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# How Georgia Elementary School Principals Manage Difficult Teachers

Tim M. Tilley  
*Georgia Southern University*

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HOW GEORGIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS MANAGE DIFFICULT  
TEACHERS

by

TIM M. TILLEY

(Under the direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this study is to ascertain how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. Two sub-questions were addressed in the study: what the different types of difficult teachers that elementary school principals encounter were and what types of strategies elementary principals found to be effective when dealing with difficult teachers. This study provides information for principals on how to deal with difficult teachers. The researcher found there to be minimal research in this area. A qualitative method in the phenomenological tradition was utilized to explore how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. Ten principals from a suburban school system in the Southeastern United States took part in face-to-face interviews during the course of this study. Constant comparison/grounded theory was used to analyze the data. The researcher found that though all principals utilized similar strategies in dealing with difficult teachers, how these strategies were applied depended on the individual administrator. Resistant teachers were found to be the most difficult teachers to deal with. The results of this study provide a point of reference for future studies on how principals deal with difficult teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Dealing with difficult teachers, Principals dealing with difficult teachers, Manage difficult teachers

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by

Tim M. Tilley

B.S., Auburn University, 1988  
M. Ed., Auburn University, 1991  
Ed. S., State University of West Georgia, 2002

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TIM M. TILLEY

Major Professor: Linda M. Arthur

Committee: Teri Denlea Melton

Ethan Hildreth

Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Carole. Without your love and support I would never have been able to complete this monumental task. You are my best friend and I cannot express how much I appreciate your support and inspiration.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Jim and Sue Tilley. You have always encouraged and supported me throughout the years. I love you and appreciate all that you have done for me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	6
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	10
Background of the Study.....	13
Statement of the Problem.....	19
Research Questions.....	20
Significance of the Study.....	20
Research Procedures.....	21
Limitations and Delimitations.....	21
Definitions of Terms.....	22
Chapter Summary.....	22
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	23
Types of Difficult Teachers.....	23
Characteristics of Great Principals.....	27
Handling Difficult Teachers.....	33
Chapter Summary.....	43
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	44
Research Questions.....	44
Research Design.....	44
Study Setting.....	45
Sample and Sampling.....	46



Instrumentation.....	46
Data Collection.....	47
Data Analysis.....	48
Chapter Summary.....	49
CHAPTER IV: REPORT OF DATA ANALYSIS.....	50
Demographic Data.....	51
Data Analysis.....	53
Research Questions and Findings.....	54
Chapter Summary.....	71
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	73
Introduction.....	73
Summary of Study.....	74
Discussion.....	75
Conclusion.....	81
Implications.....	83
Recommendations.....	84
REFERENCES.....	87
APPENDICES	
A Institutional Review Board Approval.....	91
B Principal Interview Protocol.....	92
C Research Data.....	94
D Interview Questions and Related Literature Matrix.....	96

## LIST OF TABLES

2.1: Difficult People Characteristics.....	24
2.2: Dealing with Difficult People.....	33
4.1: Participants' Demographic Profiles.....	52

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Today's principals face more pressure than ever before. Their roles are constantly evolving to meet the demands of the federal and state government as well as meeting the needs of the students, faculty and staff, and the entire community (Tirozzi, 2001). Principals serve multiple, multifaceted roles such as instructional leader, teacher and staff evaluator, program designer and implementer, school operations manager, and community representative. Essentially, the job of a principal is overwhelming as principals work long hours with a heavy workload while trying to juggle so many tasks at once (Baeder, n.d., p.1). Principals find themselves making snap judgments to get through the day due to multiple demands rather than prioritizing tasks. Baeder (n.d.) described the role of a principal as “standing in a waterfall and trying to keep your footing” (p. 1) because a principal is constantly being pulled in so many directions, and focusing on one task at hand is difficult. Silsby (2002) stated that the biggest challenge for principals is to make those who work under them feel important each day and the way to do that is to consistently and continually build and cultivate a positive environment throughout the faculty and staff that encourages, rewards, and remediates teachers in their primary responsibility—educating the students under their charge (p. 1).

While being a principal is a tough job in itself, being an effective and skillful principal adds even more pressure. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) defined an effective principal as one that “know[s] their own professional strengths and interests; understand[s] the time constraints they face; recognize[s] staff members’ talents, skills, and professional growth interests and needs; and know[s] how to foster shared leadership to support new instructional initiatives” (p. 11). Simply managing the day-to-day operations of a school is not enough to be

considered an effective principal. An effective principal must understand and embrace the everyday barriers while reaching out to those in the building without appearing to be stressed. A principal can be effective, but to be skillful, a principal must “nurture the professional development of local facilitators who understand effective instructional models, have effective teaching and management skills, and be committed to sustained implementation of various innovations” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 11). Being skillful is going beyond knowing oneself and towards empowering others while being abreast of the newest and most innovative school models. The job of a principal is very demanding and requires one to pay close attention to every aspect and person involved in the building, which in turns means devoting an enormous amount of time to the job and dealing with an increased workload. Moreover, Queen and Queen (2005) noted that “time and stress management problems for principals have increased to the point that many qualified individuals do not want to become school leaders” (p. 2).

Buckingham, Donaldson, and Marnik’s (2005) study found that principals’ work is time consuming with principals devoting 57-59 hours a week to their job. Additionally, many of the principals they interviewed for their study described their jobs as stressful and left them feeling overloaded. More specifically, they gathered the following data when asking principals about their job:

“85% reported that ‘my job is stressful’; 69% reported that “because of the long hours, I have little time left for myself,” 62% felt that “my workload makes it difficult to give my best attention to tasks,” 56% said “my job intrudes too much on my personal life,” 51% reported that “the demands of this job are wearing me out,” and 47% “often wondered if the long hours involved in the job are worth it” (Buckingham, Donaldson, & Marnik’s, 2005, p. 7).

With principals feeling this way already, dealing with difficult teachers adds another dimension to an already stressful profession. The job of a principal is already a complicated one that requires a great deal of time and energy. When dealing with difficult teachers, the time, stress, and workload increase significantly.

The problem of dealing with difficult employees of any kind is not unique to education; every manager or administrator will face certain types of challenges. No two people are alike and, though the world would be a simpler place if a manager or administrator could expect all individuals to behave in a similar manner regardless of the circumstance, this is not the reality. Because of these differences, a manager or administrator is faced with trying to find the best possible method of working with all types of individuals. There will always be a certain group of individuals who will present their own unique set of challenges. These individuals might have a propensity to be overly negative or perhaps they are just incompetent in their job performance. Whatever difficulty is presented by these individuals they can easily create a daunting challenge to any administrator or manager.

Covey (1989) stated that a win-win situation should be sought where everyone wins when dealing with challenging individuals. When a manager or administrator is dealing with difficult people, this is not a simple task. The task can become completely overwhelming if the person in charge is not careful about how they choose to handle a particular individual. If these individuals are not dealt with correctly, the damage to the organization, whether it be a school or a business, can be difficult to repair. This is one of the greatest challenges that any principal or businessperson has to handle. How they handle these situations, as leaders, will make all the difference in regard to how effective their organization will be (Covey, 1989).

While managing difficult people has been discussed widely, empirical research explaining effective strategies and techniques is scant. The purpose of this study was to identify the proven strategies that leaders have found to most effectively deal with difficult teachers. In this study, the researcher focuses on how elementary school principals handle this type of teacher.

### **Background of the Study**

The problem of dealing with difficult people has been around for a long time. The Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius once said, “Every morning when I leave my house, I say to myself, today I shall meet an impudent man, an ungrateful one, and one who talks too much, therefore, do not be surprised” (Johnson, 2002, p. 3). Dealing with difficult people can be extremely taxing for a school leader. This problem is made even more complicated because, though the principal’s goal is to change difficult teachers’ behavior, principals are dealing with individuals who are experts at being difficult and thus hard to change. Whitaker (2002) mentioned this in his book about difficult teachers, pointing out that difficult teachers have a great deal more practice at operating this way, and dealing with a teacher like this can be extremely trying. Silsby (2002) noted that “the most challenging task principals face in dealing with difficult teachers is moving out of the nurturing role into one of trying to alter the negative behaviors of staff members or removing them from working with students” (p. 1). An effective principal is able to deal with difficult teachers as well as make a difference in students’ lives (Silsby, 2002).

### **Types of Difficult Employees**

Silsby (2002) defined difficult teachers as “the most frustrating, resistant, ineffective, and negative staff members” (p. 2). He concluded that it is their choice to act or be this way. When describing and dealing with a difficult teacher, one must consider his personality traits, which

make it hard and frustrating to determine if someone will be a difficult teacher through the hiring process. Silsby (2002) pinpointed a few traits as terms or phrases that label teachers that are difficult: lazy, lack of preparedness, negative, resistant to change, defensive, inflexible, unprofessional, unorganized, cannot get along with others, and content-centered. Furthermore, Silsby notes that if these traits are visible in a teacher then that teacher is making the choice to be difficult. All of the mentioned traits can be changed and Silsby feels that it is through a clear vision from the principal that this can happen.

Bramson (1988) utilized an ethnographic methodology to create his categorization of different types of employees. He categorized difficult people into seven categories: hostile aggressive, complainers, clamming ups, super-agreeables, wet blankets, know-it-all experts, and indecisive stallerers. The author described these groups and explained the best tactics that should be utilized to cope with these individuals.

The hostile aggressive personality is always on attack, abusive, and intimidating. This type of person lacks caring and respect. Those individuals classified as complainers find fault with everything. They have no interest in engaging in productive problem solving discussions, and enjoy feeling free from the responsibility related to any problem. The clamming up never speaks. They generally answer yes or no. This group will not effectively communicate with others and refuses to cooperate. Super-agreeables want to be liked and accepted by everyone, so to achieve this they are outgoing, sociable and very personable. However, the danger with this group is that they will agree with you about one thing and then agree with the next person whose ideas are contrary to yours. Wet blankets are quick with a negative response and have the “it will not work, do not bother” approach to every problem. They are bitter about life and are characterized by negativism and cynicism. Know-it-all experts are experts on all matters. They

think people are stupid or ill informed. This type of person can become angry or irrational when faced with others' knowledge; they especially enjoy being in control. The final group is the indecisive staller. This group lacks follow-through, is not dependable, and cannot make up their minds.

Burr (1993), a former high school principal, utilized his administrative experience to place teachers in three different categories: superstars, backbones, and mediocres. Superstars are the best of the best. This is the group that not only does an outstanding job, but all, or almost all faculty members also respect them. Backbone teachers are excellent teachers who comprise the majority of a school staff, but the biggest difference between the backbones and the superstars is that if a principal lost a backbone teacher, he could probably find a replacement fairly easily. The final group is the mediocres. This is where a principal will find the most difficult and challenging teachers. These are teachers that are easily replaceable (Whitaker, 2002).

Coping with the dynamics that make up a school staff is a challenge. McEwan (2005) also explored the challenging types of personalities that principals sometimes have to face. Difficult staff members were broken into several categories: angry hostile, or tiresome teachers, mentally disordered or compromised teachers, exhausted, stressed, or burned-out teachers, and, confused, marginal, or just plain incompetent teachers. In her treatment, McEwan gave insight into strategies to help principals deal with the different types of problematic behaviors. The problems that arise for principals, as they deal with issues related to this broad range of situations, can be complex and solutions are difficult to find.

Bramson (1988) outlined a prescribed approach of how to deal with virtually every personality type. If there was an issue with an employee, he had very specific ideas about how to deal with the issue. For example, if the person the leader was dealing with is a complainer, he did



not waste time trying to argue this person out of her negative attitude. Bramson believed the best approach was to respond with optimistic expectations. According to Bramson, the leader could not necessarily change negative people, but she could break their ability to interfere with their effectiveness.

Whitaker (2002), on the other hand, had more of a holistic approach to dealing with difficult teachers. His approach also had a strong passive element; most issues could be dealt with indirectly. Whitaker believed in bringing teachers around to the correct approach by creating a positive school environment and convincing difficult teachers to change their ways in an indirect, non-confrontational fashion.

McEwan (2005) was probably the most direct of the three individuals mentioned. She believed that principals should assertively step in and deal directly with issues involving difficult teachers. Her assertive intervention approach forced the principal to confront difficult teachers head on. While McEwan believed in treating teachers fairly, she did not pull any punches as she called on principals to directly confront difficult teachers about any forms of inappropriate behavior.

