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David R. Grice

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The Journey of Discovery:
Looking Through a Different Set of Lenses

“That which you or I think is most unique about ourselves we hide. In ordinary discourse, in the normal state, we share our common self, our superficial self. Yet what is most unique about us is what has the greatest potential for bonding us.
When we share our uniqueness, we discover the commonality
in greatness that defines everyone on the planet.”

-Robert E. Quinn

My incredible journey with the Andrews Leadership Program (August 2003) coincided with the initiation of SERC agency wide professional development on *Courageous Conversations About Race* in collaboration with Glenn E. Singleton, President of Pacific Educational Group. *Courageous Conversations on Race* is a learning experience that provides an opportunity to dialogue openly about racial perspectives and their impact on student achievement. *Courageous Conversations* provided SERC staff with an understanding of the four agreements (e.g., (1) Stay Engaged; (2) Experience Discomfort; (3) Speak Your Truth; and (4) Expect/Accept Non-Closure) and conditions (e.g., (1) Focus on Personal, Local, and Immediate; (2) Isolate Race; (3) Normalize Social Construction and Multiple Perspectives; (4) Monitor Agreements, Conditions and Establish Parameters; (5) Use a “Working Definition” for Race; and (6) Examine the Presence and Role of “Whiteness”) that is necessary in order to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about race (Singleton and Linton, 2006) . Through the prism of race, SERC has utilized *Courageous Conversations About Race* as a means to examine its own philosophies, policies, structures, and practices.

One of our initial *Courageous Conversations* activities was to write our racial autobiography. I recalled while reading my racial autobiography during a meeting, in a very confident voice that I was from a “humble” background. “Isn't it really poor and not humble?” my director asked in a clarifying manner. I thought to myself, “There you go again attempting to embellish your story of growing up in the rural South.” You see my director, Marianne Kirner and I have had several conversations about the similarities and differences in backgrounds. I lived in the rural South and Marianne in the projects of Stamford, Connecticut. Throughout the years of cultivating our reciprocal relationship/rapport, Marianne and I were able to engage in very candid conversations ranging from my performance as a consultant to her soliciting input and feedback on her leadership.

I think back to one occasion during a one-on-one monthly meeting, Marianne encouraged me to find my voice and take more risks. She went on to say that she knows me, however others within the agency do not. Marianne continued by sharing that leaders need to be able to articulate their vision and followers need to know who you are as an individual. At the conclusion of the meeting, she proceeded by asking, “What can I do to support you?” We discussed various ideas and structures to ensure that my voice was heard. The importance of an organization having the necessary structures in place to ensure success is essential (Collins, 2001; Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004). Marianne and I also had conversations regarding my assuming “leadership” and facilitation roles within the agency (e.g., training opportunities, projects, LRE district lead, and technical assistance) in an effort to move beyond my level of comfort - taking more risks. Change requires that an individual move from something familiar and important into an empty

space. Once they are in this empty space, they are obliged to build a new set of meanings and norms and new cultural order to fill up the space (Sergiovanni, 2000).

“He who is not courageous enough to take risks
will accomplish nothing in life.”

- Anonymous

Parker Palmer (2000) described a leader as a person who has an unusual degree of power to project onto other people his/her shadow, or his/her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which people must live, move, and have their being, conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. He further elaborates that a leader must take special responsibility for what is going on inside his/her own self, inside his/her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.

According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), I am an ISTJ (i.e., introverted, sensing, thinking, and judging). This preference tells us how people "charge their batteries." *Introverts* find energy in the inner world of ideas, concepts, and abstractions. They can be sociable but need quiet to recharge their batteries. Introverts want to understand the world. Introverts are *concentrators* and reflective thinkers. Their motto is: Ready, Aim, Aim ... For the introvert, there is no impression without reflection. With that being said, as a natural reflector with a quiet and calm demeanor, I find myself constantly reflecting on my conversations with Marianne and identified areas for professional and personal growth. My journey with the Andrews University Leadership Program, in combination with SERC's *Courageous Conversations About Race* have resulted in an internal personal journey - a process of looking inward and outward

through a different set of lenses. In addition, they have provided a means for finding my voice as I will describe in further detail.

After being at SERC for about eight years, many consultants are not familiar or know too much about me as a person or my background. Over the years, I have made a conscious effort to keep my personal and professional lives separate. It was my fundamental belief that the background of an individual was insignificant. However, I later came to the realization that in order to move forward, an individual has to understand his/her past and be willing to face it. There is great power in sharing one's story.

