survived as a species in any case” (as cited in Soloman & Hunter, 2002, p. 38). Karen Cole is a **spiritual leader**.

Servant leadership also contains elements of her leadership style. Embedded throughout her life story are components of servant leadership. Karen listens to her students and colleagues. She listens to their needs and reacts with random acts of kindness. She teaches her students the importance of community service; to help others who are in need.

She is committed to the “growth of people and building community” (Greenleaf, 2003). She develops a current environment for student and staff success; however, she creates an atmosphere where students and staff gain the confidence to seek on-going betterment in the future. Karen Cole is a **servant leader**.

I soon realized that I could not neatly fit Karen Cole into any one leadership style. The dimensions of leadership which I researched, the Caring Leader, the Servant Leader, the Spiritual Leader, and the Moral Leader, overlap in Karen’s leadership. She has a leadership style that radiates compassion and care. She witnesses through her leadership. She emits kindness through appreciation and encouragement. She is humble, with simple roots. She is also a giver, giving herself to purposefully seek the greater good in others.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion of my research, I revisit Karen Cole's (pseudonym) life story and connect it to my research on leadership styles. I also intertwine Karen's thoughts gathered near the close of our months of interview sessions. Throughout the conclusion, I seek a better understanding of her role of leadership as a strong and yet reluctant leader. In doing so, I examine the role of reflection in enhancing educational leadership.

Finally, I look within myself to find a leader; unexpected at the onset of my research; however, a welcome awareness.

An Inspiration

*The man who thus looks up is becoming worthy
to be looked up to in turn, and, to this extent,
qualifying for leadership.*

-Irving Babbitt

After completing Karen's narrative analysis I contemplated scholarly research literature throughout the following weeks. In the weeks that followed, a pivotal moment appeared from out of the blue. My son, whom I had not previously discussed my pondering, handed me a book. Previously read, he recommended the small paperback and suggested I might find it useful in my research. The title caught my attention, *The Servant: A Simple Story about the*

True Essence of Leadership (Hunter, 1998). I had read numerous leadership articles and books, but something about *simple* and *true* in the title captured my appeal for the book. It made me sense Karen Cole.

My instinct was on target. Throughout the book, I found many similarities between Karen Cole and the book's narrator, John. Even though their backgrounds were on opposite ends of the spectrum, I was mesmerized by the parallel between John's transformation and Karen Cole's emergence of self. Having reached the top of the corporate ladder, his fall was a life-changing blow and would require much effort to dig out of the trenches. Even more intriguing was the advice of a retired business guru; his leadership philosophies were aligned with those of Karen Cole. Author James Hunter, a leadership consultant by trade, created the book evolving around a storyline; however, it contained a wealth of leadership wisdom.

Contained within the storyline were the elements of physical and mental needs referencing Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. A leader cannot expect to bring out the best in others until underlying *levels* are met. These include (1) basic needs, such as food, water, and shelter; (2) safety and security; (3) belonging and love; and (4) self-esteem. Only when these levels have been obtained can a person rise to the fifth level, self-actualization. This is the level that brings out the best in a person, being all they can be.

A leader must understand the importance of the underlying levels in obtaining self-actualization. Karen Cole seeks to help others in need. She

provides a caring and nurturing atmosphere where her encouraging words boost self-esteem in others. She lays the groundwork for self-actualization. Once they are on the fifth level, what does Karen Cole do? **Pray.**

Another component of leadership, according to Hunter, is to listen; truly listening to those who are speaking. Karen Cole spoke of her role as mentor to novice teachers. "I try to be positive with my mentees. I like to listen to their thoughts and try to guide them from a positive standpoint." A leader can show value and respect to those who are speaking by simply listening; not formulating an early opinion; not by selectively listening; and not by cutting a person's conversation short. **Listen.**

A leader must recognize others' needs (Maslow) and acutely listen to their thoughts. Once these elements are in place, other characteristics of leadership must be considered. Those qualities include patience, kindness, humility, respectfulness, selflessness, forgiveness, honesty, and commitment. I thought of Karen Cole and these qualities. Yes, she is patient and kind to her students and peers, showing appreciation for all they accomplish. She demonstrates respect, treating others as important for their valued self-worth. She listens to her students and peers. Colleagues seek Karen Cole for her honesty and commitment to creating an educational environment that promotes students' self-esteem and self-worth.

I read the definitions of each of these qualities and compared them to characteristics of Karen Cole. There was a perfect match. More interesting;

however, was the book summary of these combined characteristics of leadership. The one word summary was *love*. I quickly acknowledged author, James Hunter's supporting and powerful evidence for this short summary of leadership traits: First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Religion is part of Karen's southern tradition; a tradition that I share with Karen. The qualities of love found in First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen, parallel to qualities found in previously researched literature of caring leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and moral leadership.