Weber (2003, 2008) touched on what he believed the best way to deal with negative teachers. There were four realities mentioned when dealing with these individuals: 1) they exist in every walk of life (not just education), 2) they cannot be forced to change, 3) understanding why negative people are the way they are reduces the leader's stress and improves his ability to improve the climate of the organization, and 4) there is no single best way to deal with negative people. Some strategies that he mentioned were surrounding negative people with positive staff members, being a role model, learning to understand the psychology of negativism, reframing negativism into positive energy, using an emotional bank, and coming to grips with his own

personal behavior (Weber 2003, Covey, 1989). The idea behind the emotional bank is to make numerous positive comments (deposits) before the person makes critical comments (withdrawals). By focusing on these areas, principals can improve their ability to cope with negativism in their building. There is no one best way to cope with negative teachers in a school. The problems presented by the difficult teacher require a comprehensive approach.

Bridges (1990) took a slightly different, more systematic approach as he examined dealing with incompetent teachers. His focus dealt mainly with creating high standards of excellence for teachers, forcing principals to follow necessary procedures to document and dismiss teachers, and legal obstacles to dismissing teachers. There was very little exploration of being proactive in order to deal with poor teachers; this was more of a step-by-step playbook for remediation, documentation, and possibly dismissal. The focus was on working through the options that a principal has at her disposal to either improve teacher performance or eventually terminate employment. He provided more of a playbook on how to document, attempt to mediate, and if remediation fails, eventually dismiss incompetent teachers.

Examining a business perspective in regard to dealing with employees, Collins (2001) stressed getting the right people on the proverbial bus. One of the attributes of highly successful businesses is making sure that the people who work in the business share the leader's vision for the direction that the business should take. The unfortunate reality of education is that there are few opportunities to persuade difficult employees to get off the bus. These individuals may have nowhere else to go. The key is creating an environment where difficult people are uncomfortable. Then, perhaps they will be persuaded to change or possibly find their way off the bus.

## Highly Effective Principals

In order to deal with difficult teachers, the principal must be highly effective and have a clear plan of attack. In Whitaker's (2012) book about highly effective principals, he shared his insight regarding different traits that highly effective principals shared when dealing with difficult teachers. The first five traits dealt with addressing the issue, dealing with the teacher as a professional, and having the principal act as the funnel. He required the principal to focus on people not programs, to be the variable, to treat everyone with respect, to have the principal be the filter, and, because the principal is the instructional leader, he must be able to teach the teachers.

Additionally, in regard to dealing with difficult teachers, highly effective principals ensure that they hire great teachers that know that their loyalty is to students and their academic success. In turn, these teachers exhibit behaviors and have sound beliefs about what is best for student success. In addition, these teachers ensure that the decisions made about instruction are in the best interest of the students.

Furthermore, when dealing with difficult teachers, highly effective principals set high expectations, demonstrate compassion, and attempt to make sure that their teachers are comfortable in situations. Whitaker (2012) subscribed to the theory that the key to addressing difficult teachers is to be caring and compassionate, while confronting and addressing negative or ineffective teachers at the onset. It is important for effective leaders to work to repair damaged situations or relationships in order to better deal with difficult teachers.

McEwan (2005) offered the benefits of her experiences in her approach to dealing with difficult teachers by focusing on the seven habits of highly effective principals: being an assertive administrator, being a character builder, being a communicator, nurturing a positive

school climate, being a contributor, conducting assertive interventions, and doing it today. By following these tenants, McEwan believed that principals can be very successful. Her approach sought to work on many levels to create a successful school environment.

There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence provided to support different techniques to manage difficult teachers. The problem is that there is minimal empirical research on the subject. There is a clear need for both qualitative and quantitative research studies in effective techniques for principals to deal with difficult teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Principals have dealt with difficult teachers for as long as anyone can remember. There is a substantive body of work that deals with how employers cope with problematic or difficult employees. It is also not difficult to find research about how to deal with difficult people. The area of education, however, has scarcely little research regarding how educational leaders should deal with difficult teachers.

Though some research has been conducted on how school leaders work with their staff, there is scant research about how principals deal with difficult teachers. Research regarding how school leaders deal with marginal or incompetent teachers is useful when dealing with these types of teachers, but all difficult teachers are not incompetent or even marginal. Past studies have failed to focus on the problem of the difficult teacher in full. The dynamic relating to how different teachers function in any organization is worthy of further consideration.

Since very little attention has been paid specifically to how educational leaders deal with difficult teachers, this would be an area that merits further study. Knowing the techniques that highly effective principals use to deal appropriately with difficult teachers is an area that is in need of specific study. Insight gleaned from such a study is brought to bear so that it can be

shared with other educational leaders to improve their ability to effectively deal with their teachers.

### **Research Questions**

Dealing with difficult teachers is a problem for building level principals. Since the issue of dealing with difficult teachers is a concern for educational leaders and there is a deficiency in the body of work dedicated to this subject, a study dedicated to exploring how elementary principals deal with difficult teachers has merit. The overarching research question is as follows: How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers? The following sub-questions were used to answer the overarching questions:

1. What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter?
2. What types of strategies are effective in dealing with different types of difficult teachers?

### **Significance of Study**

This study was significant because the results will assist principals with a significant problem, dealing appropriately with difficult teachers. The results will provide empirical data in an area of research that has definitive gap. There are a limited number of studies that deal with concepts that relate to how effective principals deal with difficult teachers, therefore this research will provide valuable information to educational leaders.

### **Research Procedures**

The researcher utilized a qualitative method in the phenomenological tradition to explore how elementary school principals manage difficult teachers. Qualitative research deals with exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions (Creswell, 2005). A phenomenological study is concerned with personal experiences and perspectives (Gay & Airasian, 2006). The qualitative method assisted the researcher with collecting extensive

narrative data in order to query the experiences of elementary school principals who have dealt with difficult teachers (Gay & Airasian). This method was selected because it allowed the researcher to utilize face-to-face interviews to obtain comprehensive information (Creswell).

The participants were selected from the population of 29 elementary school principals from Alpha County School System (pseudonym). Ten participants were selected from a population of all elementary principals in the Alpha County School System.

The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. Data for this research was gathered through face-to-face interviews. Constant comparison/grounded theory was used to analyze the data, which is a means to analyze data by identifying similarities and differences (Creswell, 2005). The researcher transcribed interviews. The findings are presented in narrative form.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The study was limited by several factors. First, the participants possessed unique skills, experiences, and interests. A phenomenological qualitative method was utilized by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The use of a phenomenological qualitative study does not allow the results to generalize; however, that is not the purpose of this study.

Several different factors served as delimitations for this particular study. The scope of this study was delimited to interviews with ten elementary school principals because of the extraneous issues with middle and high school principals. Only principals from Alpha County School System were during this study, thus allowing the researcher to gain the perspectives of principals in one school system. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to middle and high school principals and other regions of the country. Due to the highly specialized nature

of the topic, there is minimal research on this topic. Therefore, the researcher had minimal empirical research to reference in this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Difficult Teachers:* For the purpose of this study, difficult teachers are defined as certified teachers who serve as distracters to school leaders that prevent them from focusing on improving instructional practice in the school.

### **Chapter Summary**

Managers and supervisors have dealt with difficult employees for as long as anyone can remember. However, scant attention has been paid specifically to how educational leaders should deal with difficult teachers. The purpose of this study was to identify the techniques that highly effective elementary school principals utilize to deal appropriately with difficult teachers. The researcher interviewed ten elementary school principals from Alpha County Schools. Participants who were selected had a minimum of three years of elementary principal experience in Alpha County Schools as elementary principals. The researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological study method to examine how successful elementary school principals manage difficult teachers. Data for this research was gathered through face-to-face interviews. Constant comparison/grounded theory was used to analyze the data. The researcher analyzed data by identifying similarities and differences. The accumulated data was analyzed and key themes were identified and explained through this study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter focuses on a review of literature that has an impact on how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. The issue of dealing with these types of individuals has been in existence as long as there have been schools, but in that time there has been very little scientific research on the appropriate way to handle these types of individuals. The majority of the literature available on this particular topic leans heavily on anecdotal evidence. Keeping this in mind, this chapter explores the types of difficult teachers, attributes of highly effective principals, and different methods utilized to handle difficult certified teachers. A limitation of this literature view is that the nature of the topic is specific to the educational leadership field and due to the highly specialized nature of the review; there is minimal literature available on the topic.

#### **Types of Difficult Teachers**

Bramson (1988), though not an educator, dedicated over a decade to studying different types of difficult people. Not only did he categorize difficult people, but he also expressed the most appropriate ways to deal with difficult individuals. The difficult people were broken into seven categories: hostile-aggressive, complainer, silent and unresponsive, super-agreeables, negativist, bulldozers and balloons and, indecisive stallers. The different characteristics of each category are explained in Table 2.1.



Table 2.1

*Difficult People Characteristics*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Hostile-Aggressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bully that always wants to be right.</li> <li>• Abusive, intimidating and arrogant.</li> <li>• Values high levels of self-confidence and demean those who do not possess it.</li> </ul>
Complainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoids taking responsibility.</li> <li>• Tends to find fault with everything, but may be some legitimacy to their complaints.</li> <li>• Comes across as fatalistic, morally perfect, and self-righteous.</li> </ul>
Silent and Unresponsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits risk and seek safety by refusing to respond.</li> <li>• Is often non-committal despite the fact that something is definitely wrong.</li> <li>• Utilizes calculated aggressiveness to avoid facing their fears.</li> </ul>
Super-Agreeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People pleaser.</li> <li>• Avoids conflict at all costs.</li> <li>• Tells the boss things that are good to hear and lets her down by making unrealistic commitments.</li> </ul>
Negativist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deeply disappointed in life and is unable to work through it.</li> <li>• Tends to throw cold water on every idea and easily deflate optimists.</li> <li>• Has little power over his or her life and believes those who do have power cannot be trusted.</li> <li>• May be angry and resentful most of the time</li> </ul>
The Know it All Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a strong need for security in an unpredictable world.</li> <li>• Often described as a “bulldozer,” he or she is highly productive, thorough, and accurate.</li> <li>• Is usually right and will confront those who question his or her logic</li> </ul>

	with a data “dump” that leaves others overwhelmed.
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Bramson, (1988)

Whitaker (2002), the first educational administrator to delve into dealing with difficult teachers, approached the subject from a different perspective of principals. His experience as an administrator led him to categorize teachers into three distinctive categories: superstars, backbones, and mediocres. He looked at the effectiveness of a teacher when determining their label. As an experienced administrator, he sought to find a way to assist principals with the process of handling difficult teachers. The superstar is the best of the best. The superstar supersedes all expectations and shines above the rest by being effective, impactful, and irreplaceable. This teacher is categorized as one that goes above and beyond daily and is an effective teacher and teacher leader. Superstars are also impactful people and have the ability to change to attitude of their colleagues. As an effective teacher leader, the superstars understand the school’s mission and have a way of getting others to follow their lead. Lastly, superstars are irreplaceable. They are the ones the principals hate to lose because replacements are hard to find and when they leave, their followers also lose their leader and often times become indifferent (Whitaker, 2012). This is the teacher who goes above and beyond. There are very few teachers who qualify as superstars. This is a teacher that would be considered irreplaceable (if they left, it would be almost impossible to find someone of this caliber). The backbones are the teachers that make up the majority of a teaching staff. They do a good job, but are not as strong as the superstar. Backbones refer to the majority of the staff or the core group that does a good job overall but lacks the effectiveness and leadership skills of the superstars. This group does a good job with teaching the students but there is no desire to go the extra mile or be great.

The final category is the mediocre people. Mediocres are those teachers that are difficult or disgruntled. Whitaker (2003) warned that this group can also be very impactful in a negative sense. However, he also expressed that an administrator should not spend extensive time combating the mediocres but rather spend more time converting backbones to superstars. These are teachers that could easily be replaced with someone who is better. They are the group that creates problems. These teachers can generally be identified as ineffective in the classroom. Although backbone teachers might create problems from time-to-time, the majority of the problems will come from the mediocres.

McEwan (2005) published the most extensive treatment of dealing with difficult teachers to date. In her work, she placed difficult teachers into three overarching categories and eleven subcategories. The aggressive (angry) teachers were broken into four subcategories: naysayers, cynics, perfectionists (complainers), and bombasters. Passive-aggressive (sneaky) teachers were broken into three subcategories: backstabbers/saboteurs, gossips, and liars. The last category was the passive aggressive, tiresome teachers: know-it-alls, jokesters, and compulsive talkers.