My Racial Autobiography:

I am from a place where there were long curvy, dusty dirt roads. People worked endless hot days in cotton and tobacco fields. I lived in a four room, wooden framed house in the rural town of Pamplico, South Carolina. Over the years, the house was discolored and bleached from the constant, intense rays of the sun. In addition to my parents, two sisters, and four brothers occupied the small house. I recalled my older brother Leroy standing at the edge of the yard for the sight of the old yellow school bus. Once the bus was in sight, he would yell, "Bus! Bus! The bus is coming!" Out of the house, dashing like young deer in a field on an early Spring morning came Johnny, Lavonnie, Michael, Mitchell, Denise, and David for a thirty minute bus ride to school. Black and White students attended different schools. For my White neighbors just two houses down the road, schools consisted of three beautiful school buildings for high,

middle, and elementary students. My school, Gibbs High and Elementary School was one building for kindergarten through twelfth grade students. The school was tucked away in a corner just across a set of old railroad tracks that literally separated people along racial and socioeconomic lines. I often heard negative comments regarding unattainable goals based solely on my skin color. It was all too frequently to hear comments that echoed, “You will never be anything.” “You will just be like your old no good, drunken father.” The backdrop of the neighborhood consisted of an environment filled with drugs, alcohol, nightclubs, and domestic violence. Black men of all ages gathered on the street corner near the old railroad tracks from sunrise to sunset. As a youngster, I recalled being dissatisfied with the limitations of my surroundings. Although, my parents only had a third and eight grade education, they stressed the importance of education. Education was viewed as the key to freedom. You responded “yes ma’am”, “no sir”, “good morning”, and “thank you”. Manners and respect would take you very far. Miss Norwood, Mr. Brown, Miss Shirley, Mrs. Archie, Mrs. Hicks, Mr. Tisdales were my teachers. They had a no nonsense approach to the teaching and learning process. They were strict, firm, encouraging, demanding, consistent, and placed high expectations upon me. They shared their own personal stories in an effort to inspire and motivate students to achieve despite obstacles.

I am from a place where I attended the House of God Church and heard a balance of hell and brim stone and about the love of the Father. Church services were on Wednesday and Friday nights, as well as choir practice on Saturday evenings. I spent long, hot days in church on Sunday listening to extended prayers, lively songs, and people giving high praises to God. In an attempt to stay cool, I waved a stiffed cardboard

fan donated by the local funeral home back and forth. Sister Millie Woodbury, in a baritone voice would begin the testimony and worship services by reciting the first two verses of a hymn. "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify, a never-dying soul to save, and fit it for the sky. To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; Oh may it all my powers engage to do my Master's will," she proclaimed in a poetic manner. Next, she would solicit someone from the congregation for a suitable tone as she outlined the first verse of the hymn again. Then, Sister Katherine Keith would sing out in an angel like voice, while lightly tapping a small tambourine on her right knee, "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify..." The sounds of string instruments, drums, cymbals, and loud lively handclapping would complement the singing. The preacher would move back and forth in the pulpit like a caged, wild animal longing to be free shouting in a loud booming voice "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" After church, I went home to a Sunday dinner consisting of delicious macaroni and cheese, collar greens with pieces of smoked ham or bacon, candied yams, sweet potato pies, chocolate layered cake, and golden fried chicken.

I am from a place where there were cows, pigs, turkeys, and chickens. Large vegetable gardens were planted with neatly crafted rows of collar greens, white potatoes, butter beans, sweet potatoes, watermelons, green pepper, corn, tomatoes, and yellow squash. Summer included preserving and canning fruits and vegetables for the long winter months ahead.

I am from a place where I was repeatedly teased unmercifully for various reasons from the sight and behavior of the drunkenness of my father in the streets, skin color, the texture of my hair, assumptions, appearance of my home, outdated clothing, or anything that was considered out of the norm. As a child, I became quiet and withdrawn, praying

that no one would tease me. Time and time again, I traveled to a fantasy world in order to escape the hurt, embarrassment, sadness, hate, shame, and the uncertainty associated with life. In spite of the teasing, I was a believer in the word of God. My favorite scriptures included: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30:5) and ". . . No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). I was an ambitious and determined individual. I was determined not to succumb to the self-fulfilling prophecy – giving others the satisfaction of determining the course of my life. It was my goal to attain something better for myself than was available in my small town.

I am David Roland Grice and I am from South Carolina and still I rise.

“When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness.
Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover
how truly necessary we are to each other.”

-Margaret Wheatley

An Example of Finding My Voice:

During the Consultant Mid-Year Survey for Directors 2004-2005, the question was proposed, In what way have you grown as a member of the SERC Team this past school year? What precipitated that growth? I responded to the question by focusing on my ability to balance technical and adaptive styles of leadership in the provision of training and technical assistance and project coordination. The technical was more of the management of tasks – solving problems. Adaptive required more of my acquiring new ways in order to change hearts and minds (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

In a conversation with Dr. Jim Tucker regarding my leadership gifts and strengths during a Spring 2006 visit to Connecticut, he used the word "consistent" to describe me. I concluded that Jim meant that I was predictable and never questioned his use of the word during our meeting. A couple of days later, I found myself emailing Jim for clarification. In his email to me, Jim explained that the description was to imply that I was dependable. He followed-up by saying, "We can always depend on you to be there, to be supportive, and to do what needs to be done. That is, of course, also a form of predictability, but it is the "we can count on you" part of the meaning that was intended more than the "you are predictable" part." Jim went on to share that by being consistent, he believed that I provided a solid, unswerving integrity that is also very comforting to the relationships I have developed. "You are deliberate," he stated, "Going with your self-reflective-nature – it is the value of giving enough time to an issue for you to have arrived at a careful course of action."

