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# The Relationship Between Principals' Humor Style and School Climate in Wisconsin's Public Middle Schools

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' HUMOR STYLE AND SCHOOL  
CLIMATE IN WISCONSIN'S PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

GREGORY RICHARD MATTHIAS

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Urban Education

at

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' HUMOR STYLE AND SCHOOL CLIMATE IN WISCONSIN'S PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

By

Gregory Richard Matthias

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014

Under the supervision of Professor Gail Schneider

In an era of unsteady political climates, high stakes testing, stressful situations, and expectations of continuous improvement, today's middle school principals are in a precarious position. Middle school principals have to be involved in the community, seen as a leader at their school, seen as a curriculum leader by their staff, and a motivational coach by their students. Middle school principals' personality and interpersonal skills are even more important today. Therefore, a principal that uses humor may help to motivate students and staff and encourage a positive school climate.

Middle school principals can integrate many styles of leadership within their schools. Leadership styles exhibited by principals are vital in conveying and clarifying with parents, staff, and students. Humor can be used as a tool to improve school climate by reducing school tension felt by students, teachers, parents and community members.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between middle school principals' humor style and teachers' perceptions of the school climate. The literature review revealed that the main topics of humor and school climate seem to give us a greater understanding of the effect of principal humor and its relationship with

school climate. Humor and human nature are inexorably connected. Therefore, in part one, the literature review discusses theories of humor through human time and humor and its benefits. Part two delves into the interconnectedness of humor and leadership, while part three discusses the impact humor has on school climate.

This study included 48 public middle schools across the state of Wisconsin. Principals in each school were given the Humor Style Survey (Babad, 1974), while teachers were given the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). The data were then analyzed to determine the relationship between the principals' humor style and the school climate. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to statistically investigate the relationship between the variables. In testing the hypotheses, the level of significance was set at the .05 level.

The major findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between principal humor style and school climate. It was concluded that principals that employed humor had schools with more open and healthy school climates. This illustrates that principals utilizing humor into their everyday interactions with students, teachers, parents, and community members have schools with better school climates. In this study, using humor has shown to be an effective way to create an open and healthy school climate.

Implications of this study include the positive use of humor by principals, school districts, and educational administration college programs. Administrators may improve their school climate by supporting staff through the use of humor. School districts may

see an improvement in the school climate of a school if a conscious effort is used to utilize humor in each school. Further, educational administration programs and classes may benefit from examining the positive use of humor by future administrators.

Recommendations for further study include replication of this study in elementary, high schools, parochial, charter, or voucher schools, in other states or overseas would help broaden what is known about the complex relationship between principals' humor style and school climate. It may also prove useful to examine the relationship between principal humor style and school climate qualitatively.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to those who have helped me through it all: My wife Kristine, daughters Malia (5) and Kira (1), my Mom and Dad, Karen and Bill Matthias, Dr. Gail Schneider, Ling Ning, my professors at UWM, and countless people who helped me navigate the many hurdles along the way.

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## EPIGRAPH

*Humor is mankind's greatest blessing.*

- Mark Twain

*I laugh because I must not weep.*

-Abraham Lincoln

*A merry heart doth good like medicine.*

- King Solomon

*Brevity is the soul of wit.*

-Shakespeare

*You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than you can in a year of conversation.*

-Plato

*The person who knows how to laugh at himself will never cease to be amused.*

- Shirley MacLaine

*There are three things which are real: God, human folly, and laughter. The first two are beyond our comprehension. So we must do what we can with the third.*

– John F. Kennedy

*If I had no sense of humor, I would long ago have committed suicide. –Mahatma Gandhi*

*Nobody ever died of laughter.*

- Max Beerbohm

*Laughter is the closest distance between two people.*

- Victor Borge

*He deserves Paradise who makes his companions laugh.*

- The Koran

*A sense of humor costs nothing, but not having one can be very costly.*

- Bob Ross

*Good humor is one of the preservatives of our peace and tranquility.*

-Thomas Jefferson

*Humor as a tool has been around for quite a while, but used as a toy because no one has ever developed a set of instructions.*

-Paul Malone

*The kind of humor I like is the thing that makes me laugh for five seconds and think for ten minutes.*

-William Davis

*When humor goes, there goes civilization.*

-Erma Bombeck

*A smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities.*

- Herman Melville

*Jokes of the proper kind, properly told, can do more to enlighten questions of politics, philosophy, and literature than any number of dull arguments.*

–Isaac Asimov

*The arrival of a good clown exercises more beneficial influence upon the health of a town than of twenty asses laden with drugs.*

–Dr. Thomas Sydenham, seventeenth-century physician

*A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs—jolted by every pebble on the road.*

– Henry Ward Beecher

*Humor is a rare and precious gift.*

–Sigmund Freud

*School climate is much like the air we breathe – it tends to go unnoticed until something is seriously wrong.*