The aggressive teacher is up-front and in the principals face; they have no qualms with public confrontation. They can terrorize colleagues, parents, and students and can destroy a positive school community if they are not confronted. These individuals are easily discernible on any teaching staff. Passive-aggressive teachers are uncooperative and refuse to compromise or concede. They utilize their anger to attempt to undermine and even overthrow the leader's authority. These individuals have little difficulty lying or stabbing their administrator in the back. The last group described by McEwan was the tiresome teachers. This group of passive-aggressive teachers appears to be socially inept, but is more than likely just frustrated and angry

about being ignored by most of their peers. Though the behavior exhibited by these teachers is probably a low priority, it should still be confronted (McEwan, 2005).

### **Characteristics of Great Principals**

Whitaker (2012) spent over twenty years in education as a middle and high school principal, college professor, and speaker. In his book, What Great Principals Do Differently, the eighteen characteristics of great principals were outlined. These traits were examined in this section. Many of which directly impact how a leader handles a difficult teacher.

Whitaker (2012) pointed out that the key to improved achievement in schools is about the people doing the teaching. Put quite simply, the two best ways to improve student achievement are to either hire better teachers and/or improve the teachers the principal has. It makes no great difference which program is being utilized curriculum-wise, the key is hiring and improving the instruction of the teachers the leader already has.

Another key aspect of highly effective principals is that they have an innate sense of self. The visionary leaders who exude self-awareness and self-assurance understand who they are, what they want to do, and how others perceive them. Great leaders understand that in a successful school they must have a clear vision of where they are going, how they plan to get there, and how individuals in the organization view them as leaders. They maintain high standards for themselves and everyone in the organization.

Effective principals take responsibility for their school, their performance, and all aspects related to the school. In highly effective schools, the principal sets high expectations for himself and all of the staff members in the school. Just as the teacher is responsible for the performance of their students, the principal is responsible for ensuring that teachers are performing successfully in their classrooms. This example sets the tone for what is expected from the

teachers. These effective principals gain the respect of their respective staffs and this leads to a higher level of performance than in schools where this is not the case (Burr, 1993). This is particularly important when the school leader is attempting to deal appropriately with difficult teachers.

Great principals consistently maintain a positive atmosphere and treat all teachers with respect. Whitaker (2012) pointed out that it is not difficult to treat some or most of the teachers with respect all the time, but treating everyone with respect all the time is difficult, but necessary. A simple way to explain this concept is in regards to the way that teachers treat their students. Every teacher is not going to like every student, but they must treat every student as if they like them. The same applies to principals. Principals are not going to like every teacher, but must treat every teacher as if they do.

Being positive and authentic with teacher praise is also important. Whitaker (2012) pointed out that the praise does not have to be for some earth-shattering event, but only need be true. When a principal praises someone, two people feel better, both the principal and the person she praises. Effective principals realize the power of being nice. It does not cost anything to be nice and being nice to the staff sets the example of the school-wide expectations that great principals maintain.

Highly effective principals act as the filter for the school on a day-to-day basis. It is important that the principal exude a sense of calm and maintain a positive demeanor. Being the filter allows the principal to maintain a positive environment regardless of the circumstance, which, in turn, models the behavior expected by the staff. If the principal allows matters to visibly upset him, then teachers, parents, and students will react to this behavior as an inappropriate model for behavior in the school. It is important for the principal to set a good

example. Allowing unexpected events to fluster or upset the principal sets the wrong type of tone for the school (Lipham, 1981). Setting the appropriate tone is another effective way to combat difficult teachers.

The best principals work diligently to improve teacher performance. This means ensuring that teachers have appropriate professional learning opportunities. Allowing mediocre teachers to visit the classrooms of superstar teachers is an excellent professional learning model. Principals cannot expect these teachers to improve if they do not allow them to see stronger teachers in action. The principal should also visit classrooms on a regular basis. Principals should visit all classrooms, but spend more time in the classrooms of troubled teachers. Finally, the principal should work to have new teachers find the right mentors. In other words, the new teachers should spend time with the superstars and be encouraged to establish collegial relations with these teachers.

Effective principals realize the importance of hiring great teachers. When given the opportunity to hire a new teacher they always attempt to hire a better teacher. Better teachers do not necessarily mean experienced teachers, but the best possible hire. It also does not mean best fit. The standard should be to find outstanding teachers that have the attributes that are needed to be on the teaching staff. The great principal is always looking to improve her school. Hiring teachers who bring something new to the staff is a vital approach to making this happen (Rutherford, 1985).

Another key attribute of a great leader is an understanding of the dynamics of change. Great leaders understand that change is inevitable and they create built in capacity to deal with change and the implementation of necessary change without disrupting the schools' learning environment. These leaders should stay positive and continue to maintain a "glass half-full"

philosophy when implementing change. If there is a budget cut that threatens school programs, they should not allow themselves to focus on the issues that they cannot control, but instead, focus on trying to find a solution. They rely on their superstar teachers to assist them in finding these solutions. At the end of the day, the leaders and their staff who are solution-oriented realize that focusing on factors beyond their control is a waste of time and is ultimately unproductive (Raisor, 2001). Staying positive is another important strategy necessary to effectively deal with difficult teachers.

Furthermore, effective principals understand that standardized testing is a fact of life in schools, but not the school's primary focus. Whitaker (2012) believed that principals should focus their attention on teacher behaviors relating to success in student achievement. If teachers place their primary focus on this area, they will ultimately affect the areas of achievement that the standardized tests measure. Ultimately, a focus on teaching the whole child should lead to success on standardized tests without explicitly focusing on her test scores. Great principals do not allow standardized tests to be a driving focus in their schools. If the teachers are focusing on what they should be, success on standardized tests will be a byproduct without becoming the focus of the school.

Whitaker (2012) also believed in the need for teachers to focus on behavior and then focus on beliefs. In this way, the principal works to try and change the attitudes of individuals in the organization who do not hold with the overall philosophy of the school. This is one of the two areas that lead to improvement in schools. That is, improving the teachers in the building. If principals want to improve their schools, they have to improve the mediocre teachers who compile the weakest part of their teaching staffs. When dealing with this segment of the school

staff, the principal must work to change the behavior. Once behavior has begun to change, then changes in their belief system will follow.

The best principals understand whom teachers should be loyal to. Teachers should be loyal to the school and students, and then to the principal. Many principals believe that teachers should be loyal to them, but ultimately they should be loyal to the school and students. If the values of the principal and the school are aligned, then everyone is working for the ultimate benefit of the school and students. The ultimate benefit of the student should be the focus area.

Truly effective principals base their decisions on their best teachers. Oftentimes, less effective principals create rules and procedures to deal with behaviors exhibited by the mediocre teachers and many times the rule or procedure proves to be ineffective. The teachers who the principals are trying to impact are not changing their behavior and the best teachers are left scratching their heads about why the rule was made in the first place. The best leaders go to their best teachers and ask their opinions before they implement a new rule or policy. If these teachers think the rule or procedure is a good one, and then the leader should go further, otherwise, he should not. If there are individual problems with teachers then those teachers should be addressed (Burr, 1993). Understanding the need to base decisions on the best teachers is beneficial when dealing with difficult teachers.

Great principals treat everyone as if they were good. Whitaker (2012) believed that principals must make sure that they make their best teachers comfortable in their building. This means they treat everyone as if they are good. By doing this, the less effective teachers should begin to feel uncomfortable and ultimately, this is what the principals want. This means that these teachers will eventually either change to adapt to their environment or move on, both of which are desirable outcomes.



In essence, to have a great school, principals should understand their high-achieving teachers. Great principals should understand the need to recognize their work and allow it to shine in order to inspire other staff members. When creating duties, the high-achievers should be placed in positions to help improve the school and not be assigned menial roles. It does not mean that they do not do their fair share, but put themselves in positions where their talents are showcased. High-achieving teachers who are not allowed the appropriate amount of attention could either begin to do less or possibly eventually leave the school (Burr, 1993).

Making it cool to care is another important attribute of a great principal. A great principal understands the need to show he/she genuinely cares. The effective principal understands that behaviors and beliefs are tied to emotions. They understand the power of emotion to assist in implementation of change. These principals work to model caring in their building. Principals that understand the desire of teachers who need the positive reinforcement signs of care and concern open and build relationships with employees and strive to enhance their connection. By utilizing emotion and kindness, principals can make change easier for teachers. Good leaders remember that traumatic events must be overcome.

Additionally, effective principals aim to treat people with respect on a daily basis. Everyone, no matter who they are, must be treated with respect. Unfortunately we are all human beings and occasionally when we are not at our best, we might not uphold this trait. When those instances do occur, it is important to go back and make things right with the individual we have a conflict with. It is important to go back and mend fences. Situations should not be left in disrepair. It is always important to try to mend fences in order to maintain the type of positive learning environment that effective principals strive to maintain.

Great principals do not allow negative or ineffective class members to go without redirection. The principal must work systematically to attempt to change the behavior of ineffective and negative staff members. They must make their expectations known and address situations when these staff members are not meeting expectations. Getting in the rooms and giving positive feedback when possible to reinforce appropriate behavior while also addressing inappropriate classroom behavior must constantly monitor these staff members. It is a constant process and principals are not miracle workers, but they can make a difference by systematically working to improve these teachers and sometimes dismiss them (Walker, 1990).

The last important quality that a highly effective principal has is the ability to set expectations at the start of the year and follow them consistently throughout the year. Effective principals understand the importance of clarifying expectations from the start. By doing this, the principal makes her expectations clear. Some principals make the mistake of thinking that teachers remember the basic tenants of the way the school runs, but this is the perfect time to reinforce expectations, regardless of whether a leader covers the information every year. It is no different than a teacher beginning the school year (Whitaker, 2012). Effectively setting expectations like any of the other highly effective principal strategies is another beneficial method of combating the adverse effects of difficult teachers.

### **Handling Difficult Teachers**

Several different strategies for dealing with difficult teachers have been supported by different authors. Bramson (1988) developed specific means for dealing with difficult employees, based on the type of employee:

Table 2.2

*Dealing with Difficult People*

<b>Category</b>	<b>How to deal with employees</b>
Hostile-Aggressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand up to them without fighting by assertively expressing her opinion ("In my opinion, I disagree with him.").</li> <li>• Take unpredictable actions to get their attention: drop a book, stand up, firmly call them by name, get them to sit down and don't sit until they do.</li> <li>• Be prepared for friendly overtures as soon as they view the leader as worthy of respect.</li> </ul>
Complainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break the self-fulfilling cycle of passivity, blaming, and powerlessness by insisting on a problem solving approach.</li> <li>• Listen attentively. They may just need to blow off steam, which could provide information that's important to the leader.</li> <li>• Be prepared to interrupt and take control. Pin them down to the specifics.</li> <li>• Do not agree. Agreeing only validates for them that it is the principal's fault and they are blameless.</li> <li>• If all else fails, ask them how they would like the discussion to end.</li> </ul>
Silent and Unresponsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get them to talk by asking open-ended questions beginning with "how" and "what."</li> <li>• Apply a friendly, silent stare toward the person and hold it. Don't be tempted to fill the space with words to ease his own discomfort.</li> <li>• The employee looks distressed/worried/concerned. Am I misinterpreting?</li> <li>• Ask the employee if he is feeling uncomfortable, annoyed, angry, or impatient.</li> <li>• Set time limits and be prepared for</li> </ul>

	<p>an "I do not know" response. The employer may either assume it's genuine or it's a stalling tactic and reply, "It appears our meeting is at an impasse." Return to the friendly, silent stare and wait for a response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the clam opens up, be attentive, demonstrate active listening, and allow them be vague (it may lead to their main issue). If they don't respond, avoid a polite ending by stating you intend to revisit the issue again.</li> </ul>
Super-Agreeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honesty is non-threatening. Ask for their opinion without jeopardizing acceptance of them as individuals.</li> <li>• Be personal without being phony and let them know a person values them as people.</li> <li>• Do not allow them to over-commit or take on more than they can handle.</li> <li>• Ask for feedback on things that might interfere with his/her good relationship.</li> <li>• Pay attention to their humor - it often masks their true feelings.</li> </ul>
Negativist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize how easily the boss can discourage. The impact these people have on others can be contagious unless the leader meets it directly with confident, assertive optimism.</li> <li>• Do not argue with them or embarrass them. The leader will not get far by making it a "win/lose" battle.</li> <li>• Allow them to play the role of "reality checker" by analyzing what could go wrong.</li> <li>• Require them to cite specifics rather than make sweeping generalizations.</li> <li>• Offer examples of past successes.</li> </ul>

The Know it All Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help them consider alternative views while avoiding direct challenges to their expertise.</li> <li>• The leader must do his homework, discuss facts in an orderly manner, and make sure the information is accurate and complete.</li> <li>• Listen actively and acknowledge. Paraphrase rather than interrupt; it shows the leaders respect for the employees expertise.</li> <li>• If a leader must point out an error or omission, do it by questioning firmly with confidence and ask for clarification by saying, "How will that look 5 years from now?"</li> <li>• Resist the temptation to assert his expert credentials. It won't work. No one knows more than they do in their opinion.</li> </ul>
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Bramson, (1988)

McEwan (2005) dealt specifically with difficult teachers and broke them into an extensive group of categories and subcategories. Angry teachers were the primary category that she further broke into aggressive, passive-aggressive sneaky and passive-aggressive tiresome. The next group of difficult teachers she examined was those who were temporarily troubled, mentally disordered, or legally compromised. She then examined exhausted, stressed, or burned-out teachers. The final group that she looked at was confused, marginal, or just plain incompetent teachers.