Over the years, I have developed a tendency of suppressing issues that I was not ready to confront. They were neatly compacted within a file tucked away in my mind to confront at a later date and time. Of course, that time never arrived. *Courageous Conversations* and the Andrews Leadership Program have provided a means for finding my voice. Through the process of looking inward in order to make the journey outward, I was able to engage in an email conversation with Dr. Tucker. I find myself asking more questions and engaging in professional conversations – finding my voice. The structure of the various regional groups, our learning community has provided a form for support and dialogue with true professionals who have deep convictions for continuous learning

and development. My continuing the conversation with Dr. Tucker was a tipping point for me.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

-James A. Baldwin

It is my belief that our steps are ordered by God and that we are predestined. There is a reason and a purpose for everything in life. I have concluded from my religious teaching that our life's experiences are God's way of equipping us with the necessary skill sets so we are able to orchestrate those things that are to come in our lives. It is through our trials and tribulations that we become a stronger and resilient people.

Gladwell (2000) seeks to explain "social epidemics", or sudden and often chaotic changes from one state to another. He identifies three types of people who have the power to produce social epidemics: (1) Connectors are those with wide social circles. They are the "hubs" of the human social network and responsible for the small world phenomenon; (2) Mavens are knowledgeable people. While most consumers would not know if a product were priced above the market rate by 10 percent, mavens would; and (3) Salesmen are charismatic people with powerful negotiation skills. They exert "soft" influence rather than forceful power. Their source of influence may be the tendency of others, subconsciously, to imitate them rather than techniques of conscious persuasion. On a small scale, he identified context as a key "tipping point" that what really matters are the little things. If you want to change people's behavior, "You need to create

community around them, where these new beliefs could be practical, expressed, and nurtured” (Gladwell, 2000, p. 173).

When it comes to cultivating and maintaining our relationships with others, Stephen Covey’s metaphor of the *Emotional Bank Account* is probably one of the most powerful ideas created for the development of interpersonal relationships. It basically means that anyone with whom we have a relationship with, whether it be our coworkers, family or friends, we maintain a personal “emotional” bank account with them. This account begins on a neutral balance. Just as with any bank account, we can make deposits and withdrawals. However, instead of dealing with units of monetary value, we deal with emotional units. The emotional units that Covey speaks of are centered on trust. When we make emotional deposits into someone’s bank account, their fondness, trust, and confidence in us grows. As a result our relationship develops and grows. If we can keep a positive reserve in our relationships, by making regular deposits, there will be greater tolerance for our mistakes and we will enjoy open communication with that person. On the contrary, when we make withdrawals and our balance becomes low or even overdrawn, bitterness, mistrust and discord develops. If we are to salvage the relationship, we must make a conscious effort to make regular deposits.

All night, all day
Angels watching over me, my Lord
All night, all day
Angels watching over me

-Public Domain Spiritual

I am convinced that angels do walk among us daily. I am fortunate and blessed to have “good people” – angels in my life. Throughout this process and over the years, God has faithfully deployed His angels to encamp around me in order to provide the necessary support, inspiration, motivation, guidance, and reflection that I need. It is not out of the ordinary for me to hear, “I need to be your mirror for a moment” from Sarah Barzee, Kim Mearman, Marianne Kirner, and Michelle LeBrun-Griffin. This is a direct result of our emotional bank accounts that have been established that we are able to hold up a mirror for each other and engage in candid and sometimes difficult conversations. Leadership involves a reciprocal process that enables members of an organization to construct meaning that leads toward a common purpose (Lambert, 1995).

Sarah Barzee will routinely bring me back to Karen Graham’s presentation, *Ethical Decision-Making Using Analytic Tools* during the Leadership Roundtable 2004. Her ocean blue eyes making direct contact with me while concurrently setting the stage, “Mr. Grice, before you respond, think beyond yourself. Consider the impact on others.” It is almost as if I am hearing Karen Graham’s confident, yet gentle voice posing the question, “Does it significantly impact your well being and the well being of others?” during her presentation. This presentation has provided a framework for ethical and moral decision-making and professional practice.

“Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make, not only our own happiness, but that of the world at large.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

The concept of “A Call to Serve” has resonated with me through several personal and professional experiences. About two years ago, I had the opportunity of watching *Oprah’s* interview with Luther Vandross and his mother regarding his stroke and journey to rehabilitation. At one point of the interview, Oprah turned to Luther’s mother and asked, “How did you make it through this terrible time? Your son was literally dead. I understand that all of his body functions essentially had stopped.” Very composed, with tears rolling down her face like a waterfall, she smiled and responded very confidently, “I have been taught that if God calls you to it, He will bring you through it.” Luther’s mother went on to articulate that it is her belief that where there are two or three gathered in His name, there He too shall be.

This struck a chord with me as I immediately made a connection between Mrs. Vandross’s comments and our call to the Andrews Leadership Program almost four years ago and the learning communities that have been established within our various regional groups. Connecticut’s regional group participated in a facilitated discussion regarding Yukl’s (2002) book, *Leadership in Organizations* with Drs. Jim Tucker and Marianne Kirner. Throughout the discussion, they constantly reiterated the point that servant-leadership is about stewardship and a feeling that one wants to serve, to serve others *first*.

I Care and I am Willing to Serve by Marian Wright Edelman (2001) is particularly inspiring to me because it affirms that we often sell ourselves short in terms of the unique contribution we can each make to the world. Wayne Muller, an ordained minister, therapist, and founder of *Bread for the Journey*, an innovative organization serving families in need helped me to understand the difference between talents and gifts when he explained that talents are things we can teach others, but gifts are uniquely for us

to do. Our gift to the world is to do that one thing we have been called upon to do. Although, we may not have the talents of others, that should not stop us from responding to our inner calling and desire to serve. The balance of the inner and outer life is allowing that caring on the inside to be expressed in stewardship on the outside.

Greenleaf (1998) described servant leadership as one who is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve others first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He goes on to explain that the difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served. 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? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived?" At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work - in essence, a way of being - that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society. An adapted version of Marian Wright Edelman's prayer, *I Care and I am Willing to Serve* provided an excellent reflection during the Leadership Roundtable 2004. Groups were asked to engage in a discussion relevant to their "call to serve" and its place in the Andrews Leadership Program overall, in their regional and state group in particular, and LeadEAST's Roundtable.

I Care and I am Willing to Serve

Lord, I may not be able to deliver a speech like Martin Luther King, Jr., or turn a poetic phrase like Jesse Jackson, but I care and I am willing to serve.

I may not have Fred Shuttlesworth's and Harriet Tubman's courage or Andy Young's political skills, but I care and I am willing to serve.

I may not be able to sing like Fannie Lou Hamer or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin, but I care and I am willing to serve.

I may not be as holy as Archbishop Tutu, forgiving like Mandela, or disciplined like Gandhi, but I care and I am willing to serve.

I am not brilliant like Dr. DuBois or Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or eloquent as Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington, but I care and I am willing to serve.

Use me as Thou will to serve thy people today and tomorrow.

-Adapted by David R. Grice
Leadership Roundtable 2004

Reflections on Leadership:

Each of us has natural leadership abilities (Glanz, 2002). My earlier views and concepts of leadership were derived from a combination of childhood, school, and religious experiences. It is through formal education and various professional teaching experiences, I have observed administrators with a variety of leadership styles that have assisted in the cultivation of my own belief about leadership.

My professional work experience began in 1980, in Chicago, Illinois as a second and third teacher in a small Catholic School. The principal, Mr. Johnson was one of the few principals in the Catholic Schools during that time who was a "lay individual." He was not affiliated with a particular religious order (i.e., priest, brother). His style of

leadership depicted a style that was all too familiar to me as a child growing up in South Carolina. People in leadership positions were given respect (i.e., principals, teachers, policemen, and ministers). Their positions were somewhat hierarchical in nature. There was a belief and mindset that with a position of authority came power. Mr. Johnson's style was authoritarian. He operated in the traditional, autocratic hierarchical style of leadership. He was the boss and in control. Mr. Johnson's leadership style was one of fear. The teachers in essence were considered as his "servants." Mr. Johnson assumed full credit for the school's accomplishments. It was always what "I" have accomplished rarely what "We" have accomplished. Sergiovanni (1994) discussed the importance of building a learning community by reorganizing educational values, beliefs, and practices. He argued that for an understanding of a community as a collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bonding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of "I's" into a collective "we." In good schools things "hang together,"- there is a sense of purpose that rallies people to a common cause, work has meaning and life is significant, teachers and students work together with spirit, and accomplishments are readily recognized.

In retrospect, Mr. Johnson's leadership style was that of a manager. His style of leadership did not reflect the emerging trends in education/leadership. He was a part of the traditional style of leadership. Larry Spears (1995), the CEO of the Greenleaf Center noted that as we end the twentieth century, we are beginning to see that traditional autocratic and hierarchical modes of leadership are slowly yielding to a newer model – one that attempts to simultaneously enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of our many institutions through a combination of teamwork and

community, personal involvement in decision making, and ethical and caring behavior. This emerging approach to leadership is called servant-leadership.