– H. Jerome Freiberg

## CHAPTER 1

Human nature and humor are inexorably linked together like a mother is to a child. Humor is a universal social interaction of humans. Humor is a word that today is synonymous with positive, funny, or that which improves another's mood. The word humor (*humorem*) gets its roots in Latin, meaning fluid. The Greek philosopher and physician Hippocrates stated that good health depends on the appropriate balance of four fluids, or "humors," of the body: Blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Six centuries later, the Greek physician Galen gave us the idea that the four fluids each have psychological qualities to them. He thought that a surplus in one over the others determined a person's mood. For example, if one's blood were in greater concentration, then that person would be happier than someone with a lower concentration of blood. Also, if a person had too much black bile, then that person would likely be sad or be unhappy (Martin, 2007).

Humor and the human condition have been at the forefront of classical literature (Bevington, 2007), while cartoonists, comedians around the world, clowns, and other humorists have used humor for many years as a means to make a living (Chapman, 2007). No one experiences humor like children. Children just seem to delight in any humor or humorous situation (Rothbart, 2007). Even Freud considered children's humor as a development of their self-play time where they are developing a sense of humor because of the incongruity of something (Martin, 2007).

As humor continues to affect humans throughout their lives, there is an intense interest in trying to pinpoint the nebulousness of humor, human nature, and their



interconnected complexities. These complexities have us trying to answer key questions about the essence of humor like: What is humor? Who uses humor? What are the results of using humor? These questions have led the author on a personal journey to develop a greater understanding of humor, its role in principal leadership, and consequently, school climate.

This research study explored school climate in the middle school and how it relates to principal's humor style. This study also investigated whether a relationship exists between principals' self report humor style and the teachers' perceptions of school climate.

This first chapter of the dissertation presents the statement of the problem, specifies the purposes of the study and states the specific aims and research questions addressed. The chapter concludes by noting the significance of the study and defining some key terms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Why should middle school principals use humor at all? What is the essence of humor personified by the principal that makes a school a better place to learn in? What style of humor works the best to promote a positive school climate? The answer to these questions can be found by studying the nexus of humor and school climate. Thus, the focus of this study was humor styles exhibited by public middle school principals in Wisconsin and their perceived effect on school climate as reported by teachers.

Middle school principals are expected to carry out many responsibilities as a school leader. To be successful in the long run, middle school principals must do two things well: First, the leader must develop a shared vision of where the school is headed. This is especially important in a middle school where the needs of young adolescents are diverse and vitally important in their future success. Second, middle school leaders must develop a system of shared decision making (George & Alexander, 2003).

It is no secret that employees who are working together with camaraderie and fun builds a place of employment that is more enjoyable. Working together collaboratively in a positive environment makes everyone more productive (Ross, 1992). Therefore, it makes sense today, more than ever, that principals must create and maintain a positive school climate for their employees and more importantly for their students. To create a positive school climate, school leaders must possess great interpersonal skills (Hoy & Miskel, 2012).

An essential component of interpersonal skills is humor. The use of humor can relieve day-to-day stress and may motivate students and staff to work and achieve at a high level. Further, humor is perhaps one of the most cost-effective ways for a middle school principal to enhance school climate. Humor can help people to work with less stress, can make us healthier, and may increase job satisfaction (Morreall, 1997).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the educational knowledge about middle school climate and its relationship to styles of humor used by middle school

principals. Past educational studies have looked at the relationship between elementary and high school principals humor styles and organizational health (Vickers, 2004; Koonce, 1997; Williams, 1994; Kent, 1993), but no study has yet examined the critical relationship between middle school principals' humor styles and its effect on school climate.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following are the definitions of terms utilized in this study.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): "Analysis of variance is a hypothesis-testing procedure that is used to evaluate mean differences between two or more populations" (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007, p. 389).

Appreciator (humor style): Humor style is referring to a person who is willing to laugh and appreciates the humor of others. Further, this person is one who seeks out humorous situations within the workplace. However, they seldom tell jokes themselves (Babad, 1974).

Assumptions: Values, beliefs, or perceptions that are known to be correct by the general population without having to show actual evidence (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

Beliefs: Ideas about what is believed to be real about the world around us (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

Climate: Overall perceptions of the people within the organization. Climate also refers to the feeling, tone, and morale of an organization. Climate has a lot to do with the

relationships between members of the organization and the organization's effectiveness (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

Closed (Negative) Climate: Illustrates the point when the principal and teachers are disengaged, stressed, burdened with busywork, excessive rules, and low morale and commitment (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Collegial: Describes the way that teachers interact together in a professional, likeable, and respectful manner (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Committed: Illustrates how teachers help students and to ensure student success (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Communication tool: Verbal or non-verbal interaction that transmits facts, stories, needs, or feelings. Communication is also the medium that influences or persuades (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

Correlation: "is used to measure and describe a relationship between two variables" (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007 p. 506).