Angry aggressive teachers were further broken down into naysayers, cynics, perfectionist (complainers), and bombasters. This group of teachers was characterized by an “in the principal’s face” attitude. They crave attention and could be angry for any number of reasons. McEwan (2005) believed that the best way to deal with angry or aggressive teachers was to do something that most other principals have failed to do with them, confront them directly about

their behavior. The confrontational approach is important and encourages principals to have a plan in dealing with these kinds of teachers.

The approach that McEwan (2005) created was called an assertive intervention (AI). Assertive interventions call for the administrator to plan a structured conference with the teacher that contains three stages. The first is the presentation, which is a sixty-second presentation that confronts teachers with their inappropriate behavior. During this conference, the principal should very specifically outline the problem, why it is a problem, what will happen if the problem continues, and her interest in resolving the issue. After this time, the teacher is offered an opportunity to respond, which is the second stage. It is open-ended and unstructured. In this portion of the conference, the administrator must be a good listener and avoid trying to lead the teacher. If the teacher responds positively to the AI then the administrator moves to the third stage. If not, the AI has not failed, but the teacher just needs more time to realize that the principal is serious about dealing with the problem and that it would be beneficial to deal with the issue. The final step is the motivational interview. During this step, the administrator and the teacher interact to create a plan to eliminate the inappropriate behavior. The last point about AIs is that the administrator must continue to confront the problem utilizing this process until a solution is found. Finding solutions is not always easy and takes time, but at the end of the day it is the responsibility of the principal to confront behavior that is in conflict with the school mission and doing what is best for children (McEwan, 2005).

Passive-aggressive teachers are broken into several subcategories: sneaky teachers, backstabbers/saboteurs, gossips, and liars. All of these teachers share the fact that their behaviors are more difficult to pin down than the aggressive teachers. Sneaky teachers say one thing and do another and are characterized by being uncooperative and uncompromising.

Backstabbers/Saboteurs are underhanded and do whatever they can to undermine and create descent in a building. Gossips do what they can to spread rumors and gossip about the staff. They have no qualms with making snide comments behind anyone's back. The liars will say anything about anyone to garner attention from fellow teachers. This type of teacher has no problem spreading lies and innuendo (McEwan, 2005).

The other category of passive-aggressive teacher is the tiresome teacher. Examples of this type are the know-it-alls, jokesters, and compulsive talkers. The know-it all believes they know everything and wants to make sure you know it as well. They never tire of hearing themselves speak. Jokesters mask their frustrations behind their wise cracks and jokes. They are a negative force in the building and though they say they are kidding when they make their jokes, there is an ugly truth behind their snide remarks. The compulsive talker talks nonstop and interrupts constantly. Though they appear to be socially inept, they are actually frustrated and angry, longing for the attention of their colleagues. When dealing with these types of teachers it is important that the leader remembers that the angry teachers really only have three choices: to become a part of the leadership team, to follow the lead of the leadership team, or to get out of the way (transfer, resign, etc.) (McEwan, 2005).

The temporarily troubled, mentally disordered, or legally compromised teachers come with their own unique set of problems. Temporarily troubled teachers are going through traumatic times in their lives; divorce, custody battles, serious debilitating accidents, etc. This group of teachers will generally resume being productive and successful after they deal with their time of crisis. Teachers with mental disorders are clinically diagnosed to have these conditions. They may have problems resulting from chemical imbalances in their brains, be suffering from depression, or some type of self-destructive behavior. Legally compromised teachers could be

dealing with a broad array of legal issues: sexual misconduct, abuse of controlled substances, theft, to name a few (McEwan, 2005).

Dealing with teachers who are temporarily troubled can be challenging. It is important when dealing with this group to listen, temporarily reduce the workload or offer assistance, be available, be able to offer referral services, protect students to the greatest extent possible, and maintain boundaries. Dealing with teachers who are clinically diagnosed with mental disorders is more of a challenge. McEwan (2005) believed the principal must be optimistic, document the erratic behavior, refer them for help, involve union representation (when called for), be ready for anything, know when to refer for dismissal, be persistent and consistent in his approach and, don't give up (deal with them). Legally compromised teachers must be handled carefully. If principals suspect that a teacher may be breaking the law: inform the immediate supervisor, call on the police department to report a crime, make sure the county public relations specialist knows about the situation if a teacher is about to be charged with a crime or make sure human resources is aware if an individual is charged with a crime. It is imperative that the principal act when dealing with legally compromised teachers.

Another group of teachers that McEwan (2005) refers to are the exhausted, stressed, or burned-out teachers. Exhausted teachers are broken into three categories: highly frustrated teachers who have lost any sense of efficacy and feel they have lost control over what happens to them, genuinely overworked teachers, and deeply troubled teachers whose perceived exhaustion may be the result of temporary personal troubles or depression. One of the best ways to help this group of teachers is to take a look in the mirror and make sure the administrator is not contributing to the problem. Good principals are a part of the solution and not the problem. Principals should be strong instructional leaders and should serve as an instructional resource for



their teachers. Have teachers focus on the things that can be controlled and avoid displacing energy on things that the school cannot control (parental support, etc.). Take steps to honor time and energy by examining the different expectations the school and county leadership are placing on teachers. Make sure the focus is on what is necessary and useful. The last key element is making sure the teachers are part of the problem-solving group. They are a vital source of solutions to the different educational decisions being made in the building.

The final categories that McEwan (2005) examined were confused, marginal, or just plain incompetent teachers. Instructionally challenged teachers are a key part of this group. These are the teachers who are confused, marginal teachers who have significant deficiencies in one or more instructional area, and incompetent teachers who cannot teach and are beyond remediation.

The confused teachers fall into two categories: novices who just graduated and mature teachers who, at some point, in their career path became confused. The confused novices need time to mature and acquire the tools of their craft. Some will not make it, but many just need more experience, mentoring, and professional learning. The confused veterans, many of whom could be great, may hold erroneous views about education, schools and teaching in general. These teachers are generally trapped in the past and want to teach students who no longer exist. Marginal teachers are teetering between competent and incompetent. This is a large group of teachers who are able to hang onto their jobs because of one or more of the following reasons: they have excellent social skills and are pleasant people, their principals and their schools are low performing and dysfunctional, or they work in schools that have teacher shortages. Unlike the marginal teachers, who have a few instructional weaknesses, incompetent teachers have multiple serious weaknesses. The teachers in this category exhibit inappropriate behaviors that directly impact instruction and must be dealt with through the assertive intervention conference.

If the teachers show improvement after the conference, then the principal continues to utilize AIs to keep them on track. If the teachers react in a hostile, aggressive, or uncooperative manner, then the principal must look at moving toward the removal of these teachers (McEwan, 2005). Confused novices must be dealt with directly through assertive interventions.

Whitaker had a less direct approach to dealing with the group of teachers that he referred to as mediocres in his book. He concentrated on several ways to deal with this broad group of teachers: motivation (motivating these teachers), making these teachers uncomfortable, weakening their influence, and finally eliminating difficult teachers (Whitaker, 2002).

Principals are all aware that positive staff morale has a high correlation with a positive school climate. If the climate of a building is upbeat, enthusiastic, and productive, then the staff within the building finds it an honest pleasure to come to work. If the climate is negative and full of tension, it eventually will exhaust any positive energy that might have been present. The establishment of an environment that allows teachers to develop and blossom as leaders is a climate where collectively all individual students and teachers are interacting critically. If principals want to effectively diminish the influence of the difficult teacher, then have a building where collectively all students, and teachers are interacting positively and working to increase learning daily.

According to the negative teacher, the parents, the school system, the principal, the students are to blame for situations that occur both inside and outside the classroom. Such an attitude tends to “cultivate” a “we against them” mentality. If this attitude is allowed to remain in a building, the overall climate will begin to become contaminated. Thus, the principal must communicate to all staff members his or her vision of how everyone in the school is responsible for its successes and failure. Acknowledging the positives throughout the building is a powerful

way to solicit the discussion of the faculty in discussing things that are working inside and outside the classroom (Whitaker, 2002).

Furthermore, nothing is more frustrating to a school and principal than a negative leader. These individuals not only fight good ideas, but they influence others to be negative also. The challenge is to reduce their influence without damaging the leader's relationship with the other members of the faculty. It is also important not to damage the principal's relationship with the negative teacher. It is impossible to achieve any change when the leaders and the negative teacher cannot get along for the good of the school and students (Whitaker, Whitaker, Lumpa, 2000).

Empowering the effective teacher with committee leadership roles, staff development opportunities, and "perks" can send a message to those who want to be a "team member" that there are methods to advance and receive recognition. Unfortunately in some cases, the difficult teacher has no desire to advance or receive recognition and just wants to be left alone to do what she wants. Since that is not an option, the effective principal can empower the effective teacher by helping provide the momentum and direction for the school and staff as well as deal with the difficult teacher in an appropriate manner (Whitaker, 2010).

There should be an understanding of the dynamics of dealing with negative leaders. Some important concepts to developing this understanding will help avoid confrontational situations for the principal and the negative leader. One essential strategy is to avoid reacting to the teacher by arguing or getting into power struggles. Many times this is exactly what the negative teacher wants to happen. Arguing on her level may increase their power. In order not to lose the teacher's respect, the principal must "respond" in a professional manner. Another time will come when the leader can reduce their influence and strengthen their own.

The most effective way to reduce the difficult teacher's influence is to reduce her following. High achievers tend to seek out other high achievers with whom to associate. Difficult teachers often associate more with other difficult and negative teachers. Breaking up the group with assigned seating at faculty meetings or arranging for different lunch periods can force the difficult teacher to interact with high achievers who have little tolerance for those who whine and think only of themselves (Whitaker, 2012).

### **Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, the issue of dealing with difficult teachers in the elementary school has been in existence as long as there have been schools. The literature review focused on difficult certified teachers, attributes of highly effective principals and different methods utilized to handle difficult certified teachers. Research findings suggested that there are numerous ways of coping with difficult teachers. However, there has been very little scientific research on the appropriate way to handle these types of individuals. The majority of the literature available on this particular topic leans heavily on anecdotal evidence. Principals are the instructional leaders and managers of their schools. Therefore, principals' perceptions of how to deal with difficult teachers should be analyzed to determine the effective means of handling these individuals without impeding on the school community and student achievement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. This chapter presents the research questions, research design, population and sample, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection and data analysis.

#### **Research Questions**

All building level principals deal with difficult teachers. Since the issue of dealing with difficult teachers is a concern for educational leaders and there is a deficiency in the body of work dedicated to this subject, a study committed to exploring how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers has merit. The overarching research question was: How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers? The following sub-questions were used to answer the overarching questions:

1. What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter?
2. What types of strategies are effective in dealing with different types of difficult teachers?

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative study was utilized to explore how elementary principals deal with difficult teachers. Qualitative research methods were used to understand certain social phenomena from the perspective of the subjects involved in the study (Glesne, 2006). Qualitative researchers attempt to recognize and infer how the participants in a collective setting create the world around them. Creswell (2003) believed that qualitative research occurs in the natural setting, uses numerous methods of data collections that are interactive and humanistic, produces theories and hypotheses from data that develops, and compels researchers to interpret the outcomes (data).

This approach was utilized for this particular study in order to learn the essential truth of the lived experiences of principals (Glesne, 2006).

The qualitative research design was chosen to assist in the completion of this study over the quantitative and mixed-method. Qualitative research was utilized because the topic chosen has a minimal amount of research conducted in this area. Limited literature existed to be utilized as a guide for dealing with how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. Qualitative research allowed the principals' responses to guide the outcome of the study. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to investigate and gather vital information that is pertinent to the understanding of shared experiences from the participants involved in the research. Therefore, a phenomenological design of qualitative research is applicable for this study (Creswell, 2009).

