

# **Examining the Roles of Male Teachers of the Year in the Elementary School Setting**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Although only a small percentage of male elementary teachers exist in elementary education, some of these teachers excel in their craft, being named Teachers of the Year for their respective campuses. While there is a plethora of research regarding male elementary teachers and their challenges they face in this particular environment, there is a scarcity of studies on such teachers who have encountered success and recognition for their impact at the elementary level. **Purpose:** This qualitative study aimed to determine how male Elementary Teachers of the Year's practices have aided in their achievements and learn how their principals and their students' parents view their roles and impact on their campuses and children, respectively. **Research Questions:** The study addressed the following research questions: (1) How do male elementary school Teachers of the Year describe the elements to their success in the elementary school setting? (2) How do elementary school principals describe the role of their male Teachers of the Year in the elementary school setting? (3) How do parents of these teachers' students describe the characteristics of their children's teacher as an Elementary Teacher of the Year? **Methods:** I conducted this qualitative study through multiple one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three male elementary school Teachers of the Year, each of their principals, and a parent of one of each of their students. I coded the initial interview transcripts through Dedoose to gain insights on various themes within the participant responses. These emergent themes guided me in creating follow-up questions for each participant, both with questions on the common themes from the groups and participant-specific questions based on their responses. **Results:** All three teachers, although receiving a campus and district recognition for their services, maintained their

focus on building relationships with their students, parents, and colleagues. Their voices noted their humble attitudes in receiving campus-wide recognition. The principal participants all reported their teacher's ability to serve as positive male role models. In the cases of participant Teachers of the Year of color, their principals noted the significance of race as an aspect of their role modeling for their respective school communities. The parent participants emphasized their appreciation for the teacher's willingness to consistently maintain communication lines that extended past school hours and through various methods. Each parent also noted the teacher's determination to help support their child, and themselves, by extension, beyond the classroom doors.

**Conclusion:** Male elementary school teachers possess the ability to connect with students and provide a positive male influence in their lives at a young age that can create relationships that will prove beneficial in both the short- and long-term. As they may encounter challenges from perceived stereotypes that either question their teaching abilities or that overemphasize their abilities to "fix" behavioral challenges in students, it is imperative for administrators and educators at the elementary level to understand these perceptions to best support male elementary teachers to become successful and effective elementary educators in the future.

*Keywords:* male, elementary, roles, characteristics, success

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

In the field of education, the vast majority of teachers in the public school setting, especially at the elementary level, are female. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), in 2019, 19.5% of elementary and middle school teachers and only 1.3% of preschool and kindergarten teachers in the United States were men. Forty years prior, Robinson (1979b) stated that the predominance of women in daycare and the early elementary years had created a sense of alarm in educators at the time. In 1994, this percentage of men in elementary education was around 12%, with most of these men teaching in the upper elementary grades (fourth-sixth grades), with only a rare male in a primary classroom (Allan, 1994).

Nearly twenty years later, researchers in the United States stated that “there is a critical shortage of male candidates entering elementary teacher education programs. Their small numbers pose a representation problem in an educational system that increasingly values ‘diversity’” (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996, p. 207). Peterson (2014) posits that this small percentage of male primary teachers is a noteworthy hindrance to gender diversity in K-12 education, especially for male students. Couple this with the fact that one in four children under the age of 18 – a total of approximately 16.4 million – live in homes without a father present, and it is clear that many young people grow up without a male presence in their lives, either at home or at school (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Although examining the reasons behind the lack of men in the home is beyond this research’s scope, this study will examine reasons for the lack of men in elementary schools and the challenges and successes they encounter (Parr et al., 2008).

Studying male educators in this environment will further understand how they experience, recognize, and navigate challenges to their masculinity, including the assumption that men, in general, cannot care for and nurture others (Shen-Miller & Smiler, 2015). While some researchers have found that an inverse relationship between men's predilections for female-majority professions and their acclivity to masculinity norms (Chusmir 1990; Mahalik et al., 2006), other studies have found that some men are less concerned with clinging to these masculinity norms and are more concerned with gaining personal satisfaction and achieving personal goals within the profession (Dodson, 2006). Although men do not have a prominent presence at the elementary level (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996), they have a presence nonetheless, and their impact influences the academic, social, and behavioral development of the youngest of students (Wood, 2012).

### **Background to the Study**

As the percentage of male teachers in elementary schools continues to decline in this nation, understanding the reasons behind such a decline and why some men continue to stay in elementary education can be critical to the future of this population in this environment. As a result, there is a need to study male teachers as role models and their effects on boys' and girls' social development in primary schools. Due to many students living in homes without a father present, Parr et al. (2008) suggest that an increase in the number of men in the primary grades is needed to provide more positive male role models. However, some view this appeal for more male role models in primary schools as discrediting female teachers' work, leading to various harmful effects for girls in school and gender relations in general (Mills et al., 2004). There is some evidence that

this call for more men in elementary schools is more of a concern for teachers than for students, with perceptions of what makes a good teacher not differing vastly between teachers and students (Lahelma, 2000).

### **Problem Statement**

Although few men enter the elementary environment, researchers have studied both the positive and negative implications of men working in elementary education (Peterson, 2014; Warin, 2006; Wood, 2012). Due to the shortage of male teachers on these campuses, they often find themselves experiencing a litany of negative and harmful stereotypes, frequently being viewed as abnormal, deviant, gay, or even pedophilic (Mills et al., 2004). While others often question the motives of male teachers at the elementary level, men who choose to teach at the high school level are usually spared this questioning due to teaching subjects considered in the masculine domains, such as mathematics, science, physical education, and manual arts (Mills et al., 2004). Such disciplines, including coaching sports, are viewed as “acceptable” areas for men to concentrate a teaching focus, and, therefore, their motives for teaching at this level are typically not questioned. For their elementary counterparts, however, they often endure questioning concerning why they would want to teach the youngest children in an area that is not “masculine” enough for “real men” (Skelton, 2003). Nevertheless, male elementary school teachers often possess positive characteristics and utilize best practices that must be recognized and understood to help other men be successful in their roles as primary educators (Peterson, 2014).

Rather than repeating the struggles and stereotypes they may face in their educational settings, this study adds to the existing literature by focusing on male

teachers' quality aspects and the subsequent recognitions as Teachers of the Year. By doing so, this research aims to determine perspectives and practices that have helped male teachers become successful in their fields, enlightening their fellow male colleagues and the administrators who hire and appraise them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

With a plethora of research on the stereotypes and pressures that male teachers encounter in the profession, the purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how the practices of male Elementary Teachers of the Year aid in their success and to determine how their principals and parents of their students view their impact in the elementary school setting and on individual students in a large, suburban school district in Southeast Texas. Through interviews with the teachers, principals, and parents, I determined these teachers' impact on their students and schools. As a noticeable presence on their campuses, male elementary teachers have the opportunity to stand out as either positive or negative examples for their students (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Although few, their impact can be positive and long-lasting, and it is imperative to understand how these individuals have become successful in an area where few men tread, and even fewer men succeed. These men can, and often do, make a difference in elementary students' lives, and while studies on the challenges that face male elementary school teachers are prevalent, there is a lack of study on those men who achieve success at this level.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions addressed the roles of male Elementary Teachers of the Year and their impact on their students and schools through the perspectives of the teachers, their administrators, and their students' parents:

1. How do male Elementary Teachers of the Year describe the elements to their success in the elementary school setting?
2. How do principals describe the roles of their male Elementary Teachers of the Year in the elementary school setting?
3. How do parents of students describe the characteristics of their children's teacher as an Elementary Teacher of the Year?

### **Overview of Methodology**

Numerous research studies involving male elementary school teachers have implemented a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with teachers to understand their thoughts and concerns as professional educators (Allen, 1994; Johnson et al., 2010; Parr et al., 2008; Wood, 2012). Rather than recounting the pressures that male elementary teachers face in this career, this research focuses on understanding how certain men have achieved success as elementary educators. To help accomplish this, I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with three male elementary school teachers who have earned the Teacher of the Year distinction for their efforts and achievements.

I also conducted interviews with these teachers' principals to gain an administrative perspective to understand the impact that their teachers have had on their campuses. The principals discussed the effects that each teacher has made beyond his classroom to the campus as a whole. To gain a non-school personnel perspective, I also interviewed one parent of a student of each teacher. Parents of elementary-aged children

are often involved in their children's education, which provided a unique perspective on the teacher's influence on their children. Utilizing open-ended semi-structured interviews helped to uncover the teachers' and administrators' views on their thoughts and experiences in their teaching environments (Cohen et al., 2018).

Each semi-structured interview consisted of eleven questions for the teachers and principals and five for the parents that varied slightly based on the participant (teacher, principal, or parent). Each participant received the questions before the interviews, which were conducted virtually through Zoom meetings or a phone call. Although I constructed the interview questions beforehand to facilitate the interview process, the semi-structured nature of the interviews aligned more closely with guided conversations than structured queries (Yin, 2014). Identical questions were asked of each interviewee initially, but based on each of their responses, I asked individualized follow-up questions to clarify their given answers. The interview questions asked "how" rather than "why," since "why" questions can connote an accusatory or even threatening tone, which can then create a defensiveness on the part of the interviewee (Becker, 1998).

I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews using the Otter application and utilized the Dedoose qualitative software computer program to code the responses to reveal any prevalent themes. After classifying coded segments into themes, I emailed the face-to-face interview transcripts to each participant to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the participants' responses. This data provided a better understanding of successful male teachers' practices and their roles in their classrooms and campuses.

To supplement the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and to triangulate the data, I utilized member checking through a 15-minute follow-up interview with each

participant. These secondary interviews provided the opportunity to ask any additional questions not asked in the first interview and gave the participants the chance to expand on their initial responses as necessary. I also shared the themes that I discovered through the coding of the first interviews. This triangulation led to feedback that improved data quality and reporting. I provided the follow-up transcripts to the participants to ensure their accuracy.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I also reviewed quantifiable data on the percentage of male elementary teachers in the district to determine similarities between local and national data. I also collected data on the number of single-parent homes in the studied area to see if their percentages align with the nation's percentages. This data helped to support the research study and verified the area data with the national data.

### **Significance of the Study**

With 25% of children in the United States growing up without a father in the home, millions of students lack an adult male presence in their daily lives (United States Census Bureau, 2018). While men are not absent from elementary schools, the few men in this environment are not always in a classroom teaching capacity, but most often in the roles of administrators, custodial staff, or the Physical Education teacher (Rice & Goessling, 2005). Although being taught by a male teacher at the elementary level will not automatically solve all behavioral issues that students without a father figure may face (Martino & Kehler, 2006; Parr et al., 2008), this male presence may be the deciding factor for some students gaining academic and behavioral success that they may not otherwise achieve.



Mancus (1992) posits that as a more equitable balance of male and female elementary educators is realized, gender stereotypes and equal perceptions of male and female teachers' positive and negative qualities will increase for both girls and boys. Learning more about the men who teach elementary-aged children can challenge the view that men cannot be caring, competent educators for young learners (Mitrano, 2014). Understanding the qualities and practices of successful male teachers can help administrators hire quality male teachers and understand how to help them grow as effective educators.

### **Limitations**

Although selecting participants to interview was objectively based on men who have earned the Elementary Teacher of the Year designation in the district, this award's teacher selection process can vary between schools. Each campus has its staff members take an initial vote to determine whom they deem to deserve this award during a particular school year. However, some schools examine the votes and have the administrative team decide who would receive the honor, whereas some schools bestow the award based on the majority of votes.

Even with dozens of elementary schools in the district, not every elementary school will select a man as their Teacher of the Year, limiting the number of schools containing eligible teachers for the study. For the 2019-2020 school year, no elementary school in the district selected a man as its Teacher of the Year, and only 5% of schools in the district chose a male for their Elementary Teacher of the Year in 2019, therefore limiting the study to only a few eligible participants. This study is also limited since I did

not consider the student perspectives due to the complications resulting from interviewing a *uniquely* vulnerable group such as young children (Yin, 2014).

### **Delimitations**

Through this study, I made several delimitations. First, I only interviewed male educators who have earned the recognition of Teacher of the Year. Limiting the study to these educators helped determine the practices and traits of successful male teachers, which led to a greater understanding of how men can improve their standing in the elementary field. Second, due to the limited number of male Elementary Teachers of the Year in the district, I did not narrow down to a specific elementary grade level or subject. Third, for convenience, I only conducted interviews with teachers employed in the same district. Fourth, I limited the range of potential data to the past three years to determine the individuals eligible for the interview process. Doing so improved the chances that these teachers were still working in the same capacity and at the same campus when selected as Teachers of the Year.

### **Assumptions**

A few assumptions were integral to the effectiveness of this study. The first assumption was that collecting data from male Teachers of the Year provided clarity about their characteristics and best teaching practices. The second assumption was that these Teachers of the Year for their campuses are, in fact, successful in their craft and were selected based on their quality teaching practices and not selected simply due to popularity. The third assumption was that the teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed for the study answered all of the interview questions truthfully. The fourth assumption was that the teacher and administrator participants are ethical educators in

good standing with the state and the district. The final assumption was that I constructed appropriate questions to gain the most insight into the male Elementary Teachers of the Year from the teachers, principals, and parents.

### **Positionality**

I have spent my entire professional career at the elementary level in various roles: kindergarten teacher, first-grade math and science teacher, fourth-grade math and science teacher, Science Instructional Specialist, and Math Interventionist. In all four of the elementary schools where I have worked, the number of employed men was, and is, few in both teacher and administrator roles. Although I was in the minority as a male in these elementary school environments, I was always warmly welcomed and treated with respect by my administrators, colleagues, parents, and students. However, this sense of belonging was not present at the beginning of my career in education.

I began working as a substitute teacher, working in various schools, culminating in a long-term substitute position lasting three months at the end of a school year. At this particular school, I was not just one of the men; I was the only man. Outside of a very few staff members who treated me kindly, the kindness and warm reception that I would eventually receive in my other schools were virtually non-existent in this particular environment. I fully realize that being a single man with no children in his mid-20s working at an elementary school may have impacted my image, although I cannot say with certainty that this was the underlying cause of this experience. This lack of positive interaction is the same discomfort that other men in elementary schools often report in their experiences as educators of young children. “Young single men, whose time and energy is not shared with their households, and who therefore have more opportunity to

demonstrate enthusiasm for, as well as a commitment to children and the work, are particularly suspect” (Allen, 1994, p. 14).

Building relationships with students is critical to a teacher’s success, and I was able to create positive connections with many of the students at this school, especially in the primary grades. However, this did not alleviate the sense of isolation that I felt as the only male on the campus. As a result, I understand the challenges and pressures that male teachers may face in their decisions to teach at this level. Nevertheless, I did not allow this experience to cloud my judgment of elementary school teaching or teachers in general, choosing to stay at the elementary level with the support and encouragement of countless colleagues and administrators. This primary education journey led to building many positive associations with staff members, students, and parents. I have had the great fortune of working with many influential colleagues and administrators over the years, and I credit my successes to their encouragement, support, and leadership.

With thirteen years of experience in various grade levels, roles, and campuses in the elementary school setting, I have seen first-hand the positive impact that a male teacher can have in his classroom. I still encountered academic and behavioral challenges with students, but the positive experiences far outweighed the negative. One incident from my final year as a classroom teacher stands out as a testimony to the positive impact that male teachers can have on their students. At our end-of-year awards ceremony, one of my female students and her mother approached me with a confession. The mother admitted that her daughter was very nervous at the beginning of the year because a male teacher had never taught her before. However, she stated that I had quickly become one of her daughter’s favorite teachers, positively impacting her life. I even saw the mother a

few years later, and she again thanked me for all that I had done for her daughter as her teacher.

As a male elementary teacher who received the Teacher of the Year designation for my campus in 2014, this study holds great significance for me as an educator in understanding the role that other successful male teachers have played in their elementary schools. Although this study looked specifically at how male teachers have impacted their classrooms, grade levels, and campuses, this study does not suggest that an increase in the number of men at the elementary level must be mandatory merely due to a few individuals' success stories. Such a stance would invite bias into the research to wrongly pursue or advocate a particular orientation to the issue (Yin, 2014). However, men at the elementary can play a significant role in their students' and campus' success, and learning from them can provide insight into the reasons behind their achievements.

### **Summary**

While the vast majority of teachers at the elementary level are female, the few male teachers in the same setting can have a limited but impactful influence. Regardless of whether or not one views men as essential in the elementary school environment, the fact remains that there is a significant underrepresentation of male educators at this level. As men enter the elementary sector of public education, it is imperative to understand the perceptions they face as a minority and to recognize their characteristics to help them in their craft. This study specifically drew on the positive examples and effective practices of prominent male teachers in the elementary school setting and their impact on their campuses and individual students.

### **Organization of the Doctoral Thesis**

This first chapter introduced the general problem and issues under consideration concerning men in elementary education, the study's significance, and the outline for the current study. Chapter II will review the theoretical framework for the study, literature and existing research on men in nontraditional careers, a history of men in elementary schools, teacher gender and teacher effectiveness, male elementary teachers' roles, challenges of being a male teacher, and future implications for male teachers in elementary education. Chapter III will review this qualitative study's methodology, including the research perspective, research design, research questions, site selection, participant selection, data collection and analysis, and provisions for validity and trustworthiness. Chapter IV will discuss this qualitative study's results and provide an in-depth analysis of the teachers', principals', and parents' perspectives. Chapter V will discuss the implications behind the research results, the potential utilization of the data to help male elementary teachers positively impact the education field, and suggestions for further research in this area.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following section provides the study's key terms and their respective meanings. This section serves as a place of reference to help the reader understand the context in which I utilize these terms.

**Alternative Certification Program (ACP):** Programs offering a nontraditional route to educator certification, allowing an individual to teach while completing the requirements of becoming a certified teacher (Texas Education Agency, 2020a).

**Dedoose:** Qualitative data software program used to code interview transcripts into themes for analysis.

**Elementary School:** A school campus that provides educational opportunities for students in grades pre-K through fifth grade.

**Hegemonic Masculinity:** Perceptions of what is regarded as “normal” in a particular context, including views on ideal male characteristics, including power, authority, and body strength; practices that serve to normalize men’s dominance and women’s subordination (Sargent, 2005).

**Math Liaison:** An individual selected at each campus to attend district math meetings to disseminate the information to the campus’s appropriate members.

**Paraeducators:** School employees who work with and under the guidance of a certified educator to provide instructional and non-instructional services to students, also known as paraprofessionals, teacher aides, and teaching assistants (National Education Association, n.d.).

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS):** An evidence-based framework designed to improve student behaviors and a method to integrate data, systems, and practices utilized within a specific structure (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

**Special Opportunity School (SOS):** The elementary equivalent of the Alternative Learning Center at the middle and high school levels. This program is part of the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) for students who have committed infractions outlined in the Student Code of Conduct requiring removal from the general classroom setting.

**State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR):** Texas’s standardized testing program, implemented in the 2011-2012 school year. This report

refers to testing at the elementary level, including third/fourth/fifth-grade reading and mathematics, fourth-grade writing, and fifth-grade science (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

**Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS):** A program that measures the growth that Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, also referred to as English learners (ELs), attain in learning the English language, testing the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Texas Education Agency, 2020c).

**Teacher of the Year:** Teachers annually selected from every elementary, middle school, and high school campus for their outstanding dedication and service to the students and the district.

**Zoom:** Computer software program utilized for virtual interviews with the participants per district and University requirements.



## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of the literature and research regarding male teachers and their experiences in the elementary school setting. The first section discusses the theoretical framework, which frames the current study. The second section looks into nontraditional careers for men and the implications of such a career choice. The third section provides a historical overview of men as educators in elementary schools and how attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes have influenced their venture into this environment. The fourth section reviews the positive and negative effects that teacher gender has on students and their abilities to learn. The fifth section looks at the various roles that male teachers play in the elementary school setting. The sixth section reviews the challenges that men face as they enter into this particular educational environment. The chapter concludes with the future implications of employing men as teachers in elementary schools.

### Theoretical Framework

To frame this study, I utilized gender role conflict theory. O'Neil (1981) defined this theory as follows:

Gender role conflict is a psychological state in which gender roles have negative consequences or impact on the person or others. The ultimate outcome of this conflict is the restriction of the person's ability to actualize their *human potential* or the restriction of someone else's potential. (p. 203)

This conflict often occurs when men experience conflict internally, toward others, and from others (Robinson, 2011). These individuals experience negative consequences due

to the opposition between inflexible, sexist, or excessively restrictive gender roles and conflicting situational demands (Wester et al., 2010). The complexity of gender role conflict divides further into (a) gender role devaluations, (b) gender role restrictions, and (c) gender role violations (O'Neil et al., 1995). Individuals experience gender role devaluations when they negatively critique themselves or others while conforming to or deviating from stereotypical masculine norms. Gender role restrictions ensue when an individual confines oneself to stereotypical norms. Gender role violations transpire when an individual directs harm or receives harm from others due to the individual deviating from stereotypical masculine norms (O'Neil et al., 1995).

Gender-role conflict conceptualizes from four overlapping dimensions: (a) cognitions, (b) affective experience, (c) behaviors, and (d) unconscious experience (O'Neil et al., 1986). Cognitive experiences of gender-role conflict describe how individuals think about gender roles and masculine, feminine, and androgynous characteristics. Affective experiences represent emotional feelings that one experiences regarding gender-role issues. Behavioral aspects include how individuals act, respond, and interact with themselves and others regarding gender-role issues. The unconscious aspects of gender roles include the repressed gender role elements beyond conscious level awareness (O'Neil et al., 1986).

Utilizing gender role conflict theory helps to understand the conflicts that male teachers face when entering the elementary school environment. As men who do not fit a stereotypical mold of a "normal" man, they are often conflicted in their roles: they find satisfaction in working with younger students in the elementary schools but are often looked upon with suspicion for taking on a position that does not coincide with societal

norms. Male elementary teachers must confront this conflict to navigate the challenges inherent in being a man in a female-majority environment. Since the teachers in this study have experienced a degree of success as male elementary school teachers, this study uncovered potential conflicts and challenges in their decisions to teach at the elementary level. By conversing with male elementary school teachers who have impacted this level, I gained insight into their reasons behind entering into elementary education and their reasons behind staying in this environment despite any similar experiences that other male teachers have encountered.

### **Men in Nontraditional Careers**

Although there is a lack of men in the elementary education environment, other occupations outside of education also experience this lack of male employees. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), in 2019, 11.7% of those in the nursing profession and 6.6% of all childcare workers were male. The Council of the European Union asserted that increasing the percentage of men in the childcare profession can show that men can provide education and care to a child just as well as women and that both male and female role models can influence the expansion of gender-stereotyped observations in children (Council of the European Union, 2011). While few men engage in childcare, Robinson (1979a) found in his study of male child care workers that 70% embarked on a career in child care because of altruistic concerns. These motivations included a love for children and satisfaction in working with them, the daycare program and curriculum's appeal, and the desire to positively contribute to this age group.

van Polanen et al. (2017) found that men as professional caregivers did not act differently than their female co-workers, nor did they possess gender roles specific to

masculinity. Both male and female caregivers demonstrated equal attention, sensitivity, and encouragement toward boys and girls in their care. Therefore, the emphasis should focus on the balance that a male child care worker can give for an improved environment for children (Robinson, 1979a). Furthermore, each caregiver was categorized as either feminine or androgynous in their character, but not masculine (van Polanen, 2017). Robinson (1979a) found that while turnover for men in child care work was rampant, one could argue that the disadvantages of not having men at all outweigh the advantages of having men for only short periods.

While the number of women in formerly male-dominated professions has increased (Barrett-Landau & Henle, 2014), there has been a negligent change in gender representation related to female-dominated employment, with the field of nursing as a prime example (Meadus & Twomey, 2011). Men often experience difficulties in attaining professional acceptance in nursing both by their colleagues and society-at-large. Both male and female patients often possess negative attitudes toward male nurses, often requesting a female nurse instead of a male (Barrett-Landau & Henle, 2014). Therefore, nursing schools must be cognizant of male discrimination in the workplace, gender stereotypes in textbooks, different clinical experiences based on gender, and male nursing students' learning styles.

### **A History of Men in Elementary Education**

Despite a claim that teaching has become increasingly “feminized” in recent years due to fewer male teachers entering primary education, the shift from a male-majority to a female-majority profession occurred over 100 years ago (Skelton, 2012). By the late 1800s, societal changes transpired, resulting in increasing numbers of women entering

the field of education, which, coincidentally, led to an increase of men leaving the classroom for “higher status occupations,” including school administration and teaching at the college level (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996). While as early as 1869, 39% of elementary and secondary public school teachers were men, by 1900, only 29% of teachers were men, dropping to 24% 50 years later (Carter et al., 2006). Coulter and Greig (2008) state that this phenomenon occurred in Canada because employers could legally pay lower wages to women than men.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, fathers were typically the head of the family, the breadwinner, and the one who set the familial standards (Berger, 1998). The philosophy surrounding child care emphasizes love and affection in forming character with the father setting the family's values and the mother providing the love. The idea that women were more suited and qualified to work with and teach young children led to the belief that teaching provided service out of love and not as a profession that should expect high remuneration levels (Coulter & Greig, 2008). However, in the 1920s and 1930s, when jobs were scarce during the depression, more men began to enter the teaching profession, pushing women out of their paid teaching employment to make room for the men.

### ***Shifting Perceptions of the Teaching Profession***

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, society-at-large began to shift its thinking on the teaching occupation, from one that was once a respectable career for men to one that was neither a “proper job” for middle-class men nor a “good job” for working-class men (Skelton, 2012). Even though teaching in state schools offered men the chance to gain an advanced education level and receive competitive pay with fewer

working hours, many working-class men were still reluctant to take on this profession (Skelton, 2012). According to Skelton, one of the suggested reasons behind this was the conflict in developing masculinity ideas in intellectual work and physical work. Intellectual, or “mind work,” was only available to those men who studied in the public schools and universities, and because working-class education centered on physical activity and strength, this prevented men from entering such a profession. In specific locations where few educated males were willing to become educators, women could now shift into the available teaching positions (Martino, 2008).

### ***Changing Numbers During World War II***

Just as the Great Depression in the United States had a significant impact on the economic environment, World War II also significantly affected the education environment (Lynch, 2016). Much of the country’s efforts focused more on securing resources for the military and less on social programs, including redirecting school funds towards funding the war effort. As teachers and students abandoned the classroom to enlist, school dropouts subsequently increased, and school enrollments decreased. High school student enrollments saw a decrease from 6.7 million in 1941 to 5.5 million in 1944. By this time, only two-thirds of those employed in education before the war were still working in this profession. However, as men left their day jobs to join the effort, employment, education, and learning opportunities for women increased, and many found work in the teaching field (Lynch, 2016).

### ***Teaching as a Means of Women’s Independence***

As the number of men leaving their homes to enlist in the armed forces rose, so did the number of women teaching at the primary level, providing them with a greater

degree of independence and an opportunity to be self-sufficient (Skelton, 2012).

Teaching remained one of the few proper employment types available to women when higher status male occupations were unavailable (Martino, 2008). As a result, teaching became synonymous with “women's work”: work characterized by low wages, reduced benefits, and demanding working conditions (Coulter & Greig, 2008). Some public perceptions of elementary school teaching viewed it as an occupation that a competent “real man” would not choose as a career (Allan, 1994). Kaplan (1947) opined that:

It should be made the policy of the school system to place men only in the upper grades and in their chosen subject fields (Social Studies, Physical Education, Industrial Arts, and Science) so that such work will come to be characterized as the work for men and that women should appear as out of place in such assignments as men are now in the lower elementary grades. (p. 368)

Throughout the 1970s, views, attitudes, and awareness towards gender roles and sexism were evaluated and questioned, leading to increased conflicts between men and women (O’Neil, 1981). Prospective female teachers continued to experience more significant exposure to social influences that encouraged their teaching choice as a profession (Dundar, 2014). Men, on the other hand, chose careers in education due to levels of self-fulfillment not available in masculine-oriented jobs, more significant opportunities for promotion, and opportunities to interact with women (Simpson, 2005). However, some men justified this career path by stating that teaching was simply a stepping stone to obtain higher status positions or occupations, such as law and medicine, rather than as a desirable destination (Coulter & Greig, 2008; Deneen, 2011; Martino, 2008; Smith, 2004).