Culture: Underlying feel of the organization. These values can be traditions, values, norms, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, language, purpose, mission and vision of an organization that can lead a school to high achievement and are what gives the organization its identity (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Directive: Rigid, domineering behavior used by a principal to directly monitor every aspect of the school (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Disengaged: Lack of meaning and focus in professional educational activities. This type of teacher behavior is lackadaisical and critical of their colleagues (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Effectiveness: Whether a factor has the intended effect (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011).

Humor: Any message that is communicated by someone that is amusing (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011).

Humor Style Survey: A four-category instrument designed to determine a person's humor style (nonhumorous, appreciator, producer, reproducer) (Babad, 1974).

Joke: Something that is done or said to evoke laughter (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011).

Joking: The practice of being mirthful as an expression of communications (Oring, 2003).

Leadership: Characteristics of people that go beyond the simple managerial role. Leaders possess a clear vision that inspires others to action (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

Nonhumorous (humor style): A person who finds it difficult to laugh. This type of person seldom tells jokes or creates humor on their own, seldom seeks out humorous situations, and seldom laughs at others' humor (Babad, 1974).

Norms: Informal rules to live by (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM): A 50-item instrument with four Likert-style responses for each item. After coding

and scoring, the instrument determines a school's climate on a continuum from open to closed (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Open (Positive) Climate: Climate in which the principal leads by example with the proper mix of direction and support and when teachers work together to achieve a common goal (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Pearson Correlation: "Measures the degree and direction of linear relationship between two variables" (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007 p. 511).

Power: Refers to the ability to influence others (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

Producer (humor style): A type of person who comes up with jokes or funny stories and can create humorous situations (Babad, 1974).

Reproducer (humor style): A type of person who retells others' amusing stories or jokes or reenacts amusing situations (Babad, 1974).

Restrictive: Way in which principals burden teachers with busywork, paperwork, and other demands that interfere with teaching (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

School climate: General environmental tone created by the policies and practices of the school administrator (Likert & Likert, 1976).

Supportive: Manner in which a principal is helpful, genuinely concerned with teachers, sets an example with hard work, and motivates others using constructive criticism (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Values: Non-negotiable factors that are considered important. Values also are the standards set by the leader for what is good, what quality means, what defines excellence, what is valued, and what shapes behavior and decision making (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the humor styles of middle school principals in Wisconsin?
2. What are the school climates of middle schools in Wisconsin?
3. What is the relationship between principal's self-report humor style and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate?

### **Hypothesis**

The following research hypothesis was derived from the research question # 3 above:

1. There is no statistical significance between the principals' self-report humor style and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate.

### **Assumptions**

1. The researcher assumed that principals are the best ones who can identify their humor style characteristics themselves using the Humor Style Survey (Babad, 1974).
2. The researcher also assumed that principals would be completely honest in filling out the Humor Style Survey.

3. The researcher also assumed that the teachers would be completely honest in filling out the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM)(Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

### **Delimitations**

1. Data were limited to the population of public middle school principals and teachers in the Wisconsin schools that agreed to be surveyed.
2. Data were limited to the self-reported humor of middle school principals.
3. Data were based on teachers' perceptions of school climate on the OCDQ-RM.
4. This study examined the relationship between the leaders' humor styles and teachers' perceptions of school climate in the middle school. Therefore, the generalizability is limited to middle schools.
5. The researcher recognizes that variables other than humor styles may affect middle school climates.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because it filled a gap by broadening our understanding of school climate by tying school climate with the previously unstudied factor of middle school principal humor styles. This study offered a baseline to the knowledge base by providing insight into the role humor plays within the middle school environment. Though some examples of workplace humor are available in journals and articles, no empirical research was found that investigated humor for its value to middle school



climate. The problem examined in this dissertation was to investigate the relationship, if any, between the middle school principals' self-reported style of humor and teachers' perception of the middle school climate.

There are many leadership styles and many books written on leadership styles and personalities of leaders within learning organizations. Humor may be one of those overlooked personality "intangibles" of which an administrator brings to a school. One of those "intangibles" may be humor style of the principal.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter Two presents a review of pertinent literature regarding humor, humor and school leadership, and humor and school climate. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter and evaluation of the literature. Chapter Three describes the research methods and procedures used to gather and analyze the data. The chapter also includes research questions, a description of the sample, research design, data procedures, and instrumentation. Chapter Four reports the characteristics of subjects and major findings of each research question. And Chapter Five presents the summary and conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on three fronts: Humor, humor and leadership, and humor and school climate. Section one examines the literature surrounding humor and its interconnectedness with the human psyche. Section two discusses the current literature dealing with humor and leadership. Section three discovers the literature involved with humor and school climate. The focus of this study was to explore the relationship of the middle school principal's style of humor to teachers' perceptions of school climate in middle schools in Wisconsin.