During December of 1987, I relocated to Connecticut and soon there after accepted a teaching position as a third grade teacher with the Bloomfield Public Schools. My new beginning in the public schools coincided with the appointment of a new principal, Mrs. Duran. She went to great efforts to build rapport and relationships with families, students, and teachers. Mrs. Duran was considered the “turnaround” principal for the school. Her style of leadership was a mixture of charismatic and servant. She brought forth many new initiatives and a sense of renewal to the school, as well as inspired and created excitement on all levels. Mrs. Duran was a leader who clearly articulated her vision for the school and its students. She assisted staff in creating a collaborative school environment in order to effectively communicate with various stakeholders (i.e., central office, teachers, families, students, and community members) in achieving the vision and goals set forth to improve outcomes for students.

Transformational leaders have a clear collective vision and most importantly they communicate it effectively to all. They act as role models, inspiring others to put the good of the entire organization above self interest (Burns, 1978). Mrs. Duran exemplified the qualities of effective leadership. There was a natural feeling within her to serve others *first* teachers, families, and students. What leaders do, as paradoxical as it maybe, transform followers into leaders. They do this by using their own power in service of others rather than in service of self (Kouzes and Posner, 1996).

Due to staff reductions in 1991, I left the Bloomfield Public Schools and accepted a position as a fourth grade teacher in a neighboring town, West Hartford. West Hartford

Public Schools placed a great emphasis on professional development and continuous learning. My principal, Miss Rustin saw the good in all students and teachers. She worked very diligently to establish a learning community. I recalled my first post-conference following a formal teacher observation. Although I have been observed by principals throughout my career, conferencing with Miss Rustin was different. She took me through a reflective process regarding the lesson she observed. Miss Rustin was the first administrator I ever encountered to inquire about my own assessment about the delivery of a lesson. She posed such questions as, “How do you feel that the lesson went? If you had to do one thing over, what would you do differently? What can I do to support you?” Throughout out the post conference, she would interject her assessment and recommendations, as well as commendations. Miss Rustin was a believer in shared leadership, group process, and team building. She placed high expectations upon teachers and created the environment/organizational structures necessary to support success. Through professional development and coaching, my skills as a teacher were enhanced under the leadership of Miss Rustin.

In 1994, I had the opportunity of returning to the Bloomfield Public Schools as a third grade teacher. I was very excited and brought to the district numerous skills and strategies that I had acquired while teaching in West Hartford (i.e., grade level meetings, co-teaching, process writing, and unification of general and special education - student support services working collaboratively with general education/inclusion model).

Dr. Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, (acting principal) was the epitome of an instructional leader. As a servant leader, she often covered classes, assigned herself to lunch and recess duty. Dr. Smith embodied all of the

qualities of a genuine leader. Dr. Smith was the administrator that I aspired to be. She possessed great passion for education. She was an administrator who made an asserted effort to ignite her passion and enthusiasm about education in others. She created a learning environment/community conducive to learning for teachers and students. The goal was to implement instructional practices to effectively meet the diverse learning and behavioral needs of all students (i.e., grade level meetings, modeling/coaching by specialists in the general education setting, co-teaching, and opportunities to visit other classes, guided reading). During her tenure at J.P. Vincent School, Dr. Smith held teachers accountable for improved student outcomes. There were no excuses. She often asked this question after an observation or review of student data, “What are you going to do differently?” She would firmly remind teachers that they could no longer conduct business as usual- teaching and utilizing the same practices as in the past. Dr. Smith constantly made the point that student data should be used to inform our instruction. She met teachers where they were, while simultaneously moving them in the direction of where they needed to go.

Sadly, Dr. Smith suffered a stroke on the opening day of school (September 1999) during a staff meeting and died a few days later. She truly left a profound legacy upon the Bloomfield Public Schools. Filling the principalship left by Dr. Smith was a tough “act” to follow. After a year of searching for a new principal, the role was filled with a colleague of Dr. Smith committed to building upon the legacy.

As a part of a series of the professional development activities, (2004 Fall) SERC consulting staff had the opportunity to view *Focus Your Vision* by Dewitt Jones (2003). The video highlighted the point that when we connect with our visions, and in doing so,

release our passion; we have a better understanding of who we are, what we stand for, and where we are going. One of the key concepts: was “Do You Have Juice in Your Camera?” The juice being the passion; the energy needed to realize our visions. Dr. Smith would often have conversations with teachers regarding their vision and commitment to the education of ALL students regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, or disability. She provided the necessary structures to foster a professional learning community where teachers reflected upon their instructional practices through data driven decision-making in order to meet the learning and behavioral needs of students from diverse backgrounds. It was her belief that teachers needed to seek opportunities for professional growth through analysis of current research and methodology to enhance the teaching and learning process.