### *The Acceptance of Men as Administrators*

While many men viewed the school teacher profession negatively, some men regarded the idea of becoming a school administrator as acceptable, leading many to take advantage of this route to advance in their educational careers (Coulter & Greig, 2008). As men actively sought higher-level positions in education, specifically the superintendency, this career path took them from the “feminized” world of classroom teaching into the “masculine” world of authority and power (Martino, 2008). However, before men could become school administrators, they had to first spend time in the classroom, which usually meant taking on more masculine education roles, such as teaching math or science, coaching sports, and teaching older students (Skelton, 2012).

Now into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even with the end goal of administration in mind, stereotypes of men as elementary school educators endure, leading men to leave the classroom as quickly as possible to step into management roles or leave the profession altogether (Deneen, 2011). As men are often still viewed as unsuitable for teaching at the elementary level, these perceptions continue to influence the number of men arriving in the education environment (Lovett, 2014). Men who are interested in a professional environment that does not require them to adhere to strict cultural gender role expectations benefit from realizing that male elementary teachers can display both masculine and feminine characteristics as non-gendered human traits in their professional lives (Galbraith, 1992). However, many men enter into female-majority occupations via a “trapdoor,” arriving at primary teaching by default rather than through planning or as a sense of desired vocation (Smith, 2004). Although these preconceived notions of male primary teachers have had long-lasting effects on men's presence at this level, some men



still choose to teach elementary-aged children despite the societal stigma of doing so (Parr et al., 2008).

## **Teacher Gender and its Impact on Teaching Effectiveness**

### ***The Qualities of Effective Teachers***

Not surprisingly, one of the most influential predictors and significant factors of student learning and success lies in their teachers (Kane et al., 2006; McArdle, 2010). The relationship between student and teacher is critical, as teachers shape their students' educational experiences and influence their academic progression (Kenyatta, 2012). Boston (2012) identified several practices of quality mathematics instructors that can easily translate to other subjects, including (a) utilizing cognitively challenging tasks, (b) providing opportunities for students to take part in higher-level thinking and cognitive tasks and to explain their reasoning through verbal and written means, and (c) setting high expectations for students' learning. Patrick and Smart (1998) found that qualities of successful teachers include (a) genuine respect of students and treating them as equals, (b) quality organizational and presentation skills, and (c) the ability to challenge students by setting high but attainable goals. A teacher with subject knowledge and practical communication skills are traits that also signify teacher effectiveness (Okoli, 2017).

Not only do qualified teachers impart knowledge to their students, but they also seek to gain knowledge themselves. Nickerson et al. (2018) posit that even the most qualified professionals in any field must continue to grow and learn and that a recognition of one's capacity for continued improvement is considered a trait of a successful teacher leader. The challenge for current educators is to help potential teacher candidates balance

two different identities: the public view of a knowledgeable professional and a caring professional (Brown et al., 2008).

In looking at specific teacher gender traits and their effectiveness in teaching, Wood (2012) examined teacher perspectives of gender-based differences among elementary school teachers. She utilized quantitative data collected from 217 teachers working in four public school districts in the Midwestern United States. Of the participants, 43% had 13 or more years of teaching experience, 39% possessed five to 12 years of experience, and 80% had attained a master's degree or higher. In addition to the survey's closed-ended questions, Wood also provided the participants with the opportunity to answer open-ended questions to describe their educational experiences and clarify answers to the closed-ended questions. Over half of the participants recognized differences between male and female elementary teachers. This study ultimately drew four conclusions:

- Overall, male teachers are viewed more negatively than their female colleagues.
- The majority of participants believed that there are differences between male and female teachers, especially regarding their abilities to serve as role models in the elementary environment.
- A considerable majority of participants believed that elementary schools should hire more male teachers.
- Differences between male and female elementary teachers remain vague.

Wood found that gender did play a role in the perceptions of a teacher's effectiveness, including the idea that men's physical presence partially accounts for their teaching effectiveness, with little regard to their teaching experience or skill.

A study by Dee (2006) suggests that students taught by a teacher of the opposite gender experience detrimental effects on their school engagement and subsequent academic progress. One theory asserts that the teacher's gender plays a significant factor in affecting communication levels between student and teacher, while another argument states that the teacher acts as a gender-specific role model, regardless of their words or actions. According to the latter theory, students are more engaged, exhibit more appropriate behaviors, and are more academically successful when taught by a teacher who shares their gender (Dee, 2006).

However, other studies have shown that students do not gain an advantage when taught by a teacher of the same gender (Faulstich-Wieland, 2013) and that teacher gender, as such, does not enhance students' learning achievements or motivational levels in school (Lahelma, 2000). Students who are taught by below-average classroom managers and teachers who infrequently interact with their students, regardless of the teacher's gender, exhibit lower engagement levels, an essential indicator of school success (Gage et al., 2018). Moreover, effective teachers also possess efficient classroom management, but gender does not determine its effectiveness (Wood, 2012). For primary-age children, the teacher's teaching ability matters more than their gender (Skelton et al., 2009). Rose (2009) found that teacher gender, either by itself or in combination with student gender or characteristics, did not significantly change the students' predicted reading levels at the end of kindergarten.

Consequently, there is not a "feminine" style of teaching attributable to female teachers nor a "masculine" style of teaching attributable to male teachers (Faulstich-Wieland, 2013). Skelton et al. (2009) found that the overwhelming majority of the

students they studied stated that they were equally encouraged by their male and female teachers to work hard. Moreover, Carrington et al. (2007) observed that the teacher's gender did not affect students' academic motivation or learning engagement. Instead, these students appreciated teachers who were consistent, fair, and supportive. Regarding the gap in reading achievement between boys and girls as they first entered the education system, Rose (2009) did not uncover evidence that male teachers were beneficial for boys in general, specifically those without fathers at home, or exhibited challenging behaviors. Nevertheless, if both male and female teachers confront and revise expectations of their students' capabilities and the relationship between those expectations and practice, the results could be both immediate and positive (Kenyatta, 2012).

### ***The Benefits of Male Teachers***

While it is not advisable to impulsively accept all potential male teachers into primary education, McGrath and Sinclair (2013) posit that including a more significant number of men at this level could potentially solve a variety of educational and societal problems. Particular masculine traits are often suited for the profession, and many laud male teachers for being more relaxed with a better sense of humor than their female counterparts (Lahelma, 2000; Wood, 2012). As boys enter an educational system that is led by female teachers, caregivers, and administrators in their early school years (Parr et al., 2008), some have argued that the teaching profession has become more "feminized" as fewer male role models establish themselves at the primary level (Mills et al., 2004; Wood, 2012). Peterson (2014) found that some participants in her study attributed the lack of discipline in elementary-aged students to the absence of their fathers, believing

that an increase of male teachers at the primary level could counteract any adverse effects from this parental figure absence.

Since many students grow up in homes without a father present, Parr et al. (2008) suggest that adding men in the primary grades is needed to provide more positive male role models for these students. The general public recognizes the need for fathers to increase their involvement in their children's lives, attributing this to the growing number of families in which a father is not present or has minimal contact with the family (Allen, 1994). Berger (1994) contends the need for fathers to be involved with their children due to (a) the increase in single-parent families, (b) the need for children to have significant male authority figures in their lives, and (c) the need to develop standards and morals in children. As the number of male teachers increases at the elementary level, the percentages of male and female teachers will begin to balance out, providing students with various teaching styles and offering a beneficial presence on the campus (Wood, 2012).

Along these lines, Warin (2006) contends that men will have a more significant impact on gender relations as they become more involved in young children's care and education. In McGrath and Sinclair's (2013) study, mothers of school-aged children stated that male primary teachers would help girls see that men can possess a nurturing quality and pursue nontraditional careers for males, such as teaching and nursing. Employing more men at the elementary level would help address this teacher gender imbalance in the classrooms and enable all students to access male and female mentors and role models (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996). According to Lee and Gropper (1974), as children encounter male and female teachers in schools, they can then internalize both

male and female cultural traits, providing them greater flexibility in their sex-role identifications in various situations. While the emphasis tends to focus on the benefits that male teachers can bring as role models for boys, their presence on the elementary campus can also benefit girls' educational experiences (Lahelma, 2000).

### ***The Lack of Male Teachers and the Effects on Boys***

As boys enter the elementary education environment, they often face difficulties in school due to the lack of male role models and the abundance of female teachers unfamiliar with how boys learn (Mills et al., 2008). This shortage of male elementary teachers alienates boys from school, leading to poor academic results and low retention rates. Dee (2006) found that boys reacted less favorably to a subject when taught by a female teacher, often stating that they did not look forward to that particular class. While it may be tempting to add more male teachers to address these detrimental consequences for boys, this hiring preference could place an undue burden on these teachers to address this problem (Bristol, 2015). Some assert that boys underperform in school because of female teachers' difficulty developing relationships with boys and not understanding their needs (Skelton, 2012). However, this reasoning implies that all boys are alike, and all respond differently to authority based on the teacher's gender.

As there is a lack of men at this educational level, this absence leaves a negative impression on the outside looking in: the smaller the number of males, the farther the occupation drops on the list of worthy and financially rewarding pursuits (Simpson, 2005). Mancus (1992) found that men's mere presence in elementary schools was not sufficient to encourage boys to consider teaching as a future career. The degree to which

men avoid teaching at the elementary level may indicate what boys think of becoming educators themselves.

**Effects on African American Boys.** Often cited is the positive impact that male teachers can have on boys in general, but they also influence African American boys specifically. In particular, Black male teachers are likely to positively affect all children, particularly Black boys, but only in a limited capacity since about 2% of all teachers are African American males (Bryan & Williams, 2017). An even smaller percentage of Black male teachers teach students receiving Special Education services (Scott, 2016). Reasons for the scarcity of male teachers in Special Education include the low status of the profession, low comparative salaries, the view of teaching as "women's work," risks of being perceived as a sexual predator, and the lack of male colleague groups (Rice & Goessling, 2005). Scott (2016) contends that if Black male children are not taught at some point in their educational career by a Black male teacher, they will lose out on learning cultural perspectives, understanding, and guidance that may only come from such a teacher.

Lynn (2006) found that Black male educators were motivated by their dedication to their surrounding community and performed an essential role in young men's lives. These men often bring a strong obligation to the Black community through their understandings of teaching as a means of social change (Hayes et al., 2014). Consequently, they possess a cultural competence that provides them with unique insights in understanding the race and class oppression struggles that their students may face (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). Black male teachers can use personal experiences to identify with the race and class oppression struggles their students face daily (Lynn,

2006). The presence of culturally responsive Black male teachers may be one solution to counteract any institutional or structural factors that negatively impact Black males' elementary educational experiences (Bryan & Williams, 2017).

One cannot overemphasize the importance of having culturally responsive Black male teachers as part of a staff to develop critical and racial consciousness among Black children (Lynn, 2006). Culturally responsive teachers build on the students' culture, but they teach as an act of freedom and as a Black person for Black students. Hayes et al. (2014) found that successful Black teachers saw themselves as responsible for helping their students learn about content and life itself. This realization is particularly important since many teachers, especially those who work in culturally diverse schools, are challenged to implement strategies that resonate with their students' multi-ethnic and social class experiences (Skelton, 2010).

Not only can culturally responsive Black male teachers positively impact their students, but their pedagogical styles and ways of interacting with their students can benefit White elementary school teachers in their efforts to teach Black boys as well (Bryan & Williams, 2017). Bryan (2016) studied the pedagogical practices and constructed identities of culturally responsive Black male teachers, noting that they viewed themselves as representative brothers or fathers whose responsibility was to promote collaboration and construct solidarity within the Black community. By doing so, they were able to academically and socially support Black male kindergarten students by using sports, hip hop music, and mathematics literacies as real-world connections to their lives. These teachers were also practitioners of culturally responsive classroom management practices, which supported the behavior management of the young Black



males in their classrooms by providing them empowering strategies rather than removing them from the classroom environment (Bryan, 2016).

However, these personal qualities and practices have little to no impact on student success if a teacher lacks in attendance and motivational abilities since these are the critical determinants of educational success for African American males (Kenyatta, 2012). Kenya found a disparity between students' values on education and the support that they believe they receive from their teachers. Unfortunately, this lack of support from teachers magnifies the students' underachievement, even though they believe that education and educational success are significant factors in their lives. Education and assessment systems often marginalize and neglect to address the achievement disparities between particular groups of students and their often wealthier White colleagues (Marquez-Zenk et al., 2007).

**Effects on Latino Boys.** Throughout the education system, Latino male teachers often find their identities positioned at the crossroads of male forms of identity, pedagogy, and racial subordination (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). Subsequently, they are active receivers of their positions, and they look for opportunities to engage students in their classrooms and ways to engage their colleagues to confront gender role expectations and explore more flexible gender identities. Although they have fashioned their identities beside stereotypical labels, teachers deliberately utilize their characteristics in their personal and professional lives (Lara & Franquiz, 2015).

In their study, Lara & Franquiz (2015) were met with this statement from a teacher: “When I graduated they said, ‘You’re going to be hired so quickly because you are bilingual and you are male’” (p. 214), underscoring a perception that Latino male

teachers sometimes have preferential advantages as potential hires in the education field. As a marginalized male, due to his bilingual ability and ethnicity, he did not recognize this advantage simply because of his gender and race.

Interestingly enough, however, was a study that found that, for Latino students, the higher the teachers' cultural awareness, the greater the probability that these teachers would report lower levels of educational achievement expectations for students with little connection to the school (Mahatmya et al., 2016). Since only 2% of the educator population is made up of Latino and Black male teachers, and as Latinx children comprise the fastest enrolling population in many public schools, only a tiny percentage of Latinx students experience socialization with gender, linguistic, and cultural equity (Lara & Franquiz, 2015).

### ***The “Masculinization” of School***

Although employing more men in the primary grades could benefit the education environment, this movement is considered a contributing factor in making schools more masculine (Mills et al., 2008). This "crisis" – boys being negatively affected due to the lack of men in schools – justifies the hiring of male teachers to restore boys' failing masculinities in the education system (Martino & Kehler, 2006). However, if other educators praise male teachers for acting in masculine ways that are considered necessary in schools, women's classroom work is at risk of devaluation and being represented as inferior to men's work (Mills et al., 2008).

This devaluation of female teachers' work persists throughout the gendered hierarchy prevalent in primary teaching, in which men, as the minority, manage, and women, as the majority, teach (Chan, 2011). Both male teachers and male principals find

themselves generating masculine and feminine practices by evaluating women as more meticulous than men and evaluating men as better disciplinarians than women (Chan, 2011). This way of thinking, in turn, stereotypes primary teaching as "women's work" and stereotypes discipline as a "man's job." The thought that students will lack self-control without a male presence to control them suggests that hegemonic masculinity must be at the root of any form of child-rearing that will be effective (Mills et al., 2004). Society tends to follow and respect men when they give out instructions, simply because they are men (Moosa & Bhana, 2017).

When taught by a male teacher, however, Dee (2006) found that girls were more likely to report that they were unenthusiastic about the subject, that the subject taught was not relevant, and were hesitant to ask questions (Dee, 2006). However, just as not every male teacher is a proper role model for boys, neither is every female teacher a proper role model for girls (Driessen, 2007). Furthermore, this matching of teachers to students solely according to gender may reinforce and strengthen negative and damaging stereotypes.

### ***The "Feminization" of School***

On one end of the spectrum lies the argument that adding more men to the primary grades will "masculinize" the school in negative ways (Mills et al., 2008). On the other end, another assertion posits that a lack of men at the elementary level can equally negatively impact a school, leading to its "feminization." Some claim that the larger the female presence in the school, the higher the chances of cultivating a feminine culture and a greater possibility of male discrimination (Skelton, 2012). As females' presence increased in the school environment, teaching became characterized in society as an

extension of a woman's domestic responsibility in the home, associated with caring for and nurturing young children (Martino, 2008). Fear has even emerged of the adverse effects of feminization on school-aged boys and the men who teach them in a female-dominated profession (Martino, 2008). Some argue that women are "feminizing" young boys and, as a result, are being disadvantaged in this process of feminization. (Robinson, 1979b).

Primary schools' feminization could potentially alienate boys and their corresponding educational needs, thus blaming female teachers for these boys' perceived underachievement (Jones, 2007; Skelton, 2012). The male-dominant culture often depicts boys as victims whose natural masculinities are overshadowed by a female-dominated education system (Martino & Kehler, 2006). One view asserts that female teachers have difficulty in relating to boys, to motivate them to learn, or manage their behaviors effectively, hence the "need" for more males at the primary level to combat these "problems" (Skelton, 2012). When a woman teaches a class, boys are more likely to be perceived as disruptive to the learning, whereas girls are less likely to be seen as either inattentive or disruptive (Dee, 2006). Due to a more substantial presence of female teachers than male teachers in primary schools, boys have suffered from this gender imbalance, which is detrimental to their learning and academic aspirations (Chan, 2011; Jones, 2007).

Nevertheless, the idea that shifting the gender balance will counterbalance the feminized structure of primary schooling is unfounded (Skelton, 2003). Whether or not this idea of feminization should be a cause for concern is debatable (Skelton, 2012). An influx of men into professional care work is no more magical and transformative than

women's preeminence in these professions is inherently crisis-generating (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). No less important than the appeal for more men to teach at the primary level is the appeal for more female role models to teach the typically male-dominated math and science disciplines (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Although primary female teachers far outweigh male primary teachers in terms of numbers, this does not automatically feminize elementary education (Chan, 2011).

This numerical domination may imply that elementary school teaching is "women's work." However, women's predominance does not necessarily indicate a culture of feminine values or styles in primary education (Chan, 2011). With the perception of teaching as an "inferior occupation," its reduced salary relative to other occupations, and the willingness for men to abandon a career in education for other more socially prestigious professions, any idea of teaching becoming feminized did not pose an initial threat to male dominance (Martino, 2008). Nevertheless, the notion that primary schools have been feminized is perhaps one reason why this profession has had trouble living up to the social status standards that men seek when selecting a career (Skelton, 2012).

### **Characterizing Male Elementary Teachers**

#### ***The "Right Kind of Man"***

Just as men often have views on what roles men should play in education, so do their female colleagues. Jones (2006) interviewed 18 male student teachers and 13 female teachers who had worked with men at Key Stage 1 (children aged five to seven years) in England. She found that although most female teachers initially agreed with increasing the number of male teachers in primary schools, they eventually became more hesitant

about this idea, particularly at the primary stage. Jones (2007) later found that female teachers preferred that any man who was to teach at the primary level possess certain qualities: “(a) being enthusiastic about teaching young children and knowing particular strategies for doing so, (b) being willing to listen without being arrogant, (c) having a sense of humor, and (d) not a ‘wimp’” (p. 188).

However, even with these specific attributes in mind, there is still no consensus about the types of skills and attributes that should characterize men who teach at the primary level (Jones, 2006). Some female educators want male teachers who display feminine qualities, such as listening and caring, but who can also be “real men” at the same time (Jones, 2007). This ideal man is one who can display both masculinity and sensitivity (Wood, 2012). Men capable of working with young children should possess traditional feminine traits. In child care, men must be nurturing, sensitive, and conceding in some instances and assertive, independent, and forceful in others (Robinson, 1979). Some maintain that the ideal man for a primary teaching position is neither exclusively “macho” nor exclusively “caring and nurturing,” but rather one who displays various masculine personality traits (Jones, 2006). The idea of “any man is better than no man at all” tends to be the public sentiment (Jones, 2006, p. 62). Men are often praised for their abilities to act as disciplinarians, provide learning experiences that are more compatible with boys’ needs, and help young girls know how to work with adult men (Mills et al., 2008). However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity pressures men to live up to these standards of being an “ideal man,” even if they have no desire to uphold them, thereby deterring many from entering this profession.

### ***Men as Managers and Administrators***

While teaching at the primary level is a suitable profession for any willing educator, there is an underlying understanding that primary teaching does not provide equal opportunities for both men and women in advancements and promotions (Skelton, 2003). Coinciding with masculinity stereotypes, men tend to serve in dominant masculine roles, which reproduces masculine power in school management (Moosa & Bhana, 2017). Men are often attracted to managerial positions due to the attached prestige, status, and monetary benefits. Mallozzi and Galman (2014) assert that since American men are often stereotyped as the breadwinners of their families and as questionable in their abilities to care for and nurture young children, their paths towards administrative positions in education seem already solidified.

Jones (2007) found that the male primary teachers in her study regarded management and authority positions as the end-goal for their careers and often sought opportunities to take on these types of administrative roles as quickly as possible. Male educators consider these positions themselves, but they also tend to promote these positions to male student teachers, asserting that they are more effortlessly attainable for men. One teacher stated her belief that men should not be "sitting with babies," and therefore, should be looking for any possible way to advance quickly and gain promotion (Moosa & Bhana, 2017, p. 375).

Another stereotype assumes that women are not suited to hold positions of authority, such as the principal's role, and this belief undermines a woman's ability to hold a position of power (Moosa & Bhana, 2017). Moosa and Bhana found that the women they interviewed stated that people tend to feel safer if a man is in control and in charge, underscoring strong patriarchal beliefs in society. Some view the rising of men to

management positions in primary schools as attributing men as “natural leaders” and the efforts of individual men to emphasize leadership and management as characteristics of teaching compatible with “proper masculinity” (Skelton, 2003, p. 203).

### ***Teachers as Role Models***

Due to the small percentage of men in the elementary schools, men may gain an advantage in the hiring process due to the public’s perception that schools need men as role models as many students lack a male authority figure in their homes (Allan, 1994). Driessen (2007) found that the motive to increase the number of male teachers is inconsistent. Some believe that men possess an inherently different personality type than women and that only men can provide a proper role model and example for boys. In contrast, others view having men in the education profession provides a non-stereotypical image of men for boys – namely, that men can nurture and educate children just as effectively as women.

However, these benefits become problematic when both male and female teachers believe that males can solve problems that boys face by modeling a hegemonic ideal of masculinity, assuming that female teachers in some way obstruct the development of young boys (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). Martino (2008) found that some male teachers experienced a dilemma between acting as a male role model while working in a female-majority profession. Context, the situation, and the expectations that others have of male role models influence the roles and behaviors that men undertake as role models (Brownhill, 2014).

**An Ambiguous Definition of Role Model.** The concept of a "role model" can be challenging to define, with some male elementary educators placing a greater emphasis



on being genuine rather than trying to live up to a "role model ideal" (Brownhill, 2014, p. 257). While acknowledging their gender minority status's advantages on their hiring process, several male teachers expressed uncertainty on what role modeling entailed and what that meant for them as professional educators (Martino, 2008). This inability to define what a role model should be and do generates complications because it perpetuates the traditional stereotypical behaviors and characteristics of men and women that do not promote a more educated recognition of gender (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). Mitrano (2014) posits that "We need to move beyond the concept of a male role model and ask, what kind of model do we want to teach young children?" (p. 318).

Johnson et al. (2010) interviewed three men taking a graduate school course entitled "Men in Education and Male Teachers" at Indiana University in Bloomington in the spring of 2008. The students admitted that they would rather receive praise for being "a good teacher" than for being a "male role model" (p. 21). In one of his studies on men in early childhood education, Sargent (2005) interviewed 54 men in California, Washington, and Oregon working in this field. Despite the vast array of ages (early 20s to late 50s) and teaching experience (one to 30 years) between the men, one of their main concerns was the expectation that they would have to take on a supplemental role as role models for their students. Martin (2008) posits that being a male role model equates to being a real man and that such a role necessitates ensuring that boys' masculinities remain intact or at least appropriately cultivated.

As the role model definition is ambiguous, it is challenging to come to a shared agreement on the perceived characteristics and qualities that male role models should possess (Brownhill, 2014; Sargent, 2005). Once hired, men are often uneasy about being

a “surrogate father” to their students and are uncertain about what being a role model entails (Allan, 1994). Even though some men are comfortable with this designation, other teachers declare their primary role is to educate and not act as a substitute parent (Smith, 2004). Viewing this concept of "the imaginary perfect male teacher" to be difficult or impossible to align to, some men have chosen to leave the teaching profession altogether (Mills et al., 2008, p. 71). Regardless of the type of model necessary to successfully teach young children, the teacher must be genuine in his characteristics and actions to not appear disingenuous (Brownhill, 2014).

**Is There a Need for Male Role Models?** In the mid-1900s, women were deemed perfectly qualified to act as proper role models for all children, hence the lack of concern for placing males in this position (Wood, 2012). Driessen's (2007) research found that a teacher's gender produced no significant outcome on students' levels of achievement, attitudes, or behavior, whether for boys or girls, for minority or non-minority students, or for children of lower or higher socioeconomic statuses. McGrath and Sinclair (2013) found that parents generally regarded male primary teachers as role models, but that such a teacher-student relationship need not be gender-specific. The idea that men possess specific male behaviors and mannerisms carries over to the assumption of men's innate ability to be role models for school-age boys (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). Calling for an increase in men at the primary schools assumes that all boys require and would benefit from the presence of adult male role models and that fundamentally different teaching styles exist between men and women (Smith, 2004).

While having male and female teachers work together in educational environments can help create communities more in-line with actual society, simply

adding men assumes inherent abilities in men and inherent deficiencies in females (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). Nevertheless, men who effectively serve as positive role models can significantly impact their students' lives. The converse is also true, however, that those who are ineffective as role models are often perceived negatively by their colleagues (Wood, 2012).

To assume that augmenting the number of male teachers in elementary settings will automatically provide boys with positive role models is basing such an idea on faulty notions of gender (Skelton, 2003). Sex-role socialization theories, whereby masculinity resides solely in males and femininity only in females, underpin such beliefs (Brownhill, 2014). However, knowing these ideal characteristics can help male teachers be more critically reflective and self-aware in interacting with young children. As more men enter the education profession, serving as positive role models, children will experience opportunities to observe professional male educators' caring and nurturing sides (Parr & Gosse, 2011).

When working in the elementary school environment, men tend to establish their non-female nature, which inevitably is in question due to their work in a female-oriented career (Pulsford, 2014). The challenge is in understanding how to maintain one's male identity while recognizing that one is, in fact, the minority in his environment. If male teachers must fulfill their roles as father figures, they will develop inconsistencies in their roles, as being a father involves acting as the provider and disciplinarian of one's family (Faulstich-Wieland, 2013). Research conducted by McGrath and Sinclair (2013) found that the fathers they interviewed did not overtly state that male teachers need to be father

figures, but rather that they should act as role models for all students, regardless of the students' family structures.

Allan (1994) asserts that male teachers must model ways of "being a real man" to sustain themselves personally and also model appropriate techniques to those who supervise and evaluate them as educators (p. 3). Along the same lines, male teachers experience challenges in discovering genuine and relevant motivations for doing what they do and understanding the stereotypical feminine ways necessary to effectively educate young children (Allan, 1994). Despite the divergence of thoughts on the necessity of adult male role models in schools, researchers agree that students need quality male educators who can function as positive examples and fulfill an effective teacher's responsibilities and obligations (Parr & Gosse, 2011).

### **The Challenges of Being a Male Teacher**

#### ***Under the Microscope***

As men recognize their sense of vulnerability in working in the elementary school setting, they often take measures to protect themselves from the severe accusations of engaging in inappropriate physical contact with students (Parr & Gosse, 2011). As they distance themselves from their students, the children may then develop a wariness, or even fear, of men (Haase, 2010). This fear could later develop into respect from the students, underlining the belief that men can better handle and address children's problem behaviors than women.

This physical distancing from students stems not from the teachers' opposition to showing appropriate affection to their students (i.e., hugging), but rather due to the suspicion that such a display would bring about (Parr et al., 2008). Men recognize that

young children often seek physical contact with their teachers when they need assistance and comfort, leading to an irreconcilable dilemma between supporting students as their teachers and protecting themselves as adults (Smith, 2004). Besides being considered unmasculine, showing affection that is considered "natural" and "acceptable" for women is dangerous and risky for men (Allen, 1994). In his study, Allan conducted interviews with 15 male elementary teachers in Iowa between late 1989 and December 1991. He found that many teachers feared child abuse accusations by merely showing normal and acceptable gestures of concern for children.