The benefit of a positive school climate has been widely accepted (Duncan, Smeltzer, & Leap, 1990; George & Alexander, 2003; Halpin, 1966; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; McGregor, 2006; Stringer, 2002; Ziegler & Boardman, 1986; Ziegler, Boardman, & Thomas, 1985). Yet, if school climate appears to be so important, how does humor affect that environment? More specifically, how can the principal's use of humor affect the school climate? Are there different styles of humor that affect school climate? Principals interact with people almost every moment of the day (Amundson, 1993). Their style of leadership often rubs off on others around them through their interactions. The use of humor within a middle school principal's leadership style may enhance communication with others, reduce stress, and may help promote a better school climate.

## **Part I: Humor**

Humor and the study of humor are such an essential parts of human life that “humor is probably the most significant characteristic of the human mind” (deBono, 1994, p. 55). The ability to express amusement appears to be natural and fundamental in humans (Wilson, 1992). In fact, humor has been seen around the world and has been associated with humans since the beginning of human documentation (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). Laughter and humor was found most everywhere together. Humor keeps the machinery of life pumping around freely and smoothly like oil in a car (Martineau, 1972). This section discovered the connections between humor and humans.

Humor has been a large part of the human psyche and human society. Just consider how many times humor has been used to meet a new person or to break the ice when starting up a conversation. Or, one can ponder the role humor plays in mass communication. Network television has been inundated by comedy shows; some cable TV channels televise all comedies; most major metropolitan centers have at least one comedy club; and half of all the current paperbacks are books of cartoons or graphic novels (Morreall, 1997).

People value humor. References to the importance of having a sense of humor are liberally sprinkled throughout the popular media. It is usually mentioned as a factor to look for when hiring as well as one of the qualities of effective employees. It is without a doubt the one quality that most of us agree is needed in life (Morrison, 2012, p. 1).

Due to the very large and influential role humor plays in our society, school leaders might find success with the use of humor. Humor brings people together and encourages further social interactions (McGhee, 2010). It has been no secret that school principals are often pressed for time. Their time with individuals and interactions with people and students are often cut too short. The principals' individual interactions with others in the school, no matter how brief, may have an effect on the climate of their schools. Humor could be one of those tools that develop a deeper and more meaningful connection with teachers and staff members. Building strong relationships promotes trust and enthusiasm to achieve the leader's vision (Maxwell, 2007).

### **Theories of Humor**

There are a variety of theories of humor dating back to the ancient Greek philosophers. In fact, the original theories of humor started out in human history as a negative form of human expression. The four main theories are: Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory, Relief Theory, and Cognitive Appraisal Theory.

#### Superiority Theory

Humor has been around for a long time, but it has not always been funny. The Superiority Theory finds that humor stems from the feeling of triumph over the others by using mockery, ridicule, and laughter at others. The Superiority Theory acts like a put-down. By putting others down it elevates others into a superior position. This feeling of superiority makes some people feel humorous (Martin, 2007). The Superiority Theory has been documented as far back as ancient Greek times.

Protagoras urged people not to be consumed by uncontrollable mirth. Epictetus counseled others against laughing out loud without restraint. Further, Plato contended that laughter was so powerful an emotion that it caused people to lose self-control. Plato felt that laughter does indeed feel good, but that it was at the expense of the person being laughed at. He thought that in the ideal state, laughter has no place because it would cause people to become uncooperative and lose their self-control (Morreall, 2009).

The point Plato was getting at was the fact that laughing at someone makes one feel better or superior to the laughed at person. The British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes was the first to name this theory called the Superiority Theory. In his 1651 book called, *Leviathan*, Hobbes described his premise that we find laughter in the belief that we are superior to others. Hobbes thought that people are able to laugh at the misfortune of others. People laugh because they feel that they are superior than the victim of the joke (La Fave, Haddad, & Maesen, 2007). However, humor doesn't have to have negative connotations; humor can be something that we never expected.

### Incongruity Theory

Instead of making fun of someone to feel superior to him or her, the Incongruity Theory states that something was funny because it is different. For example, we may think that something was funny because it was not what we would immediately think. Humans have learned things throughout life and put them into patterns in our brains. When those patterns of learned behavior and experiences are disrupted, we laugh. Something people considered funny or humorous primarily because it goes against our

normal expectations. In fact, Cicero once said that the most common type of joke was when we expect one thing, but receives another (Morreall, 2009).

To illustrate the incongruity theory, Francis Hutcheson gave us some insight as to how humor changed from having a negative connotation to being a positive experience for people. In his 1750 book, *Reflections Upon Laughter*, Francis Hutcheson argues against the current dogma of the time and described the incongruity theory. In it, Hutcheson argued against Hobbes's ideas that humor only serves to make fun of people at their expense. Hutchinson thought that we do not have to make fun of other people or even ourselves to laugh or find something funny. Further, he contended that if we feel superior to another person, we probably would not laugh at them. For example, if a rich, powerful, and famous person came in contact with a poor beggar, the rich person would probably not laugh at them but cry (Morreall, 2009). Therein lies the Incongruity Theory, it appeared to be the essence of finding humor in the unexpected. And when we laugh at something unexpectedly, we feel a sense of relief.