The phenomenological design was developed to highlight the specific, the recognition of phenomena through the perception of individual in a situation. Phenomenological research is the examination of lived experiences and the way people understand those experiences to develop a worldview. It rests on the premise that there is an organized structure of shared experiences that can be narrated (Creswell, 2009). The principals in this study were impacted by their experiences as they determined how they would deal with difficult teachers.

### **Study Setting**

The Alpha County School System (pseudonym) is located in the Southern region of the United States. The Alpha County School System serves 40,000 students (approximately 60% White, 30% African American, and 10% Asian, and other) in the county. There are 5,000 school and system level instructional support and administrative staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, media specialist, psychologist, social workers, counselor, nurses, and administrative staff

members) employed in the school district. Approximately 45% of the total student body is categorized as economically disadvantaged, as defined by students who participate in free or reduced lunch program.

The county residents are proud of the Alpha County School System. All Alpha County schools meet the standards of the State Department of Education and are fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Alpha County School System students are recognized at the state and national level for excellence in academics, athletics, the arts and extra-curricular activities. All schools offer a wide array of programs, including services for both academically gifted students as well as students with disabilities.

### **Sample and Sampling**

The participants were selected from the population of 29 elementary school principals from Alpha County School System. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who would best represent elementary school principals in Alpha County School System. According to Nardi (2006), purposive sampling is appropriate when there is specific reason to select a unique sample on purpose because of some characteristics or traits that will be analyzed.

Ten participants were selected from a population of all elementary principals in the Alpha County School System to be interviewed upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Participants were be selected based on the following criteria: the participant has served as an elementary school principal for at least three years.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher was the main instrument in this research study. According to Creswell (2009), “The researcher is the key instrument. In qualitative research, the researchers collect data themselves through interviewing participants” (p. 175). The interviewing process was utilized. It

consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions that were created based on previous research identified in the literature and designed to answer the overarching research question (see Appendix D). The researcher actively listened to the participants and was aware of his appearance, speech, and behavior during the interview process as these can have an effect on the participants. During the interview process, the researcher tried to make the participants feel at ease with the researcher to ensure that they felt comfortable to respond both openly and honestly during the interviews (Creswell, 2009). The researcher reviewed Glesne (2006) proper procedures for interviewing before interviews were conducted. Glesne reminded the researcher to appropriately plan for contingencies relating to interviews as well as how to appropriately conduct a face-to-face interviews.

### **Data Collection**

A proposal for approval to utilize human subjects in the research was submitted to the IRB at Georgia Southern University. Upon receiving IRB consent, the Alpha County School System (pseudonym) was contacted in writing to gain approval to conduct the study. The school district was supplied with an overview of the study and a letter explaining the process. The researcher requested written permission to conduct research in the school system. Once approval was granted from the school system, the researcher adhered to the Alpha County School System's policies regarding research. A letter of consent was mailed to all participants requesting their participation, introducing the researcher, informing the participants about the study, assuring confidentiality, and thanking them in advance for their participation. The researcher had participants sign informed consent agreement forms prior to their participation in the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities and confidential information.



Once consent forms were received, principals were contacted to set-up a designated time and place for the interviews that was convenient for the participants. Interviews were conducted during non-contractual time for participants between 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday for two weeks. Interviews were also scheduled on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. during the six-week interview timeframe at the participants' school or at another private and quiet location. The environment for the interviews reflected an atmosphere that was natural. Before the interviews began, the consent forms were reviewed with each participant to assure him or her of confidentiality. The interviews lasted for approximately forty-five minutes.

Data for this research was gathered through face-to-face interviews. The researcher used a tape recorder to record each interview. The interviews consisted of eleven open-ended, in-depth questions to gain knowledge pertaining to the principals' experiences and perceptions about managing difficult teachers. A transcriber was hired to put the interviews into text form. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement. All audiotapes and transcripts were destroyed after data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

Constant comparison/grounded theory was used to analyze the data, which is a means to analyze data by identifying similarities and differences (Creswell, 2005). The interviews were transcribed by a transcriber. The researcher utilized Gay and Airasian's (2006) three steps to analyze data; reading and memoing, describing, and classifying and interpreting. This assisted the researcher with handling the data so that it could be examined. The analysis also involved identifying categories and themes (Creswell, 2005; Gay & Airasian, 2006).

Each interview was transcribed in a timely manner of each individual interview by a transcriber. Data was organized using Microsoft Word. The researcher reviewed the data to

identify recurring themes (Airasian & Gay, 2000). A list of themes was created by reviewing the information gathered from the interview transcripts. The themes were merged into major themes based on frequency and analysis engulfed in the data and findings were presented in narrative form. Transcribed data will be stored on a jump drive, locked in a file drawer at the researcher's home, and will be maintained for five years.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. The research design for the proposed study was a qualitative research design. The ten selected participants for the research were elementary school principals in a suburban school system in the Southeastern United States. The researcher created the interview instrument for the study. The researcher obtained data through interviews. The data was analyzed through constant comparison/grounded theory.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how elementary principals deal with difficult teachers. For the purpose of this study, difficult teachers are defined as certified teachers who serve as distracters to school leaders that prevent them from focusing on improving instructional practice in the school. To accomplish the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed ten elementary principals from Alpha School System located in the Southeastern United States and analyzed the data to determine how they dealt with difficult teachers. The participants were selected from the population of 29 elementary school principals. All principals who had a minimum of three years of principal experience at the elementary level were invited to participate via e-mail. The first ten elementary principals who responded were selected. Using the basic interpretive approach, the researcher identified common themes that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

The common themes that emerged from the analysis were used to answer the research questions. The over-arching question for this research was: How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers? Two additional sub-questions were used for this study. The first sub-question sought to determine the different types of difficult teachers that elementary principals deal with. The second sub-question sought to determine effective strategies that elementary principals utilized to deal with difficult teachers.

The researcher used face-to-face interviews and general field notes as the means to collect data for the study. The data from the interviews and field notes were sorted in relation to research question and sub-questions. Coded data, trends and patterns gathered from transcribed interviews were analyzed by the researcher to develop an understanding of how elementary

school principals deal with difficult teachers. Participants from this study included ten Georgia public elementary school principals from a suburban school system.

Chapter Four represents an overview of the findings and overall results from the one-on-one interviews with ten school administrators, beginning with the demographic data of the participants. The remainder of the chapter reports the findings associated with the research questions.

### **Demographic Data**

The data for this study was collected from ten elementary school principals. To add depth to the study, the participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire immediately prior to the interview. The questionnaire included questions regarding sex, ethnicity, years of experience, age, and highest completed degree. A table showing the data obtained through this questionnaire is shown below. The table is organized alphabetically by participant.

Table 4.1

*Participants' Demographic Data*

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Years of Principal Experience</b>	<b>Highest Degree Attained</b>
Armstrong	Male	Caucasian	36 – 40	6	Masters
Burns	Female	Caucasian	46 – 50	8	Doctorate
Carter	Female	Caucasian	51 – 55	3	Specialist
Douglas	Female	Caucasian	41 – 45	4	Masters
Edwards	Female	Caucasian	46 – 50	12	Doctorate
Ferguson	Female	Caucasian	46 – 50	3	Doctorate
Gordon	Male	Caucasian	41 – 45	5	Masters
Henry	Male	African American	41 – 45	6	Doctorate
Irving	Female	African American	46 – 50	8	Specialist
Jones	Female	Caucasian	46 – 50	6	Masters

Seven of the ten participants were female and three were male. Four of the participants had a doctoral degree as their highest degree, two had educational specialists, and four had earned a master's degree. Three of the principals were very experienced with eight or more years of principal experience. Three of the principals had six or more years of experience, and four had five years or less of experience. Five of the ten principals were between the ages of 45 – 50. Three of the principals were 41 – 45, one principal was 36 – 40, and one principal was 51 – 55. Eight of the participants were of Caucasian descent and two were African-American descent.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this phenomenological qualitative study was obtained through the use of in-depth open-ended interviews from ten participants. The interviews were conducted at a time and location that was convenient to the participant, but private (school conference rooms, principal's office, participant's private residence). Each interview lasted no longer than forty-five minutes. The analysis of this study was constant and consisted of organizing data, creating categories or themes, testing the emergent themes alongside the data, and composing the report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Each interview was transcribed upon completion of individual interviews by a transcriber within two weeks of completion of the interviews. Secondly, data was created using Microsoft Word (the transcriber typed the interviews, the researcher utilized word to type the text, create tables, and organize the information). Next, the researcher read the transcriptions repeatedly to grasp an understanding of the information. Then, the data was reviewed to identify recurring categories (exact quotations that were relevant to the sub-questions were pulled out of the interview text, then the data was further analyzed to create thematic summaries of each quote), and divided into themes (Airasian & Gay, 2000). Finally, themes that emerged from the interview transcripts were coded and categorized in relation to the research questions. Each category was correlated back to one of the research questions in the study.

## **Research Questions**

In order to answer the sub-questions, the overarching question served as the focus of the interviews. The overarching question was: How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers?

*Research Sub-Question 1:* What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter?

In question one, themes that were most frequent regarding the types of difficult teachers that principals identified were these:

- Teachers who are resistant to change
- Teachers who do not teach required curriculum/utilize adopted teaching methods
- Teachers who exhibit strong personality/vocal teachers
- Teachers who fail to get along with colleagues
- Dishonest/deceptive teachers
- Insubordinate teachers
- Teachers with self-control issues
- Incompetent teachers
- Negative teachers
- Teachers with emotional issues

### **Teachers who are Resistant to Change**

The resistant teacher is identified as a teacher in the building who chooses not to incorporate changes that have been implemented in the school. These changes could be

state, county, and/or school mandates. Principal Armstrong stated, “Teachers that have between twenty-five-plus years experience and particularly with them, it's more about not having a connection with other teachers, but particularly, doing things they want to do without regard to anything the school system wants.”

One hundred percent of the principals who took part in the study stated that this was a difficult group they were always contending with. Principal Burns echoed this point. He stated, “I've had a couple of teachers that have had a very difficult time letting go of the old way of teaching and following the new initiatives that we have here. That's been very difficult to deal with.”

This group appears to be difficult across the board. Principal Ferguson had a particular group of teachers in mind when she talked about resistant teachers, “I felt like the choices they are making, they're very conscious of these two in particular; teachers were very conscious of the choices they made and it was more of, I can do what I want and you can't change it; I've been teaching 19 years, I know exactly what I'm doing.” The teacher that is resistant to change provided a great deal of difficulty for the principals who participated in the study.

### **Teachers Who Do Not Teach Required Curriculum/Utilize Adopted Teaching**

#### **Methods**

Teachers who choose not to teach utilizing the required curriculum and/or fail to utilize the current adopted teaching methodology is also identified as a difficult group. This group fails to meet their instructional obligations by not appropriately utilizing the state and county mandated curriculum, by utilizing unsanctioned teaching practices, or both. This was a real concern for ninety percent of the principals. Principal Carter



mentioned her frustration with teachers identified with this problem. She stated, “They've been trained as to what to do, but when it comes down to it, they go in their classroom, they shut their door and they do their own thing.” The teachers understand what the expectation is, but fail to meet the expectation. Principal Ferguson sees it this way, “This teacher is not following the guidelines that the state, county, or school has placed on them, but also, not teaching standard-based and things like that.” The difficulty incurred relating to this group of teachers was shared by all of the principals who participated in the study. Principal Irving described these teachers in this way, “Those teachers that probably don't want to be where they are; they don't like the students. They have no intention of making changes to their teaching practices and doing what they need to do to meet the needs of the students.”

The teacher who chooses not to teach required curriculum and/or to utilize adopted teaching methods proved to be a frustrating group for the principals. In most cases this group of teachers could teach according the prescribed method, but chose not to do so. Consistently, knowing when appropriate instruction is not going on can be difficult.

### **Teachers Who Exhibit Strong Personality/Vocal Teachers**

Teachers who prove to have strong willed personalities, and are generally vocal forces in the building were also identified across the board as difficult. This is a group that has no qualms about speaking out against the leader. Principal Edwards described them as “Teachers who are difficult personality-wise and not wanting to cooperate and be a team player.” This particular group can be particularly difficult to handle. Principal Carter states, “Very strong-willed teachers that, as I said before, think their way is the

right way. They come in with their own set of ideas and thoughts and they don't buy into the culture of the school in which they're working in.”