Questions then arise over whether gender influences observers' perceptions of specific behaviors by a teacher (such as holding hands with students) as either nurturing a positive, helpful relationship or as priming students for inappropriate interactions in the future (Parr & Gosse, 2011). An underlying assumption posits that male teachers are not trustworthy around young children, especially girls, and that these men are harboring an ulterior motive for choosing the primary teaching path as a career (Peterson, 2014). It is never acceptable to condone child sexual and physical abuse, but neither is it acceptable to automatically assume male teachers' intentions based on stereotypes that perpetuate conditions of fear and prejudice toward males in the elementary schools (Parr et al., 2008).

Male teachers often find themselves under closer examination than their female colleagues regarding accusations of inappropriate relations and their decisions to teach young children (Parr et al., 2008). In choosing the elementary school route, men encounter suspicions of being effeminate, gay, or even potential child molesters (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). For male teachers, the potential risk of receiving false accusations of

inappropriate conduct with students is a reality, which leads to a constant feeling of anxiety that infringes on their willingness and ability to naturally respond to the care and comfort of their students in their classrooms (Parr & Gosse, 2011).

Exacerbating these beliefs is the notion that men who would willingly choose to enter the elementary field must possess a predatory sexual interest in young children (Skelton, 2003). Men describe the feeling of such suspicion, without any apparent cause, as incredibly strong when faced with the idea that it is “unnatural” for men to work professionally with children (Eidevald et al., 2018). With such a threatening accusation, male teachers often adopt a culturally accepted form of hegemonic masculinity to assert their "normalcy" (Martino, 2008). While male teachers feel valued as a prized commodity, they also see themselves as under surveillance from those who are suspect of their chosen profession (Mills et al., 2008). This constant scrutiny creates apprehensions in male teachers as they must continuously self-monitor their actions and immediate surroundings with students (Lara & Franquiz, 2015).

Fordice and Nielsen (2013) found that male teachers visualize themselves as role models for their elementary school students, but in a compromised role due to negative social interactions imposing a cloud of suspicion regarding their gender. This distrust that hangs over them leads to wariness to behave in ways that they might otherwise act, including ways their female colleagues can engage in without questioning from others (Parr & Gosse, 2011). Male elementary teachers believe they must overtly demonstrate care and sensitivity for their students. Still, by doing so, they invite suspicion from others merely by displaying actions that are otherwise natural for women in which to engage (Allen, 1994). If they get too close or show too much care towards them, they run the risk

of being accused of impropriety (Lovett, 2014). When entering into a non-traditional career plagued with stereotypes, men often have little to gain and much to lose (Simpson, 2005).

### ***Comfortable in Their Decisions***

In contrast, Mitrano (2014) found that the male participants in his study were comfortable in their roles as elementary educators and were even comfortable showing affection towards their students. They believed that constructing strong relationships with their students was the cornerstone of their roles as teachers. Having built trusting relationships with both their students and their parents, they felt free to respond to each student to appropriately display their caring nature. Men who have children at home themselves tend to be more comfortable choosing the primary education route and are enthusiastic about their impact on a young child's education (Parr et al., 2008). Brownhill (2014) found support for male teachers to present socially constructed feminine characteristics, such as being sensitive, understanding, and caring. Some men have accepted the fact that others will question their masculinity and sexuality as a result of pursuing this path into elementary education, but have decided to continue nonetheless (Skelton, 2003).

### ***The Dilemmas Facing Male Teachers***

Although some male elementary teachers feel very comfortable in this environment, there is still an underlying public belief that only certain people should pursue a primary education career (Mitrano, 2014). Moreover, many men outright reject the idea of working in a primary school, considering it to be less valuable "women's work" (Martino, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Males are often better represented

at the secondary level than at the primary level since the stereotype persists that secondary schools are where "real learning" occurs. If real learning only occurs at the middle school and high school levels, it stands to reason that elementary education is merely a place to care for students (Lovett, 2014).

Men who choose the elementary career path may endure ridicule for doing so, not because of their desire to teach, but for their willingness to teach at the elementary level (Parr et al., 2008). Unfortunately, this creates a double standard in which females are encouraged and applauded for entering non-traditional roles. However, men are still open to suspect and derision for showing interest and pursuing atypical gendered professional careers (Parr et al., 2008). Men often encourage other men not to seek a position in the lower grades but to set their sights on roles deemed more fitting for men, particularly management or administrative positions (Jones, 2007).

However, men who pursue a career in elementary education find themselves caught in a "catch-22" situation. If they display traditionally-perceived masculinity norms (being unemotional, harsh, severe, and impatient), they may be considered inept at working with elementary-aged children (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). However, if they display non-traditional male characteristics towards their students (nurture, empathy, care), others may question their masculinity and morality. Most male elementary teachers soon discover upon entering the education field that, although their gender works to their advantage, it often isolates them as well (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). Some men may choose upper elementary rather than lower elementary teaching to display more conventional and comfortable masculinity forms (Skelton, 2003). Several of these men that Skelton studied separated themselves from men who chose to work with younger



children, intimating that such work was not “proper teaching,” liking it to childcare and was, therefore, not suitable for “real men.” Men often criticize male elementary school teachers as taking on women's work and a profession that a real man would not consider (Smith, 2004).

As men enter the elementary education environment, they receive praise for displaying dominant heterosexual masculinity and are shunned and marginalized if they do not (Chan, 2011). Roulston and Mills (2000) suggest that men will regularly reinforce their masculinity through their associations with boys, teaching approaches, and reinforcing gender-stereotypical behaviors in boys rather than challenging dominant forms of being male. Sumsion (2000) found that it is socially acceptable for men to be teachers, but they must teach in ways that do not compromise their masculinity. They do so by eschewing activities and roles that are typically considered feminine (e.g., early childhood teaching), which leads to the development of fears within themselves (i.e., not being a real man) or the stigmatization of being labeled as a pedophile or a sexual suspect. There is a sense that if a real man were to find himself working in a feminized profession (i.e., teaching), his masculinity would risk contamination (Martino, 2008).

Consequently, since early childhood education frames itself through the metaphor of motherhood, male teachers find it challenging to fit into this standard while at the same time living up to the fatherhood and hegemonic masculinity expectations placed upon them (Sargent, 2005). These hegemonic masculine principles can influence male teachers to exhibit characteristics of the “right” kind of male teacher, bearing a distinction from their female colleagues (Hasse, 2010). Ironically, these men receive praise for their

rejection of masculine hegemony culture, and yet those characteristics validate their professional and personal behaviors as men (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013).

### ***More Effective Disciplinarians?***

Just as some parents express reservations of a male teaching their children due to doubts about his teaching abilities or concerns regarding his intentions, some have countered by arguing that men have the qualities to adequately address student behaviors, particularly boys (Faulstich-Wieland, 2013). According to Haase (2010), men are often given respect simply because of their gender. Placing men as patriarchal figures in the schools can lead to female teachers sending their “problem students” into the male teacher's classroom to correct the problem behaviors (Lara & Franquiz, 2015).

Unfortunately, this mindset and valorization of male teachers as "natural disciplinarians" implies a deficit thinking of female teachers (Mills et al., 2014). If administrators assign problem students to male teachers due to perceptions of men being tougher and better able to manage these students, such a view labels female teachers as weaker than their male teacher counterparts, incapable of dealing with difficult circumstances, and in need of protection (Parr & Gosse, 2011). Parr and Gosse found that male teachers were more often assigned students with behavioral issues than their female colleagues, assuming that the men could "fix" the children. This perception is also damaging to gender relations since it constructs boys as active, boisterous, and rebellious, and constructs girls as quiet, compliant, and passive (Mills et al., 2004).

### ***A Lack of Maternal Instinct?***

If women possess natural maternal instincts to care for and nurture young children, a career in elementary education is, therefore, considered a natural pursuit for

females (Coulter & Greig, 2008). Some view women as more capable than men of relating to children, particularly girls, which may lead to male teachers experiencing difficulty creating relationships with specific students (Hjalmarsson & Lofdahl, 2014). Behavior traits, such as empathy, care, patience, and nurturance, are often considered exclusively female characteristics, thereby discounting men as suitable primary teachers (Peterson, 2014). Men are not typically associated with a nurturing ability and sensitivity awareness with adults, much less with young children (Wood, 2012). Kaplan (1947) even indicated that "...no man should be assigned to teach children below the fifth-grade level" (p. 368). Skelton (2003) found that student teachers internalized the perception that men are naturally suited for secondary teaching.

As education philosophies have shifted from didactic and teacher-centered to more student-centered, with an emphasis on caring, empathy, patience, and understanding, many male primary teachers feel more at ease with early teaching philosophies that advocated keeping a physical and emotional distance from the children, hence the need to be less nurturing (Smith, 2004). Even those who consider men to be potential role models for boys in the upper elementary grades do not view them as suited to teach the younger children due to their perceived inability to nurture others (Lara & Franquiz, 2015; Wood, 2012). Some believe that men are incapable of showing empathy to young children, lacking the ability to care and love for these students (Peterson, 2014). In this regard, male teachers, particularly those in the elementary environment, have to defend their career path in ways that their female associates do not (Hjalmarsson & Lofdahl, 2014).

Such stereotypes must be challenged by educators when children, especially primary-aged, are developing their gender identities (Johnson et al., 2010). Although male teachers receive the same training, same title, and same classrooms, they are often on the fringes of care, working as a protector, disciplinarian, semi-administrator, and even “student whisperer,” but not “carer” (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). Many men do not feel persuaded to become elementary school teachers, and therefore, such encouragement is necessary for them to consider teaching and other caregiving professions as career options (Johnson et al., 2010).

Caring and teaching are viewed in many societies as primarily the work of women, and, as a result, this stereotype perpetuates ideas concerning who is most suitable to teach young children (Piburn et al., 2011). Men who work in primary school environments find their masculinity challenged since society views such care work as ideal for women (Lovett, 2014). The more care for children that the teacher’s job requires, the fewer the number of men who choose to work in that role (Hjalmarsson & Lofdahl, 2014). Women may often view care work as a profession unique to females, driven more by natural biology than acquired skill (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). Teaching has long focused on nurturing children's intellectual, social, physical, spiritual, and moral well-being, with such responsibilities usually attributed to women, and mothers in particular (James, 2010). Unfortunately, this stereotype hinders men from entering into primary education and is problematic for women as they balance their dual roles as both mother and teacher in the school environment.

While female teachers may project a more nurturing personality, male teachers tend to be more relaxed in their teaching styles and yet also viewed as more domineering

and controlling when working with their students (Wood, 2012). Johnson et al. (2010) interviewed one early childhood teacher who stated that although most of his colleagues and students' parents accepted him in this role, a few parents withdrew their children from his class because of his gender. They were perhaps uncomfortable with a male in such a role or doubted that he, as a man, could create a caring classroom environment for their children.

However, Unal and Unal (2010) found that some fathers saw their child's male teacher in a positive light, leading them to be more involved in the male teachers' classrooms than in the female teachers' classrooms. If the general public recognizes men as capable of being productive, caring teachers, it will help eliminate the stereotypes that male teachers experience that damage the teaching profession and, more importantly, the children being taught (Mitrano, 2014). Men must be encouraged to employ more compassionate and gender-equitable versions of masculinity within primary teaching to relinquish the hegemonic masculinity that impedes school progress (Moosa & Bhana, 2017).

### ***Perceptions of Supervision***

Regarding the education system's supervision domain, female teachers report similar satisfaction levels, whether they work for male or female principals (Grissom et al., 2012). Male teachers tend to have a higher sense of satisfaction when working for male principals, but they have lower feelings of satisfaction and a higher propensity for turnover when working for female principals. In general, however, male teachers have less favorable opinions about both male and female principals' feedback and classroom observations than their female colleagues (Range et al., 2014). Male teachers may be less

willing to accept women in leadership positions or find it more challenging to work in an environment where gender imbalance is present (Grissom et al., 2012). Female teachers who work with a female principal report feeling empowered, whereas male teachers believe female leaders restrain their control over their classrooms (Range et al., 2014). Female principals, therefore, must understand and recognize the needs of male teachers when it comes to their perceptions of feedback and guidance as men tend to be less receptive to such when given by a female principal.

Nevertheless, while female educators are equally likely to have either a male or female supervisor, male teachers are approximately twice as likely to be assigned to a male principal than a female principal (Grissom et al., 2012). Male primary school teachers are also more likely than females to have a mentor and experience a greater appreciation for their presence from their colleagues (Smith, 2004). Their minority status facilitates unique partnerships with male principals and helps them stand out in positive ways.

### ***Fewer Males Equals a Greater Responsibility***

As they comprise a smaller percentage of the teaching staff, male elementary teachers often feel scrutinized in everything they say and do at their schools (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). A scarcity of male primary teachers leads these few men to significantly influence their students' views of male teachers, especially for girls who have had few experiences interacting with men outside of their immediate families. McGrath and Sinclair found that even one negative experience with a male educator may be incredibly detrimental to a girl's perceptions of not just male teachers but men in general. Due to a lack of other adult males on campus, many male primary teachers spend the recess and

lunch periods on the playground with students instead of socializing with their female colleagues (Smith, 2004). By doing so, they both distance themselves from the social networks in the primary schools and feel distanced from them.

These educators must provide quality first instruction and act as good examples for their students to represent male teachers in the primary school setting accurately. Most of these men are aware of the gender imbalance that permeates throughout elementary education (Warwick et al., 2012). They are unlikely to fully understand the difficulties that male teachers may face in a female-majority setting. However, male teachers can benefit from working in elementary education, but their minority status infers that their actions are more overtly visible to others, which some consider a vulnerability (Hjalmarsson & Lofdahl, 2014).

## **The Future for Male Elementary Educators**

### ***Male Teachers in Preservice Teaching Programs***

Not surprisingly, the number of men in preservice teaching programs is comparable to the number of men currently employed as educators at the elementary school setting. One study in Illinois found that 90% of its 6,649 participants were female (Latham et al., 2015). A review of a teacher preparation program from a large Midwestern university showed a similar percentage in its study, with men comprising only 15% of its 248 undergraduate teacher education participants (Conderman & Walker, 2015). Programs designed to focus on one subject also experience a lack of men on their rosters. Rutherford et al. (2017) found that, in a preparation program that concentrated on early reading instructional components, 93% of its participants were female. Another study focused on teachers' self-efficacy in mathematics, including only one male out of

60 total participants (Brinkmann, 2019). Males are overwhelmingly the minority throughout many teacher preparation programs, with one study not containing any males out of 120 participants (Stites et al., 2018).

The relatively few men who matriculate through teacher education programs must learn several essential concepts to succeed in their fields (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). These programs must explicitly construct elementary teaching through a gender lens since men face various challenges when they are among the few men, if not the only man, on their elementary campuses. Educational leaders must express support for a more representative and diverse staff by utilizing their influence to confront and rectify gender disparities in elementary education (Piburn et al., 2011). Perhaps most importantly, these programs must directly address the impact of gender on the teacher's position by promoting meaningful discussion beyond merely lauding men for venturing into a female-dominated field. Balancing the number of male and female primary educators will help grow children's perceptions of gender roles and question gender-stereotypical messages that they may encounter outside of school (Piburn et al., 2011).

Mitrano (2014) contends that there must be a more intentional infusion of ethical care into the teacher education programs. Men will face challenges when working closely with young children that women may not necessarily face, and educators must confront these stereotypes to provide men the support they need to continue in their endeavors (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). Elementary school teachers must have an opportunity to create a forum to discuss the act of caring and its implications for them and their students (Mitrano, 2014).



Not only must men learn about these challenges in their teacher education programs, but they must also have opportunities to continue to improve their skills and learn about ways to express their identity through professional development once they have secured a teaching position. These professional development courses must address gender studies, which will allow teachers to contemplate gender as a social construct (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). Martino and Kehler (2006) assert that professional development should strive to upset masculinity's hegemonic scripts, which require men to demonstrate traditionally-identified roles and attributes. Graduate courses on male teachers and the teaching profession are one outlet to provide a space of collaboration with schools of education to discuss matters of gender, sexuality, and masculinity (Johnson, 2010). Professional development courses must also promote the acceptance of men as career teachers and not merely glorify the administration path as the only proper outlet for men in elementary school settings (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013).

### ***Support for Current Male Elementary Teachers***

While a focus is on recruiting more men to the teaching profession, supporting the male primary teachers currently in the field must also be a focus (Smith, 2004). It is counterproductive to draw men to an unsustainable work situation in the long term if education systems do not take note of the experiences, disadvantages, and difficulties faced by their current male elementary school teachers. To address this numerical decrease of men pursuing a career in primary education, those in the education field must learn from the experiences and insights of those currently working in this specific domain (Lovett, 2014).

With a shortage of male teachers in the elementary environment, it is imperative to understand those in the field to dispute the stereotypes concerning a man's ability to be a caring, competent teacher of young children. Although some men receive encouragement and support from family and friends for their decisions to enter elementary education, many of them encounter adverse reactions from these integral people in their lives due to this career choice (Smith, 2004). Men are generally introduced to the working world by their fathers, and it is potentially disruptive for families if sons choose the work of women and their mothers. Men who opt for a career in elementary education will not automatically be perceived as competent carers or nurturers, even if they are fully capable of taking on these roles (Lovett, 2014).

While male teachers should not be discouraged from teaching at the elementary school level, since they help boys develop healthy masculinity, assumptions concerning this healthy masculinity cannot be formed based on biological essentialism or sex differences (Martino & Kehler, 2006). Parr et al. (2008) found that several of the men they interviewed recalled childhood experiences that introduced them to the idea of working with children, which contributed to an interest in this type of work, and led them to pursue a career in primary education. Brookhart and Loadman (1996) found in their study that male elementary preservice and in-service teachers had prior experience in working with young children through babysitting and teaching groups. Although not culturally conditioned to view themselves as potential elementary teachers, some young men find enjoyment in interacting with children, leading them to embark on a teaching career (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996). As more male teachers enter elementary schools and become positive examples of men as educators, their influence can lead young men

to consider becoming educators themselves as they pursue a professional career (Parr & Gosse, 2011).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a review of the literature and research regarding male teachers and their experiences in the elementary school setting. The first section provided an overview of gender conflict theory, which frames the current study. The second section provided a look into nontraditional careers for men and any hardships and successes they face within. The third section provided an overview of the history of men in elementary schools and how attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes have influenced their venture into this environment. The fourth section reviewed the effects that a teacher's gender has on his students and their abilities to learn. The fifth section looked at the various roles that male teachers play in the elementary school setting. The sixth section reviewed the challenges and stereotypes that men face as they enter into elementary education. The chapter concluded with the future implications that come with employing men as teachers in the elementary schools.

Although there is no denying that the percentage of male teachers at the primary level is much smaller than that of female teachers, the reasons behind this shortage are not so clear cut. Moreover, the call to employ more male teachers in the primary grades is often given and lauded as a worthy goal. However, questions continue to arise as to why men are crucial at this level and how they impact the elementary education environment. Administrators and other teachers must understand the challenges and pressures that male elementary teachers face to best support them in their endeavors. Despite the difficulties that men may encounter in choosing to teach at this level, certain men have become

successful in their elementary teaching careers, and this study will look more closely at the characteristics and practices that have helped male elementary teachers achieve this status.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology and procedures used in the study, consisting of the following sections: research perspective, research design, research questions, site selection, participant selection, data collection and analysis, and provisions for validity and trustworthiness. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how the practices of male Elementary Teachers of the Year have aided in their achievements and to learn how their principals and the parents of their students view their role in the elementary school setting in a large, suburban school district in Southeast Texas.

#### **Research Perspective**

With testing performance and state accountability as unavoidable emphases at the campus and district levels, teachers and administrators often concentrate on students who are struggling academically to help them meet the standards set forth by the state. Unfortunately, some educators may believe that advancing students who are not academically on grade level to reach state standards is extremely difficult, if not impossible. According to Gorski (2008), educators often hold a deficit perspective in defining students' abilities to succeed based on their limitations rather than their strengths. One of the weightiest consequences of deficit thinking is that it leads educators to engage in instructional practices that hinder student learning development by limiting their access to learning opportunities routinely afforded to students in affluent, high-achieving schools (Dudley-Marling, 2015).

Deficit thinking also manifests itself from teacher to student and teacher to teacher, believing that men do not possess the skillset nor inherent characteristics to be useful as elementary school teachers. Female teachers often view primary teaching as a uniquely suited profession for women due to their natural inclination for caring for others (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). Deficit thinking about men as elementary teachers extends to parents of children as well. Some parents feel uncomfortable with a male in a nurturing position and even doubt that a man can create a caring classroom environment for his students (Johnson et al., 2010). Cognizant of this viewpoint, men often seek to leave the classroom as soon as possible to take on administrative roles or leave the profession entirely (Deneen, 2011).

Converse to deficit thinking, in which teachers focus on what their students “cannot” do, asset-based thinking focuses on what students can do centered on their various strengths and talents. Assets signify the gifts, expertise, and abilities a person has to offer and the resources, aptitudes, and abilities available within a community (Lubbe & Eloff, 2004). This approach does not negate academic issues or needs that students may possess but instead reinforces a system’s resources to create a sustainable intervention. Just like viewing students as possessing the skills to be successful academically, one can view male teachers as educators who have the talents, skills, and abilities to help their elementary students succeed. Rather than perceiving male teachers through a deficit thinking lens, believing that they lack the skills to be nurturing, caring, or patient, one can view them with an asset-based lens, having perspectives and knowledge that will prove beneficial to all young students at the elementary level.

### **Research Design**

In determining the research method needed for this study, a qualitative case study approach was deemed most applicable. Yin (2014) states that “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in-depth and within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). Cohen et al. (2018) state that, “Qualitative research regards people as anticipatory, meaning-making beings who actively construct their meanings of situations and make sense of their world and act in it through such interpretations” (p. 288). Yin (2014) asserts that case study research is the most suitable design when researchers seek to understand the “how” and “why” of a social phenomenon. As the purpose of this study was to determine how teachers have achieved success as male teachers in a role that is not typically “masculine,” this type of study was deemed most significant to realizing these objectives.

Much of the research studies surrounding male elementary teachers have implemented a qualitative approach through teacher interviews to communicate their thoughts and concerns behind their chosen career paths (Allen, 1994; Johnson et al., 2010; Parr et al., 2008; Wood, 2012). While interviews are necessarily contrived and not part of the interviewees' everyday activities, this data collection method discovered participants' views on specific situations, events, experiences, and phenomena (Cohen et al., 2018). Rather than retelling the pressures or hardships that male elementary school teachers face, this study's focus looked at the reasons behind why individual male teachers have been successful in their roles, hence leading to being named Elementary Teachers of the Year. To gain an administrator's point of view, the teachers' principals provided insight into their teachers' roles and impact at the campus level. Parents of the

teachers' students also provided an external perspective on the teachers' characteristics and the subsequent impact on their children.

Utilizing a qualitative case study method facilitated the discovery of answers to the research questions with a particular group of teachers I wished to study. This data provided a better understanding of the practices that successful male teachers exhibit. The open-ended, semi-structured interviews helped to uncover the teachers' views on their thoughts and experiences in their teaching environments (Cohen et al., 2018). The semi-structured interviews contained pre-designed questions and allowed individual tailoring of wording and sequence based on the participants' responses.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions addressed the role of male Elementary Teachers of the Year through the perspectives of the teachers, their administrators, and their students' parents:

1. How do male Elementary Teachers of the Year describe the elements to their success in the elementary school setting?
2. How do principals describe the roles of their male Elementary Teachers of the Year in the elementary school setting?
3. How do parents of students describe the characteristics of their children's teacher as a Teacher of the Year?

### **Site Selection**

I conducted interviews with participants at three different elementary schools within the same suburban school district in Southeast Texas. I chose this particular district, one of the largest in the state, because it comprises dozens of elementary schools



to identify and select teachers who fit the selection criteria. I also selected this district using convenience sampling due to my employment in this district throughout the study. I made a formal application request with the district, outlining the research's specifics and purpose to gain permission to interview participants from the individual schools.

### **Participant Selection**

I selected teacher participants for this study through purposive sampling. This sampling type involved explicitly choosing participants based on specific characteristics I looked for to meet the study's purpose (Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling helps gain access to well-informed individuals, i.e., those with in-depth knowledge and experience with a particular phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018). The teacher participants were selected based on three primary criteria:

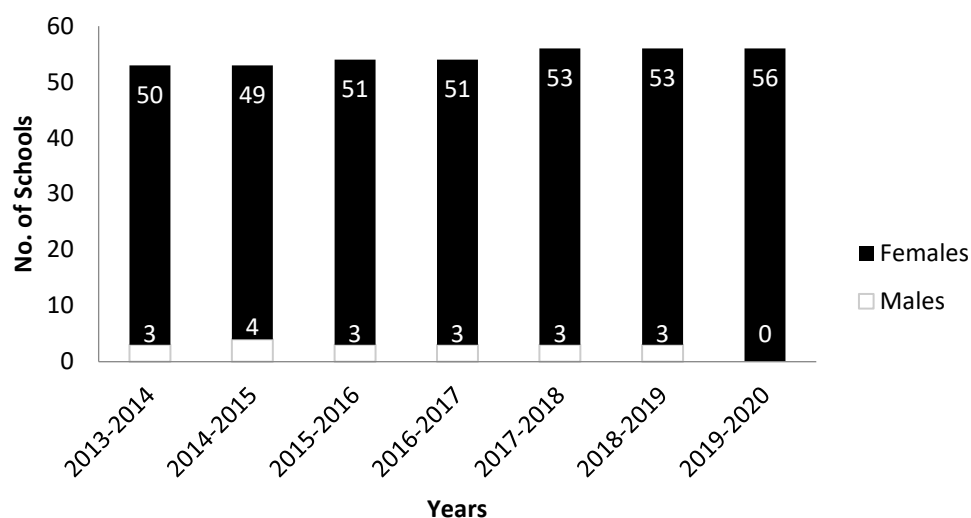
1. The participant is male.
2. The participant works in an elementary school setting.
3. The participant is a recipient of the Teacher of the Year designation for his campus in the last three years (2018-2020).

A total of six male teachers have earned the Elementary Teachers of the Year distinction in the district since 2018 (three in 2018, three in 2019, and zero in 2020). For this study, I chose three of the recipients from 2019 to participate in the interviews. Figure 1 shows the number of male teachers and female teachers selected as Elementary Teachers of the Year in the district since the 2013-2014 school year. Each year, every campus in the district selects one teacher for their outstanding dedication and service to their students. One recipient from 2018 participated in a pilot interview to determine if revisions to the questions were needed before interviewing the other teachers. I

interviewed a select group of these individuals to determine their practices and their impact as male teachers in their elementary schools. While teacher participants were specifically chosen based on criteria, I did not randomly choose the teachers to participate in the study due to the limited number of qualified teachers.

**Figure 1**

*District Male and Female Elementary Teachers of the Year*



In addition to interviewing the male teachers, I also interviewed their principals to gain an administrator's perspective on the impact these teachers have had on their campuses. As the principals were inextricably linked to the chosen teachers as their supervisors, I did not intentionally choose them before-hand or in a random fashion. Each principal was given the opportunity through the district signature form to select a research sponsor who would work directly with me to obtain consent forms from the school's chosen participants.

To gain an outside perspective, I interviewed one parent of one student of three of the teachers. Each school's teacher and research sponsor worked together to choose a

potential parent to participate in the study. Parents of elementary-aged children are in a unique position to report on the educational experiences of their children. These interviews provided an outside perspective on the influence of these male teachers on their children. This triangulation of data led to more convincing and accurate findings and conclusions due to its basis on several different sources of information (Yin, 2014).

Each participant was required to provide consent to participate in the study before the interviews could proceed. The research sponsors emailed both the district and the University of Houston's consent forms to each participant. Once I received the consent forms, I created Zoom meetings to interview each individual virtually.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews yielded information regarding the participants' insight into their teaching experiences as male elementary school educators. Due to the study's affirmative nature, all participants (teachers, principals, and parents) were eager to discuss the positive impact and experiences revolving around each successful teacher, allowing the interviews to run efficiently and produce the most valuable data (Creswell, 1998). Although I constructed the interview questions beforehand to facilitate the interview process, the intention was to structure the interviews more closely to guided conversations than structured queries (Yin, 2014).