### Relief Theory

Finding meaning in their humor, theorists found true purpose to their laughter. Offering relief to the pressures of everyday life, humor suited people by giving them a socially acceptable way of venting their stress. Think of stressors as a boiling pot of water: The stress as steam will build up and eventually the pot will boil over (Morreall, 2009). In fact, Nazi soldiers were found to laugh at Jewish people while they were shooting at them (Lefcourt, 2001). How can humans find humor in this appalling scene?

It seems as though humor transcends all, and helps humans cope with extreme stress. For example, Aristotle, and, later, Thomas Aquinas described humor as play. They thought the purpose of humor was to rest and wrote that everyone needs rest from strenuous activities, and humor can provide that rest (Morreall, 2009). Lord Shaftesbury was the first to describe the meaning of relief. He explained that without a release, one would explode their constraints. Herbert Spencer wrote about the physiological effects of laughter. He proposed that laughter was only to release excess nervous energy (Morreall, 2009).

John Dewey thought that there was something more to humor than Spencer. Dewey stated that a laugh is like a big sigh of relief. He claimed that laughter was a human's way to relax and let go (Morreall, 2009). Linking humor to lust belongs to Sigmund Freud. In his book, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1960) writes that jokes are about the satisfaction of an instinct. That is, the stuff that people find funniest are those things that are not allowed, and as such, provide a release for our pent up libido and hostility (Freud, 1960). For example, jokes about subjects like talking about sex, discussing bad things that happen to people, or poking fun of a leader all are funny because they offer liberation from the domination society puts on us. To the human mind and body, people need to take part in humorous activities to relax with laughter (Morreall, 2009). Humor can provide the relief that people need, however, can there be another role for humor?

### Cognitive Appraisal Theory

To shed some light on the role humor plays with people, the cognitive appraisal theory tries to find out why some situations or jokes may be funny. When someone tells a joke, the cognitive appraisal theory states that people will appraise the situation positively or negatively. This assessment is determined upon by the joint beliefs of the people in the group (Duncan, Smeltzer, & Leap 1990). That is, the brain tries to fit the joke into a selected pattern learned early on in life. These patterns are symbols in which the mind recognizes as true or correct. These patterns of which everyone in the group believes to be true come from our sense of play. This sense of play is when the child begins the development of humor (Piaget, 1950).

This sense of humor really develops near age seven, when the child now has the ability of concrete operational thinking (Piaget, 1950). This is the time when the child understands abstract ideas and when the child can comprehend the double meaning of words. The development of brain during this time period gives the child the ability to appraise a joke or something that is humorous. Further, it also allows the child to better explain the why they find something funny (Bariaud, 1989).

To find out why something is humorous, Thomas Shultz (2007) studied humor in adults where data and analysis can easily be controlled and results can easily be seen. After studying adult humor, his study travels backwards in time in a person's life in an attempt to determine the important developmental milestones that bring a child closer to adult humor (Shultz, 2007).



What's more, Immanuel Kant found that the role humor plays in our psyche is vitally important. He described humor as the play of thought providing a description of how the human brain develops with humor (Kant, 1892 as cited in Morreall, 2009). Further, current philosopher Henri Bergson expresses that the purpose of laughter is to be the creative and vital force that drives humanity. He claims that humor and wit serve to amplify thinking and boost flexibility (Bergson, 1913 as cited in Morreall, 2009).

To determine how humor works, Babad (1974) used the Cognitive Appraisal Theory to find out how humor tests worked within people. Babad's results showed that people who were humorous already and who told jokes to other people used creative thought within their brain to continue to tell jokes. Further, people who were not humorous to begin with and told a joke replicating humor that they heard also used their creative thought to retell the joke. That is, there is a definite cognitive and creative element to humor within the human mind to be humorous (Babad, 1974).

Experiences of humor vary from person to person. To show how people differed on humor tests, Babad (1974) developed four humor styles: nonhumorous, appreciator, producer, and reproducer. The nonhumorous person finds it difficult to laugh and seldom tells jokes or creates humor. The appreciator is a person who shows a readiness to laugh, enjoys the humor of others and seeks out humorous situations but seldom tells jokes or makes up jokes. The producer is a type of person who invents humor, makes up jokes or witty, amusing stories and creates humorous situations. The reproducer is a type of person who retells others' jokes or amusing stories to others or reenacts amusing situations (Babad, 1974). The type of humor style a middle school leader possesses may

have an impact on how successful he or she will be as a school leader and may have an impact on school climate overall. Further, using humor in the workplace may have great results.