The role of the principal is to nurture and develop teachers’ professional growth as part of the school culture. It is important to create consensus, promote shared values, ensure systematic collaboration, encourage experimentation, model commitment, provide one-on-one staff development, offer purposeful staff development programs, promote self-efficacy, and monitor the sustained effort (DuFour and Berkey, 1995).

A leader envisions goals, sets standards, and communicates in such a way that all associated directly or indirectly knows where the school is going and what it means to the community (Drake, 1999). While managers rely on the authority given to them from above (Buhler, 1995), leaders seek to create a cooperative culture in which everyone has a responsibility to lead and to suggest changes when necessary (Drake, 1999; Perez et al, 1999). Conversely, Fullan (2002) noted that the difference between success and failure of any school is the quality of the leader.

I equate leaders to the saying, “People come into your life for a reason, a season, or lifetime. Some people come into our lives and quickly go...Some people become friends and stay a while...leaving beautiful footprints on our hearts...and we are never quite the same.” Leaders come into our lives for various reasons and purposes. Some to plant seeds, till the soil, provide organization, move people to feeling uncomfortable, or to think differently about their current practices. Although the length of their presence may be for a short duration, these leaders do make an impact. I feel that leaders are called to serve and that their length of service will vary.

Indicators of Demonstrated Competency:

Effective Teacher/Mentor

Background: My teaching career began in 1980 as a second and third grade teacher in Chicago, Illinois. Consequently, over the past years I have held various positions that have facilitated the development of my skills and abilities as an effective teacher/mentor. Through a combination of education and professional experiences, I bring an extensive degree of background to the three competencies in this area.

As a teacher, I instilled in my students the motivation that each one of them has something truly unique to offer the world through hard work, goal setting, and self-discipline. I encouraged my students to dream and to follow their dreams – to open themselves to the endless and wondrous possibilities residing within them. Life may present them with disappointments and failures, but growth comes from every honest effort. Our classroom motto was “Never Settle for Less Than Your Best!”

As a classroom teacher, I took a tremendous interest in my students that went well beyond the basic acquisition of reading, writing, and math skills. I was instrumental in bringing several innovative programs to my school that involved community partnerships. As a result of these initiatives and efforts, the school (J.P. Vincent School) had local artists and medical interns from the University of Connecticut working closely with its students on variety projects that were meaningfully integrated into the curriculum. I incorporated a variety of teaching strategies and community resources into the classroom with the goal of capitalizing on the strength and individuality of each student. The classroom environment was conducive to learning and student growth - an environment where all students could experience success.

“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”

-Henry Brooks Adams

In 1997, I was selected as Bloomfield Public School’s Teacher of the Year. It was truly an honor to be recognized by colleagues for my contributions to the teaching profession. Dr. Peter Azar (1999), a former administrator once stated in a letter of recommendation that as a classroom teacher, I had a clear sense of instructional practice. I utilized the practice in the way I structured my classroom and instruction. Upon entering the classroom, visitors were immediately struck by the print rich environment in which I immersed students. He continued by emphasizing my open respect for students, ability to teach utilizing a variety of instructional strategies, and clear expectations for behavior created a work atmosphere for students to flourish.

When I reflect on my teaching, the majority of it was based on instinct and intuition. Doing what I thought was “good teaching.” It was not until my involvement in the Leadership Program and SERC that I was able to make a correlation between my teaching and the research on effective schools and cultural responsive pedagogy. In the article, *“But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,”* Gloria Ladson-Billings (1990) discussed the importance of linking schooling and a student’s culture. She makes the point that if students’ language, culture, heritage, and experiences are valued, used, and incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience success. Teachers/schools must develop culturally responsive instructional strategies and transform information about home and community into effective classroom/school practice (Gay, 2000).

Larry Bell (2005), a motivational speaker confirms my belief about the importance of teacher relationship and rapport with students. In the kick off to a new school year in Vero Beach, Florida he spoke with great passion about the important role that each and every teacher plays in the success of all students, in and out of the classroom. “Somebody needs you, every day,” he said. “Kids don’t care about what you know until they know that you care,” he reminded teachers and support staff alike. “Every one of us has the power to make a difference in every child, no matter their race, religion, or economic status.”

Ron Edmonds (1979) suggested that to be truly effective a school must challenge all students, and must close the achievement gap between students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, Edmonds stated that high expectations for students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, and effective family/community

involvement are cornerstones of effective schools research. He goes on to say that schools must have a climate of high expectations reflected in staff and family beliefs, and must demonstrate that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and school skills.