Each interview consisted of a set of open-ended questions given to each participant to review before the meeting. The teachers and principals all received eleven questions, and the parents each received five questions. The questions asked "how" instead of "why," as such questions connote an accusatory or threatening tone, potentially leading to defensiveness on the part of the interviewee (Becker, 1998). The questions

focused on the roles, attitudes, skills, challenges, and positive experiences teachers have experienced as males in the elementary school setting.

Confidentiality was of the utmost concern, and I addressed this matter at the beginning of each interview (Adams, 2010). I asked each participant to choose their pseudonyms for their names and, for the parents, their children's' names as appropriate. To protect participants' privacy interests, I conducted each interview one-on-one and not in a group setting. Participants had access to the interview questions before-hand to help them prepare their thoughts before our meeting. Although I did not design the questions to be emotionally intrusive, I informed each participant that they were free to share as much or as little as they wished in answering the questions.

Due to the various professional roles played by the different participants, the teachers, administrators, and parents each received a different set of questions tailored to their role in the study. Before I began the interview process, I conducted a pilot interview with one teacher to obtain initial feedback on the responses and revise the interview questions before interviewing the other teachers. This pilot interview served as a guide to make any necessary changes to the interview questions based on the responses received. I transcribed and reviewed the pilot interview data to refine the teacher interview questions as required to ensure their quality and effectiveness. In the subsequent interviews, I asked identical questions of each interviewee initially. However, based on their responses, I asked clarifying follow-up questions that were not necessarily part of every interview. As semi-structured interviews, they contained pre-designed questions as well as questions that naturally generated throughout the interviews.

Per district and university requirements, all interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom meetings or a phone call rather than face-to-face on the participants' home campuses. With the participants' permission, I audio-recorded the interviews using the Otter application, which automatically transcribed the conversations. Utilizing an audio recording provided a more accurate account of the interview than merely taking written notes (Yin, 2014). I then carefully reviewed the transcripts to ensure that the audio recording and written transcripts accurately conveyed the interviews. The goal was to keep the initial interviews to one hour or less to minimize fatigue on the participant and researcher (Adams, 2010). Although the semi-structured interviews were labor-intensive, they produced a rich amount of insight and information (Adams, 2010).

### *Analysis of Descriptive Statistics*

To accompany the qualitative interview data, I reviewed the specific district percentages to determine if the numbers of male teachers at the local level were similar to the percentages of male elementary teachers at the national level. While 19.5% of elementary and middle school teachers in the United States in 2019 were men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), according to the Texas Education Agency's (2020d) Texas Academic Performance Report for each school in the district, the percentage of male teachers in the district in 2018-2019 was approximately 5.7%. I also reviewed the data on the number of single-parent homes in the local area to see if these percentages align with the nation's percentages. Although approximately 25% of children in the United States live in homes without a father (United States Census Bureau, 2018), this percentage is approximately 43.2% for the city and 36.1% for the county (Houston State of Health, 2020). Comparing the data at these different levels helped determine if the national

numbers and percentages were consistent with percentages at the local level or if an anomaly existed between them.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

After collecting the interview data, I uploaded the transcripts to the qualitative data software program Dedoose. Upon reading the transcripts in their entirety, I began to categorize phrases into various codes that led to the development of different data themes. By reading the transcripts and writing notes in the margins, I was better able to understand the data as a whole. I found approximately ten to twelve different themes for each of the teachers and principals and approximately four themes for each parent. I attributed this difference to the differing numbers of questions for each group.

Through this process, I uncovered commonalities throughout each group of teachers, principals, and parents. Although utilizing Dedoose assisted in the initial coding, a much higher in-depth analysis was needed to understand and conceptualize the participants' responses (Creswell, 1998). Reading between the lines of the dialogue assisted me in determining any unspoken similarities between the participants.

### **Validity**

To supplement the one-on-one interviews and to triangulate the data, I utilized member checking through a 15-minute follow-up interview with each participant. These follow-up interviews allowed the participants to ask any additional questions, not in the initial interview, and expand their responses. I was also able to share the themes that I discovered through the coding of the first round of interviews. This qualitative data helped to augment the previously acquired data through expansion and clarification. I conducted all follow-up interviews, except for one, through Zoom, averaging

approximately 11 minutes in length. The one exception to a follow-up Zoom interview or phone call was a parent who elected to provide a typed document to respond to the questions.

Member checking, or respondent validation, involved providing the transcribed interviews to each interviewee to correct factual errors, give more information, provide summaries, and check the analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). The process of member checking is the most critical action inquirers can take, for it is the foundation for credibility. Inquirers must document having made such checks and how the inquiry emerged or unfolded due to member feedback (Guba, 1981). Member checking led to feedback that improved data quality and reporting. After classifying coded segments into themes, I emailed the face-to-face interview transcripts to the participants to ensure that they accurately reflected their genuine responses. One way I sought to achieve greater validity in these interviews was to minimize bias as much as possible (Cohen et al., 2018). I accomplished this by being aware of my characteristics and similarities between those I interviewed and aware of the questions' substantive content.

### **Trustworthiness**

To promote credibility and increase the study's trustworthiness, I utilized triangulation, which refers to “the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding” (Yin, 2014, p. 241). Collecting data from the teachers, their administrators, and their students' parents corroborated the collected data. Transferability refers to the study's ability to be applied to other situations (Cohen et al., 2018). A crucial aspect of trustworthiness is providing a well-defined and in-depth study description so that others can decide the degree to which the study's findings are

generalizable to other studies and areas (Schofield, 1996). However, since the study looked at a particular group of individuals, the results are not representative of a broader population and are unavoidably biased in their selection (Cohen et al., 2018). The concern with this qualitative research is not whether the results are generalizable in the broader sense but rather the extent that the participants, setting, and situations are generalizable (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the methodology and procedures utilized in this qualitative study. The purpose was to determine how the practices of male Elementary Teachers of the Year aid in their success and to determine how their principals and their students' parents view their impact in the elementary school setting in a large, suburban school district in Southeast Texas. I accomplished this with two sets of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the participants. I then coded the interview transcripts using Dedoose to uncover themes throughout the various participants' data. The following chapter will discuss the results and information gained from these qualitative methods.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

This chapter provides a detailed summary of the results gained from the qualitative research methods. Through data analysis of the interview transcripts, the purpose of this chapter is to provide answers to the research questions. Based on initial and follow-up interviews with the teachers, principals, and parents of students, I uncovered various themes regarding the male Elementary Teachers of the Year and their impact and influence on their students and campuses. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how the practices of male Elementary Teachers of the Year have aided in their achievements and to learn how their principals and the parents of their students view their role in the elementary school setting.

#### **Methodology Summary**

Numerous research studies involving male elementary school teachers have implemented a qualitative approach by interviewing educators to understand their thoughts and concerns behind their chosen career paths (Allen, 1994; Johnson et al., 2010; Parr et al., 2008; Wood, 2012). Rather than recounting the pressures and challenges that male elementary teachers often face, this research focused on understanding how certain men have achieved success as elementary educators. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with three male elementary school teachers who have earned the distinction of Teacher of the Year for their efforts and achievements.

In addition to conducting interviews with the teachers, I interviewed their principals to gain an administrative perspective on the impact and influence these male teachers have had beyond their classrooms to their campuses as a whole. To gain a non-

school personnel perspective, I interviewed one parent of a student of each of the teachers. As they are often still involved in their children's education, these parents provided a unique perspective of the male teacher outside the campus setting.

Each semi-structured interview consisted of eleven questions for the teachers and principals and five for the parents that varied slightly based on the participant (teacher, principal, or parent). I provided the questions to each participant through an email before the meetings, which, except for one interview, were scheduled and conducted through Zoom virtual meetings. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews using the Otter application and then utilized the Dedoose qualitative software computer program to code the responses to reveal any prevalent themes.

In addition to the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, I conducted a follow-up interview with each participant. These secondary interviews provided the opportunity to ask any additional questions not asked in the first meeting and gave the participants the chance to expand on their initial responses as necessary. I also shared any themes that I discovered through the coding of the first interviews. After each interview, I emailed each participant's transcript to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected their responses to the interview questions.

### **Population, Sample, and Participants**

I selected each of the participants in this study based on specific criteria. All four of the teachers (including the pilot interview) were male Elementary Teachers of the Year for their respective campuses in the last four years. While male teachers are scarce in the elementary school setting, male Elementary Teachers of the Year are scarcer still. More men were selected as Teachers of the Year at the high school level in one year than were

selected at the elementary school level in this district for the last four years combined. Even with almost five times as many elementary schools as high schools, the sample was still very limited in men who met these few criteria. Two of the four teachers are still working as classroom teachers, while the other two have moved into supporting roles (behavior coach and math interventionist).

While men are scarce within the halls of elementary schools across the country, some have found success in this particular role, not only with their students but also with their parents, colleagues, and administrators. The four men interviewed for this study had many differences between them, including race, age, years of teaching experience, administrators, campuses, grade levels, content taught, and current role. However, their Teacher of the Year recognition for their respective elementary campuses binds them all together. Although very few campuses have selected men in the past five years in this district (19 total since 2013-2014), these four men in this study provided a great deal of insight into their experiences and roles as male elementary school teachers.

To gain an administrator perspective on the roles of their teachers of the year, I interviewed the teacher participants' principals, not including the principal of the teacher who completed the pilot interview. Each principal is the teacher's current supervisor, who provided a first-hand experience of the impact that they have played on their respective campuses. Two principals have led their current schools for one year, while the third has led her school for five years.

While I chose the teachers and principals to interview for the study based on the specific criteria outlined, determining the parents to interview required more assistance from both the teacher and the research's sponsor – either the principal or assistant

principal – at each campus. The campus personnel chose a parent who could speak directly to the teacher’s impact on their child’s life. Two of the teachers’ parents responded in the affirmative to participate in the study. However, the initial third parent participant declined to participate, necessitating finding another parent to engage in the study. Although the parents could not provide a first-hand experience as to the teacher’s influence in the educational setting, they provided personal accounts of the influence the teachers have had on their children's lives.

Due to the study's nature in learning about a particular, limited population, complete anonymity was not feasible, as found in an anonymous survey sent to a wide range of participants. However, I took precautions to substitute pseudonyms, as chosen by each participant, for all teachers, principals, parents, and children throughout the final report.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions addressed the roles of male Elementary Teachers of the Year and their impact on their students and schools through the perspectives of the teachers, their administrators, and their students’ parents:

1. How do male Elementary Teachers of the Year describe the elements to their success in the elementary school setting?
2. How do principals describe the roles of their male Elementary Teachers of the Year in the elementary school setting?
3. How do parents of students describe the characteristics of their children’s teacher as an Elementary Teacher of the Year?

### **Teacher: Eric (Pilot Interview)**

Before conducting interviews with the three sets of teachers, principals, and parents, I conducted a pilot interview with Eric, a former teacher, now a behavior coach in the district. This pilot interview helped determine the questions' valuableness and provided an opportunity to revise any as necessary for future interviews. I interviewed Eric through Zoom on June 8, 2020, and it lasted for approximately 58 minutes.

### ***Path to Elementary Education***

As Eric recounted his path into elementary education, one of his main influences on becoming a teacher was a male World Geography teacher he learned from as a freshman in high school. The teacher's amiable personality as a cheerleader for his students had a significant effect on Eric's plans to become a teacher himself in the future. In his junior year of high school, Eric became involved in the Peer Assistance Leadership (PAL) program, in which he traveled to three different schools providing mentorship to younger students in the district. Although he did not pursue a degree in education upon graduating from high school, he continued to be involved in young people's lives by becoming a YMCA summer camp counselor and eventually a program director. He also volunteered his time in his church's children's ministry, continuing his natural predisposition to influence and teach his community's youth.

While he enjoyed working with younger children, his initial inclination was to teach at the high school level, similar to other men who enter into the field of education. However, after experiencing difficulty with the 8-12 Generalist and History exams, he decided to pursue the middle school route. As luck would have it, his former principal, after seeing his application to become a para (having not yet received his teaching certification), called him to come in for an interview. She had just been named the

principal of a school, and she wanted him to come work for her as either a Special Opportunity School (SOS) paraeducator or as a Special Education paraeducator. One of the themes gathered from his interview was resistance to work in specified education areas, including elementary education. However, she assured him that he would love the position, and her persistence paid off because he spent the next twelve years under her leadership. He readily admits that “I owe it all to her because I wouldn’t have gone elementary and even wouldn’t have thought to do elementary unless she didn’t interview me and offer me the position.”

**Resistance to a Program.** As Eric discussed his role in the SOS environment at his school, several themes began to manifest themselves throughout the interview. Although he initially resisted the idea of going into elementary education, desiring a secondary education career, he discovered that he “absolutely loved” the elementary SOS classroom. However, this was not without some resistance expressed to the principal as well. He believed that his influence was to go beyond the classroom, and he initially resisted teaching the SOS program because, “usually when you go into those programs, it’s usually hard to get out of those programs.” This statement was a glimpse into discovering his ultimate goal of becoming an administrator in the district, as he “wanted to have a bigger influence with kids and not just a small selected number.” Still, Eric reiterated that he has fond memories of this role because his students looked up to him as a positive role model.

**Moving Out.** Eventually, Eric moved from the SOS classroom to a classroom of his own as a third-grade math and science teacher, where he spent most of his teaching years. Again, his principal wanted to put him in a role that he was resistant to take on.

When she decided to move him to second-grade math and science, he “fought her on that.” He viewed moving from a STAAR grade (third grade) to a non-STAAR grade (second grade) as punishment and a demotion. However, she assured him that this move was not based on his teaching performance but was instead a way to help a team that was “stuck in the past.” This would seem like a step down on paper, but it was a way to grow Eric as a leader. His principal saw his leadership abilities and his potential to become a leader to others, and she provided such an opportunity for him to grow in this regard.

In his final year at this particular school, his principal asked him to change grade levels again, this time to fifth grade. Although he had initially resisted elementary, SOS, and second grade, he eventually made his way through each and found success at every level. However, as he was only certified Early Childhood-4, it was not an automatic transition, as were the previous moves. Being a new parent made him hesitant to take on a new grade level, and he was not ready to take another certification exam. Although he was hesitant to teach fourth grade, he told her he would teach third, which ended up as an all-day math teaching assignment. She eventually retired at the end of that year, and before she left, he mentioned that he was looking to take on other leadership roles, such as instructional specialist (IS) or behavior coach. Since he wanted to work mostly with kids, she suggested going the behavior coach route.

### ***A Male in Elementary Education***

When asked about how being a man in elementary education has affected his success as an educator, he repeated throughout the interview that “if the students love you, the parents are going to love you.” As natural as it is for him to be himself around the students and act in both silly and serious ways, he still has to prove himself to the

parents. “If you were their very first male teacher, a lot of parents have a lot of pushback,” he admitted. However, over time, they began to see him as a cheerleader and an excellent example for their children, and they, in turn, came to appreciate and love him as well. While he has enjoyed working with younger students, he recognizes that most men choose middle school and high school environments over elementary so that they do not “have to deal with the babies” and so that they can “go straight to talking to them [students] like an adult.”

### ***Challenges as a Male Elementary Educator***

Although he has effortlessly made connections and built positive relationships with his students, Eric reiterated that building these relationships is often difficult with some parents in the beginning. Before meeting him for the first time, some even think of his name as a feminine one. This first encounter has led some parents to request that their child be assigned another teacher, realizing that he is, in fact, a man. However, his administration is supportive enough to convince these parents that Eric is an outstanding teacher and that their children would be missing out on a great educational opportunity. As a result, the parents eventually relent on their request, and inevitably, at the end of the year, they are all very thankful for keeping their children in Eric’s class.

Unlike Parr & Gosse (2011), who found that male teachers often experience anxiety that inhibits their natural responses to care for and comfort their students, Eric simply mentioned that sometimes he does not know how to comfort students. Although he has learned to be a “softy” at times over the years, he admits that it is difficult to relate to some students and understand their emotions and how they need comforting. Using “tough love” and not allowing students’ tears to get in the way of their work have been



his go-to strategies for working with students needing emotional support. However, now that he is a father, he has learned how to better comfort his students since he understands how to comfort them more effectively.

### ***Getting to Know His Students***

In his behavior coach role, as in his teacher role, Eric has found that he can “connect with those that teachers cannot connect with because I find one more thing that they’re really good at.” As a behavior coach, his goal is to build relationships with the students to know more about their lives and, subsequently, the reasons behind their actions. Twice he mentioned his role is “to live life with the kids.” This practice involves getting to know them, being in their classrooms, familiarizing himself with things his students have learned from YouTube, and even attending their sporting events. He made it a point to go to as many of their games as he could because “once they know that you care, they will do anything for you.”

To build relationships with his students, every Monday morning, he would sit them in a circle and have them talk about two things they did over the weekend. He would even take time out of instruction to conduct this conversation because his principal was “really big of taking the time upfront.” Making these connections with students was critical to connecting and building positive relationships. Even when a student exhibited misbehavior, Eric knew what they had engaged in over the weekend, which helped redirect the student while building up that positive relationship. Not only was he purposeful with utilizing instructional time for connecting with his students, but he also took his own non-instructional time to eat lunch with them. He made it a point to do so

when they improved their quiz or test scores to show his appreciation for their hard work and efforts.

Interestingly, he mentioned that all of this just comes naturally to him and that he was not “tooting his own horn” or “trying to outdo someone else.” It is just his personality, and he is willing to try whatever works for his students. Even trying to learn the latest dances as a self-proclaimed “Black man with no rhythm” was just another way to make those essential connections with his students.

**Positive Role Model.** As an anomaly at his prior campus, being one of the very few male educators at the school, Eric took it upon himself to ensure that he was the positive role model that many of his students needed and deserved. He remarked:

I think that a lot of people say they want a positive role model, but I also think that you need a positive male role model. A lot of times, in the African American household and the Hispanic household, you don’t really have a good role model to model after. I want them to also know you don’t have to do drugs and you don’t have to beat your wife. You don’t have to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes all the time.

As an African American male in the elementary education environment, he has an excellent opportunity to showcase his positive attributes to influence other students. When students go to school and see an educated African American male as a teacher, it helps his students see that they can go to college and become a teacher. This type of modeling is not just the responsibility of male teachers but all teachers and members of society in general, as he remarked: “I just think that in society, we pass it on to the next person, when really we all should be modeling.”

While Eric believes that all teachers have the obligation and responsibility to model positive behaviors for their students, a greater responsibility often falls on the men in elementary education due to their sparse numbers in this environment. “So when you are the one token male on campus, you’re playing a lot of hats,” he noted. Extra responsibilities, including teaching the human growth and development course for boys, tend to be placed upon them simply because they are men. He remarked that if elementary schools contained more positive male role models, one person would not be responsible for having to take on those roles and “playing all hats.” Although he is willing to undertake responsibilities for the students' betterment, he also expressed concern over his class being stacked with students with “behavior issues” simply because a student “needs a male role model.” Interestingly, he mentioned it not necessarily being a burden to himself but rather his teaching partner, who is invariably a female, since she now has to contend with an overwhelming number of behavior issues for half of the school day, simply because her partner is a man.

### ***Proving Himself to Parents***

His influence at the elementary level does not end with his students; it expands to his students' parents as well. As he has met resistance from parents who did not want their child to be in a male teacher's classroom, and possibly even in an African American male teacher's classroom, he has had to prove himself worthy of educating their children. Having support from his assistant principals to advocate for him and promote his excellent teaching abilities were keys to convincing parents to keep their children in his classroom. Building a partnership with the parents was just as critical as building a partnership with his students. He made sure that he never approached them in an

accusatory manner, condemning them as “a bad parent or a horrible parent because you didn’t do something.” Instead, he provided the resources to help their children who may have been experiencing either academic or behavioral challenges. Since he and his wife are working parents, he understands the challenges that many of his parents encounter.

Eric found that by encouraging his parents to reach out to him, they build a partnership together that positively impacts their children. He mentioned that parents are sending their very best to teachers, so it is imperative to treat them respectfully to build an effective home-school partnership. One way he was successful with his parents was by maintaining a positive attitude in every communication outlet. He would always reiterate with the parents that they would partner together to make their child successful. This communication was encouraging to parents, as he would take an asset-based rather than a deficit-based approach to discussing their children’s academic abilities and potential. It was never about what the child could not do; it was always about what the child could do.

While he could control his actions and emotions with his parents, he could not control how other teachers reacted and engaged with these parents from prior years. Although limited background knowledge of the parents can be beneficial, he did not focus on or listen to other teachers’ complaints of parents of his current students. Students and their parents deserve a fresh start each year, and he wanted to give every one of them the benefit of the doubt. As he put it, “If I knew you had a hard time with that parent, I’m going to go in, and I’m going to win that parent over.” When asked about what his students’ parents would say about him, he replied, “I think the parents will say that I took the time to get to know them, to encourage them, to live life right alongside with them, and challenged them to be better.”

### *A Leader of Teammates and Colleagues*

Just as his relationships with his students and their parents were strong, his relationships with his various teammates were strong as well. He recalled building a relationship with a veteran teacher with many years of experience who was comfortable in her ways and afraid of taking on new challenges. By not being pushy or coming across as an expert, he was able to push her out of her comfort zone by incorporating new technology and new teaching practices into her classroom. His ability to find strengths and areas of improvement in his teammates, building upon strengths and targeting areas of improvement, showcases his talent for leading and coaching others to higher success levels.

As his role in the elementary education environment has changed from classroom teacher to behavior coach, his relationships with his colleagues have also changed. Although he still possesses a teacher classification, this leadership role goes beyond working with students and ensures that teachers continuously improve their craft. Upon arriving at his new campus in his new role, he received pushback from the very beginning, mostly from veteran teachers who saw him as a “young kid coming in telling them what to do.” It is unclear if this resistance was due to his inexperience or to his gender.

However, while some teachers did not give him “the time of the day” at the outset, his ability to build relationships with them has won them over because they now see that he is “kids first.” His former principal's influence is seen in this statement when he mentioned, “she always made decisions kid first. It’s just always instilled.” His servant leadership mentality helps him build up teachers' capacity by being willing to model

routines, procedures, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) strategies while never pointing accusatory fingers. However, this does not mean that he avoids uncomfortable conversations when the students' best interests are at stake. When something needs to be said, he does not sugarcoat it but says it to challenge the teachers to grow in their abilities.

### ***An Understanding of Administration***

During his first few months as a behavior coach at a new school, Eric was careful to sit back and take in the culture and climate of his new environment without “rocking any boats.” However, now that he has developed positive relationships with his administrators and leadership team, he feels more confident to be upfront with them to improve its PBIS system. His perspective on an administrative team's components and responsibilities has changed since he has taken on his new position, a perspective that he “wouldn’t have known in the classroom.” He can now more clearly see the reasons behind administrators’ decisions, which helps him become even more of a team player for the school's good.

### ***Impact of “Teacher of the Year” Designation***

Eric’s abilities to teach effectively and build positive relationships with students, teachers, parents, and administrators led him to be named Teacher of the Year for his campus. This designation has made a significant impact on his professional career. While he admits that he was “completely caught off guard” and was “just doing what was best for kids,” he is fully aware that this recognition played a part in being offered a leadership role as a behavior coach. During the interview for his current position, he relayed that, “once I said I was Teacher of the Year, they were really paying attention to

what I was saying.” While it is often difficult to find men to teach at the elementary level, it is rarer to find men named Elementary Teachers of the Year. This scarcity of men most likely played a pivotal role in him securing this position. However, even with this recognition, he is humble and honored for it and admits that he was not trying to compete with anyone else, but merely being the educator he knew his students needed and deserved. He even mentioned that he wanted to decline it upon the announcement since he was reluctant to and nervous about making the video for the Teacher of the Year ceremony. Nevertheless, he completed the video and ultimately enjoyed the process.

### ***Administration Aspirations***

Unlike the other teacher participants in this study, Eric sees his future beyond the teacher role and classroom to become an administrator in the district. However, to do so, he must first obtain a Master’s degree, a district requirement that he is not yet fully ready to fulfill. Although he is hesitant to pursue a graduate degree, he does see himself moving out of the behavior coach role into an assistant principal role in the next five to ten years. He views his current position as a stepping stone to administration, as other male teachers have noted in other studies (Coulter & Greig, 2008; Deneen, 2011; Martino, 2008; Smith, 2004). When asked about what makes him want to become an assistant principal in the future, he stated, “I want to be in charge of people.”

Interestingly enough, he does not want to be the head person in charge (i.e., principal), but he does want to lead in some capacity since “schools need really good leaders.” Knowing that there are typically not many men in leadership roles in every district, taking on such a role would encourage kids to consider such a role in their future. He remarked that “kids should see people that look like them in those roles.”

### ***Advice for Future Male Elementary Teachers***

For those men who wish to embark on an elementary school career, Eric suggests conducting some teacher observations at the elementary level. As is seen throughout the district and throughout the country, men do not often consciously move toward this foundational level of education. Although he was resistant to the idea of teaching students younger than third grade, he kept an open mind when he moved to second grade and loved it. He advises potential educators to do the same. Men interested in teaching elementary education stand out automatically, and earning various certifications can make one even more marketable to the elementary schools. As most men in education gravitate towards middle school and high school teaching, where they can coach sports teams, elementary education provides men an excellent opportunity to secure a position and benefit their students, parents, colleagues, and campus.

### **Teacher 1: Trenton**

Trenton is another former classroom teacher who is now a math coach for the same campus that honored him as Teacher of the Year. Although both he and Eric have transitioned to a leadership role on their respective campuses, Trenton revealed some different motivations for entering into elementary education and different aspirations for where he wants to go in the future. I interviewed Trenton through a Zoom meeting on June 9, 2020, and it lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

### ***Path to Elementary Education***

Like other men who eventually arrive in elementary education, Trenton did not begin his path to becoming a certified teacher straight out of high school. Upon enrolling at Texas A&M University, he chose a liberal arts degree program in communications.



While he intended to transfer into architecture after his freshman year, he discovered that he enjoyed his communications courses and questioned whether he should return to the architect path. Eventually, he sought a guidance counselor's advice, who provided him with several career and personality tests to determine a good career fit. Ultimately, the results indicated that his personality was not suited for architecture, but rather for other occupations such as working in a church, artist, photographer, and educator. Interestingly enough, however, he was not interested in any of these fields, the least of which being education, but that is where he has eventually ended up in a very successful career.

After completing his communications degree, he looked into becoming an archivist, counselor, or even a lawyer. However, all of these professions required a Master's degree, which he was unwilling to pursue without knowing the commitment and requirements that such a degree would entail. So he began to substitute teach at the recommendation of his sister, a teacher in the same district. One day after substituting at the school where he is currently employed, one of the students asked if he would be back the next day. He told her that, unfortunately, he would not, but at that moment, he realized that he wanted to become a full-time teacher and have a classroom of his own to come back to every day. This incident spurred him into starting the process of becoming a certified teacher.

### ***Standing Out in Elementary Education***

Before entering the classroom, Trenton was concerned about outside perceptions of him as a male in a female-majority environment. He felt that irrespective of his gender, he was already disadvantaged by not having an education degree or experience in student teaching. "I felt like I had to work extra hard just to even stay afloat with all of the things

that a teacher has to do,” he recalled of his first year in the classroom. While his work ethic would eventually stand out in the future, his presence stood out immediately in his classroom and campus. Students would come up to him and look at him as if to say, “Who is this person? It’s not the usual kind of person that we see.” At the campus level, he would be seen as “the guy” among both staff and students who did not have direct daily contact with him, and this recognition made him at times feel almost like “a celebrity.”

### ***A Challenging Situation***

While others have noticed Trenton’s positive influence with students and teachers in every role he has played in elementary education, one past incident made him realize that he is vulnerable as a male elementary educator. In his second year of teaching, he had a student he referred to as a “hugger” who constantly desired teachers’ hugs. While not wanting to give the impression that he was cold and uncaring, he also understood the perceptions that could manifest if he, as a male, had too much physical contact with his students. In this regard, he mentioned:

I try not to hug students at all unless they initiate it, and then I can turn and give them a side hug or something like that, but I never liked trying to touch them, other than a fist bump or a high five.