### **Humor in the Workplace**

Does humor belong in the workplace? Humor allows people in the workplace to become resilient, more upbeat, and clearheaded (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994).

Traditionally, work and humor are thought of as completely different characteristics (Wilson, 1992). It almost seems by nature there is connection between humor and work. Yet, could there be a positive relationship between humor and having a productive work environment? Blumenfeld & Alpern (1994) give us insight as to why humor has such a high impact in the workplace:

1. Humor makes work fun.
2. Humor can help us cope with our problems.
3. Humor is a safety valve for aggression and is an acceptable way to express a different opinion.
4. Humor offers perspective and balance.
5. Humor is a means of communication and creative expression.
6. Humor provides temporary relief from regulations.

7. Humor is a way to express the truth even when the truth is feared and repressed.
8. Laughter brings people together.
9. Humor is physically and mentally good for you.
10. Humor often succeeds where other methods have failed (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994 p. 8-9).

Humor is so important in the workplace that three-hundred chief operating officers in Fortune 500 companies stated that humor is vital in the company. These same CEOs also noted that when they hire people for leadership positions, a sense of humor is one of the key things that they look for. In fact, 84 percent of personnel directors and vice presidents stated that employees with a sense of humor do better work (Morreall, 1997). What's more, in his book, *Laughing nine to five: The quest for humor in the workplace*, Fahlman (1997) explains that humor plays a significant role in the reduction of stress in the workplace, increases work performance and communication, increases creativity, and improves the maintenance and betterment of personal health. Fahlman also notes that positive humor can also build connections with people and develop a greater sense of perspective. In addition, Andrew Tarvin, in his 2012 book, *Humor that works: 501 ways to use humor to beat stress, increase productivity, and have fun at work*, states there are ten main benefits of using humor:

1. Humor beats stress.
2. Humor improves health.

3. Humor increases efficiency.
4. Humor develops creativity.
5. Humor expands learning.
6. Humor improves relationships.
7. Humor creates opportunities.
8. Humor makes better leaders.
9. Humor can make you more cash.
10. Humor leads to happiness (Tarvin, 2012, p. 6-7).

However, humor is not just something that brings cash and happiness, humor does truly belong in the workplace. In addition, humor impacts the flexibility of workers. The use of humor can reduce stress, bring play into the workplace, act as a social lubricant, and make us more mentally flexible (Morreall, 1997). The mentally flexible person can:

1. See things from several perspectives.
2. Tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.
3. Takes risks willingly.
4. Adapt to change.
5. Learn from mistakes.
6. Solve problems in new ways.

7. Switch between practical and non-practical thinking (Morreall, 1997 p. 91).

Collectively, these key points give us key information that shows that increased levels of humor will result in a variety of benefits in the workplace.

### **Humor as a Motivator**

Laughter and play are extremely important to a person's health and a dire necessity for a person's ultimate satisfaction in life. Motivation is a key part of the dynamic between staff members and their productivity within the workplace. For example, corporations that promoted the use of humor at work had employees that did not leave for other opportunities, had lower health care costs, and boosts in sales and profits (Wilson, 1992,). Humor acts as a motivator within any organization, not just the private sector. In fact, schools leaders can use humor to promote strong and healthy relationships within the organization too. In order to accomplish this, school leaders must allow subordinates to feel free to be creative and share their ideas. The greatest productivity is shown to come from a workplace that is fun and enjoyable, where employees can work in an informal, creative atmosphere (Ross, 1992).

Motivation within the workplace has three pathways: A leader can threaten people, bribe them into action, or persuade their employees into doing what they want them to do (Ross, 1992). This is where humor comes in. Humor provides a non-threatening way to entice employees into action. The use of humor in a motivational way instead of in a threatening manner creates an environment that develops and sustains trust

within the educational organization (Ross, 1992). The motivation factor of humor can be seen through the reduction of stress and increased positive feelings.

Humor can increase people's motivation by elevating chemicals into the body that make people feel healthy and happy. A good laugh increases oxygenation of the blood, heart rate increases, and then the body begins to relax, and puts the employee in a proper frame of mind. Humor helps people put stressful situations into perspective, allowing them to deal with the stress in a more time conscious and constructive manner (Adams & Mylander, 1998). In addition, Morrison (2012) states that a good humor workout can also provide benefits that:

1. Maximize creativity and comprehension
2. Increase ability to take risks and try new things
3. Expand ability to generate ideas
4. Capture attention
5. Increase memory storage and retrieval
6. Respond to change and crisis with positive energy
7. Facilitate communication with individuals and in groups
8. Enable observation of internal emotional state
9. Reflect the inner spirit of self and others

10. Increase ability to “read” the emotions of others
11. Reduce tension, fear, and anger
12. Nurture trust
13. Increase group energy and positive group dynamics (Morrison, 2012, p. 4).