She demonstrates many of these traits in her daily encounters as an educational leader. Regardless of her religious roots, she loves her students and fellow colleagues. She loves her commitment to enhancing moral character in others. She loves providing an environment where she serves others, where they feel respected, valued, and *special*. She radiates all the combined characteristics of a leader. **Love.**

How can an effective leader build a leadership premise on prayer, listening, and love? Examples of two important leaders come to mind, Martin Luther King and Gandhi. But more important is, as I believe, a great leader of over two thousand years, Jesus. Each of the humble, yet great leaders led

through service to others while influencing others to work toward a common good. While I am not suggesting that Karen Cole's leadership style parallels to the magnitude of these three great leaders, I am suggesting that she exhibits snippets of their leadership greatness. She is an educational leader within her school.

Removing the Reluctant Leader Mask

*Leadership is practiced not so much in words
as in attitude and in actions.*

-Harold S. Geneen

The conclusion of my interviews with Karen Cole was emotional. She had reflected throughout the past several months on events in her life that had been dormant for decades. Some of the events were fond memories while others were harsh realities of life. Both types of encounters were learning experiences for Karen Cole. They are firmly placed in her foundation, each providing a cornerstone of her self-actualization.

She gained an awareness of herself from months of reflection. Karen reflected on her childhood and adult experiences, and she reflected on herself as a leader.

Reflection and inquiry are not practiced much: People everywhere are impeded from working together effectively by the conflicting views of the world.

But the discovery of oneself, the ability to see something in your own behavior that was invisible to you before, and appreciation of what's productive and what's painful in your

attitudes – awareness of these capabilities seems pretty intrinsic to the human condition.

*There is something integral in the core idea that manifests at all different levels and can be seen from all different angles.
- Senge, et al, as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 21*

Karen's reflective experiences guided her to a realization of self. *"I guess all these things that I do could be seen as things that leaders do."* Prior to her reflective life story, Karen did not view herself as a leader, she struggled with her own role as a woman. Just as Karen does with those around her, she recognized her own needs (Maslow) and **listened to herself**.

Embedded since childhood, an inner struggle occurred within Karen Cole. Two of her female role models, both grandmothers, created disturbance within Karen Cole's thoughts of a woman's role in society. Grandmother Jones, unbeknownst to herself, was a feminist in an era of change.

In contrast, Grandmother Smith, whose conservatism brought opposing views to Grandmother Jones' ideology, created turmoil within Karen. These opposing views followed Karen Cole into adulthood as she struggles for a sense of self, wavering between self-worthlessness and high self-esteem.

Grandma Smith was more proud of me when I got married than when I went to college. *I never really understood that, but that was what was important to my Grandmother Smith . . . establishing a good family of your own. That kind of thing was important to her.*

I think that I could have stayed a single woman and it wouldn't have bothered my Grandma Jones. *She probably would have*

liked that. On the other side, Grandma Smith thought it was important to establish a good family . . . to become a mother.

Opposite ends of the women's rights spectrum, Grandmother Smith's value of marriage contradicted Grandmother Jones' value of education. Karen Cole thought her maternal grandmother would have been happy if she stayed single. Perhaps it wasn't indifference in Grandmother Smith's view of education, but due to Grandmother Smith's embedded role of a woman . . . submissive.

How do these differing views influence Karen Cole? Throughout the interviews, she speaks freely of her lack of self confidence, her struggles of coping with negativism, and her emerging belief, or disbelief, in self. During all the turmoil, Karen Cole persevered. She has a life history of desire, setback, and then perseverance.

Karen Cole, as each of us, is in a **process of becoming**. Every life event has an influence on who we are and who we will become. A person's complexity, their hurdles, hardships, and happiness all play a part in our continual development as a person and who we are as a leader.

Why does this teacher appear to be a self-confident leader in one setting yet a reluctant leader in other situations? In areas where she is passionate, such as creating self-esteem and self-awareness, Karen Cole demonstrates self-confident leadership abilities. During an interview, she excitedly gave an example of a county-wide teacher workshop she conducted which addressed creating an educational atmosphere that promotes students' sense of self worth.

However, in areas of less compassion, she appears reluctant to take the leading role, regardless of her qualifications as a strong educational leader.

Should her reluctance in particular leadership environments be viewed as a weakness or questioned as a leader? Are leaders ever truly confident with themselves in all settings? My response is no. A leader grows and learns from each situation, always in the process of becoming. Karen Cole has learned many life lessons and has continually transformed from those experiences. As we continue to follow life's journey, our values and beliefs continue to spiral. We continue to grow from social interactions with our families, acquaintances, and the decisions we make during our lifetime (Curry, 2000, p. 27).