One morning, while preparing materials for the day, he kneeled over his desk when this particular student came from behind and not only hugged him but tried to tickle him as well. Trenton, recognizing the physical contact’s inappropriateness, immediately stopped the contact and asked him to go to his seat to start his work. Later that week, his assistant principal approached him in a private room with the news: she had received a

phone call from the student's parents saying that their child told them that Trenton was not ticklish anywhere. Naturally, the parents were very concerned about such a remark, and they reached out to the assistant principal. To say that Trenton was worried would be a gross understatement. "This is my worst fear coming to life," Trenton admitted, knowing the potentially damaging ramifications of such an accusation. He then explained the situation to her, to which she was very understanding. She then spoke with the parents, explaining what had transpired, which alleviated their concerns. While this outcome turned out for the better, he fully understands that he is vulnerable as a male in elementary education. However, he feels secure knowing that working in an open-concept school with numerous cameras helps protect him when he does the right thing. Although this is the only time he has experienced such concern from a parent, this awareness of his vulnerability helped prevent any other issues from occurring.

### ***A Positive Presence with Students***

Trenton has made it his mission to create connections and relationships with his students to help them grow as learners. He regards his relationships with them to be positive ones, where he does his best to be positive, upbeat, and energetic. Providing such an open, caring environment, specifically for students being taught by a male for the first time, helped his students feel safe and relieve them of any potential stresses they might encounter throughout the year. To help even the most reluctant students become motivated to work, he made a concerted effort to implement strong incentive systems with his students. These systems helped him to motivate and encourage his students for tremendous academic success. As other male teachers have discovered, eating lunch with his students was also a great way to create connections.

While building positive relationships with his students was vital, he also ensured that his students knew that he also built positive relationships with the *teachers*. Doing so showed his students that he and his teaching partner worked together to help them reach new levels of success. He believed that he often made the most impact on students whenever he would tell them that he and another teacher were talking positively about them. This revelation to students was a great strategy to build up their confidence and help them learn to react to other adults positively.

### ***Communication with Parents***

Not only did Trenton build a level of communication with his students, but he also sought to do so with his students' parents. "I always try to keep parents really connected and in the loop with what was going on," he recalled. He accomplished this through a Remind account, and when information became too lengthy for the text medium, he created newsletters to send home to parents due to the vast amount of information needed to convey regarding testing. Initially, the newsletters were only sent near the end of the year to provide information on testing, but then he received feedback from a parent wanting more: more information on what their child was learning at school and more ways that they, as the parents, could academically help their child at home. Although he realized that this would take a concerted effort to put these together every month, he knew that doing so would pay off in the long run. Just as he stayed positive and encouraged his students, he maintained the same self-attitude to develop this crucial parent-teacher communication piece.

Not only did these newsletters include what they were learning in his classroom and a list of upcoming school events, but they also included links to the district's math

resources sites where students could continue their math lessons at home. He then went one step further by creating videos to assist both students *and* parents through math problems when they needed assistance. The feedback he received from parents on the videos was positive, and he recalled that “they would tell me how much they appreciated the videos because they didn’t really understand how math was being taught.” By communicating through newsletters and videos with the parents, he found that he did not receive as many questions as in previous years since parents could discover answers to their questions through these resources.

One of the pieces of advice that his sister gave him was always to do everything he could so that parents could not claim that he lacked in communication. While he found this advice to be useful in covering all the bases, he believes that effective communication goes beyond this: “It’s about them being in the know, and when they’re in the know, and in the loop, they’re going to be more involved and invested in their child’s education.” In turn, the relationship between parent and teacher would also be strengthened, which would only help to grow the student in the long run.

### ***Connecting with Teammates and Colleagues***

Not only does Trenton strive to build strong connective relationships with his students and their parents, but he also endeavors to create these relationships with his teammates and colleagues. One theme that continued to manifest itself throughout the interview was the importance of collaboration. As a teacher, he was always grateful for his teammates and their willingness to answer any of his questions. He described his relationships with them as positive, and ones that started strictly as working relationships, but over time would “evolve into a personal relationship and friendship.” Throughout the

interview, Trenton had nothing but great things to say about his colleagues, and this positive attitude and collaborative spirit had a significant role in him being named Teacher of the Year. As an ACP graduate who has achieved success in his career pursuits, he acknowledges that such a program can produce many great teachers, when he remarked, “I know that there are a lot of other great teachers that I work with who also went through Alternative Certification, and they’re amazing, and I want to be just like them.”

As Trenton has gained experience in the education field, he has had the opportunity to expand his influence beyond the classroom by becoming the Math Liaison for his campus. This role entails attending district meetings and disseminating math information to the other teams on the campus. He admitted that this role had helped him to strengthen his communication abilities with others. However, more so than his leadership roles, which has helped him build positive relationships with his teachers, is remembering what it is like to be a teacher himself. He mentioned that “being a teacher is one of the hardest jobs on campus” and “letting teachers know that you know what it is like” helps break down any barriers teachers may put up working with him. He later remarked that he was concerned over being named Teacher of the Year because he believed that others would feel that he was not deserving of the honor. He recognizes that “being really positive and supporting of the teachers is really important,” which has only helped solidify relationships with all of these teachers, whether they started strong or otherwise.

As the math coach for his campus, he tends to work with students who exhibit the most difficulties in math. He knows that the teacher role is a very difficult one and, “the

last thing I want is to seem like I'm accusing the teachers, and I don't want them thinking that it's their fault that their students are this low, because I know that's not true." There were even nights where he would be in tears, knowing that he was doing everything he possibly could do for his students, and yet see the lack of progress in their data. However, he remarked that "it takes a village to help students and support them," and celebrating even the smallest measure of growth is essential, not just for the students, but for the teachers who are going above and beyond to help support their students in their mathematical journey.

Building "really close-knit relationships" is something that Trenton strives for with all of his teachers. One of the ways that he does this is through the sharing of not only his ideas but of ideas from other classrooms as well. When he became the campus Math Liaison, he would send out emails to the grade level teams to disseminate district information and encourage others to share their ideas. He readily admits that it is often difficult to get people to share ideas due to time constraints and lack of opportunities to talk with other teachers outside their grade levels. "It's not that they don't want to share their ideas, it's just, on top of being busy, they're just very modest, and people are shy about sharing things," he remarked. Recognizing this, he encourages teachers to share their classroom ideas and practices in planning sessions to help build that sense of collaboration, building up teacher leaders. Trenton is an educator who does not keep great ideas to himself but encourages others to share their ideas. His openness to ideas has not only helped him develop as an educator but has also helped others whom he is seeking to develop.

### ***A New Relationship with Administrators***

While he is now part of the administrative team, Trenton readily admits that he had never been very close to his administrators in the past:

I have always been the kind of person that never wants to get into trouble or anything like that, so I would never really go to them unless it was a question about a student or a question about something important that was work-related. Outside of school hangouts, he does not feel that he ever has a real relationship with them before taking on his new role.

Nevertheless, he is now part of that administrative team, although he admitted that “it’s still a little weird to me because part of me feels like my position doesn’t warrant being on an administrative team, to begin with.” With this new group, he can now view the campus from a different perspective and appreciate all that goes on behind the scenes to make a school run smoothly. He admires and appreciates all that administrators do every day and all the things that they must balance in order for the school to achieve success. As a result of this insight, he mentioned that he is not aspiring to be an administrator due to all of these tasks and pressures they must face, but he now has a greater appreciation and admiration for them.

### ***Impact of “Teacher of the Year” Designation***

Being named Teacher of the Year for a campus is an honor, and being designated as a male elementary teacher is even more noteworthy. However, it is still hard for Trenton to wrap his head around this distinction. “When I was selected as Teacher of the Year, I was kind of floored. I wasn’t expecting that at all because I hadn’t been teaching very long,” he remarked. He felt like he was always “bugging” his partner for things, asking lots of questions, and asking for help. Even upon receiving this spotlight on



himself, he thought of all the teachers around him whom he felt were much better candidates for this distinction. This modest attitude was just one of the reasons for his designation as Teacher of the Year in the first place.

Although this was a humbling experience for him, Trenton likes to think that teachers still view him as Trenton: “After I got Teacher of the Year, I felt like things were just kind of same old same old on campus, which is what I wanted.” One of his biggest fears upon receiving this honor was seeing himself as undeserving of it and thinking that others would feel the same way. He also worried that people would gossip about how other teachers were more deserving of the award than him. However, this concern is unfounded since he is not aware of others' comments on campus. While he felt like nothing changed at his school, other teachers would recognize him at professional development as “that guy who sings and dances with their kids on the Teacher of the Year video.” As far as this designation being a catalyst for his move to his leadership role, he feels that this certainly is a possibility, but he cannot say this with certainty.

Trenton also provided insight into the decisions behind why his principal chose him for his current leadership role. He told of a friendship that he had developed with another teacher at his school who was a “trendsetter” on their campus by incorporating blended learning and various technological applications in her classroom. Upon being approached with this new leadership role, he felt a sense of guilt about being chosen over his friend, whom he felt was much more deserving of the position. He then sought out one of the instructional specialists (IS) to gain insight into this decision. The IS did not discount the other teacher’s ability as an educator but told Trenton that the principal

selected him because of the staff's perceptions of him, his willingness to talk to anyone, and his overall friendly personality that people respected.

### ***Future Aspirations***

While Eric is considering the administrator route in his future, Trenton has “never really thought about any new career aspirations, other than not wanting to be AP or principal and never thought about anything more than being a math IS.” On his decision to not pursue an administrator position, he remarked, “I don't really have a desire to be an assistant principal or principal, especially now that I'm getting to see everything that they have to go through.” As his number one goal is to work with students, he feels that staying in his current position or moving to a math instructional specialist role would help achieve those goals without taking up the challenges of being an administrator.

When asked about these future aspirations, it was interesting to note that even with such a personal question, his focus was still more on the campus than on himself. Although he sees his campus as already very collaborative, he wants to make communication lines open up even further to enable the collaboration to grow stronger. His objective is to make ideas easier to obtain and open communication lines to help everyone feel comfortable. Doing so will give staff members the information and tools needed to make a significant impact not only with the parents, students, and staff but also with the entire community.

### ***Advice for Future Male Elementary Teachers***

As he has experienced success in the elementary education environment, Trenton sees no reason why other men seeking elementary educator status could not experience a similar success level. He was surprised at how happy the administration can be to have a

positive male educator on their elementary campus. Even more so, how happy students can be when they have a male teacher at the elementary level, especially if they do not have a male figure in their lives.

However, even with the success that a man can achieve in the elementary school environment, Trenton warns them about “taking any actions that could be misconstrued from anyone who’s watching, just because we are different.” Certain people may have judgments about male teachers in the classroom, and one must be careful to watch what he says and does at all times. Once again, his sister provided him with compelling advice to never rub a student’s back as that could “look weird to people.” Trenton even considered mailing a letter to one of his students, but a male colleague cautioned him against doing so. Even if one’s intentions are good, such a male teacher's gesture to his student could negatively affect his reputation.

Suffice to say that Trenton feels very blessed for all of the opportunities that he has received in education. While he believes that all of these fortuitous events have just lined up for him, his attitude, personality, and work ethic are critical factors of his success at the elementary level. Even with the Teacher of the Year designation, he has continued to do what he knows is best for students and continues to collaborate with his teachers and leadership team to lead his school to even greater success.

### **Principal 1: Lucy**

As Trenton's principal, Lucy has witnessed his effectiveness as a male elementary teacher on her campus. Although she has only led her current school for one year, Trenton has impressed her in such a short time that she “promoted” him mid-year from a classroom teacher to a second through fifth-grade math coach for the school. He

encompasses the full range of what it takes to be an effective educator and leader, which led to his Teacher of the Year designation and new leadership role for the campus. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 10, 2020, and it lasted approximately 28 minutes.

### ***Influence as a Male Elementary Teacher***

While Trenton is one of the few men on her campus, Lucy cannot fully determine whether his success is due to him being male or due to his personality traits and who he is as a person. However, she recognizes that having a male perspective and presence at the elementary level is valuable. “Having males like him on our staff is great because, for the kids that are males, it is nice to see someone that is like you in the leadership role,” she remarked. For the Latino males on her campus, Trenton’s influence is particularly beneficial, as they can look up to him and see that they could be like Trenton when they grow up. She commented that kids typically connect to those adults of the same gender more than the opposite gender. Whether or not his gender has exclusively led to his success is difficult for her to answer, but there is no denying his impact at this elementary school.

### ***Relationships with Students***

One of Lucy’s comments that came up time and time again regarding Trenton’s relationships with his students is that they love him. From the first day of school, he makes it a point to greet them every day by calling them by their names and making every moment intentional. The kids know that they are loved, and they can see how much he loves them. He tailors the instruction to meet their needs, and they feel loved by those efforts, which pushes them to work hard. Trenton is a teacher who lets his students know

that “every day is a new day,” it is okay to make mistakes, and that such incidents are learning opportunities. Due to this very personable and caring relationship with his students, they are willing to work for him and do whatever he asks of them no matter the level of work involved.

**Effective Instructor.** Not only does Trenton possess a natural ability to connect with his students due to his personality and character traits, but he also has a very successful ability to teach his students what they need to learn. The name of the game for him is “support.” Anything and everything he could do to support his students in their learning was fair game. When students came into his classroom, they knew the expectations, and they knew they were loved. Not surprisingly, Lucy remarked that “he was not a teacher that really ever had any kind of classroom management or discipline concerns.” While his voice level was low, the learning was intense. His use of songs, modeling, visuals, and vocabulary development, to name a few, all helped his students to stay engaged in their learning. Lucy mentioned that “he really spends a lot of time investing and making sure each instructional minute is purposeful and worth it.” She attributes his success to this balance between knowing his students and knowing his material.

### ***Relationships with Parents***

Trenton’s efforts to build positive relationships with his students did not stop with them; he sought to build those same types of relationships with his students’ parents. Lucy stated that he was not a hands-off teacher when it came to his parents; he was not afraid to give them his contact information to be readily accessible. As he was willing to go above and beyond for his students, the parents appreciated his efforts, strengthening

the home-school partnership. In his relationships with parents, Lucy emphasized that he is very approachable and willing and able to help both the children and the parents support their child's success. Lucy reiterated the benefits of the math videos that Trenton created for his parents: "They have the support they need whenever they don't understand what's going on." He never comes across as intentionally or unintentionally condescending in any way, which "allows the parents to feel like they have that champion for their kid." Due to his professionalism, hard work, and level of responsibility, Lucy remarked that she has never had any concerns with him in any way, shape, or form.

### ***Relationships with Colleagues***

As Lucy relayed how Trenton builds relationships with his teachers, her comments revolved around three main areas: (1) his ability to connect, (2) his efficient communication skills, and (3) his partnering with teachers. Such characteristics played a role in his selection as Teacher of the Year and his move to his current math leadership role. Upon building these positive relationships with colleagues, his influence has spread to his students, parents, and campus.

**Ability to Connect.** Trenton proves that one does not need to be loud and forceful to be a leader of students, and his quiet but caring manner extends outside of his classroom as well. Lucy stated, "He's just kind and soft-spoken in a way that people trust him very readily." He shares his opinions, and others respect his opinions because of the empathy he shows towards the teachers. His colleagues respect him because he listens, validates others, and tries to see the whole teacher's perspective, which helps him win people over and gain an "incredible buy-in with the staff."

**Effective Communication Skills.** Just as Trenton discussed his communication practices with his parents, Lucy remarked on his ability to communicate with his coworkers effectively: “He has been able to help with the communication pieces and to both pushing and supporting our math teachers.” While Trenton is not the most outgoing or brashest of educators, this by no means indicates that he stays silent on important issues or keeps ideas to himself. Interestingly, she remarked that “if he says something, then it is worth being said.” This communication restraint indicates that he is not one who talks just to hear himself talk, nor is he one to waste other peoples’ time with inconsequential matters. She mentioned that if he has a concern that he feels she needs to know about, he will tell her but in a pleasant way. His concern for the well-being of students is first and foremost: “he thinks about his words, but if he feels like something needs to be addressed, he’ll address it, regardless of who you are.” Trenton is an educator who can have those tough conversations as needed, but he always does it in a kind, caring, and understanding way. Others may not always fully agree with him, but they ultimately respect him for his opinions.

**Partnering with Teachers.** Providing feedback to teachers to help them in their craft certainly has its benefits. Partnering with them and working side-by-side with them provides another set of benefits altogether. His comment about not wanting to forget what it is like to be a teacher, even in his new leadership role, rings loud and clear with Lucy’s insight and observations. He is not a leader content with sitting back and telling others what to do. He works right alongside teachers as necessary to help them in various ways, including pushing into classrooms to assist students, modeling for teachers on how to pull small groups or incorporate blended learning into their classrooms, working with them on

data analysis and how to apply that data once it is analyzed, brainstorm sessions, and even just sitting with them to provide support. He is their partner, and his goal is to help build up the teachers so that they, in turn, can build up their students to tremendous success.

### ***Innate Personality Traits***

While some of these characteristics, especially in educational practices, can be taught and learned, Lucy admits that there are many unteachable qualities of Trenton that are simply innate within him as a person. The way he teaches students, how he communicates with his parents, and how he collaborates with his colleagues are just “natural to him.” He tends to be very reflective of his practices with all stakeholders, which only leads to improving and strengthening his craft. Being trustworthy, encouraging, and humble, “his greatest impact is his relational skills.” Among all the compliments that Lucy gave of Trenton, one, in particular, stood out: “he has a type of personality, you meet him, and you just walk away being like, ‘man, I just love him!’” We may encounter educators who merely put on a show for students, colleagues, and administrators to advance in their careers or encounter those who simply go through the motions. No one can make such accusations of Trenton. He is authentic, personable, knowledgeable, and a valuable individual to have on one’s campus.

### ***A Stand-Out Teacher of the Year***

Trenton is a teacher who does what he does because he loves his students and desires to impact their lives. Although he was a natural choice for Teacher of the Year, the announcement came as a shock, as he did not believe that he deserved the title. As he noted, Lucy mentioned that he did not expect such an honor and even cried, thinking that



he did not deserve that title. This recognition does not define his self-worth, nor does he feel that he needs it to move up in the district. “He isn’t who he is because he’s on this leadership track in this journey of ‘I’ve got to check these boxes to become such and such,’” she remarked. These qualities and personal characteristics are just a part of who he is, as someone who has a great sense of integrity always to do the right thing no matter the circumstances.

### ***Future Aspirations for Trenton***

Corroborating the conversation with Trenton, Lucy also showed no indication that she feels that Trenton desires to pursue the administrative route. However, based on his practices and characteristics, she does view him as a natural-born leader who could eventually do whatever he desires to do in the district. She knows that his heart and strength are in the curriculum, and she can easily see him in a leadership role in that area in the future.

### ***Men on Elementary Campuses***

As an elementary school Principal, Lucy knows that what I found in research is true: very few men pursue the elementary education route. Her experiences have typically seen men choose the secondary path in order to coach sports. Perhaps men shy away from elementary due to stereotypes they will encounter, or simply because “they feel like they don’t know what to do with little kids,” but she could not say this with certainty. Knowing that most male educators are more interested in secondary than an elementary education, she believes that elementary principals “should always consider a man, especially if they’re a strong candidate.” She stressed that elementary school principals who do not have men on their campuses need to examine their hiring filter to determine if

they are carrying any implicit bias against employing men at their schools. Although she is not advocating hiring men just because they are men, she advocates hiring for the right fit and never to rule out a male candidate, because as she has discovered, they can often bring a valuable perspective and presence to the elementary school environment.

### **Parent 1: Mary**

One of Trenton's great qualities is that he not only cares about his current students, but he is also concerned for his former students as well. One such student, Jane, has experienced some difficulties in math due to her dyslexia. Jane's grandmother, Mary, provided some personal insight into Trenton's teaching abilities and his influence on her granddaughter's academic life. As she was not available to meet through Zoom, I conducted this interview with Mary through the telephone on June 29, 2020, and it lasted approximately 16 minutes.

### ***An Above and Beyond Teacher***

Trenton is not your everyday teacher. He is an educator who goes above and beyond every single day for all of his students. Making sure that his students have what they need to be successful is his top priority. Mary mentioned several times that he "goes out of his way to make sure that the students know their curriculum...his children had what they needed...and that the children are learning." However, even with such support, she found that her granddaughter still struggled with the math content. She stated, "I felt like she was falling behind, and he told me not to worry about it, that he would be pulling her for math tutoring." Not only did he help Jane when he was her teacher a few years ago, he even tutored her during the school building closures. Mary reached out to the principal, Lucy, and asked if Trenton could tutor her remotely, which he happily agreed

to. She is very grateful for such a caring, loving, kind teacher who “is constantly thinking about the kids” and what he can do to help them improve. He even made sure that she could get her work to continue learning at home when she became ill in third grade.

### ***A Quality Communicator***

While Mary mentioned that some teachers do not readily supply their phone number to parents, Trenton never hesitated. She remarked, “He would absolutely make sure that you had his phone number and that he responded to your emails immediately.” This open line of communication between him and his parents, and Mary, in particular, was comforting to her in knowing that he would be there to assist the students and parents with whatever they needed to be successful and whenever they needed it. Communication also extended beyond informing parents of upcoming events and classroom news. He was also diligent in posting math videos to assist parents and students in solving math problems. These outlets of communication helped build an effective line of communication between Trenton and Mary.

### ***A Lasting Influence on His Student***

There is no question that Trenton has impacted his students, colleagues, and school as a whole, but Mary provided a particular insight into the lasting impact that he has had on one particular child. Although Jane has dyslexia and has experienced difficulty in math, Trenton can help her with her mathematics abilities as no one else can. “He can get her to understand math with ease, and not many teachers can do that,” Mary remarked. Trenton has made such an impact on Jane that Mary stated, “she knows math now. She did not know math. She’s good at math. She does math all the time. She’ll watch TV and start doing math.” Not only does she like math, but she especially likes the

one teacher who has taught her the most. Mary stated that “she talks about him all the time while she is doing math,” and, many times, she will state that, “that’s not how Mr. Trenton teaches it,” and, “this is how Mr. Trenton does it.” He has undoubtedly made a lasting impression on her and her grandmother for the better.

### ***Men in Elementary Schools and the Lack Thereof***

While studies have shown some parents to be reluctant and even adamant about not having their child in a male elementary teacher’s classroom, including Eric’s classroom from this study, Mary is a strong supporter of putting more men in elementary schools. “I think children need more men teachers than they need women teachers because men are a good strong influence on the children,” she professed. She continued, “Let’s face it; you don’t have a lot of men teachers in elementary school...and the kids that don’t have dads at home need that.” Her views on men in the elementary environment are entirely positive, and she completely trusts Trenton in his work with the children. She also believes that having more men on the elementary campus would strengthen the community’s image of the school and the entire district.

Although she is very grateful that Trenton has had such a positive impact on her granddaughter in her elementary school journey, she wonders if there is a lack of men who chose the elementary education route simply because “the kids are so little” and that they may be “afraid of being accused of something.” Thankfully, Trenton has chosen to take on the elementary school path leading to this very positive relationship with Jane and Mary. She summed up Trenton as a person and as a teacher in this way: “It’s just natural for him. He has a gift. He is just a kind soul.”

### **Teacher 2: Obadiah**

Unlike both Eric and Trenton, who have moved out of the classroom and into leadership roles for their respective campuses, Obadiah is still in the classroom and sees himself eventually retiring in the classroom as well. However, his story and testimony from others are similar to those of his Teacher of the Year colleagues. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 23, 2020, and it lasted approximately 50 minutes.

### ***Human Resources Training and Path to Education***

Obadiah's path to the world of elementary education began with a career in Human Resources (HR). He mentioned that he has always been involved in training in some form or fashion in his professional life, either in developing training or hiring people who would conduct the training. He recalled a time when he needed to create a training for his company, and in doing so, he realized that the visual and kinesthetic components he utilized helped the employees remember the concepts more effectively. He began to understand that the "more movement we put into saying things and acting them out, the better they remember them." This incorporation of movement into learning reminded him of when he was younger when he used movement and whole-body learning for poetry readings that helped him recall the material. This realization would prove valuable when working with students years later to learn the concepts through movement.

Before his career in HR, he was a teacher in Mexico, teaching English as a second language to students in a vocational university. He remarked, "I enjoyed that because that was only for students from very humble backgrounds. They had a sense that education was something that would take them out of poverty, and they took that very, very

seriously.” He admitted that while he enjoyed working with older students in such a setting and circumstance, he steered clear of entering secondary education upon becoming a certified teacher because of how different middle schools and high schools were in the United States. He prefers to work with “little ones,” and that is where he has stayed. One of the reasons he gave when asked about choosing the elementary path over the secondary one is that “kids learn better when they’re younger. The younger the kids, the more chances that you have to model and engage them.”

### ***Hardship Free in Elementary***

Finding a male teacher who wishes to pursue elementary education is rare, and finding one who desires to teach the primary grades is rarer still. Obadiah has taught Kindergarten through fourth grade, and while men in elementary education often teach the upper primary grades of third through fifth, he has found his niche in first grade. Even with stereotypes that abound regarding men teaching in elementary education, Obadiah admits that he has not experienced any obstacles while working in this environment. “It’s never been an issue for me being a male in there,” he admitted. He reiterated that he has a great team and that everyone on the campus has been welcoming.

### ***A Focus on the Students***

As with the other teachers in this study, Obadiah’s primary focus is on his students and how he can best help them in their learning achievements. While he utilizes a variety of best practices to help them become stronger in their academic abilities, he reminds himself of the oft-quoted but still very relevant phrase, “kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” He accomplishes this by building positive relationships with them, focusing on both their academic and social needs. He

stated that this all starts in the morning when he welcomes them in the hallway and gives them a handshake or a fist bump, but it most certainly does not end there. Obadiah takes the time to get to know each of his students personally, what they like to do in their free time, and if they are interested in sports, what teams they support. He then takes their interests and personal lives and puts them into the stories he writes for them. By doing so, he puts his focus on the students as people, not as numbers, which results in “smiles from ear to ear” and “twinkles in their eyes.” He shows them that he has not forgotten what they have told him about themselves, and they appreciate that he is interested in them as people and not just students.

Not only does Obadiah understand what his students need academically, he knows and understands the culture from which they come. While some teachers may see a student who does not make eye contact with a teacher to be a sign of disrespect in this country, one must consider that such an act *shows* respect in the Latinx culture. Although being a part of the same culture as your students is not required to impact them positively, Obadiah’s background has helped him make an even deeper connection to his students, and by extension, their parents, due to their similarities in culture.

**Teaching Philosophies.** A great deal of Obadiah’s success comes from the philosophies that he holds in teaching the youngest of minds. He does not see each student as a carbon copy of each other. “Everyone has different learning abilities,” he stated, and beyond this, everyone learns at different rates as well. He reminds them not to worry if they are not learning as “fast” as the next person. He likens them to seeds: “when one plants seeds, they do not all come out at the same time, but their time will come.” He believes that every student has different gifts, and it is his job to nurture each students’

gifts and talents to bring out the very best in all of them. Being honest with students in a loving and caring way goes a long way to building trust and earning respect from them, which leads them to continue working hard despite any obstacles that may come their way.

**Engaging Classroom.** To help each student make the most of their talents, Obadiah creates a student-centered, engaging, and fun classroom. Just as he did with his adult colleagues in his previous HR life, Obadiah incorporates hands-on learning with his students, utilizing Play-Doh or Legos when they create stories of their own. As they are engaged in their work, he documents their activities through photographs, increasing their engagement. When asked what it would look like if someone came to his classroom, he immediately said, “first of all, there’s a lot of fun going on!” He uses singing and word exercises he learned many years ago in Mexico called “Jazz Chants.” These are effective because they get a chance to be silly and act out while learning at the same time. When Obadiah dons the outfit of a pilot, chef, or pirate, to name a few, his students become all the more engaged in the lessons and their learning.

#### ***A Partner with the Parents***

As he is primarily a bilingual teacher to bilingual students, his students encounter a different path in their education than their non-bilingual counterparts. However, since he possesses the same cultural background as his students and parents, he can perhaps make a stronger home-school partnership than he would otherwise. His acknowledgment of the importance of such a collaboration shows in his statement:



I tell them what we're doing, and I say 'we' because it's not just myself as an educator, but them as parents. We're working towards a common goal, including the school and their administrators, to make better human beings, better citizens.