### **Humor and Physical Health Benefits**

As stated previously, there is evidence that supports the idea that humor plays a huge role in the motivation of principals and staff. Let us now examine the effects of humor on a person’s health. Stress is part of the day-to-day life of any administrator. Educational leaders often deal with mentally taxing situations in their schools. Further, society's drive towards continuous improvement in education has added additional stress to the school administrator. In fact, 57 percent of public school principals are so besieged by the day-to-day stress that they are unable to stay ahead of the game. Further, these same principals believe that they have little time left in the school day to provide a clear vision for the future of their schools (Johnson, 1994).

There are many stressors in people's lives. Common stressors for all educators can include time stress, situational stress, or stress about the economy (Seyfarth, 2007). Yet, administrator's can add to their stress the fact that many school boards around the country have or are looking into performance pay for principals. Then, add to that, the stress of losing one's job due to the reductions of administration staff and this equates to more stress (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Taken together, all of this stress can be daunting as well as physically damaging to the body. Wolf (2010) shows that stress is directly tied to the fight or flight response. Further, she states the physiological damage prolonged exposure to stress can cause. Cortisol and epinephrine (brain chemicals) are briefly released into the body when it experiences stress. These little bits of chemicals the body can tolerate, however, when stress is ever-present, such as the stress experienced by today's school leaders, cortisol and epinephrine can build up in their bodies. This prolonged elevation of brain chemicals causes cognitive decline. Wolf goes on to say that further damage can be done with exposure to prolonged stress such as the immune system deteriorating which increases the risk of disease and the slowing of growth of the body (Wolf, 2010). In short, working in a positive work environment may be healthier than working in a stressful environment.

So how can humor reduce the negative effects of stress? Humor has a quality that gives people a sense of release and offers an alternative to the build-up of stress. Humor relieves tension and stress (Adams & Mylander, 1998). It does this by improving a person's psychoneuroimmunology. That is, if your mind is happy, your nervous system and immune system will respond as a result of this happiness (McGhee, 2010). For example, when you hear a joke and you laugh at it, your body relaxes, psychological tension is released and your blood pressure goes down which may reduce your risk for a heart attack (McGhee, 2010). In fact, a person who has a more developed sense of humor is less likely to get stressed out and is better able to deal with future stressors (McGhee, 2010). Further, a joke and laughter may be all that is needed to reduce tension, decrease stress, and make others around you feel positive. Humor could be a way to cope with



problems that arise. For instance, laughter increases the secretion of natural chemicals which makes people feel happy. It also decreases cortisol secretion and improves oxygenation of the blood (McGhee, 2010). The sense of relaxation lasts for about forty-five minutes after the last laugh and may be helpful in lowering your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and depression (Fahlman, 1997).

Humor has the same positive effects on a person's health as exercise. Humor has been shown to give the body protection against certain ailments such as cancer, heart attacks, stroke, asthma, ulcers, and AIDS. Laughter in general provides exercise to the muscles and heart, reduces pain, reduces blood pressure, increases respiration, and regulates blood sugar levels (McGhee, 2010).

So how can humor help principals with their physical well-being? There are two studies that give us information about this link. In the first study, Iuzzolino (1986) found that high school principals in Pennsylvania thought that having a sense of humor was the most efficient way to deal with stress at school. In a second study, the author found that the use of humor was found to be the most successful way to cope with stress by both male and female school administrators (Spradling, 1984). These studies provide insight into the practical way that humor can be used in the everyday life of a school principal. Humor might be the answer.

## **Humor and Mental Health Benefits**

The positive effects on a person's mental health are also well documented. Humor is thought to be an important way to cope with mental stress (Lefcourt, 2001). Humor and its corresponding mental health benefits include the development of a feeling of hope and decreased anxiety and conflict (Ziv, 1984). Humor has the ability to lighten tense situations by helping people deal with their problems in a socially acceptable way (Ziv, 1984).

In Adams and Mylander's 1998 book *Gesundheit!: Bringing good health to you, the medical system, and society through physician service, complementary therapies, humor and joy* and subsequent movie, *Patch Adams*, real-life physician Adams unconventionally treats his patients through laughter. Adams and Mylander state that laughter develops healthy and positive emotions. They go on to write that laughter is a way to release emotions that have been kept inside for too long. In the book, they state that The American Association for Therapeutic Humor describes four significant psychological benefits of humor: Laughter helps reduce sadness and fear, helps to develop open lines of communication, creates fun, and increases love (Adams & Mylander 1998).