Dynamic Change Agent

Background: As it relates to a dynamic change agent, I am a work in progress. I am ever growing as a change agent in the three competencies in this area. I feel that my education and professional background have not adequately prepared/provided me with the necessary skills and background experiences needed to be a dynamic change agent. However, my current position has afforded me with opportunities to expand knowledge and skills in planning and implementing change, developing human resources, and public relations through the provision of training and technical assistance.

Leading change is one of the most important and difficult leadership responsibilities. Efforts to implement changes are more likely to be successful if a leader understands the reason for resistance to change and the phases in the change process. People tend to resist change for many reasons. The Stages of Concern/(CBAM) focuses on determining what a teacher/individual thinks and feels about a change. How an educator/individual feels about and perceives a change will in large part impact whether or not change will actually occur in the classroom. There are seven stages that range from Stage 0-Awareness, where a teacher/individual is merely becoming aware of an innovation without any particular concern, to Stage 6-Refocusing, where much time and effort have been put into a change, and now there is deep reflection about more universal benefits of it (Hall and Hord, 2001).

However, a leader can do many things to facilitate the successful implementation of change (Yukl, 2002). Effective leaders establish moral purpose, build relationships, generate knowledge, understand the change process, and build coherence. Educational change is technically simple and socially complex, and never a checklist, always complexity. There is no step-by-step shortcut to transformation. It involves the hard day-to-day work of reculturing (Fullan, 2001).

Through my participation in the Leadership Program, there has been a greater heightened awareness of the complexity of the implementation of change. I often find myself viewing the change process through a different set of lenses. I have been a facilitator in the navigation of the change process. I recalled my first technical assistance visit to a school district regarding moving forward with responsible inclusive practices. My team and I initially went into the district with “our” agenda – “our” marching orders. Subsequently, after much resistance from the district, we reflected upon our actions and quickly realized the importance of meeting people where they are and moving them to the place where they need to be, developing a shared vision, listening, and asking the right questions. Quinn (1996) defines incremental change as limited in scope. An extension of the past and does not disrupt past patterns. While on the other hand, deep change requires new ways of thinking and behaving. A discontinuous of past and distorts existing patterns.

In the April issue of *Educational Leadership*, Michael Fullan, Al Bertani, and Joanne Quinn (2004) detailed crucial components to effective leadership for change at the district level. They noted ongoing learning as one of the key components to effective leadership for change (i.e., Effective districts do not just get the strategy right to begin

with; they continually refine it using systematically collected information. Districts maintain close contact with problems, promote and invite regular feedback, and engage in problem-solving actions. This disciplined inquiry fuels deeper and more sustainable improvement). As with any new initiative or program, this component illustrates the importance of leaders taking time to reflect and evaluate their efforts through the process of ongoing learning. Learning from mistakes while remaining disciplined about what they are learning (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000).

Lessons Learned:

About two years ago, SERC, a learning organization, afforded its Consultants an opportunity to internally reflect and assess our efforts as they related to supporting schools through the provision of training and technical assistance in moving forward with responsible inclusive practices through a series of “lessons learned” in order to develop strategies to approach change. Having an opportunity to discuss “lessons learned” with colleagues was beneficial and critical to our work with schools in the implementation of change. The process of reflecting upon one’s own practice is a strategy that is not utilized by many practitioners. However, it is a process that develops leaders as reflective practitioners. The shared process of reflection, reevaluation, and action is critical to an organization. Reflection and inquiry skills provide a foundation for dialogue and that dialogue that is grounded in reflection and inquiry skills is likely to be more reliable (Senge, 1990).

Effective Organizer

Background: I feel that I bring a great deal of background to the three competencies in this area. I have always possessed great organizational and management skills. My organizational skills enhanced my skills and abilities as a classroom teacher. Having the necessary organizational skills assisted me in providing students with an organized classroom conducive to learning. Ultimately, being an effective organizer contributed greatly to my success in meeting the need of students in the general education classroom. My various professional experiences over the years have contributed and enhanced my overall skills as an effective organizer. Currently, I am responsible for the co-ordination of SERC's *Early Intervention Project* and *Black Men's Forum*. These roles involve the coordination of professional development activities, materials, collaborating with an array of stakeholders, and the provision of training and technical assistance. Being an effective organizer is critical to my role as a consultant.

Lessons Learned:

Although, I have excellent organization skills and coordinated various conference and other professional development activities, I have come to the realization that one's strength can also be a weakness. During a mid-year review, it was brought to my attention that I was driving the assistants "crazy" with my organization and need to control everything. I had a belief that things had to be accomplished according to my defined set of "criteria." There was a lack of trust that things could be done without my micro-managing the work – my need to be involved along the way. Greenleaf (1998)

maintained that everyone needs to assume leadership roles and responsibilities – shared leadership. A leader must move from being the “chief” into the role of “builder.” The responsibility of a servant leader is to cultivate future leaders. I had to change my mindset. Deep change requires the reconstructing of existing individual and collective mindscapes of practice (Sergivanni, 1998).