Obadiah reiterates with his parents that he relies on them to assist with their child's instruction and learning at home. His ability to communicate with them in the Spanish language strengthens that bond between them. He knows their cultural background, and he understands any circumstances they may be dealing with at home, including the fact that many of them work two jobs to make ends meet. He also has some parents who have difficulty reading Spanish, so just sending information is not always enough; he makes sure that they truly understand its contents. Keeping an open communication line is vital to this partnership, so Obadiah provides his cell phone number to his parents to let them know that they can call him whenever they require assistance.

Just as Obadiah notifies the parents that they are free to contact him at any time, the parents let him know that he may do the same. In the Latinx culture, parents often view teachers as authority figures and experts, and they are more than willing to trust the teacher to do what is best for their children. This level of trust is a vote of confidence, even to the point where many parents tell him that they would be willing to come to the school to pull their child out of class for misbehavior. He assures them that the students will behave and that calling them for such a reason will not be necessary. Having that strong partnership between himself and the parents only strengthens the relationships between him and his students.

### *A "Father Figure" to His Colleagues*

As he is often the most advanced in age of all of his team members, they often view him as “the dad.” Combined with his years of educational experience, leadership abilities, and level of teaching expertise, it is no wonder then he is often seen, in a positive way, as a “father figure” to his colleagues. He remarked that his teammates often say to their administrators that, “Obadiah was the one that keeps us in order because whenever we’re meeting, and we start talking, he was like, ‘Hey ladies, let’s focus on what we need to do.’” With this age difference, they view him as a natural leader of his team, enabling him to make those kinds of statements professionally and respectfully. He mentioned that he could take advantage of this situation to say what needs to be said to focus on what they need to accomplish in the meetings.

As a result, they have developed a relationship of mutual respect between them. His willingness to share his ideas makes him approachable, leading to his teammates' confidence to inquire about his classroom activities and practices or ask how to accomplish specific tasks. While he admits that collaborating with teammates is not always straightforward since they teach their students in different languages, the ideas, ways of teaching, and ways to engage are still the same.

Not only is he available for his colleagues when they seek academic support, but he is there for them when they need moral support as well. His willingness to take on Bilingual/English as a Second Language committee leadership roles and conduct training on the English Language Proficiency Standards for teachers has led to his positive reputation. Obadiah is a teacher who is willing to assist his colleagues in any way to help them grow in their professional abilities, just as a father would seek to grow his children's developmental capacities.

### ***Comfortable and Confident with Administration***

Like his approachable attitude and demeanor with his colleague, Obadiah is, likewise, open and honest with his administrators. He stated that “It’s always been a very supportive relationship. I think that whenever I need them, they’re there for me, and whenever they need me, I’m there for them.” Perhaps his professionalism, hard work, and love for students and colleagues are the reasons why he has “never had any bad experience with any people from the A-team.” Although he cannot recall any time he has asked for specific feedback on his teaching performance, he is always open and willing to listen to their thoughts.

Not only is Obadiah comfortable in working with his administrators, but he also has a sense of confidence around them as well. While he admires the leadership team and respects their roles, he cannot keep silent on issues that he believes warrant addressing. “Whenever there is something that I find is a discrepancy or inconsistency, I bring that up. I’m confident enough that they will hear it,” he admitted. He can do so because he knows that he has their trust as much as they have his to talk about concerns as professional adults. He admits that he does not have the answers to all problems, but he is still willing to have those difficult conversations to provide a different perspective.

The confidence that he places in his administrators is reciprocated by them as well. He knows that he is the best person to teach the students in his classroom, so having their vote of confidence to be the best teacher for his students is encouraging. This level of trust allows him to develop creative ideas for his classroom because, in the end, they are confident that he will continue to do whatever is best for his students and that he will get results. With this trust, he is confident enough to say, “sometimes it is better to ask for

forgiveness than to ask for permission.” He tends to do what he needs to do for his students, but when he asks his administrators to try something, and they deny him permission, he has enough confidence to trust their judgments and honor their decisions.

### ***Ever-Improving Teacher of the Year***

Obadiah is not a teacher who enjoys the spotlight. While he admits that it is nice to receive recognition for his efforts, having the title of Teacher of the Year increases his expectations from others. “With my type of personality, that just makes me think that expectations of my bar has been raised further,” he remarked. This award has made him more aware and conscientious of what he says and does in the school because of his success. He is not the type of teacher who has gained attention by complaining or stirring up conflict, but he has gained attention due to his teaching abilities and this achievement. With all eyes on him, he realizes that there is not a chance that he can ever be laid back and become complacent at any point in time. However, he takes a positive outlook on this when he said, “I don’t take that as a bad thing, because I’m always trying to come up with new things and try new approaches or whatever we get in professional development.” Not one to rest on his laurels, Obadiah is a teacher who is continually striving to improve in his abilities and is not willing to become complacent regardless of the number of recognitions he receives.

### ***Choosing a Future in the Classroom, Not in Administration***

As his principal would later corroborate in my interview with her, Obadiah is an educator who wants to continue his career in education as a classroom teacher. Although he has considered pursuing a Master’s degree, doing so would be for its intrinsic value

and not as a means to gain more money or an administrator role in the future. Even with the implication of additional educational opportunities, he stated,

Modesty apart, I see myself doing things that people with a Master's in Education have or have learned how to do through their learning, but I have learned to do the same thing through reading or through some lectures from the Great Courses.

Earning another degree in higher education is appealing, but his focus remains on his students: "I just need to focus on being there, one hundred percent of the time for my kiddos." He mentioned that many of his younger colleagues are pursuing Master's degrees to head into administration and become principals, but that is not the route he wishes to take. He wants to continue being a teacher.

With his Human Resources background, he has realized that working as an administrator is not where he wants to go. "I want to keep doing what I'm doing because we will always be needing experienced teachers and teachers that know the ins and outs of how things work," he stated. He is comfortable in the classroom and loves what he does in that environment. Although he could be successful in a role at the district's central office or the campus level as an administrator, he admitted that he would not find satisfaction in those roles he finds in being a classroom teacher. Leaving little doubt about his future aspirations, he stated:

You need people that can take the new teachers under the wing, guide them, the students, and the parents, of course, and you don't get to do that being away from the classroom. We need soldiers. Not too many generals. I'm proud to be a foot soldier.

### ***A Lack of Men in Elementary Education***

While Obadiah is proud to be a male elementary educator, he recognizes that this education route is not always taken or desired by other men. “I think there’s just too many guys that don’t have a quality per se to work in elementary education,” he admitted. One’s love of children must be present to work in elementary, and those men interested in teaching the youngest of students must realize that elementary kids behave differently than middle school students. Teachers cannot talk to elementary students in abstract ways as they can with those in the upper grades. Obadiah supposes that personality types will play a role in the acquisition of men on elementary campuses. Those who pursue this path must feel comfortable working with little ones, as stereotypes abound in viewing the more nurturing side of nature as associated with the lower grades.

### ***Encouragement of Male Teachers***

Although Obadiah states that men who wish to become elementary educators must have the personality and willingness to do so, he encourages males who want to pursue this career. He stated that elementary education is “where you’re actually planting the seeds for the love of learning. It’s very rewarding when you get to see a mind, the young mind, start blooming because of the connections that you have been teaching them how to do.” He cautions men to seriously consider thinking about what they are doing because he ultimately wants them to feel successful so that their students can also feel successful.

### **Principal 2: Joelle**

Joelle has had the privilege of being Obadiah’s principal now for five years. The impact that he has made on the campus as a whole cannot be quantified. Obadiah embodies the ideal elementary teacher, and his influence as a male in this environment

has had far-reaching positive effects. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 10, 2020, and it lasted approximately 51 minutes.

### ***A Strong Professional Educator***

One could describe Obadiah as a consummate professional. Joelle summed it all up by saying, “I don’t think anybody on this staff would have one bad thing to say about Obadiah” Staff members highly regard his work with students, colleagues, and administrators because of his integrity, professionalism, overall genuineness, and his desire to do what is best for kids. There is never a question about whether or not Obadiah will be at work on any given day. “Rarely is he out,” Joelle remarked. “He’s got to be with a 105 fever to take a sick day. When he does, I know he is really ill.” The commitment to his teammates is second only to his commitment to his students. Whatever he learns, he shares. He is not one to keep great ideas to himself. He is willing to answer questions, and he is proactive in sharing what he has learned. Although he possesses considerable technological and creative skills, it is his energy that others genuinely feed off of to become energetic educators themselves.

### ***Best Teaching Practices of Obadiah***

First and foremost, Obadiah is a teacher of children. He is there to shape and mold young minds into the future leaders of tomorrow. His classroom is one that is educational, engaging, and fun. Students are not sitting and getting; they are doing, exploring, conversing, and, ultimately, learning. It is a very hands-on, kinesthetic classroom. Joelle stated that “If they are learning vocabulary, then they are using their hands to manipulate the letters or form the letters in some way.” Although students are engaged and excited, it is not what you would call a loud classroom. His clear

expectations allow for a classroom that is orderly but engaging. She admitted that she “cannot recall a time that he called the office for support.” Even in their independent work, they are engaged because they do not engage in busywork. This structure allows for an orderly but exciting classroom for his students.

Every minute of instruction is essential to his students and their learning. He is not one to waste any time while he is with them. He is a “bell-to-bell teacher,” even asking her at one point if he could conduct recess tutoring. While she emphasized that his students need to play, she appreciates that he will do whatever it takes to help his students succeed. One resource he utilizes to help his students succeed is YouTube videos of his lessons. As helpful as these are for students who are absent to view them at home, these are even more helpful when *he* is absent. “He does not like anybody else teaching his lessons,” Joelle admitted, “so he will record his lesson, and then the substitute would just come in behind and support that.” When an assistant principal is new to the campus, they may see that what he is doing in his classroom is not a traditionally-conducted practice. Joelle tells them to “watch and trust” because he knows the curriculum and his students inside and out. Assuredly, they are impressed with his skills and the classroom he has created for his students.

### ***A Heart for His Students***

While he has a natural aptitude for creating a fun and engaging classroom, one of Obadiah’s main strengths is creating strong relationships with his students. Joelle stated that “he’s so great at building relationships, those kids know that he genuinely cares about them.” He sees every student as one who is deserving of a quality educational experience, and he is the one to provide it. As he knows what it is like to learn a second



language, he is “very sensitive to the children that come here not knowing one word of English.” He desires to teach bilingual children and help bridge their learning over to English.

What makes him so successful is that he makes his expectations very clear even with his very young students. He expects them to listen to him and follow his rules, but he is always there when they need his help. There is no pity, and he does not assist because he feels sorry for them. There is an expectation that they will learn from him and that he, in turn, will do whatever it takes to help them succeed. For any students who struggle academically, he is diligent in taking data and providing interventions if a referral for special services for that student is needed. He is a teacher who advocates for all of his students to ensure they receive what they need to be successful.

### ***A Positive Male Influence on the Students***

While Obadiah incorporates best teaching practices, classroom management, and communication protocols that would benefit any teacher, his status as a male teacher in the elementary school setting provides him with a unique perspective and an influence on his students that he might not have otherwise. Joelle stated that many of their students come from broken homes in which the mother usually has custody and provides a positive motherly influence. However, they are missing that positive male influence in their home. Obadiah can uniquely provide that influence: “he’s not flowery at all,” and yet “he is still nurturing but extremely professional.” She admitted that his gender plays a role in the response that he receives from his students. “Being a male does help because, automatically, it’s more authoritative.” He is a teacher who says what he means and means what he says, and yet his firmness is not overshadowed by his care.

### ***A Partnership with Parents Built on Trust***

Not only does Obadiah build effective relationships with his students, but he also does so with his parents as well, so much that Joelle remarked that his parents “blindly trust him.” However, as I learned from one of his students' parent interviews, this trust level is not automatic. This trust develops as a result of his reputation and his building of a true partnership with the parents. They can see that Obadiah indeed does have the children's best interests at heart. He is not a teacher who gives empty promises regarding communication; he tells parents that they can contact him anytime, and he means it. Joelle mentioned, “He works really well with parents, he has great communication with them, and they trust him.”

Just as he wants his students to have a hands-on education, he is also very much “hands-on” with his parents to help them whenever they require assistance. Throughout the school building closures and the distance learning model, he was there to call parents, create curriculum videos, and be a lifeline for them if they needed help navigating the resources or understanding the assignments. Providing visuals for his students in the classroom is a significant key to their success, and providing visuals to his parents, in the form of the videos, helped them successfully traverse the online curriculum to help their children be successful.

While his capacities to teach best practices and connect with his students may be appreciated by any parent of any race, his ability to speak the Spanish language has only helped strengthen his relationship with parents even more. Not only does Obadiah predominantly teach bilingual students, but the campus itself is also predominantly Latinx. His ability to translate for Spanish-speaking parents has been a blessing for Joelle

as he can ensure that communication to all parents can continue unheeded. Joelle recalled a time when she had to make a sensitive and confidential home visit in which she invited Obadiah to be the translator for the parent. The parent was “very forthcoming and maybe even more so because of his gentle spirit and him speaking the language.” She credits this positive and successful home visit to him. Even when involved in serious conversations with parents, “they’re not intimidated by him because he’s not in your face.” Not only does he set boundaries, but he also respects them, and by doing so, people sense that about him and are willing to trust him perhaps more than others who are not so conscientious of such boundaries.

### ***Collaborative with Colleagues***

Obadiah’s collaboration with students and their parents extends to his teammates and other campus personnel as well. “He’s all in, and he’s not just all in for his students; he’s all in for the staff,” said Joelle. He is adored, respected, and loved by the staff members. He is not only willing to help those on his grade level; he is willing to help anyone in need of assistance. What sets him apart, Joelle noted, is that “you don’t have to have a deep, long-standing relationship with him for him to be helpful to you. If he barely knew you, and you went and asked him for help, he would help you.” Although he is not the Lead Mentor for the campus, he unofficially mentors many teachers and anyone who needs him. Joelle admitted that she does not even know half the people who go to him when they require assistance. She will find out later that Obadiah has helped someone in some fashion, but not through him. He simply helps his colleagues because it is who he is as a person.

### ***An Asset to Administration***

Though Obadiah is not a teacher who often seeks feedback from administrators, nor is he one who needs micromanaging, his relationship with the leadership team, especially Joelle, has been one of mutual respect. Not only is he willing to do whatever is asked of him by the administration, he feels comfortable enough to speak up when he feels like an idea presented may not be in the best interest of the campus stakeholders. While he has no desire to go into administration himself, he respects those in leadership, which allows him to continue doing what he knows is best for students and allows the administration to let him work. As Joelle noted, “I just basically leave him alone, and he just does his thing.” Obadiah is not afraid to state his beliefs, but he always does so professionally through the chain of command. His expertise and ideas are beneficial to the decisions made by administrators for the betterment of the school.

### ***Influence Beyond the Campus***

Obadiah’s influence, expertise, work ethic, and success levels are known throughout his classroom and campus and even to those at the district level. With his reputation as a very knowledgeable and successful bilingual teacher, the bilingual curriculum department has naturally asked him to be a district model teacher. He declined this request as the district asked him in the middle of a new curriculum adoption. Even with his natural teaching abilities, he did not believe he knew the new adoption well enough to be an exemplar model teacher for others. Joelle even admitted that “I know that the bilingual department is trying to steal him. He is that good.” While the district may be disappointed that he is not looking to leave the classroom for a curriculum role, no one is disappointed at his impact and influence on his classroom and campus.

### ***An Obvious Selection for “Teacher of the Year”***

His professionalism, positive relationships with staff and parents, academic successes with his students, and positive reputation all made for a straightforward choice for her campus's Teacher of the Year. "When I announced that he was Teacher of the Year, there was a standing ovation because everyone recognizes the kind of teacher he is," Joelle recalled. She jokingly mentioned that "I think if he hadn't been named Teacher of the Year, I probably would have been skinned alive because they adore him, and they respect him." However, he remains humbled by this recognition. As Obadiah mentioned in his interview, Joelle reiterated that "he didn't want the spotlight on him." This humble personality only lends itself to respect from others who see that his actions are not motivated by recognition from others but instead motivated by his genuine love for his students.

### ***Future Aspirations for Obadiah***

The future looks pretty clear for Obadiah and his educational aspirations: "he wants to be the best teacher. He doesn't have his sights set on anything other than being a teacher for children." This sentiment was echoed by him as well, and although he has the capabilities to, at the very least, work at the district level with curriculum development, "Obadiah just wants to grow in his teaching." Joelle even acknowledged that sometimes work is much more pleasant and worthwhile when working with children than adults. Obadiah is reluctant to trade in children's innocence for the "drama of adults" because he can change young lives for the better every day. While it may seem obvious from talking with him and his principal about where he wants to be in the future, and although it would pain her to see him go, Joelle admitted that "if he's ever said that he wanted to become an IS or assistant principal, I would support him 100%." She is truly thankful for

all that he has done for the campus over the years, and she is looking forward to seeing how many more lives he can influence in the years to come.

### ***A Lack of Men in Elementary Education***

Not lost on Joelle is the extreme lack of men in the elementary school environment. Her comments regarding this phenomenon often parallel findings from other studies. “We need more of them,” she stated, but the “draw of coaching” sports at the secondary level is too tempting, and the “thought of teaching little children scares them to death.” As elementary students are naturally inclined to hug their teachers, she admits that teaching at the elementary level presents more unique challenges for men than women. “You know they don’t want to hug or be overly nurturing because it could be misconstrued, and that’s so sad because they are not any different than the females on staff,” she remarked.

Due to these stereotypes that males in elementary education face, she stated that “I feel like females can get away with that hug, that nurturing side, whereas males just have to be very cautious about that.” However, while such stereotypes may be present elsewhere, she has not encountered those at her school with her male employees. She confirmed, “I get more reaction that my parents don’t want a first-year teacher. If somebody looks young, they don’t want that teacher. I haven’t gotten it for males.”

### ***The Hiring of Men in Elementary Schools***

Joelle encourages principals who are not considering hiring men on their staff to reconsider such a viewpoint. “Maybe people don’t see men as being great elementary teachers, but they really are,” she admitted. She welcomes having a balance between men and women teachers on the staff, which helps bring diversity to the school. If she finds a

qualified male candidate for a position at her school, she will not hesitate to hire him. The male influence that they can provide to the youngest of students is invaluable since so many of her students come from homes without a father figure influence in their lives. She stated, “they have women ruling their lives every day, everywhere, and so to have that male influence, I think, is just so valuable.” However, she will not hire just any man who applies for a position at her school, as she noted., “They really have to do the job. They have to be Obadiah.”

### **Parent 2: Dahlia**

While Obadiah’s influence impacts the campus and district, his influence is often felt most of all through his students. Dahlia, the mother of one of Obadiah’s students in the previous school year, further expounded on his influence on her child, specifically. Although face-to-face instruction was cut short due to the school building closures, she is thankful for the time that her son had to be in Obadiah’s class. Throughout the interview, she had nothing but positive comments for him and his ability to teach, communicate, and build relationships effectively. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 23, 2020, and it lasted approximately 15 minutes.

### ***A Very Good Educator***

One of the phrases that continued to surface in the interview was that Obadiah is a “very good teacher.” Throughout the distance learning from home, he regularly checked in on Dahlia and her son to make sure that they understood the online program and resources and answered any questions. This positive impression of him did not begin with the school building closure; it began when they first opened for “Meet the Teacher.”

Knowing that he was Teacher of the Year and having an excellent track record made her feel more comfortable sending her son to him.

However, beyond these accolades, what most impressed her was Obadiah getting to eye level to introduce himself to her son. This seemingly small gesture helped to let her guard down about sending her son to a male elementary teacher for the first time. She stated that “he took that initiative and not many adults do that, and so I really appreciated him doing that, getting to that eye level with my son.” This approach helped him to assure her son that they would have a great year together.

As learning moved online for the last two and half months of school, Dahlia mentioned that Obadiah continued to go the extra mile. His communication remained outstanding, but she was even more impressed by his willingness to extend the quality instruction he provided at school to the home environment. A quote from Dahlia sums up his devotion to his students: “he didn’t want to leave my son behind. He could have easily said, ‘you know, there’s only two or three months left out, and they’ll be okay. The next teacher can handle it.’” Instead, he continued to go above and beyond to ensure that quality instruction continued and that communication outlets were in place to assist the students in their learning and help the parents help their children in these unprecedented times.

**A Positive Impact on Her Child.** From the first moment of meeting him, Obadiah has positively impacted and influenced her son’s life. As her son is an English learner, he has struggled, at times, trying to balance two languages at his young age. However, as an English learner himself, Obadiah understands his students' struggles and encourages them to continue learning even when it may be difficult. Although she is



thankful for Obadiah's academic support, she is even more thankful for the confidence he has built up in her son to grow his language and academic abilities.

### ***An Excellent Communicator***

As quality communication is key to building a strong relationship with parents, Obadiah made it his mission to develop those lines of communication with his parents in a way that would benefit them the most. He was available through various means, including phone calls, texts, emails, and Remind, and he was cognizant of responding quickly to communication from parents. Throughout the distance learning, he would continue to check on her and her son, not just concerning school matters but also in general matters. She appreciated him for “taking that extra step to helping and making sure that the parents knew what to do and how to help their students.” His ability to communicate with the parents in Spanish was also helpful and appreciated. At Meet the Teacher, he stated that he would speak in English, but he was also willing to communicate in Spanish to ensure that all of his parents understood what he was trying to say. The communication piece is critical to building relationships with parents, and Obadiah kept those lines open to make sure that both his students and his parents had a successful academic year.

### ***Men in Elementary Education***

Although Dahlia has come to respect Obadiah as an educator and positive influence on her son, she was initially concerned about him being in a male teacher's classroom. “This was the first year my son had a male teacher, and I was worried about the whole change from a female to a male teacher,” she admitted. This concern stemmed not from an aversion to Obadiah personally but from worrying about how her son was

going to react to having a male teacher for the first time. Those fears were allayed very quickly at seeing the relationship that he developed with her son from the very beginning. As she admitted having her guard up at first, she mentioned that it is understandable that other parents may also have their guard up on a male elementary teacher. This experience with Obadiah has led her to state that “you have to trust that they’re doing their best to teach them whether they’re male or not.” Further, she advised other parents “to just entrust that that teacher is going to take care of your child and that he’s going to, to the best of his knowledge, give them a solid education for first grade.”

### **Teacher 3: David**

This study's final teacher participant was David, an elementary educator who has taught all subjects in second, third, and fourth grades for the past 18 years. His abilities as a male teacher, and more specifically, as a male Latino teacher, have led to great success with his students. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 19, 2020, and it lasted approximately 57 minutes.

### ***A Different Path to Elementary Education***

As is the case for the other teacher participants in this study, David’s professional background did not include a career in elementary education. As his background is in industrial psychology, he admitted that “I didn’t even think about becoming an elementary school teacher.” After graduating with his degree, he began working as a newspaper editor in human resources in Mexico. As fate would have it, he discovered a newspaper advertisement indicating a need for bilingual teachers in Texas. Deciding to embark on this educational path, he eventually became a certified teacher through the Alternative Certification Program in Region IV. While he planned to only be in the

United States for three years, per the period that immigration services provide international employees, eighteen years later, he is still teaching and making a difference in all of his students' lives.

### ***A Tough First Few Years***

Since bilingual teachers were in high demand in Texas when he began his education career, David did not have the luxury of learning the profession's ins and outs through student teaching. He noted, “They just threw me into the classroom. I had to learn everything from scratch. It was very bad. At the beginning, it was not easy.” Although his teaching career began with a troubled start, he slowly began to gain a wealth of experience and knowledge through his classroom teaching. However, he admitted that he did not learn much from the ACP theory courses: “in reality, when you are really in the classroom, practice makes a difference.” While such challenges could have persuaded him to end his teaching career, the ones who motivated him to continue were his students. He recalled, “My students were my teachers, probably my first three or four years, the ones that instructed me the most, and what I learned the most was from them.”

### ***Building Relationships with Students***

David’s number one priority, above all others, is building relationships with his students. So much so that he stated, “I spend the first two weeks of school where I don’t worry too much about content. I worry about building relationships with my kids.” He has a goal that within the first 30 minutes of meeting his students on the very first day of each school year, he will have learned every one of their names. Once he has learned their names, he eventually learns about their likes, dislikes, cultures, and backgrounds.

He finds about where their parents come from and the foods from their native countries, which, when he brings them up in conversation, they become interested as to how he knows about those foods. Sometimes he even learns about the music they listen to, “even though I don’t like their music,” he admitted. Wearing a shirt that sports the name of their home country and bringing up words unique to their cultural backgrounds makes a considerable difference in the relationships he builds with his students. He stated, “the more I find out about them, the better the kids will respond to me.”

While David understands that getting to know students on a limited personal level is essential to building trusting relationships with them, he ultimately recognizes why they are all there: to learn. In his first few years of teaching, he was fortunate to move to the next grade level with his students to continuing building his relationships with them, and they were able to provide him with invaluable and unforgettable learning experiences. He understands the implications and obligations of this delegated task, and he takes it seriously. Concerning his students, he admitted that “you might see me sometimes as your friend, but don’t always forget that I am your teacher.” He never wants to project negativity to his students, and while he is willing to hear their voices, he wants them to remember why they are there: “I’m here to listen to you, but at the same time, you need to work in my class.” As he builds these relationships from day one, their commitment to working is never really in doubt.

### ***Advocate for Student Services***

Similar to Obadiah, David is a dedicated advocate for his students. While he recognizes that some of his students would benefit from Gifted and Talented and Special Education services, only one student he has referred has qualified for either service.

Although students do not often qualify due to a language barrier, David does not see it as such. However, this does not absolve him of continuing to provide the very best instruction possible for his students. He continues to “fight for them to get services,” as he is a “true advocate to those kids.”

### ***Growing Better Citizens***

As important as it is for his students to gain academic knowledge, David also values the importance of his students becoming better citizens of their school community. He does this by taking notice of what they do, not just in the classroom but even *outside* the classroom. “I try to see things happen at recess, happen in the cafeteria, or even greeting the librarian,” he remarked. He does not always use academics as benchmarks for success: “Some of them might not have the strength in content, but they all have strengths in one area or in other areas.” He admitted that they are often surprised when he mentions these random acts of kindness towards other students and staff members since they do not even know that he is taking notes on their actions. These positive recognitions only strengthen the relationships with his students and, in turn, help build better citizens for the entire campus community.

### ***Student-Centered Classroom***

One of the keys to David’s success has been his ability to build the classroom with students at the center. He views himself as a facilitator and guide, who is more of a listener than a speaker. A visitor to his classroom would see “kids teaching themselves,” and student groups frequently created by themselves rather than him. They are in control of their learning. If they have concerns, he will listen to them with an open mind and provide guidance, but then allow them to come up with solutions themselves.

### ***A Community of Mutual Respect***

David builds this type of classroom by creating what he called a “community of mutual respect.” To begin each year, he speaks about a metaphor of the students climbing a mountain together in their second-grade journey. They will ascend the mountain as a group and a family; they are all in this together. Everyone is in it to help each other along the way. “Every time we see one of our partners, students, or even Mr. Luna falling down, then I help him to help us stand up,” he stated. The mindset is one of getting to the top of the mountain together, for that is when they graduate second grade.

This mantra is not just a motto that is said once at the beginning of the year; it becomes ingrained into the entire classroom culture. While he motivates his students to become better in their abilities, they are not in competition with one another. They are very much concerned when one of their classmates has “fallen down,” and they are right there to help them back up. There is a pervasive culture of mutual respect in his classroom, where every individual assists each other along the journey. Although rules and boundaries are necessary for any classroom, David prefers to call them “norms.” “I don’t even call them rules; I call them norms. They are norms in my class. I don’t like that word ‘rule’ – it scares the kids immediately,” he stated. As the students and the teacher create the norms, they create that community of mutual respect critical to developing good students and even better citizens.

### ***Risk-Taking is the “Norm”***

The student-centered classroom built on mutual respect does not happen by accident. David instills it into the room's culture and climate from the very beginning, and he must be the one to model and set the standard. As they build the classroom norms

on routines and procedures, one norm that he models and instills in his students is taking risks. “I have a philosophy in my class,” he stated, “that I make mistakes as a human being, and I learn to correct those mistakes, and then we grow.” He shows his students that he is not perfect, that he makes mistakes, and that this is natural. When they understand that even their teacher will make mistakes, that he is not afraid to admit them, and that it is normal to make mistakes, his students are much more willing to take risks themselves, knowing that they have a teacher who understands and will help them through their challenges. He does not just say that he makes mistakes, he provides examples, and he uses those experiences to learn and grow as a teacher and as a human being. He tells his students, “you will always take risks. You have to feel comfortable taking those risks in my class.”