Strong-willed teachers were extremely trying for seven out of ten principals who were a part of the study. Principal Carter added this to her previous statement, “I've had a couple of teachers that have had a very difficult time letting go of the old way of teaching and following the new initiatives that we have here. That's been very difficult to deal with. They're very strong-willed and want to do it their way.”

Teachers with strong personalities can create problems if they are working against the principal. Principal Henry states, “One in particular is very strong and very resistant and she tries to recruit. I talk to those people that she's tried to recruit. They just find little things they can do to try to spread their cancer cells throughout the building.” The principals agreed that it was important to be cognizant of the strong-willed-vocal teacher. This group can prove to be quite troublesome and can require more time from the administrator to manage their behavior with colleagues.

### **Dishonest/Deceptive Teachers**

The dishonest/deceptive teacher is a person that the principal cannot trust. This individual either deceives or outright lies to her supervisor. The most difficult part of dealing with this type of teacher is identifying them. A naïve administrator may not be aware that a particular teacher is being friendly and cooperative to his face while secretly working against him behind his back. Sixty percent of participating principals found the dishonest/deceptive teacher to be a disruptive force in a school building. The participants in this study were well aware of the need to be on guard for these individuals in their buildings.

Principal Ferguson describes this group of teachers this way, “Your more difficult teachers to work with are the ones who are very manipulative and cunning to the point that they know just how far to push the limits and you really can't do anything about it.”

Principal Burns recounts a situation with a teacher that she trusted, “There was an incident on the playground. There was one little girl and five boys in this EBD class. The teacher and parapro both knew they had to keep constant supervision on these kids. You know, I supported them up until the hearing when I kind of caught them in a lying situation and then I said, ‘I can't support (you).’” The teacher and paraprofessional both ended up resigning.

The dishonest/deceptive teacher can be extremely frustrating to deal with, Principal Irving explains, “A passive/aggressive, who will agree with or tell you anything and then when they get to the other end of the hall, it's another story, you know, when you're there with them.” The principals in the study had found dealing with this type of teacher disheartening.

### **Teachers Who Fail to Get Along with Colleagues**

Another group of difficult teachers identified by the principals in the study is teachers who fail to get along with colleagues. Eighty percent of the principals who participated in the study mentioned this group of teachers. The job of today's public school teacher is difficult enough without the stress of facing difficult colleagues. This is coupled with the fact that collaboration between teachers is as important today as it has ever been. Principals need teachers to collaborate and interact professionally with their colleagues and when this does not happen, problems tend to continue and may even

worsen. Principal Edwards states that, “Teachers who are difficult personality-wise and not wanting to cooperate and be a team player create problems in the building.”

Principal Ferguson talks about difficulties she has with these types of teachers, “She could not get along with any of her peers, any of her colleagues. She always had to be right, and it was her way or no way. She was very, in my opinion, sneaky about how she did things in her classroom.”

Teachers who cannot get along with their colleagues create problems in the building. More stress is created, which is not conducive to a productive environment. Principal Gordon explains it this way, “When teachers are not professional with each other in the way that they talk about each other, it’s frustrating. In reality, I kind of look at the school as a family, because we do spend so much time together.”

Teachers who do not act professionally with their colleagues are another difficult group and the operation of the school, in part, depends on trust and collaboration.

### **Insubordinate Teachers**

Fifty percent of the participating principals identified the insubordinate teacher as one they consider to be difficult. Any teacher who is brazen enough to violate a directive or policy is a source of difficulty for the elementary principal. Principal Jones concurs, “I’ve had to deal with teachers like that (insubordinate) and it’s very difficult because you feel like you have to catch them.”

Principal Ferguson said this about one of her teachers: “She was insubordinate to me and the assistant principal. She, even after we put many expectations in writing to her, she just, I don’t know, refused to follow through with them.”

This insubordinate teacher is as frustrating to deal as any of the aforementioned. The policies that these individuals choose to violate are clearly stated. These individuals are just choosing to contradict the directives and/or expectations spelled out by the school system or principal.

### **Teachers With Self-Control Issues**

According to seventy percent of the principals who participated in the study, teachers who are identified as having self-control issues are teachers who fail to use good judgment. These are the individuals that lose their composure and may exhibit unprofessional behavior with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. They sometimes communicate inappropriately with parents. They might very well have several enduring traits, but still need to work on self-control.

Principal Burns gives this example, “The thing that I get the most is teachers raising their voice. Sometimes they just don’t know how to bite their tongue and count to ten when it comes to just getting upset about things.” Another situation involving Principal Gordon became even more volatile, “I had one other teacher that blew up in here, started raising her voice, yelling and screaming. I told her that we now have two problems. A, the one I brought you in for and now you want to start screaming and yelling at me.”

Sixty percent of the principals who participated in the survey agreed that teachers who have self-control issues are definitely a problem, but one that must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Teachers exhibiting issues of self-control may in fact have a deeper-rooted problem that may need additional support beyond the support that most teachers receive from administrators.

### **Incompetent Teachers**

A problem teacher that almost every principal has dealt with at one time or another is the incompetent teacher. Fifty percent of the principals interviewed mentioned this as a difficult type of teacher to deal with. Despite a principal's best efforts, they sometimes hire a teacher who just does not have what it takes to do the job.

Speaking about one teacher in particular, Principal Irving states, "It got to the point where she really just stopped taking care of the children and she stopped doing anything that needed to be done to help the students to be successful; you know she's incompetent."

Principal Douglas states, "An incompetent teacher, she tries really hard, but she just doesn't quite measure up or he. They need a lot of additional training."

Principals try different methods to work with the incompetent teacher to improve their performance, but sometimes that is not possible. Participants in the study who identified this group as difficult all felt that it was their duty to try and help these teachers improve and not just get them out of their building. The principals who identified this problem group agreed that it was difficult to decide how much effort to put into remediating this group of teachers before termination is viewed as the appropriate option.

### **Negative Teachers**

Negative teachers were identified by forty percent of the principals interviewed as problematic to their school. It appears that almost every building has negative teachers in it. The difference is more in the number of negative teachers and the influence they wield on the staff as a whole.

Principal Carter states this about certain negative teachers at her school, “They are a cancer in the building; they work very hard to undermine what's happening in the building on a lot of different levels.”

Principal Edwards says this about one of negative people in her building, “Extremely negative, negative with me, negative to anybody that would listen to them, to the point that I had parents come to me and say, ‘You know, at the end of the year, I don't ever want my child near them because they're very negative.’”

The participants felt that the biggest issue with negative teachers is the fact that they do not operate in a vacuum. They tend to spread negativity wherever they can. Negative teachers need an audience and affirmation.

Principal Edwards speaks further about the subject, “Where you've got a teacher who's or a couple of teachers who are being negative, and as I said the word before, cancerous to the staff, it's hard sometimes to find a way to stop it without being heavy-handed, because I think that just reinforces, sometimes, the perception of other people out there.” Negative teachers are, as Principal Edwards points out, not the easiest group to deal with. She feels that, all principals deal with them to some degree.

### **Teachers With Emotional Issues**

The last group of difficult teachers that fifty percent of the principals interviewed identified is the teacher with emotional issues. This is a tough group to deal with. Principals are in a people business and, while they are empathetic about the plight of these teachers, the principal has a responsibility to the student, first and foremost. The principals in this study realize this. Principals noted that they were aware that there

exists certain guidance and laws when managing teachers identified with diagnosed incapacities.

Principal Edwards states this about one of her teachers with emotional issues, “Truly unbalanced; she was a cancer on the staff because it didn't matter what I did or what my administration did, it was bad; it was wrong. And it was twisted; there's a lot of what she said that would be twisted and she would go to the county office and she would go to other principals and she would go to parents. I would have parents complaining about things that she had related to them incorrectly.”

Principal Ferguson had this to say about one of her emotionally distraught teachers, “It was like she was trying to appear that she had a mental problem or something, and that’s what created her hardships to be a teacher maybe. A teacher who had some serious mental illness per documentation that she provided to us; however, it was very difficult to remove her from the classroom. We had to wait until something happened that was of concern to us for the children’s safety in the classroom.”

Teachers who have mental issues are a reality that several of the principals encountered. The issues these teachers exhibit vary, as does the severity; each principal explained their method of managing this type of teacher.

*Research Sub-Question 2: What types of strategies are effective in dealing with different types of difficult teachers?*

Within research question two, the strategies that elementary principals found to be effective when dealing with difficult teachers were:

- Conferencing/dialogue
- Written re-direction



- Teacher observations evaluations and monitoring
- Following-up
- Professional development plans
- Providing professional learning
- Utilizing coaches and mentors
- Consulting human resources

### **Conferencing/Dialogue**

The study participants were in agreement that the initial step in confronting an inappropriate behavior by a teacher was to conference with the staff member. This is especially true if this was the first issue. Principal Ferguson describes her conferencing process this way; “I started gathering information first from that teacher. I would have a sit-down one-on-one conference with the teacher and ask questions, makes some notes and then share my expectations and then after the conference, I would write a letter to follow up with what our conference was about and I'd put all my expectations in writing.”

Conferencing is the key to gathering information and establishing two-way communication with the teacher. Whatever the circumstance, it is important to hear what the teacher has to say about the matter. Principal Burns utilizes conferencing to help her get at the heart of the issue, “I have to massage the situation and figure out what's going on. I really need to call them in and say, talk to me about the situation that I heard about today or yesterday or the day before. I'll say, well, do you think that's the right way to do it and we talk about it. Then, when that's over with, then they get that letter. Usually, I

don't start with the letter and then move to that. I start with, let's talk about this. So, it's about listening and trying to figure out what they say that they did.”

Many situations regarding inappropriate teacher behavior can be resolved within the course of a simple conversation. Principal Douglas finds dialogue with teachers to be a useful practice, “I just don't try and do it in a confrontational way. I just sit down and I'll say “Look, here's a problem that I'm seeing that we're having and I'm just going to talk to you honestly. This is how I see it and I want your side of it. I want to hear how you feel about it”; we just kind of talk through it.” Regardless, the participants in the study found conferencing to be a sound practice. The principals agreed that the process only escalates when conferencing fails.

### **Written Re-Direction**

Principals in the study agreed that some form of written re-direction should follow a verbal warning via teacher conferences and conversations. If a teacher continues to have issues after informal and formal conferencing has occurred then this is the logical next step.

Principal Armstrong provides this example of a teacher who he re-directed in writing, “I had already re-directed this person verbally, and the second time, the direction of leaving early warranted a letter of re-direction.”

Principal Henry explained the need to put a re-direction in writing this way, “I'm going to put this in writing with the understanding that if there's no change after this, then, I will be making recommendations to HR from this point, as far as, do I need to do some type of re-assignment.”

The principals in the study all agreed about this step, but had different ideas about when a formal letter of re-direction should be presented to a teacher. Some principals moved to this step quickly, while others provided several less formal warnings before a formal letter was issued. Regardless of the exact process, all of the principals in the study utilized this tool in their dealings with difficult teachers.

### **Teacher Observations, Evaluations and Monitoring**

Teacher observations provide an important opportunity to monitor teacher performance. This is especially important when a principal is dealing with a difficult teacher. Principal Carter described the usefulness of classroom observations this way, “Teachers tend to be more on their toes when they know you're going to pop in at any time; they tend to follow the procedures better. The math coach, literacy coach, assistant principal, the grade level chair, and myself are constantly in and out of those classrooms all day long. Especially the few that I have that I have to watch closely.”

It is important for principals to be in all classrooms, but a greater focus must be dedicated to observing teachers who are having difficulty with classroom instruction or procedures. Principal Gordon states, “You have to go back there and you have to do more observations. You have to work with them. I’m a firm believer, you can’t just say, you did bad, and move on. You have to show them what they did and work with them and give them resources, then follow-up with them with our title coaches, which we have here.”

Talking to a teacher about an alleged behavior is one thing, but observing the behavior and providing feedback provides a much more concrete avenue to assist a principal in dealing with an inappropriate behavior (as far as it relates to classroom

practices and instruction). The value of this part of the process cannot be underestimated.

### **Follow-up**

Our study participants agreed that once a principal has addressed a behavior verbally or in writing, it is important that they monitor and follow-up with the teacher. Simply speaking to a teacher about an inappropriate practice or behavior will not necessarily fix the problem. Principal Irving believes in following-up with her teachers, “I always go back to check, do a follow-up to see how things are doing, go do an observation. Whatever the situation is, I always do a follow-up.”

Follow-up conferences should follow the initial contact with the teacher. Whether it is scheduled for three weeks after the meeting or directly after some type of classroom observation. Principal Ferguson has found following-up with her teachers to be a sound practice, “I’ve learned the hard way, I always document by a follow-up letter or an e-mail or something that shows date and time that we had the discussion, and I always put my expectations, like that’s the last thing in the letter. My expectation is from this point forward, you will do this, this, this, and this. Then I follow up to see if those things have been done or if things are getting better.”