As we reflect on our bumps and bruises, each one has the capability to create change. **Leadership is a continually changing role**, where the roles of leaders and followers are being transformed. Through this transformation, leaders will possess a less vocal, and more collaboration and cooperative qualities (Duffy, 2006, p. xii). As Karen Cole grows with her self-awareness, she may one day desire to become more vocal in formal settings. Even reflecting on her life story, Karen admits that things she does "could be seen as things that leaders do." While others label the qualities of a leader, Karen lives those qualities.

*These interviews have been good for me, all this **self-analysis**. I guess all these things that I do **could be seen as things that leaders do**. All I want to do is what is best for the children . . . to be fair and to treat them with respect . . . to treat them like they are special . . . and they are.*

Our interviews required Karen Cole to reflect on her life. It brought to the surface a self-awareness that may have remained dormant had we not brought her historical events to light. For the first time, Karen Cole views herself as a leader. It is a new self-awareness that is the result of reflection.

Role of Reflection

*There are three methods to gaining wisdom.
The first is **reflection**, which is the highest.
The second is limitation, which is the easiest.
The third is experience, which is the bitterest.
– Confucius*

A key to continuing growth is reflection. Karen Cole was not fully aware of her own leadership potential until she reflected upon her life. At the conclusion of months of oral history, Karen, speaking confidently as an intellectual educational leader, summed her own reflective analysis:

*I've been a **paradigm shifter** for a long time and didn't realize it until lately.*

Thoughtful reflection by Karen brought her to this unexpected realization. Reflection was the means to this discovery. Surprisingly, leadership frameworks mention very briefly, if at all, the importance of reflection in leadership.

The current *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards* (CCSSO, 1996) which address criteria for effective school administrators who are educational leaders, do not use the term *reflection*. Even though reflection could, and should, be interwoven into the standards by leaders, it is still surprising that

reflection is not mentioned within the following six ISLLC Standards or their performance indicators.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

My concern for the need of reflection in educational leadership is not alone. Researcher Litchka in his study, *No Leader Left Behind: Planning to Prepare Effective Educational Leaders in this Era of Accountability* (2007), promotes reflective leadership as an integral component in educational leadership training.

His justification for formal training in reflective leadership is due to an increasing shortage of educational leaders, particularly principals. Reasons for the shortage are contributed to stress, time, politics, compensation, and the ever-changing role and expectations of the leader.

Litchka contends that utilizing reflection as a coping strategy, taught as a formal educational means of leadership, leaders will be better able to identify areas of weakness and strengths in their knowledge base of practices, which includes decision-making and problem-solving abilities.

Karen reflected on her experiences which led her to the realization that she is an educational leader. Without reflection, she may never have seen the leadership skills that her colleagues admire.

*The works of Argyris (1982), Schon (1983, 1984, 1987), Kolb (1984), and Mezirow (1991, 1995), have contributed to the knowledge, understanding, and application of learning, reflection, and action. These studies support the position that leaders in education that have **reflective thinking skills** are more adept at recognizing that problems and difficult decisions are solvable, providing a foundation for effective planning, and helping the leader address the issues of fear and isolation when it comes to decision-making.* - Schon, 1983

Smith (1995) suggested that reviewing events can enhance the practice of effective leadership by avoiding situations that were not handled properly in the past, and will allow leaders as practitioners to deal with situations that may be unique to leadership itself. - Litchka, 2007, p. 48

Concern for reflection, and the modeling of reflection, in the role of leadership was also addressed by Lisa Bjork, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Seattle Pacific University, as she indicated:

Reflection is critical, especially for busy administrators. If you model reflection, it will help other staff members to do the same. Sometimes you must step away, at least mentally, from the pressure-filled arena of multiple demands and reflect on where you're heading.
– Bjork, 2006

Amazed at the minuscule mention of reflection in the ISLLC standards for administrative leaders, I reviewed the *North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards* (NCPTS) model that envisions educators for 21st century skills. The five NCPTS are:

- (I) *Teachers will demonstrate **leadership**;*
- (II) *Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students;*
- (III) *Teachers know the content they teach;*
- (IV) *Teachers facilitate learning for their students; and*
- (V) *Teachers **reflect** on their practice.*
–N.C. State Board of Education, 2006

Standard One of the NCPTS, which addresses *leadership*, confirms that teachers, as leaders, must “advocate for schools and students,” “demonstrate high ethical standards,” and “work collaboratively with all school personnel to create a professional learning community.” Karen Cole, through her moral

curriculum and high ethical standards, advocates for her students and works collaboratively with her colleagues. She demonstrates leadership.

Based upon the fifth NCPTS indicator, Karen Cole is also a reflective teacher and leader. Throughout her oral history, Karen states teaching and leadership examples. Only through reflection, does the realization occur that Karen Cole is a leader within the school. She reflectively summarized, “*These interviews have been good for me, all this **self-analysis.***”

I believe that the role of leader continues to be viewed by society as one of rationality; that leaders must act and react to situations based on ethical principles. In order to accomplish rationality, I believe leaders must engage in continual reflection.