However, before students can feel comfortable taking those risks, they must know that it is safe to do so. David does this by never putting them down when they make mistakes themselves. “I never criticize their answers,” he remarked, “Always value their input. Always value, do not criticize.” As students contribute to discussions, he makes sure to value that contribution, even if they may be incorrect in their thinking. It all comes back to putting his students and their learning first: “make them feel valuable. Make them feel that they are contributing to the class. I always tell them, ‘everyone, all of your opinions are valued. All of them.’” This level of trust and openness has only led to greater risk-taking and, ultimately, greater success levels for his students as they together climb the mountain to the top of second grade.

### ***An Understanding Relationship with Parents***

While David's number one priority is helping his students succeed, he does not underestimate that their parents play a significant part in their children's success. He very succinctly stated, "without parents, this is not going to work." With that in mind, he keeps an open-door policy to his classroom to always be available for them whenever they may need assistance. When he meets with them, he has found that speaking to them in their native language helps them feel comfortable to bridge that connection from home to school. Although sometimes it is difficult to reach some of his students' parents, especially parents of students who have struggled academically or behaviorally, he understands why once he does get a hold of them. Some of them are working two jobs, and some are single parents, so he understands and empathizes with those who may be experiencing some difficult circumstances in their lives.

However, this does not mean that he allows students, or by extension, their parents, a free pass. He is candid with them on ways that they can support him at home. While this is often difficult, since many of his parents have educational experiences far different from what their children are experiencing, he reassures them by informing them of research behind these ways of learning and that ultimately, they will be best for their children in the long run. He emphasized that "it's important for them to participate, to be involved in the kids' education. I always stress that so much." By doing so, it only helps to make that connection with the home-school partnership that much stronger.

**Quick to Communicate.** Building this relationship with the parents takes a strong commitment to communication. When he receives a message from a parent, he responds immediately: "If I got it at 8:00, and I saw it, believe me, 8:05, they're getting back their phone call." He does not wait to respond to his parents because he believes it is essential



to do so quickly. The communication lines are open at all times and in ways that are most convenient for his parents, including evenings and weekends. David stated that “I am always accessible for parents whenever they need to contact me.” He must be open to communication outside of work hours because he realizes that many of his parents would not be available during the day due to their work situations or other life circumstances. Parents appreciate his willingness to continually communicate with them to provide their children with the best educational experience possible.

### ***A Quiet, Happy Team Player***

The positive relationships that he has built with his students and their parents do not end with them. David went on to say that his teammates would see him as a happy person, someone who is always smiling, but also quiet and reserved. His quiet nature does not mean that he is not a team player or is unwilling to do his share. “I love and enjoy listening to everyone, being supportive, and being there for them,” he remarked. Most importantly, he loves to share: “whatever I have, they have.” He is not one to keep things to himself. He realizes that they are all working with the same goal in mind, so sharing with him is of great importance. If a colleague has to leave for an emergency, David is quick to take the lead to bring that teacher’s students to his classroom or to split them between the grade level as needed. These types of supports that he provides to his teammates help to build those positive working relationships that are critical to a team’s success.

### ***A Positive Impact on Others***

David does not reserve his cheerful nature just for his students, parents, and team members. It extends to everyone on the entire campus. Just like his teammates, those

outside his grade level would also say that he is one who is always smiling. He does this because he has “to be the one person that maybe smiles at them and makes their day better.” Others on campus know him as “the guy who is always smiling and happy.” “I get along with everyone, librarians, custodians, PE, block teachers, everyone,” he stated. His open-door policy is not just for his parents but for anyone on the campus as well. He welcomes anyone to observe his classroom at any time. They do not need to make an appointment or let him know in advance; everyone is always welcome.

### ***Respectful Relationship with Administrators***

The positive relationships that David has developed with his teammates and colleagues extend to his administrators as well. He stated that he sees his relationships with them as very respectful, with no issues or conflicts with his supervisors. Like Obadiah, David is also not afraid to speak his mind to the administration when he stated, “if I have something to say, I will say them. I always tell them my concerns expressing what I think needs to be done.” He stressed the need to keep open the channels of communication with all of his supervisors. Although he works well with his administration, his relationship with them is very similar to Trenton’s. David is not a teacher who needs to go to them continually. He admitted that “they might say, ‘he hardly ever comes to my office.’ They might see me once or twice a year, or maybe the highest will be three times in a semester.” While his administrators will congratulate him on his data or express any concerns they observe from the data, daily check-in with each other is unnecessary.

### ***Being a Man in Elementary Education***

**A Male Role Model to His Students.** David's impact on his students comes not just from his best teaching practices or from his ability to motivate his students to heights of success they have not yet achieved. It also comes from simply being a male, and more specifically, a Latino male, in the elementary school setting. Many of his students come from homes where there is no father role model present at all, and when they have a father in the home, he is often absent due to long hours at work. These students often grow an attachment to David because of his daily presence as a male authority figure in their lives. He recounted, "sometimes I get to know those kids so well, sometimes, by mistake, like when we're working in a small group, they call me 'dad.'" He sees a considerable lack of role models and that schools need more men: "I want to be there for those students that are lacking that model." His goal is to be a good role model for all the students, not just in the current school year but also in the future.

**Different and Yet Similar to Female Colleagues.** As he is often the only male teacher on his team, David will stand out automatically due to his gender, regardless of his teaching practices and styles. He fully admits that "the kids respond differently to me than when they respond to a female colleague." Perhaps it is his voice, tone, the way he sees the kids, or how they see him, but he cannot say with certainty as to why the difference in response. The students simply work for him, even those whom his female teammates say will not work for them. One statement of David was that:

They have observed me. There's not much difference in the content, in the way that we do things, but just the simple fact of being a male role model, it has a different way of the kids probably perceiving things differently.

The question of, “why do they do this thing with me, and they don’t do it with other teachers?” is one that he is still trying to answer.

### ***New Opportunities as Teacher of the Year***

As his male Elementary Teacher of the Year colleagues also spoke of this distinction upon themselves, David is not one who enjoys the spotlight. He opined, “I’ve always liked to be under the radar, that nobody comes to me. I don’t exist. I’m over here only for my kids.” Now having this designation to his name, his previous mindset has changed. He realizes that this prestige affects not just his students but also all of the kids the school's staff members serve. “I need to be out and be more of a spokesperson to all the students in school,” he remarked. Now that he is a Teacher of the Year, the spotlight is on him, whether desired or not, and he recognizes that he has to do the very best job possible for his students and campus.

Even though he does not like being the center of attention, he concedes that this honor has taken him out of his comfort zone, helping him become a school leader. Interestingly, he stated that “even though I do a lot of sharing, I’ve never, ever taken leadership roles.” Being Teacher of the Year has helped him grow as an advocate, a volunteer on various campus committees, and as a spokesperson for his school.

### ***A Love for Teaching***

Throughout his eighteen years in education, David has worked in various districts with various teammates, administrators, and students, but one thing has stayed constant: his love to teach. “I totally enjoy teaching. It’s something that gives me intrinsic motivation,” he stated. Although he received excellent pay in his previous career, he did not feel happy or satisfied with the work. Becoming a teacher has provided him a sense

of happiness that he did not find in other occupations. Building relationships with students and the chance to see them grow and succeed have been the driving force behind his longevity in this profession. He proudly stated, “I wouldn’t change it for anything else, even though they might offer me other jobs and positions.”

However, David is not ruling out the possibility of moving out of the classroom into a leadership role, specifically as an elementary school counselor. As he is more of a listener than a speaker, he believes that such a role would fit his talents and skillsets nicely. He sees the need for bilingual counselors in schools, and it is a position that he believes he would enjoy pursuing. As his Teacher of the Year designation has helped him branch out more from his classroom to help all students in the school, this role would help him expand his influence even further on campus to be a positive male role model and leader for all students.

### ***Too Many Challenging Students Leads to Fewer Men***

When asked what he thought keeps men from pursuing a career in elementary education, David’s answers centered around the students. While gender often plays a significant role in a man’s ability to motivate students and provide a role model for them that they may be missing in their homes, gender can often act against him as well. “Many times, we get a lot of students with behavior issues, more than anyone else,” he admitted. The question then surfaces of, “why did I get so many students with behavior issues?” The answer invariably is, “you can handle them. You can work with them. They will respond to you.” While David admits this is often true, he also admits that this outcome is not automatically guaranteed. The best teachers will rise to the challenge, but in the end,

they are human too, and there is a limit to the number of challenging behaviors they can take on at one time.

### ***A Rewarding Career***

Nevertheless, such a challenge should not discourage men from pursuing this “beautiful career,” as David put it. His one major piece of advice for men who wish to enter into elementary education is to build relationships. If they take the time upfront to build those strong relationships with their students and get to know them, “the outcomes of the responses, in the long run, will be very effective,” he noted. Kids will respond to those with whom they have made connections, which will help eliminate many of the behavior issues that would occur without such relationships. David stated, “I noticed that all of them are doing exactly what I asked them to do, and I contribute that to the relationship that I build at the beginning of the year.” David has made a significant impact on his elementary campus as a male Latino teacher, and he looks forward to continuing to do so in the years to come.

### **Principal 3: Lauren**

Unlike Lucy, who moved Trenton into a math interventionist role for the school, David’s principal, Lauren, has no intention of moving him from his current grade level. She has seen the incredible impact that he has had with his students and the strong, cohesive unit that his grade level team comprises. The focus of her answers centered more on David’s race than his gender, as the critical component to his success as an educator. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on June 17, 2020, and it lasted approximately 49 minutes.

### ***A Positive Influence in the Classroom***

**A Master Teacher.** David utilizes many best practices in his classroom to help his students gain academic success. Students who are English Learners need wait time to process questions and form their answers, and David provides wait time that is “impeccable.” His manner of asking questions and giving them time to think through their answers helps his students feel successful even when they may not have the right answer or even an answer at all. “The kids don’t realize, ‘Oh, it’s not the right answer,’ because he doesn’t put them down,” Lauren noted. He makes them think about the question, and because of his patience, understanding, and encouragement, they eventually come up with the right answer. As Lauren pointed out, this best practice is instinctive and unique to David:

Not a lot of people can do that. You know a lot of people say, ‘no, that’s not the right answer. Who wants to help him out?’ and he’s never done that. He makes all of his kids think they’re smart, and that’s why they perform for him because he instills that confidence in them. If you were to ask him, ‘how do you do that?’ he doesn’t know how because it’s just natural.

While he is not a boisterous or loud teacher, work is always happening in his classroom, with many student discussions.

David is very much a growth-mindset teacher, one who instills that sense of confidence in his students to become smarter and more capable in their academic abilities. Lauren stated that “he makes sure, as a second-grade teacher, that he’s setting them up for success, to love education, and to be lifelong learners.” He is an educator who makes sure that he has everything he needs for his students. She admits that if she moved him to fourth grade, he would probably be just as successful with the kids, but she

believes that he makes a more significant impact on younger students. He is an exemplar for other teachers, especially bilingual teachers, modeling how to set high expectations for his students and provide ways to reach those expectations to be successful. She noted that his walls are by no means bare and that his students can learn as much from what is on the walls that they can from him.

**Personal Bilingual Learning Experiences.** The success that David has had with his students in learning another language stems from his personal experiences in learning the English language himself. “He takes a lot of pride in being a bilingual teacher because he was a bilingual student himself,” Lauren stated. He has lived through this experience, and he understands the pressures that the students will face throughout their entire educational career. Knowing this great responsibility before him, he is emphatic that his students will always speak English while in the classroom.

Although his classroom is composed of students whose first language is not English, they quickly become fluent in the language because that is what he expects of them. He wants to ensure that they have a solid foundation and are genuinely fluent when leaving his classroom. Lauren recalled a teacher whom she referred to observe David in the classroom to understand that students, and the teacher, must speak English in class to be successful with the language. David’s exit rate from the bilingual program is always high because of this consistent practice and the English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies he expertly incorporates to help his students learn another language.

Unlike other teachers whom Lauren has had to have conversations with over the Spanish spoken in upper-level classrooms, this is not a concern with David. She stated that he only speaks Spanish “when he needs to and only sporadically because it doesn’t



benefit the students later on.” These personal experiences in learning another language himself inspire David to provide these experiences for his young students to leave his classroom fluent in the English language.

**A Counselor in the Classroom.** As David mentioned in discussing his future aspirations, Lauren also sees him as a counselor for his students. Although that is not an official title, he is there for his students to discuss anything concerning them. He has a great way of listening to their concerns and being nonjudgmental in hearing what they have to say. David can make his students feel comfortable enough to talk to him about their school lives or even their home lives as necessary.

**Creating a Community.** Just as David alluded to, Lauren sees his classroom as one of a community. “He’s great with getting the students to feel comfortable in the classroom,” and that “they want to be there,” she stated. He provides his students with an open classroom environment for speaking their minds and thinking for themselves. His classroom is one of collaboration, pairing, sharing, and conversing. David ensures that his students are speaking to one another in English to improve their language proficiency skills. She mentioned that there is “no glass ceiling for them.” They can attain the highest levels of success because of his encouragement and creation of an environment conducive to student achievement. He and his students are family, and they are all in it together to achieve their academic goals. As a result, his former students’ parents speak highly of the impact that he has made on their children.

***Parent Communication is a Priority***

Similar to his Teacher of the Year colleagues, David is an expert communicator with his parents. Lauren reiterated that he has excellent relationships with them, and it is

due, primarily in part, to the level of communication that he holds with them. She stated that she has never received any concerns about him not communicating with his parents. He always wants to ensure that they are receiving communication from the school, if such messages went out in Spanish, and if she needs him to translate for her. “He wants to make sure that his parents are informed,” she stated, and he goes to great lengths to make sure that his parents receive the level of communication from the school that they deserve.

### *A Helpful Team Player*

David has not only built his classroom into one of collaboration with his students, but he has also developed these relationships with his teammates as well. “I don’t think anybody has any concerns with him not being a team player,” Lauren mentioned. He is always willing to assist anyone who needs help, especially new teachers on the campus. Although he is not an official mentor to these teachers, he still lends his expertise and a listening ear to all who come to him for assistance.

With his teaching capabilities and positive reputation on the campus, he has taken a position on the “Teachers Observing Teachers” committee. This group comprises teachers who wish to observe other teachers in classrooms and provide non-appraiser, informal feedback. While many teachers are often uncomfortable critiquing their peers, she appreciates that he simply wants teachers to do justice for their kids and do what is best for their students. She mentioned that he was always complimentary in his observation notes, and even though he may offer some suggestions or questions for teachers to think about, it was never anything designed to deflate the teacher. “I don’t think he could tell somebody that they were doing something wrong unless they were

hurting a student. That's just not his style," Lauren noted. His constructive, non-critical feedback to teachers allows him to build even stronger relationships with not only his teammates but other colleagues outside his grade level as well. He is respectful and professional with his coworkers, which has led to a positive reputation throughout the campus.

### ***Respectful to Administration***

David is an educator who does not need micromanaging. He can work very well independently without the need for a supervisor to push him along to get started. Lauren described her relationship with him as "very formalized." She tries to keep a casual atmosphere with her staff, allowing them to call her by her first name, but David cannot bring himself to do that. He respects her not only as a person but as the principal and leader of the school. While she wonders if this will change over time as they come to know each other better, she respects his desire to address her formally as he is respectful of all administrators and their roles. Although she has not yet seen him take the initiative to start any school programs, she knows that he will do whatever the leaders ask of him because he respects his supervisors and the positions that they hold.

### ***Influence on the Campus***

**Impact as a Latino Male Teacher on Other Teachers.** Though David has made a significant impact on his students' lives as a Latino male teacher, he has also influenced other teachers. Lauren discussed a situation where she moved a male teacher, who struggled in his teaching abilities, to be David's teaching partner. She decided this because she recognizes that David is "able to capture his students and get results from them." She not only depends on the other male teacher to watch and learn from David,

but she needs David to be a leader to his partner because he is also male. She stated that “one of the things I want him to learn from David is to have high expectations for our bilingual students.” Learning from David’s modeling will help him develop a more positive, asset-based mindset for his students.

David is not only a beneficial and hardworking role model for the male teachers, but he is also a role model for all of the teachers on the campus. Like Joelle’s comments regarding Obadiah, David is also a teacher who is approached by and helps more teachers than Lauren knows. “He’s a go-to person for a lot of teachers,” Lauren stated. “A lot of the teachers who have TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System) questions, or struggle with their ESL students, they go to him for advice.” Many will even observe him in the classroom and see firsthand how he interacts with and teaches his students. “I love his teaching style and his teaching practices, so I often take people to watch him,” said Lauren. They do not even need to make an appointment; his open-door policy is for anyone who wants to observe his classroom. Lauren frankly stated, “He’s that confident in his ability to teach,” but this is not an indication of arrogance by any means. He just wants to help others become better teachers for their students.

**A Presence for Students and Parents.** While David’s students have benefitted from his teaching and role modeling, his classroom does not hold a monopoly on his influence. His impact expands outside his classroom walls to all the students in the school. “We’re 60% Hispanic with our demographics,” Lauren reported, “and it’s important that the students, even if they’re not in his class, see him in the hallways or at recess to know that they can aspire to be like him.” This Latino representation as a

teacher for students is also helpful for parents. As the campus is mostly Latino in the student population, it benefits the school when the campus hosts parent events, and the parents can see that they have representation, not just for Latino teachers, but also for a male Latino teacher.

**Keep it Positive.** Perhaps above all else, David is simply a positive person, one who is always smiling and always has a “sunny disposition.” “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him upset,” Lauren admitted. “That’s just not his character; that’s not his nature.” If she ever has bad news to share, he always finds something positive about it. This type of positivity is infectious, and it helps to build up not only his students but everyone throughout the campus.

***A Very Humble and Worthy “Teacher of the Year”***

Noting the range of his positive qualities, both a teacher and as a person, David was a very worthy recipient of Teacher of the Year. His attendance, punctuality, passion for his students, and levels of preparation shine as an educator who has represented his campus well. He sets an excellent example for his students and is a positive role model for everyone in the school. Still, he is another very humble and modest male Elementary Teacher of the Year. As Lauren noted, he would be the first to say, “Why did you pick me? I’m no different than anyone else. I’m not doing anything special. I’m just doing what I love.”

Although she is sure he appreciated that his hard work was recognized, she also imagines that he is happy that someone else is now Teacher of the Year and can go back to being David. “He’s here for his kids. “He’s not here for himself to get that recognition,” she mentioned. He does not see this title as one that allows him any

bragging rights with his peers. He will continue to do the same things that he has always done and will continue to be the teacher that his students deserve regardless of recognition.

### ***The Future for David***

David is an educator who is so attuned to his kids that he may not want to leave the classroom environment. Even though he mentioned that he aspires to be a school counselor, this role would still involve working more with students than adults. Lauren does not envision him as an IS, one who would coach the teachers in their practices, since “he is very mindful of people’s feelings. Unless somebody is truly hurting a student, he’s not going to correct anyone.” Due to his personality and love of students, she sees him making more of an impact in the classroom than in a leadership or administrative role working intensely with adults. However, if he ever desires a role outside of the classroom, she will help him grow in whatever capacity he desired.

### ***A Lack of Men Due to Pay and Stereotypes***

In asking for her principal perspective on what keeps men from entering into elementary education, Lauren’s first response was emphatic: “the pay. I think it’s pay, and it doesn’t matter the race of the man, it’s pay.” She followed up this with an additional reason: the stereotypes. She elaborated:

I have to caution our staff to never be in a room alone with the kids. Sometimes the kids don’t tell the truth, or what have you, for whatever reason, so who needs that headache? So I think that’s a detriment to having strong male role models in elementary.

She mentioned that it is unfortunate since there are honorable and genuine men who want what is best for kids, but the appearance of impropriety and the low pay of the profession prevent otherwise very qualified men from taking the elementary education path.

### ***Searching for Male Elementary School Teachers***

Due to the lack of men applying for elementary education positions, Lauren often has difficulty acquiring male teachers for her campus. “I’m certainly looking for males to join our staff, but there are not a lot of applicants right now,” she stated. While she wants to have another male on the staff, she realizes that she needs to be equitable and hire for the school's best fit. She admitted that she would not hire a male just because they are male, but she also wants to mirror her staff demographics with her student demographics as much as possible. Despite the lack of men in elementary education, she is thankful for men like David, who have devoted their careers to the youngest students and set such good examples not just for them but also for all staff members on the campus.

### **Parent 3: Jessica**

Although he only spent a short amount of time in his class, David influenced Jessica’s son, Matthew, in a very positive way. Throughout the interview, she had nothing but positive comments about him and his abilities to not only teach effectively but for his ability to encourage and uplift her son even in such a limited time together. I conducted this interview through a Zoom meeting on July 24, 2020, and it lasted approximately 15 minutes.

### ***Uncertain at First***

Although face-to-face instruction was cut short for everyone in the district, Matthew was with David an even shorter amount of time due to switching to David’s

class halfway through the year. Jessica mentioned that she was very nervous and afraid of the change for her son since he has a speech delay and was unsure how he would tolerate the move. She expressed her concerns to David regarding his speech difficulties, but he assured her that he would do everything he could to help him. After a short time in the new classroom, Jessica asked Matthew if he was okay with the change, and he mentioned that he wanted to stay with David and not return to his former class.

### ***Positive Relationships with Parents***

This desire to help a student in whatever he needed, no matter how long he had with him, greatly impressed Jessica and her husband. Not only was David able to make connections with his students, but he also built positive relationships with the parents. “He was always there for us,” Jessica commented. He made sure to let them know that they could call him at any time if they had any questions or concerns about their child. At times, both Jessica and her husband would volunteer their time at the school and noted that David was always very friendly, helpful, and easy to approach during their interactions together. These positive encounters helped to allay any fears regarding her son's change to a new classroom with a new teacher.

### ***A Lasting Impression***

Despite the brief amount of time that Matthew and his family spent with him, David made a significant impact and impression on their lives. “He took us like we were there the first day of school,” Jessica stated. She went on to say that she was upset that Matthew was not with David from the beginning of the school year, as he has had a significant influence in his life. As testimony to his Teacher of the Year status, this showed his willingness to help all students at all times and to do everything in his power



to help them succeed no matter the time constraints. She made an insightful comment saying, “we know that the teacher’s attitude is the key.” While his ability to teach is commendable, she was even more impressed by how he approached the helping of her son to ensure that he was supported both academically and emotionally.

### **Follow-Up Interviews**

#### ***Teacher Commonality: A Lack of a Degree in Education***

**Teacher Reflections.** Although all four teachers involved in the study had differences in their number of teaching years, grade levels, subjects, and current roles on their campuses, they all had one commonality: an absence of a degree in education and no prior student teaching experience. Even without formal training in education, these teachers have achieved success levels in their classrooms in various ways. David mentioned that a critical factor to his success today can be attributed to his mentor’s support in his first teaching year. His mentor helped him through feedback on his teaching and took him to observe teachers to gain insights into their teaching practices. Lacking a degree in education or student teaching experience weighed on Trenton in his first year. “I felt like I had to almost overcompensate for that lack of education,” he remarked. Over time, however, he learned from other teachers that studying education does not necessarily prepare you for the real world of education. Obadiah was also surprised about this common element but stated that a teacher learns how to teach through an ACP.

**Principal Reflections.** As these male teachers have earned Teacher of the Year designations, the principals expressed their surprise over the teachers’ lack of a degree in education. Although Lauren appreciates the contributions that ACP teachers can bring to

a campus, she admits that some campus leaders do not consider such professionals for their schools. She finds this way of thinking “unfortunate” because “people who didn’t go through the traditional route of elementary education and college come with a different skillset and different perspectives.”

Interestingly, Lucy's thoughts mirrored those of Trenton when she mentioned, “I think candidates that don’t have student teaching have a lot of difficulty in the beginning, and it’s a huge hurdle to jump.” However, she also remarked that it takes a special kind of person to teach successfully without this experience. Joelle complimented this sentiment by saying, “It’s really hard to teach somebody how to be a teacher. It’s either in their heart, or it’s not. No amount of student teaching can teach that. You can’t teach heart.” She did express a disappointment that ACPs do not offer student teaching in their programs since this element can be the determining factor between a successful and unsuccessful first year of teaching for an educator.

**Parent Reflections.** Jessica also mentioned that this profession must be something that is one’s heart to be successful. Expounding on the element of student teaching, Mary believes that this experience “allows the teachers to pick up tips and tricks from seasoned teachers.” Merely having a degree in education “does not define a person and how well they will be able to teach others,” Dahlia noted.

***Principal Commonality: Success is Not Dependent on Gender***

**Teacher Reflections.** The idea that gender does not play a significant factor in success in the principals' eyes was not surprising to the teachers. Both Obadiah and Trenton mentioned that some students need male father figures in their lives and that men

could be good role models for them, but gender alone does not a good teacher make.

Trenton expanded on this by saying:

I think a good teacher is just a good teacher. It doesn't matter if you're male or female as long as you have really great classroom management and as long as you have a really great rapport with your students.

Echoing what the principals said, David remarked that, "Either you have that passion to teach, or you don't. It's innate; it's in your heart."

**Principal Reflections.** While there was no denying the positive impact and success that each of their male Teachers of the Year has had on their campuses, none of them could say definitively that their success was explicitly due to their gender. While Joelle admitted that Obadiah's gender might affect some students, she could not say that his gender played a role in this Teacher of the Year distinction any more than his race. She also mentioned that men, especially if they are the sole breadwinner for their family, will often bypass the elementary environment for middle and high school positions to subsidize their teaching with coaching. Although with no intention to overgeneralize, Lucy mentioned that both male and female teachers tend to have specific qualities that can be both positive and negative. She mentioned:

Women tend to be a little more nurturing, which is a great thing, but it can also be a negative thing. Men tend to be more black and white, a little less emotional.

That can be a very positive thing, but it can also be a negative thing.

Lucy also recognizes the value of having gender diversity on a campus, which leads to various perspectives that balance each other out. Likewise, while not linking David's

success strictly to his gender, Lauren finds value in representing her school with male teachers who desire to teach at the elementary level.

**Parent Reflections.** Espousing the benefits that a male teacher can bring to the classroom, Mary believes that “men teachers can be better in some cases than women as they hold a stronger presence in the classroom.” She also believes that more men would enter elementary education were it not for the potential to be accused of impropriety with children. On the other hand, Jessica believes that the gender of the teacher is irrelevant, and regardless of one’s gender, “teaching is not for everybody,” and that “not all teachers have the heart to be them.” Dahlia noted that the teacher’s gender will not necessarily matter as to their effectiveness and that it is essential for schools to have a diversity of teachers, with various strengths, on its staff.

***Parent Commonality: Communication is the Key***

**Teacher Reflections.** The importance of keeping an open line of communication with his students’ parents is essential for David. He described this partnership as a triangle that is composed of the teacher, student, and parent. “If one of those corners is missing, there’s not going to be a success in the kid,” he admitted. His contract hours do not limit communication lines; he is even available evenings and weekends for his families whenever they need assistance. While Trenton also does not view contacting his parents outside of contract hours to be a problem, he also recognizes that his life situation is different from that of his colleagues since he is neither married nor has children as obligations outside of school. Obadiah spoke of an experience early in his career that has stuck with him for many years. When his son was in elementary school, he returned a call from his child’s teacher after hours, and her response was less than ideal. She thanked

him for returning her call, but she did not want him to call after a particular time. He was shocked by this response because he is more than willing to give out his cell phone number and email to his parents so that “they can reach me when they need to.”

**Principal Reflections.** Each of the principals recognized that what makes these specific men Teachers of the Year is the above and beyond communication level that they engage in with their students’ parents. The Teacher of the Year designation is “not just about the bells and whistles,” It is about meeting kids and parents where they are, and a characteristic of a Teacher of the Year is how they communicate,” Joelle remarked. Lucy mentioned that it is better to over-communicate with others than not. Lauren recognizes that quality, consistent communication from the teacher to his parents is “the best way to increase the trustworthiness that the parents have with you as a teacher.”