The teachers need the feedback and an administrator needs to be sure that the behavior is corrected. Following-up with teachers has proven to be a sound practice for the principals in this study.

### **Professional Development Plans**

A Professional Development Plan (PDP) that is created through collaboration between the principal and/or assistant principal and the teacher is a key component

relating to the handling of a difficult teacher, if it is well written and appropriately monitored.

Principal Douglas describes a situation when she had to put a teacher on a PDP, “I’ll usually meet with the assistant principal and the teacher and myself, just so there’s another body present there. If the problem still persists, then I put them on a PDP. I had one teacher who was doing well with the support of the math coach. The year went very well, but as soon as the coach left, she wanted to dive right back into her lackadaisical process or practice; and so, that’s when I put her on a PDP.”

A few of the principals in the study expressed their frustration with putting a teacher on a PDP. Principal Ferguson states, “I had to meet with the teacher and it ended up where I had to put her on a PDP. I then had to meet with her every three weeks so that she could turn in student data or lesson plans, things like that, that we could actually review so that I could make sure that she was doing them the way we had asked her to do all of that, because no matter how many times I asked her or how many times I’d put it in writing, she just did not follow through.”

The key to the plan is making sure it is a collaborative effort, ensuring that the teacher played a role in the plan’s creation. A strong plan that is monitored by the principal and/or assistant principal can create an opportunity for teacher improvement and student success.

### **Provide Professional Learning**

The principals who took part in the study consistently identified professional learning (development) as a tool utilized to help difficult teachers. Finding appropriate

professional learning courses and/or professional articles can be extremely beneficial to teachers who are having difficulty.

Principal Carter sees professional learning as a way to be proactive with her teachers (especially the ones who are struggling), “I try to provide them all the professional development training I can to get them to understand exactly what procedures it is that I want them to follow. We utilize a lot of professional development and, again, a lot of one-on-one conversations, upfront before anything happens again. If I've had one incident, I always try to be proactive and make sure I have those conversations with that teacher often and give them support.”

The key is finding the appropriate courses and/or reading materials, having buy-in from the teacher, and monitoring the implementation of strategies acquired from this professional learning via conversations, lesson plans, and classroom observation.

### **Utilize Coaches and Mentors**

Several of the principals who participated in the study talked about their utilization of coaches and mentors to assist teachers who were having difficulty.

Principal Edwards sees the value of utilizing coaches this way, “I've even gone so far as to hire coaches for them to bring them up to the standard where they need to be so that they are good for kids and good for the school. Sometimes that has worked and sometimes it hasn't.”

The math and literacy coaches, available to Title I Schools, can be extremely helpful as they provide non-threatening feedback and support. Colleague mentors can also be helpful to teachers, since the mentor can relate to the struggling teacher as a colleague and can empathize with the teachers who are experiencing difficulty. Principal

Burns states, “So, to me, the best thing is just talking with them, find them a mentor, then revisiting those situations, revisiting them and making sure that, hey, is everything going better?” It should be pointed out that coaches are only available to teachers who teach in Title I Schools and that mentors are limited by time and the financial burden associated with assigning them. Six of the principals participating in this study are in Title I schools.

### **Consult Human Resources**

All principals in this study talked about the role of the Human Resources department when dealing with difficult teachers. If a principal has a problem and they are unsure of the proper course of action, HR is consulted to assist the principal with the situation. Principal Henry consistently seeks counsel from Human Resources, “I always seek out the guidance of HR as far as, how do I deal with this person that is constantly, you know, they have their p's and q's lined up as far as, okay, they're delivering instruction wonderfully, but the way they talk to parents may be challenging.”

The participants all spoke about the support they receive from HR in a positive way. Principal Burns believes Human Resources is a valuable tool for her, “I feel like I have a very supportive county office that supports me when I have those types of situations. They tell me this is what you do, this, this and this, and if it doesn't occur we'll remove them, and we've done that.”

Each of the participants commented on how helpful the Human Resources Department was when dealing with the possible dismissal of a difficult teacher.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter revealed the findings from the participants' responses to the interview questions. The findings identified ten distinctive types of difficult teachers that principals identified. Eight different distinctive strategies for dealing with difficult teachers were also identified. The most common types of teachers identified were these: teachers who are resistant to change, teachers who do not teach required curriculum/utilize adopted teaching methods, teachers who exhibit strong personality/vocal teachers, teachers who fail to get along with colleagues, dishonest/deceptive teachers, teachers with self-control issues, incompetent teachers, and teachers with emotional issues. The most common types of strategies to deal with difficult teachers were these: conferencing/dialogue, written re-direction, teacher observations, evaluations, and monitoring, following-up, professional development plans, providing professional learning, utilizing coaches and mentors, and consulting human resources.

The principals in the study identified several key strategies utilized to deal with difficult teachers. Conferencing was one of the strategies. This particular strategy was generally a first step in dealing with an issue. During the conference the principal attempts to discuss the inappropriate behavior with the teacher. This allows the principal to gather information and hear the teacher's side of the story. Written re-direction is the next strategy that is utilized. Written re-direction allows the principal to put their concerns in writing. Teacher observations, evaluations, and monitoring allow the principal to ensure that changes are being implemented through classroom observation. Following-up gives the principal an opportunity to check on whether a



situation with a teacher is improving. This is generally done through informal conferencing. The professional development plan (PDP) is a document created by the principal and teacher to outline specific ways to improve in agreed upon areas. Principals provide professional learning as another way to assist teachers. The professional learning option allows teachers to gain information about a problem area through classes or workshops. Utilizing coaches and mentors is where the principal has a colleague work with a teacher and/or has an instructional coach work with a struggling teacher. Consulting human resources is necessary when a principal is unsure of the appropriate strategy to utilize in order to address a behavior being exhibited by a teacher.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how elementary principals deal with difficult teachers. To accomplish the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed ten elementary principals from Alpha School System and analyzed the data to determine how they dealt with difficult teachers. The overarching question was: How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers? Two sub-questions served as a guide throughout the process: (1) What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter? (2) What types of strategies are effective in dealing with different types of difficult teachers? This chapter will present a discussion, make recommendations and consider implications for the future. A brief summary of the study is included.

The study yielded several common practices that were mentioned by the study participants. These common practices were planning of meetings with difficult teachers, listening, dealing with problems immediately, having a witness, and building relationships.

- When dealing with a difficult teacher it is important to plan before having a face-to-face meeting. The principal needs be aware of exactly what they plan to say and their expectations about how the difficult teacher will react.
- Listening is also extremely important. All teachers need to feel that they are being heard. Just because a principal has a conversation with a

teacher does not mean that he has actually heard what the difficult teacher has to say. Letting the teacher know that you are actively listening can go a long way toward persuading a difficult teacher to see things your way.

- Principals should have a witness when meeting with difficult teachers about substantive issues. This can prevent a teacher from fabricating a version of the facts that is less than accurate. It also gives the principal someone to take notes during the course of the meeting. When dealing with particularly difficult staff members, this is almost a necessity.
- Principals need to build relationships with staff members. By building relationships with teachers when things are going well, it is less difficult to confront a teacher if there is a problem or issue. Creating a positive relationship with teachers, whenever possible can make having a difficult confrontation with a teacher, less stressful.

### **Summary of the Study**

Principals today face a difficult task. Their roles are constantly evolving to meet the demands of the federal and state government as well as meeting the needs of the students, faculty and staff, and the entire community (Tirozzi, 2001). While being a principal is a tough job in itself, being an effective and skillful principal is even more pressure. Buckingham, Donaldson, and Marnik's (2005) study found that a principal's work is time consuming with principals devoting 57-59 hours a week to their job. Additionally, many of the principals they interviewed for their study described their jobs as stressful and left them feeling overloaded. With principals feeling this way already,

dealing with difficult teachers adds another dimension to an already stressful profession. The focus of this study was to assist principals in dealing with difficult teachers by identifying common techniques that are being utilized.

The study's participants were elementary school principals in a school district in the Southeastern section of the United States. The Alpha County Schools is located in the Southeastern United States. The participants were selected from the population of 29 elementary school principals from Alpha County School System (pseudonym). All elementary principals who had a minimum of three years of principal experience at the elementary level were invited to participate via e-mail. The first ten elementary principals who responded were selected to participate in the study.

### **Discussion**

The findings in this study were identified in Chapter Four. In this section, the researcher connected the findings of the research with the review of literature presented in Chapter Three. The findings of the study yielded ten distinctive types of difficult teachers: (1) teachers who are resistant to change (2) teachers who do not teach required curriculum/utilize adopted teaching methods (3) teachers who exhibit strong personality/vocal teachers (4) teachers who fail to get along with colleagues (5) dishonest/deceptive teachers (6) insubordinate teachers (7) teachers with self-control issues (8) incompetent teachers (9) negative teachers (10) teachers with emotional issues. Eight distinctive strategies for dealing with difficult teachers were identified: (1) conferencing (2) written re-direction (3) teacher observations evaluations and monitoring (4) following-up (5) professional development plans (6) providing

professional learning (7) utilizing coaches and mentors (8) consulting human resources.

The findings will be discussed in the following sections according to sub-questions.

**What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter?**

Elementary school principals, like anyone who serves in a supervisory capacity, deal with all different types of difficult employees. This can be a challenging task, but the task is made even more challenging by the fact that there is no one distinctive type of difficult employee. Whitaker (2002) and McEwan (2005) identified categories based on their experience with challenging teachers when they served as principals. The participants in the study identified ten distinctive categories of their own. The most universally agreed upon difficult teacher identified by the participants were those who were resistant to change. This particular group of teachers had a difficult time accepting and adapting to change. When a new directive or initiative was put into place in the school system, this group would either overtly or covertly avoid implementing the new initiative. Veteran teachers generally dominated this category. Another type of teacher that the principals identified was teachers who fail to teach required curriculum/utilize adopted teaching methods. The teachers in this category choose not to adhere to policies relating to new curriculum or teaching methods either because they did not believe the curriculum or methods to be effective or they believed it was too much work to change what they were presently doing.

The participants all recognized the presence of at least a few teachers who exhibited a strong personality and/or were vocal. This category is similar to the angry aggressives identified by McEwan (2005) and the hostile-aggressives that Bramson

(1988) categorized. This group did share some similarity to resistant teachers and teachers who choose not to follow the curriculum and/or teaching methods, but these individuals choose to be extremely vocal in their displeasure with the changes. This particular category of teacher had an opinion about every subject and wanted the principal and everyone else to know when she did not agree with something that was being implemented in the school. The principals also identified teachers who do not get along with their colleagues as a type of difficult teacher. Whitaker (2002) discussed this group as a part of his backbone group and McEwan (2005) referred to these teachers as part of her passive-aggressive group. This group has difficulty getting along with other teachers. In the current school environment where teachers need to collaborate to provide the best possible instruction for their students, having colleagues that cannot work together is not a viable option.

A category of difficult teacher that all principals identified was the dishonest/deceptive teacher. In McEwan's (2005) book, she refers to this group as "liars." All of the participants had at least a few of these teachers on their staff. This is a group that would appear to be following the curriculum or initiative in place in the school, but upon closer inspection they were willfully failing to adhere to the curriculum or procedures of the school or school system. This group could be extremely clandestine and difficult to catch. The participants were in agreement that the principal should be leery of teachers they suspect may fall into this category. Insubordinate teachers were another category identified by the study participants. The major difference between this type of teacher and the dishonest/deceptive teacher is that they are much more blatant in

their behavior. These individuals did not necessarily believe that school or system policies apply to them.

Most of the participants identified teachers with self-control issues as another difficult group to contend with. The previous authors did not specifically identify this group. This category of teachers exhibited inappropriate behaviors from time-to-time; an example might be yelling at students or making an inappropriate comment to a parent in the heat of the moment. The teachers in this category might be excellent for the most part, but had an occasional episode that must be addressed by the administration. Almost every principal, who took part in the study identified incompetent teachers as difficult teachers. These particular teachers simply are not providing the appropriate instruction for students on a consistent basis. The principal must deal swiftly with these teachers trying to remediate or terminate.