Leaders must engage in reflective practices that go beyond the surface of school policy and discipline issues and into the deeper **reflective thoughts of one’s values, beliefs, and emotions**. Freire addresses the model through *authentic reflection*, where leaders become learners (2004, pp. 80-81). However, current practices appear to lack in deep, meaningful reflective practices. “In literature, problem solving, strategic planning, and even reflective practice are considered from an exclusively rational standpoint” (Beatty, 2000, p. 334).

There is a need for reflection within our educational leaders, whether school administrators or classroom educators. It is from this inner reflection that allows us to improve current practices and maintain check on our values and beliefs. “Perhaps leaders themselves need a forum of trust and safety within

which to examine and reflect upon the emotionality of their experiences” (Fineman, 1992, Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993, as cited in Beatty, 2000, p. 335).

At the conclusion of her narrative, Karen Cole realized that she is, and has been, an educational leader. It was only after thoughtful, deep, and emotional reflection did this reluctant leader come to fruition.

A New Beginning

*If you understand others, you are smart;
if you understand yourself, you are enlightened.*
-Lao-Tuz (cited in Litchka, 2007)

As I indicated at the onset of my research, Karen Cole traveled a dusty road of hurdles and bruises, dotted with potholes of happiness and sorrow, but more importantly, she traveled a forked road of choices.

Karen was a stereotyped woman, she was nurturer, she was fat, she was humble, she was passive, and she possessed gentility. She was an easy target for authoritarian *role models*.

Nevertheless, her perseverance triumphed over the undermining of others. She made decisions that were influenced by a loving, caring, and determined grandmother. She made choices based upon the strength *gained from her extended family and her southern culture of faith in God and kin*.

Throughout numerous encounters, Karen mirrors her grandmother and becomes a *determined* woman. Reflecting on her bruises, Karen recalls:

*Having the **hard knocks** made it where I wanted to make a name for myself . . . I wanted to prove myself, and I think that **I have proved myself.***

Karen, as I, has compassion for the underdog. She has sympathy for those who endure the *hard knocks* of today's society. Those include all forms of biases, such as gender, race, social, and cultural biases. Her compassion is the strength to her leadership. It is during situations that compel her compassion that she exhibits strong leadership skills. She is confident and assured that she will make a difference in the lives of her students and in the lives of her peers.

I have also come to understand why Karen is a reluctant leader in other settings. As I reflect on past experiences with Karen as a colleague, the settings where Karen was less vocal, less directive, were in settings other than her community or in settings that did not involve a moral curriculum. Even though the topics may have been of interest, they did not possess her *compassion*. She was not confident.

As Karen Cole continues her reflective practice in the years to come, I predict an even stronger, more confident leader will emerge, perhaps no longer reluctant in particular settings. "Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). Karen's contextual meaning of self-confidence will, hopefully, broaden to other situations and circumstances.

Reflecting on research and its relation to Karen's narrative analysis, I find several recommendations for graduate studies in educational leadership. First, while encouraging women to obtain leadership roles, leadership programs should address confidence and compassion as factors in leadership. Karen exhibits leadership when she is passionate about her topic, which promotes confidence in herself.

Another area of interest for future graduate study programs is the role of reflection in leadership. As I strongly indicated in the previous section, reflection is a powerful tool in gaining self-awareness. Reflection is a tool for gaining confidence.

Beyond Researcher: Defining Myself as a Leader

My historical life experiences define who I am as a human being, and as a researcher. Just as Karen, throughout my research, I reflected on life occurrences. I found many of my situations were parallel to Karen's experiences.

My strong roots in **southern culture** and **family traditions** are the backbone to my belief in neighbors helping neighbors philosophy. Just as Karen, I was reared in a small farming community where neighbors are relatives. Attendance at weekly church services was *religious* and greeted by extended relatives. I was taught, as Karen, to treat others with dignity and to always respect your elders. From these *God and kin* experiences, my teaching heart lies in a **moral curriculum**.

Mentioned in an earlier section of my research, I pull for the underdog. The children whose home life appears more difficult, whose financial means are less fortunate, or whose appearance or social status is less acceptable by their peers are the children where my heartfelt compassion lies. Community service is stressed in my family. Serving at the local soup kitchen, stocking shelves at the community clothing closet, and visiting local nursing homes are components of my children's **moral duty** to help neighbors in need. It is a quality that also parallels to Karen.

Reflecting on the multitude of educational research that define leadership, there is no one philosophy that sums neither my leadership role nor that of Karen's. We are bound to service to others, spiritual roots, moral curriculum, and to care for our neighbors and those less fortunate. As future life experiences evolve, I feel certain that those encounters, if met with compassion and reflection, will continue to spiral into ever-changing dimensional leadership ideals.

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