**Parent Reflections.** All three parent participants emphasized the same appreciation for the level of communication they had with the teachers. While some teachers are hesitant to provide their cell phone numbers to their parents, this was not the case with the teachers in this study. Every parent was thankful that their child’s teacher was willing to keep open the line of personal communication to strengthen the home-school partnership. Jessica remarked that no other teacher has ever provided their cell phone number to her, which meant a lot to her, knowing that David was willing to talk to her at times that were convenient for her to discuss her son’s progress. Similarly, Mary was appreciative that Trenton was also willing to provide his cell phone number if she ever needed to reach him concerning her granddaughter’s progress. “The ultimate goal, between both [teacher and parent],” Dahlia stated, “is to get that student to the best level that we both can, and working as a team is always going to make them better.”

### ***Participant-Specific Follow-Up Interview Reflections***

In addition to the three identical questions posed to each individual regarding a specific theme discovered with each group of participants, I also asked an individual-specific question based on the first conversation with each participant. These questions allowed me to ask for clarification and for the participants to expand on their answers and comments. As Eric was the pilot teacher interview, I did not conduct a follow-up interview with him.

**Trenton.** When Trenton experienced a difficult situation with his student and his student's parents, he made it through such a challenging situation with his assistant principal's help. Due to the seriousness of the situation and potential damaging repercussions, he felt she treated him as she would have treated a female teacher. He appreciated her willingness to take him to a private room to discuss the parent complaint, and he especially appreciated her non-accusatory manner with him. He expressed what transpired and his subsequent concern, which the administrator ultimately handled to appease the parents and alleviate the concern. Although he had not committed any infraction, such a complaint could have led to extraordinarily damaging consequences, so having an administrator trust him and have his best interests at heart was comforting to Trenton in this scenario.

**Lucy.** Moving Trenton from the classroom to the math coach role has led to both positive and negative consequences for his campus. While Trenton can now help a broader range of students across grade levels, thereby assisting teachers in the process, there was a void left on his team that needed to be filled by an inexperienced teacher. However, Lucy recognizes that moving him to this new role has given him the ability to

expand his influence and expertise throughout the building. Providing support from the administrative level will help the new teacher to the grade level adjust and assist Trenton as he works to broaden his influence beyond just his classroom.

**Mary.** In our first interview together, Mary mentioned that Trenton is an “old school teacher.” Expounding on this statement, she mentioned that “he cares about his students, he wants the students to learn, and will go out of his way to ensure that he does what he can to make sure that the children are learning.” She remarked that he is not merely doing this job for a paycheck; he truly wants to make a difference in his students' lives.

**Obadiah.** Although there is a percentage imbalance between male and female educators in elementary school settings, Obadiah believes that more males would be found in elementary schools if more men were interested in working with younger children. He remarked that “many times, it is easier for a person to teach students that are already at different cognitive levels.” He previously stated that many men do not have the quality per se to work in elementary education due to a lack of patience for teaching at this level. As was mentioned by several others, Obadiah states that this profession is either something you are inclined to do or not.

**Joelle.** Recognizing the difference in percentages between male and female elementary educators, Joelle would like to employ more men on her campus, but she ultimately wants the best person for her students, regardless of their gender. However, if the best-fit candidate is also a male, it is a bonus. “I would love to have more men on campus,” she remarked, “because I think they [the students] like having those role models.” When reviewing applications for positions on her campus, she does not look

exclusively for males to hire; she wants the best teacher for those children. She wants more teachers like Obadiah.

**Dahlia.** Although Dahlia was initially nervous about her son being in a male teacher's classroom, her fears and uneasiness dissipated upon seeing Obadiah get to eye level to converse with her child. He did not just see her son as another student but also as a person he was willing to connect with to build a positive relationship. Students are often nervous about entering into a classroom for the first time, but this eye contact with the students at their level helps to break the ice and show them that Obadiah truly cares about all of his students.

**David.** One of David's interesting comments in the initial interview was the idea that there was not much difference in how he and his female colleagues teach their students. He elaborated on this by saying that working with his partner teacher to be consistent with procedures, lines of communication, and areas to cross the curriculum helps with consistency between the classes.

**Lauren.** While Lauren confidently stated that pay and accusations keep men from entering elementary education, she could not definitively state why even fewer men enter primary education.

**Jessica.** Due to the very positive impact that David has had on her son in such a short time, Jessica was disappointed that Matthew was not with David from the beginning of the school year. She is thankful for all of the teachers that he has had, but she is most thankful for how David took Matthew in even at mid-year to work with him as much as he could.

### **Summary and Transition to Chapter Five**



In relation to research question one regarding how male Elementary Teachers of the Year describe the elements to their success in the elementary school setting, I noted the following findings. Despite the range of years in education, grade levels, subjects, and schools, every teacher found his education path through an Alternative Certification Program. Their initial ventures into higher education did not begin with education, but all of their paths led them to the teaching profession with positive and significant results. The lack of a university degree in education did not hinder their effectiveness as a classroom teacher. Instead, it is their love of young children and a desire to be positive role models for their students, their parents, and their colleagues that have earned them a prestigious district distinction and the respect and admiration of those whom they work with and for.

While each teacher has enjoyed a level of success as an elementary educator, only Eric, the pilot interviewee, has aspirations to become an administrator – assistant principal or principal – while the other participants prefer to stay in the classroom or as an instructional coach. Obadiah spoke explicitly about how he wants to become the best teachers he can be for his students, finding ways to improve his craft every year. All teachers spoke to the support they have received from administrators as one reason they have seen success at this particular educational level.

In relation to research question two regarding how principals describe the roles of their male Elementary Teachers of the Year in the elementary school setting, I noted the following findings. As the teachers' supervisors, each of the principals mentioned that these educators' qualities could not be quantified or explain their elementary level successes. Every principal discussed how each of their teachers has innate personality

traits and characteristics that characterize them as effective educators, including love for students, professionalism, consistent communication with parents, and a will to learn and grow in their craft. Lucy noted that Trenton's ability to relate to teachers and empathize with what they experience in the classroom has helped him build strong connections and relationships with the math teachers throughout the campus.

In relation to research question three regarding how parents describe their children's teacher's characteristics as an Elementary Teacher of the year, I noted the following findings. All three parents emphasized their appreciation for the teacher's level of communication with them. Every teacher was willing and able to go above and beyond in communicating with them and in various ways that met their personal needs. This included being available through phone calls, texts, emails, and hours outside the school day, including before and after school. This availability ensured that they, as parents, could reach their child's teacher in ways that were convenient for them. This helped to strengthen their respect for the teacher and build a strong, cohesive home-school partnership. Trenton even communicated with his student, Jane, even after she was no longer in his classroom. Such dedication to his student made a significant impression on Jane's grandmother, Mary. Both Obadiah and David's willingness to speak Spanish to parents helped their parents who felt more comfortable in speaking this language than English helped them, in turn, to feel more comfortable in conversing with their child's teacher.

The final chapter will speak to the research questions that guided this study on the effects, practices, and impact of these teachers on their students, staff, and parents. The chapter will also address insights from the literature review, how this study adds to the

research base, potential future research needs based on the study's findings or any information not found within the study, and implications for current practice.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

Although men who enter elementary education may face hardships and struggles with this decision, this study adds to the existing literature by focusing on male teachers' quality aspects rather than repeating the struggles and stereotypes that they may face in their educational settings. By doing so, this research aimed to determine perspectives and practices that have helped male teachers become successful in the elementary environment, enlightening their fellow male colleagues and the administrators who hire and appraise them. In this final chapter, I will discuss the results from chapter IV, implications for further research, implications for practice and recommendations in education, a relationship of the results to the theoretical framework, limitations of the study, and a final summary and conclusion.

The three research questions that I utilized to guide this study looked at the elements, roles, and characteristics of the male teacher participants as Elementary Teachers of the year. Although the number of eligible teacher participants was limited, limiting the number of principal and parent participants, I gained significant insight into the research questions' potential answers.

### **Summary of Insights to Research Questions**

#### ***Research Question One***

Throughout the teacher interviews, several elements to their levels of success began to emerge. All four teachers spoke of their surprise when receiving the Teacher of the Year honor. These teachers do not work as hard as they do because of a desire to receive an extrinsic reward from their peers; they do so for the intrinsic reward of being a

positive influence in their students' academic and social lives. Both Obadiah and David mentioned explicitly that they “don’t like to be in the spotlight,” and Trenton remarked, “that whole experience was really humbling.” Eric provided a similar sentiment when he stated, “I wasn’t trying to better myself with anyone else; I wasn’t trying to compete; I was just doing what was best for kids.” While not seeking out this recognition, this personality trait was just one reason why they received the honor in the first place.

Obadiah’s commitment to his students is seen in his statement, “I just need to focus on being there, a hundred percent of the time for my kiddos.” As he is not looking to move into a coaching role or administrative position, his focus is on being the very best teacher for his students. This, coincidentally, helps him to grow in his craft and continue to be a successful educator.

### ***Research Question Two***

Through interviewing the principals of male Elementary Teachers of the Year, I gained insight into their roles and impact on their respective campuses. While several studies in the literature review mentioned that there is not necessarily a need for men at the elementary level (Driessen, 2007; Mallozzi & Galman, 2014; Smith, 2004), each of the principals noted how these men, in particular, have positively impacted and influenced their students, parents, and colleagues at their schools. Joelle remarked that Obadiah’s “male influence is so positive,” and that often her students have a “mother influence, but they’re lacking that male influence.” His ability to connect with his students and parents as a Latino male has helped him be a leader in many areas.

Lucy also mentioned that Trenton’s presence on her campus is vital since “having a male perspective is valuable.” Since Trenton is no longer exclusively in one classroom,

his influence has expanded to the rest of the school. Lucy reiterated that “having males like him on staff, sometimes it's great, because the kids that are males, it's nice to see someone that is like you in that leadership role.” She recognized his ability as an excellent math teacher for his students and has extended his influence beyond his classroom.

In speaking to David’s growth as an educator, Lauren noted that she is “depending on him to be a leader because he is male.” Having the title of Teacher of the Year leads itself to a recognition that he did not want but nevertheless has received. She recognizes his influence and has pushed him outside of his comfort zone to become more of a campus leader.

### ***Research Question Three***

Providing a unique perspective on the teachers was the parents of the teachers’ students. Parents of elementary-aged children are often still involved in the students' day-to-day activities, so hearing their voices was essential to understanding the impact these male Teachers of the Year and their characteristics have had on their children. Each parent spoke to the teachers as master communicators. While each of the teachers was available through various methods and times convenient for the parents, he did not relegate their communication to academics. Dahlia mentioned that at the outset of the school buildings' closure, Obadiah made it a point to check on them “not only in school but overall, are we okay? So I really appreciated him for doing it.”

Both Mary and Dahlia also spoke to Trenton and Obadiah's determination, respectively, to do whatever it took to help their children. Dahlia mentioned that Obadiah “didn’t want to leave my son behind,” regarding his academic abilities at the school

buildings' closure with two and a half months left in the school year. Mary found confidence in Trenton when she stated, "I felt like she was falling behind, and he told me not to worry about it, that he would be pulling her for math tutoring." These teachers did not simply forget about their students after they left their classes; they continued to check in on them and make sure that they still had what they needed to succeed in subsequent grade levels.

### **Discussion of Participant Commonalities**

I discovered three main commonalities from the interviews, one for each of the three participant groups: (1) Every teacher participant lacked a degree in education or student teaching experience, (2) The principals all reported their belief that there is not an exclusive link between the teacher's gender and his success, and (3) The parents all expressed an appreciation for the teacher's level of communication. While other themes manifested themselves throughout the interviews, these three similarities were the most commonly mentioned by each participant in the teacher, principal, and parent groups.

While each teacher differed in their current professional careers, levels of experience, and work backgrounds, they all lacked a formal university degree in education and received their teaching certificates through Alternative Certification Programs. Even without a formalized education in studying education or the opportunity to work as a student teacher to gain classroom experience, each of these men has found success in not only education itself, but specifically elementary education. This discovery surprised both the principals and parents, realizing that they have achieved success in their careers despite not obtaining an education degree. However, they also noted that just having an education in teaching will not automatically make someone a great teacher.

In this study, the three principals reporting on the effects that their male Teachers of the Year have had on their campuses stated that they could not definitively say that their gender was the leading cause for their success. They expressed their beliefs that their qualities and characteristics were innate within them, without attributing these successes as exclusively due to being male. They realize that men can certainly have a lasting influence on staff, students, and parents due to the low numbers of these individuals in elementary education.

Quality communication from the teachers was the key to developing a successful home-school partnership between the teachers and the parents. Their willingness to provide their cell phone numbers made a significant impression on their parents. They mentioned their appreciation for this contact information and the teacher's willingness to be contacted during evenings and weekends.

### **Discussion of Results**

One insight that I gained from the participant interviews was realizing that the only teacher participant who had a prior background in working with children is also the only one who desires an administrator role as an assistant principal. Eric not only has prior experience working with children at a YMCA, but he was also the only teacher to mention another teacher in his past who had a significant influence in his decision to become a teacher himself. Although he has these prior experiences, his preferences have been to teach the older students and eventually move to an administrator position, mirroring Skelton's (2012) study, which saw men teaching older students before moving into a role of authority. Even though male elementary teachers often have previous experiences working with younger children before graduating high school (Brookhart &



Loadman, 1996), only Eric, out of this study's teacher participants, had such an experience.

As Nickerson et al. (2018) found, these teachers have been successful due to continually recognizing their capacity and potential to improve their craft. While not looking to become assistant principals or principals in the future, both Trenton and David are still open to the possibility of moving into an instructional specialist or counselor role, respectively. Even though Obadiah has no desire to leave the classroom, he continues to improve in his learning by taking courses outside of district requirements that help him grow as a classroom educator. Although each of these teachers plays slightly different roles on their campuses, their ability to lead students and staff members has played a role in their success as male elementary school teachers.

### ***Influence as Men in Elementary Education***

With studies that have spoken to the effects that an absence of a father in a home can have on students in the school (Parr et al., 2008; Peterson, 2014), Joelle also noted this phenomenon in her school. Since many of her campus's students come from homes where only a mother is present, they do not have a stable, positive adult male presence in their lives. While she does not discount the impact and necessity of mothers in the home, she recognizes that students miss out when missing a male role model in their daily lives.

Having male teachers of various ethnicities on a school staff can significantly provide students with relatable role models. As Scott (2016) has suggested, Eric recognizes that his presence in an elementary school can help other African American students, in particular, see that they can pursue higher education and become teachers like him should they so choose. Such a positive presence can also be provided by Latino

teachers for their Latino students as well. Lauren noted that with most of her school as Latino, David could influence Latino students throughout the building, not just in his classroom, to aspire to become positive members of society just like him.

Both Joelle and Lauren discussed that the low wages for elementary teachers often keep men from pursuing a career in this environment, mirroring Martino's (2008) findings. While middle school and high school classroom teacher positions pay the same in this district, the lure of coaching sports not only appeals more to men in general, but they can also subsidize their pay with stipends that are not available at the elementary level. However, elementary administrative positions offer an increase in salary and levels of prestige, which have attracted Eric to this potential route in his career.

Just as Driessen (2007) found no importance of a teacher's gender on their students, each of the three principals could not speak to the teacher's gender as the sole factor to his success levels. They recognize that men in elementary education can stand out positively and have a lasting impact on the campus and its stakeholders. However, the principals recognized the link between the teachers' successes and the personality characteristics that simply make for quality educators.

### ***Difficulties Encountered as Male Elementary Teachers***

Eric has discovered what Allen (1994) spoke of regarding the difficulty male elementary teachers often face when educating students in stereotypical ways. He admitted that relating to them in caring and comforting ways has been challenging for him over the years. However, now that he has a child of his own, he can better understand how to nurture and care for his students and help them grow in their academic abilities and behavioral and emotional abilities (Parr et al., 2008). One could speculate that

Trenton experienced the concern he received from the parents due to being unmarried with no children, as Allen (1994) noted, but Trenton cannot verify this with any certainty.

Parr and Gosse (2011) have stated that men understand their vulnerability in the elementary school environment, and they take precautions to not engage in any physical contact with students that others could negatively misconstrue. Trenton, recognizing that he is different as a man in elementary, is always cautious about his image with his students. While he does not completely distance himself from them, he keeps the physical contact to a bare minimum to not run the risk of being accused of impropriety (Lovett, 2014). Such signs of acceptable affection to students appear to be restricted exclusively to females as Joelle noted a difference between what is acceptable for women and what is not acceptable for men (Allan, 1994; Parr and Gosse, 2011). Even these men who are highly respected by their colleagues and administrators are still cognizant of their vulnerability around students.

Though some view men who enter elementary education with suspicion about their motives behind such a career choice, they can frequently be viewed as rescuers for students who exhibit behavioral difficulties (Lara & Franquiz, 2015; Parr & Gosse, 2011). This presence can lead administrators to load their classes with numerous students who struggle behaviorally. Both Eric and David admitted that this is not just challenging but discouraging, knowing that if their teaching partner is female (as is often the case), she will have to contend with these numerous behavior issues for half of the day as well. David noted that great teachers could take on several challenging students, but doing so can still provide a strain on one's teaching abilities, no matter the years of experience or level of expertise.

Although Eric encountered parents over the years who initially requested a move for their child to a female teacher's classroom, they soon retracted their request after learning from the Assistant Principals about Eric's quality teaching abilities. He did not have to experience moving his students to a female teacher, as Johnson et al. (2010) found for a teacher in their study. Joelle mentioned that she had not received such concerns about Obadiah or any male teachers on her campus.

### **Implications for Further Research**

As this study looked at a limited number of teachers, a recommendation for future research would be to increase the number of male Elementary Teacher of the Year participants. This data will help determine if the similarities exist between these teachers and other Teachers of the Year. Since the number of district male Teachers of the Year at the elementary level are few, another option would be to study male teachers who have earned a different district designation, such as a model teacher. To become a model teacher for the district, they are first nominated by their principal for their outstanding teaching abilities in a particular subject. These nominations go to the appropriate curriculum departments at the district level, which leads to observations by curriculum personnel to determine if the teacher exhibits the qualities of a model teacher for the district. Studying men who have earned the distinction of model teacher may not only provide for a more significant number of participants but also provide for research into male elementary teachers who have also been successful in their careers but with a different designation.

Future research could also compare male Teachers of the Year to female Teachers of the Year to determine if similarities exist between them. As the principals noted that

their teachers' successes could be attributed to their innate abilities rather than their gender, studying female Teachers of the Year may provide insight into any differences between female teachers and their teaching styles and practices. Studying female Teachers of the Year would also yield a larger sample of participants as over 94% of the district's elementary schools yielded a female Teacher of the Year in 2019.

While this study lacked the teachers' students' participation, future studies could incorporate their voices to gain another perspective on the teachers' abilities. Students have first-hand, daily interaction with their teachers that neither the principals nor parents possess. These encounters would allow the students to let their voices be heard and provide an honest look at their teachers' talents and effectiveness. Along with the student perspective, future studies of male elementary teachers could incorporate their colleagues' voices. Although principals provide a broader perspective on the teacher's influence on the campus as a whole, they are often not in daily interactions with these teachers. However, colleagues work with them daily in a very close manner and could provide a richer source of information than third-hand accounts from their supervisors.

While the interviews produced a good deal of insight into the participants' thoughts, particularly the teachers, one suggestion for a similar future study would be for the teachers to keep a journal of their weekly or even teaching experiences. This data collection method could yield teacher reflections that may not necessarily be evident in responses to pre-designed interview questions. Researchers could provide the participants with specific prompts to address or have the teachers simply write their thoughts without explicit guidance.

### **Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

As I gained insight from communicating with male Elementary Teachers of the Year, their principals, and their students' parents, I uncovered various characteristics and practices that have led to their success paths. While all three principals noted their teachers' quality practices and characteristics, these teacher qualities do not appear to be gender-specific. This implies that these traits and practices are not limited solely to the male gender. However, each principal recognized the benefits of having male educators on their campuses to act as positive male role models.

While some districts and school leaders would prefer to focus on recruiting and hiring only those with degrees in education and student teaching experience, graduates of Alternative Certification Programs should not be excluded entirely from staff hiring considerations. As noted in every teacher participant, these individuals have made a positive academic, behavioral, and social impact on their schools' students, staff, and parents. Although any first-year teacher, regardless of gender, may require more assistance as an ACP graduate than those who have had student teaching experience, the support they receive, especially as males, will be crucial to their success in the classroom. Principals can recognize that to discredit all ACP graduates from consideration could deprive them of an opportunity to bring male teachers to their campuses who could positively impact their students.

As the male teachers noted the challenges of receiving numerous students with behavior issues, administrators should be cognizant of this as they create class rosters. While quality male teachers can undoubtedly positively affect students who need an affirmative male role model, consideration must be given to their partner teachers as they will also have responsibilities for teaching these students. This loading of classes with

students exhibiting behavioral challenges could lead to burnout, not only with the male teachers but also with their female teaching partners.

### **Relationship of Results to Theory**

To frame this study, I utilized gender role conflict theory. This conflict often occurs when men experience conflict internally, toward others, and from others (Robinson, 2011). Utilizing gender role conflict theory helps to understand the conflicts that male teachers encounter when entering the elementary school environment. These four teachers, each of whom have gained a degree of success at the elementary level, have experienced very few if any, conflicts regarding their decision to enter into a female-majority profession. Although some individuals experience negative consequences resulting from the opposition between stereotypical gender roles and incompatible situational demands (Wester et al., 2010), none of the teacher participants expressed any major internal conflicts in their decision to enter into elementary education as the minority gender.

As men who do not fit the stereotypical mold of an elementary school teacher, they take pride and satisfaction in working with younger students in the elementary schools. However, some look upon them with suspicion for taking on a position that does not coincide with societal norms. Male elementary teachers must confront this conflict to navigate the challenges inherent in being a man in a female-majority environment. Such conflicts have not kept these teachers from entering into this environment, nor have they kept them from receiving the honor of Teacher of the Year. By conversing with male elementary school teachers who have impacted this level, I gained insight into their decisions to enter into elementary education and their reasons behind staying in this

educational environment despite any typical experiences that other male teachers have faced.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to this study that limit the generalizability of its results. Although I selected teacher participants based on objective criteria, the process by which teachers earn this award is not consistent across schools in the district. This process can vary between a majority vote to a combination of a staff vote and an administrator's final recommendation. In addition, the number of teacher participants was limited since no elementary school in the district selected a man as its Teacher of the Year for the 2019-2020 school year, and only 5% of elementary schools in the district chose a male for this designation in 2019. Limiting the study to only male Elementary Teachers of the Year by no means indicates that these men are the only quality male elementary school teachers in the district.

I did not randomly choose the specific teachers to interview with a small number of eligible teacher participants for this study. As a result of choosing teachers who only met specific criteria, I did not randomly choose their principals as participants. I also did not choose the teachers' parents to participate, limiting my control over their ability to effectively speak to the teacher's effectiveness. Their responses were limited to their children and not to any influence in the classroom or school.

This study is also limited since I did not consider any student perspectives due to the complications from interviewing this vulnerable group. While interviewing parents provided a glimpse into specific students' thoughts of the teachers and their teaching abilities, I was limited to third-hand perspectives from the parents rather than first-hand



accounts from the students. Although students would have provided another perspective on the teachers' impact and their teaching abilities, I chose to limit the interview data collection solely to adults.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

While most teachers at the elementary level are female, male teachers' impact in the same setting can be limited but impactful. Whether or not one views men as essential in the elementary school environment, the fact remains that there is a significant underrepresentation of male educators at this level. As I discovered in this study, several male elementary teachers have made a lasting impact on their students, parents, and colleagues in an area where very few male educators thrive.

As men enter the elementary sector of public education, it is imperative to understand the perceptions they face as a minority and their characteristics to be useful in their craft. This study specifically drew on the positive examples and effective practices of prominent male teachers in the elementary school setting and their impact on their campuses and individual students. Administrators and other teachers must understand the challenges and pressures that male elementary teachers face to best support them as they lead their students of today to the learners and leaders of the future.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Teacher Interview Protocol**

1. Describe the path that led to a career in elementary education.
2. How has your gender affected your success as an elementary teacher?
3. What hardships have you encountered in choosing this particular role?
4. How would you describe your relationships with your students?
5. How would you describe your relationships with your parents?
6. How would you describe your relationships with your teammates?
7. How would you describe your relationships with the other staff members?
8. How would you describe your relationships with your administrators?
9. How has being recognized as Teacher of the Year award changed your professional life?
10. What other aspirations do you have as an educator?
11. What advice would you give to male teachers who are seeking a career in elementary education?

## **Appendix B**

### **Principal Interview Protocol**

1. How would you describe his role as a male elementary teacher?
2. How has his gender affected his success as an elementary teacher?
3. How would you describe his relationships with his students?
4. How would you describe his relationships with his parents?
5. How would you describe his relationships with his teammates?
6. How would you describe his relationships with the other staff members?
7. How would you describe his relationships with his administrators?
8. What impact has he had on the culture and climate of the school?
9. What qualities does he possess that influenced his designation as Teacher of the Year?
10. How has being recognized as Teacher of the Year changed his professional life?
11. What advice would you give to other administrators who are considering hiring men on their elementary staff?

## **Appendix C**

### **Parent Interview Protocol**

1. How would you describe him as a teacher?
2. How would you describe his communication skills?
3. How would you describe his relationship with his parents?
4. What qualities does he possess that influenced his designation as Teacher of the Year?
5. How has he impacted your student's life?

## **Appendix D**

### **Follow-Up Interview Protocol**

1. One theme that I gathered from the other teacher interviews regarding their paths to elementary education was an absence of student teaching or a degree in education. What are your thoughts on this?
2. One theme that I gathered from the other principal interviews regarding the effectiveness of gender was difficulty in determining how the teacher's gender affected his success. What are your thoughts on this?
3. One theme that I gathered from the other parent interviews regarding communication was the teacher's willingness to be contacted at any time through various means. What are your thoughts on this?
4. During our first interview, you commented that\_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about that?
  - a. Trenton: During our first interview, you commented that your assistant principal helped remedy the situation with the student and his parents. How else can administration best support men in elementary education?
  - b. Lucy: During our first interview, you talked about his move to the math interventionist role. What advantages and disadvantages have resulted from this move?
  - c. Mary: During our first interview, you commented that he is an old-school teacher. Would you elaborate on that?

- d. Obadiah: During our first interview, you commented that many men do not have a quality per se to work in elementary educations. Will you expand on that?
  - e. Joelle: During our first interview, you commented that you would love to have more men on campus, but they have to be able to do the job; they have to be (teacher's name). Would you expand on that?
  - f. Dahlia: During our first interview, you commented that him getting at eye level with your son was so important. What makes that important?
  - g. David: During our first interview, you commented that there is not much difference in how you and your female colleagues teach. Would you expand on that?
  - h. Lauren: During our first interview, you commented that you do not see a lot of male teachers in the primary grades. Outside of your comments on why men do not go to elementary education, in general, what keeps those men who do become elementary teachers from going to the younger grades?
  - i. Jessica: During our first interview, you mentioned that you were upset that your son was not with the teacher at the beginning of the year. Tell me more about that.
5. What other comments would you like to make?

## Appendix E

### University of Houston IRB Approval Memo

#### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

May 23, 2020  
 Jeremy Effinger  
 jieffinger@uh.edu

Dear Jeremy  
 Effinger:

On May 23, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Examining the Role of Male Teachers of the Year in the Elementary School Setting
Investigator:	Jeremy Effinger
IRB ID:	STUDY00002278
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal Recruitment Email - Pilot Interview.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Teacher Recruitment Email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• HRP-503 Protocol Jeremy Effinger 5-23-2020.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Principal Recruitment Email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Interview Protocol - Effinger.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• Parent Recruitment Email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Effinger, Jeremy Memo.pdf, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission;</li> <li>• Follow-up Interview Protocol - Effinger.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• HRP-502a - CONSENT DOCUMENT- NON-CLINICAL - Jeremy Effinger.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Research Application, Category: Other;</li> <li>• _____ Adult Informed Consent Form 5.3.2020 - Effinger.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Sandra Arntz

The IRB approved the study on May 23, 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO)  
Office University of Houston, Division of  
Research  
713 743 9204  
cphs@central.uh.edu  
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>