Principals in the study identified negative teachers as a distinctive group that had to be dealt with. Bramson (1988) referred to negativists and McEwan (2005) referred to these teachers as aggressive-naysayers. The negative teacher is never content. They generally never see the positive in anything. One of the major problems with the negative employee was their ability to spread their negativity. All principals must have a strategy devised to deal with this extremely toxic group of teachers. The final category of teachers that several of the study participants identified was the teacher with emotional issues. This particular group of teachers had shown signs to the principal or their staff that they may have an emotional issue that might require professional help and quite possibly removal from the classroom. Principals should be sure they seek the advice of human resources when they deal with situations involving this type of teacher.

### **What types of strategies are effective in dealing with different types of difficult teachers?**

Today's elementary school principals have extremely demanding jobs, with federal, state, and local achievement mandates (Tirozzi, 2001). This job becomes even more difficult when they begin to grapple with difficult teachers. The principals who participated in the study agreed about the fact that dealing with difficult employees can be time consuming. Eight strategies for dealing with difficult teachers were identified by the subjects of the study. The first category identified by the participants was conferencing/dialogue. Conferencing with a teacher that a principal is having difficulty with is the first step (and hopefully the last step) in dealing with the issue. During the conference the principal gathers information and listens to the teacher's version of events. In most cases the problem with the teacher can be resolved by utilizing this step. If this does not happen, the principal has to escalate her response. Whitaker (2002) and McEwan (2005) both utilized conferencing as a strategy to assist in dealing with teacher issues.

The principals in the study viewed the letter of re-direction as the next step in the process of dealing with a difficult teacher. This is a formal letter completed by the principal outlining the inappropriate behavior and exact expectations as to how the behavior is to be corrected. All of the study participants mentioned the letter. McEwan (2005) discussed the need to document and present letters of re-direction when dealing with inappropriate teacher behavior. The only difference between the perceptions of the re-direction letter was in regards to when it would be presented to the teacher. Some of



the respondents allowed several chances (had several conferences with the teachers before they issued a letter of re-direction) while others believed in issuing the letter more quickly. Another resource at the disposal of the principals is utilization of teacher observations, evaluations, and monitoring. The principal can learn a great deal by visiting classrooms to see if the teachers are following appropriate instructional practices. The principal should also monitor lesson planning, assessment, and other aspects relating to teacher performance. This is an extremely important tool that will assist the principal in ascertaining exactly what is occurring in the classroom.

The majority of participants discussed the importance of following-up with the teachers after a problem has been addressed. This might require a formal meeting (two weeks after the conference on the issue) or just a drop-by meeting. It depends on the severity of the issue. Follow-up was considered by principals to be an important way to ensure that the necessary corrections were being made. Whitaker (2002) and McEwan (2005) mentioned utilizing follow-up meetings with teachers. The professional development plan (PDP) is the next option exercised by principals to try to deal with a behavior. The PDP is a document that spells out specific methods the teacher is expected to utilize in order to improve a deficiency. The PDP might require working with a mentor, weekly meetings with an administrator, reading books or article, and a professional learning course. The PDP is generally considered an escalation from the letter or re-direction. Principals involved in the study discussed utilizing professional learning opportunities to assist teachers who were having difficulties. These can be specific professional learning opportunities to assist particular teachers or learning

opportunities offered to the entire staff to either respond to a need or proactively prepare teachers for a possible problem area or county initiative.

Several of the principals discussed difficult teachers working with coaches and mentors as a means of improving their instructional practice. Academic coaches can be extremely helpful in assisting teachers who are having difficulty with their instruction. Unfortunately, only Title I Schools (schools that have been identified as having a high student population that has a high free and reduced lunch population) have access to coaches. Mentors are another viable option. Principals can assign experienced teachers mentors to work with teachers and this practice can be effective. The only possible roadblock to assigning mentors is funding. Mentors were once funded by the school system, but budgetary constraints have ended this practice in Alpha County School System (pseudonym). Whitaker (2002) made reference to utilizing mentors to assist his teachers. Consulting the Human Resources (HR) department when dealing with difficult teachers was mentioned as almost a necessity. The participants mentioned contacting HR when there were any questions pertaining to how to deal with difficult employees. All of the principals believed HR was a valuable resource when they ran into a question relating to a difficult teacher. McEwan (2005) referred to the utilization of human resources when the situation dictates.

### **Conclusions**

Principals continue to deal with an overwhelming number of issues on a daily basis; state and county mandates, changes in curriculum, training teachers, monitoring student academic progress, parents, and dealing with teacher issues. Based on the findings of this study, practices utilized by elementary principals when dealing with

difficult teachers were identified, and the over-arching question was addressed; “How do elementary school principals manage difficult teachers?” The researcher found credible evidence that sub-question, “What are the different types of difficult teachers in education that principals encounter?” was answered.

The researcher yielded the following conclusions from the study on how elementary principals manage difficult teachers:

- Resistant teachers were the most difficult group with which principals had to deal. The teachers in this group were the most prevalent and problematic for the participating principals to cope with on a day-to-day basis.
- Though the principals utilized the same strategies for dealing with difficult teachers, the approach depended on the personality of the principal. Some of the principals in the study were more punitive in their approach. These individuals gave less verbal warnings before they re-directed an employee in writing. Other principals were more nurturing in their approach. These principals attempted to conference more with difficult teachers and offer them more opportunities before they escalated their responses (writing letters of re-direction, placing teachers on PDP's, etc).
- The majority of the behaviors exhibited by difficult teachers had to be dealt by the principal. There were a limited number of situations that could be dealt with by utilizing coaches and mentors.
- Male principals had a greater tendency to be legalistic or punitive in their dealings with teachers than female principals. Males tended to go directly from

verbal re-direction to re-direction in writing; female principals tended to give more opportunities before they formally re-directed in writing.

- Principals were encouraged that they were not alone in dealing with difficult teachers. When a principal had an issue they were unsure how to deal with, they felt comfortable contacting human resources for assistance. All of the principals felt supported by HR.

### **Implications**

Based upon a thorough review of the available literature and the findings of this research study, the following implications can be drawn:

1. This study provided additional research relating to how elementary school principals deal with difficult teachers. The findings of this study offer further credible information that can be utilized by principals as they deal with problem teachers. The groups of difficult teachers identified in the study along with the strategies that were outlined will provide another resource for principals to draw upon when dealing with difficult teachers.
2. The information gleaned from this study will provide a point of reference for future research in this area. This study can be referred to as future researchers to provide more data relating to how principals should deal with difficult teachers. The current amount of research relating to this subject is minimal. This subject is rich with potential avenues for future study.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify how elementary school principals dealt with difficult teachers. The researcher makes the following recommendations for future studies based on the information that emerged from the findings:

1. Conduct a study that focuses on school climate as it relates to negative teachers. This recommendation was influenced by the references made to school culture by Whitaker (2012). His philosophy of dealing with difficult teachers focused heavily on school climate. This research could yield valuable information about a possible correlation between school climate and negative teachers.
2. Conduct a study that focuses on how male and female principals deal with difficult teachers. This would allow a greater understanding of the differences in the thinking of male and female principals in how they deal with challenging teacher behaviors.
3. Conduct a study that focuses on how middle and high school administrators deal with difficult teachers. A limitation of this study is that it focuses solely on elementary principals. This would be a fascinating topic that would eventually allow an opportunity to compare the approaches of elementary and middle and high school administrators.
4. Conduct a study that focuses on how principal personality and/or leadership styles impact their approach to dealing with difficult teachers. The researcher found differences in the way that different principals dealt

with difficult teachers. Focusing on personality as it relates to principals responses to teacher behavior would prove to be an interesting study.

5. Conduct a quantitative study that focuses on how elementary school principals deal with difficult employees. This would allow a comparison between the qualitative and quantitative studies on this subject.
6. Create an instrument based on the findings of the study to send to a large sample. This would allow for a larger sample size and allow the findings to be generalizable, which was not possible with this study.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Elementary school principals face ever-increasing responsibilities and pressures in today's educational climate. Improving student achievement, implementing new curriculum, planning and implementing professional learning, school improvement planning, student progress monitoring, parent issues, and supervision of an entire school staff are all areas that an elementary principals manages on a daily basis. This galvanizes the need for principals to make valuable use of their time and have a systematic approach to dealing with school issues. Having an orderly approach to dealing difficult teachers is a must. This group of teachers can consume an inordinate amount of time and this study provides a resource to assist administrators with the process, thus providing a means to create a game plan for dealing with difficult teachers.

This study will assist administrators with their task of dealing with difficult teachers, but also serve as a source of information for other researchers that might

consider continuing to improve the amount of viable research in this area. This is an area that presents enormous potential for future educational research.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Tim Tilley  
Dr. Linda Arthur

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 05/30/12

**Expiration Date:** 07/31/12

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

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After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H12458** and titled "**A Study of How Georgia Elementary Principals Manage Difficult Teachers,**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 10 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B  
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Introductory Comments: I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to identify the impact that instructional coaches have in elementary schools. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be taped for accuracy. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Your responses will remain confidential as well as your identity, school, principal, and school district. Please elaborate on specific details during the course of the interview. Please be candid, honest and accurate in your responses. Are there any questions?

Interview Questions:

1. Have you ever encountered a difficult teacher?
2. How would you define a difficult teacher?
3. What kind of teachers have you had difficulty with?
4. How do you deal with a teacher who is difficult to yourself, students, colleagues, or parents?
5. Give me an example or two of teachers that your found particularly hard to work with.

6. What specific strategies work best for you as an administrator when a teacher becomes difficult?
7. How difficult is it for an administrator to confront a difficult teacher?
8. Have you ever made a mistake in dealing with a difficult teacher? If so, what have you learned from the mistakes you have made?
9. What issues do you encounter when dealing with difficult teachers?
10. What criteria do you base your decisions on when handling a difficult teacher?
11. Do you have anything to share about working with difficult teachers that I have not asked you about?

APPENDIX C  
RESEARCH DATA ON DIFFICULT EMPLOYEES

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Bramson, (1988)	Identify types of difficult people and develop strategies to cope with these individuals	Approximately 200 people	Qualitative Case Study	Categorized different types of difficult people and devised appropriate strategies for coping with the different categories of difficult people.
Collins (2001)	Identify companies that made the leap from good companies to great companies	1,435 companies	Mixed Method Case Study Interviews Data Analysis	Identified eleven companies out of the original 1,435 that went from good to great  Identified key components that any business can utilize to become great  Identified concept of getting right people on the bus and wrong

McEwan (2005)	Identify techniques to help difficult teachers become positive and energetic professionals	33 Principals	Qualitative Case Studies Round Table Interviews	people off the bus  Identified types of difficult teachers and devised appropriate strategies for coping with the different categories of teachers.
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## APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RELATED LITERATURE MATRIX

<b>Principal Interview Questions</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
1. Have you ever encountered a difficult teacher?	Axlerod. A., & Holtje, J. (1997), Fleck, F. (2003), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)	1
2. How would you define a difficult teacher?	Axlerod. A., & Holtje, J. (1997), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. R. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)	2
3. What kind of teachers have	Axlerod. A., & Holtje, J. (1997), Bridges, E.	1,2

<p>you had difficulty with?</p>	<p>(1990), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	
<p>4. How do you deal with a teacher who is difficult to yourself, students, colleagues, or parents?</p>	<p>McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008). Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p>5. Give me an example or two</p>	<p>Axlerod. A., &amp; Holtje, J. (1997), Bridges, E. M.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

<p>of teachers that your found particularly hard to work with.</p>	<p>(1990), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	
<p>6. What specific strategies work best for you as an administrator when a teacher becomes difficult?</p>	<p>Axlerod. A., &amp; Holtje, J. (1997), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	2
<p>7. How difficult is it for an administrator to confront a difficult teacher?</p>	<p>Bridges, E. (1990), McEwan, E.(2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	1
<p>8. Have you ever</p>	<p>Axlerod. A., &amp; Holtje, J.</p>	1,2

<p>made a mistake in dealing with a difficult teacher? If so, what have you learned from the mistakes you have made?</p>	<p>(1997), Bridges, E. (1990), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	
<p>9. What issues do you encounter when dealing with difficult teachers?</p>	<p>Axlerod. A., &amp; Holtje, J. (1997), Bridges, E. (1990), Fleck, F. (2003), McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003) Weber, M. (2003), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	1
<p>10. What criteria do you base your</p>	<p>Bridges, E. M. (1990), Fleck, F. (2003),</p>	1

<p>decisions on when handling a difficult teacher?</p>	<p>McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	
<p>11. Do you have anything to share about working with difficult teachers that I have not asked you about?</p>	<p>McEwan, E. (2005), Weber, M. (2003), Weber, M. (2008), Weber, M. (2008), Whitaker, T. (2002), Whitaker, T. (2003)</p>	<p>1,2</p>