Collaborative Consultant

Background: Essentially through various professional experiences, I have developed a great deal of skill in the three competencies in this area. As a classroom teacher, I communicated on an ongoing basis with administrators, teachers, and families regarding academic student progress. I also collaborated with student support services professionals providing services to students in the general education classroom. Other professional experiences required decision-making and problem solving. My current role as a consultant requires ongoing collaboration both within and outside of SERC. To this end, communication and collaboration are critical in my role. I collaborate regularly with SERC Consultants and the Connecticut State Department of Education in order to facilitate connections between initiatives/projects, maintain seamless communication, and enhance problem solving through ongoing reflection and learning cycle.

Lessons Learned:

When you are kind, honest, caring and friendly to another person, you make deposits on an *Emotional Bank Account*. However, if you are unkind, disrespectful, uncaring, and mean, you draw from this account. Covey (2004) uses the metaphor of *Emotional Bank Account* to describe “the amount of trust that’s been built up in a relationship” (p. 188). Trust is needed for a relationship to thrive. Without trust, we may manage to accommodate and endure another person, however, it cannot be mutually satisfying in the long run.

Reflection Researcher

Background: My background is extremely limited in the area of research. My education and/or professional experience has not facilitated the appropriate development in the areas of reading and evaluating research, conducting research, and reporting research.

During the Summer, 2004, Fall, 2004, and Spring, 2005, I took courses to enhance my ability in the areas of reading and evaluating research, conducting research, and reporting research. The introductory course in statistics for students in education and psychology provided an opportunity to increase my ability to evaluate and interpret educational and psychological research, design simple research studies, utilize statistical software, and to interpret statistical analyses. It utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to provide a series of guided exercises in order to assist students with necessary competencies that are needed to produce various statistical analyses. Students were also required to conduct four statistics writeups consisting of the following

form: (1) Identify a researchable problem; (2) Identify the relevant variables needed to conduct an investigation; (3) Provide a rationale for the problem, the variables that were chosen, and the analysis that is proposed; (4) Analysis results; (5) Interpretation; and Discussion/Recommendation.

The course, *Issues in Research* was an extension of the orientation leadership seminar. Students reviewed literature, discuss the findings in study groups and with faculty, and provide scholarly feedback related to assigned topics in professional research as researcher reviewers. This course served as a foundation for writing the dissertation proposal. It provided a greater understanding of the components of the dissertation.

Through my participation the course, *Qualitative Research Methods in Education and Psychology* (Spring 2005) with Dr. Shirley Freed, I became interested in qualitative research. The course included an introduction to the philosophy, theory, and methods of qualitative research. It featured different theoretical approaches to ethnography. As part of the requirements of the course, I conducted a pilot study entitled, *Teachers and Parents' Perceptions About the Overrepresentation of African American Students in Special Education*. The qualitative study focused on the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the overrepresentation of students in special education, specifically African American students. I plan to expand this previous pilot study as my dissertation topic focusing specifically on third and fifth grade general education teachers in selected Connecticut public schools regarding their perceptions about the overrepresentation of African American students in special education.

Competent Scholar

Background: Through education and my current role as a consultant, I am developing the necessary skills of a competent scholar. However, I feel that it is an ongoing process – staying abreast of emerging educational trends.

I have been taught that man and woman are constantly in search of self-development and growth and that we should never allow ourselves to become complacent. One key to successful leadership is continuous professional and personal growth/change. Personal change is a reflection of our inner growth (Quinn, 1996). On an ongoing basis, SERC affords me opportunities to develop and enhance the necessary skills to assist schools/districts in ensuring effective instructional practices and promoting positive educational outcomes for all students. The professional development serves as a means of keeping Consultants abreast of current research and trends in education. SERC has created a professional learning community as characterized by an environment fostering mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth, and a synergy of efforts (Dufour, 1998). Structures are in place to assist with the ongoing development of Consultants as competent scholars (e.g., book groups, Courageous Conversations, professional development, Monday Consultants meetings) – making the connection of scientifically based research to individual initiatives and programs

Lessons Learned:

Leadership is building and cultivating relationships. It is a willingness to listen with a reflective ear. Leadership is inspiring, providing clear communication, modeling, building capacity, and implementing and providing the necessary pressure and support.

There needs to be philosophy, policies, structures, and practices in place to ensure success. An individual does not need a title in order to lead or serve.

Lessons Learned:

Leaders need to seek for understanding and clarification. They are passionate and able to articulate that passion through their point of view about a specific topic or when striving to maintain integrity. Leaders are listeners and welcomes multi- perspectives. Leadership involves a reciprocal process (Lambert, 1995).

“Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches,
letting us stretch and
grow and reach new heights.”

-Pauline R. Kezer

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