The mental health benefits of humor go beyond what is simply humorous. Humor makes people more alert and helps to put our brains into a more receptive mood for humor (Lefcourt 2001). This humorous mood is variable from child to adult. The average five year old laughs approximately 400 times per day, while a twenty-five year

old person laughs only about fifteen times per day (Bariaud, 1989). Further, the educational function of humor is undeniable. The use of humor has been found to make students' learning more enjoyable, improve students' attention span, promote creativity within the classroom, and improves retention of educational information (Bryant & Zillmann, 1989). Schools and classrooms where humor and laughter are part of the school climate have students who are more apt to learn (Rightmyer, 2008). In fact, humor in the classroom can help to reduce tension, stress, anxiety, and boredom for students while enhancing student-teacher relationships (Ziegler, Boardman, & Thomas, 1985).

Having a sense of humor may be beneficial to mental health by helping people regulate and manage their emotions by keeping them on an even keel. Further, the uplifting that humor does to a person's mental being is one that can help to reduce stress and allow for a more positive and open feeling within the person (Martin, 2007). In short, "when people engage in humor and laughter, they tend to feel more cheerful and energetic, and less depressed, anxious, irritable, and tense" (Martin, 2007 p. 270).

### **Humor and Communication**

Humor and communication are so important that "humor has been called the universal language" (Righter, 2010, p. 12). A sense of humor will build strong relationships, hold peoples' attention, and help to persuade people within the organization. Humor can be used to break down barriers and make people more

approachable within the organization. With the use of humor, communication lines can be opened allowing the free exchange of information and ideas (Ross, 1992).

By using humor in communication, emotion is enhanced, as well. Emotion can help to focus and hold people's attention and can help the audience recall what the speaker said (Kushner, 1990). The use of humor in communication can bring people together even if they disagree. Humor develops a sense of immediacy, or close bond, between people and helps them communicate their feeling (Martin, 2007).

In the private sector, executives spend 94 percent of their day communicating with others (Ross, 1992). Similarly, the average school administrator spends more than three-fourths of their day conversing with others (Johnson, 1994). Humor is the one tool that can be used by educational administrators that is cost-effective and is universally understood by everyone. In fact, administrators trying to move the organization forward need to foster communication within the school so that it empowers teachers (Laud, 1998). Humor can be used by school leaders to enhance their message by making it more attention grabbing, more meaningful, and more memorable (Black and English, 2001). School administrators and staff alike are bombarded with hundreds of spoken and written messages a day. Using humor within communication is important in grabbing people's attention (Morreall, 1997). Through the use of humor, a principal and their staff can have open and healthy dialogue even if they disagree. Leaders can transmit negative messages without being mean. Principals can use humor as a way to express critiques or critical comments in a constructive and meaningful manner (Ross, 1992).

Communication can be enhanced by humor if three key things are kept in mind: First, you need to be extra sensitive to your audience. For example, being sensitive means use the kind of language to which the audience is used to. Pay careful attention to who is listening, especially age and gender. Use humor only when people are comfortable with it. Second, bring humor into the conversation so that it is a natural experience for both the person using humor and the audience appreciating the humor. This means one needs to keep the conversation simple and focused so that everyone in the audience feels as though they are being talked to directly. The most believable and influential communication is done on a personal level. Third, humor can be used to grab people's attention. Maximizing surprise entails finding the perfect spot for a quick jolt of humor. Humor often produces laughter if it has incongruity, meaning it catches the audience off guard. Find that perfect opportunity to take full advantage of humor (Morreall, 1997). But do not misuse humor.

### **Misuses of Humor**

As seen above, the positive effects of humor are vital to humans and their health, but humor used negatively has vastly different consequences. Positive humor brings us together, while negative humor creates fear and distrust. Negative humor excludes people and is destructive (Tarvin, 2012). The misuse of humor in the workplace can be a possible problem for an organization (Morreall, 1997).

In his book, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* John Morreall, (2009) asserts that humor has had eight main negative charges against it throughout history. They are:

1. Humor is insincere.
2. Humor is idle.
3. Humor is irresponsible.
4. Humor is hedonistic.
5. Humor diminishes self-control.
6. Humor is hostile.
7. Humor fosters anarchy.
8. Humor is foolish (Morreall, 2009 p. 92).

These are very good reasons not to use humor. However, they also serve more as guideposts as ways that we can avoid the negative use of humor. The pattern that emerges above revolves mainly around humor and morally unacceptable acts like sex or violence, none of which belong in any organization.

There is further evidence in the literature that indicated a misuse of the social control within an organization that boil down to three main themes for the misuse of humor: Sarcasm, horseplay, and harassment.

Sarcasm does real psychological harm by humiliating a person. A genuine joke is usually humorous to all the people involved whereas sarcasm is not (Webb, 1997). The ancient Greeks described sarcasm as literally “to tear flesh with the teeth.” Sarcasm can consist of practical jokes, cute quips, ridicule, belittling, or the posting of posters of

inappropriate jokes. Each of these forms of sarcasm erodes the trust within the organization. This negative feeling within an organization breeds distrust and hostility which decreases people's motivation (Morreall, 1997).

Horseplay can also have negative effects within the organization. Horseplay is characterized by the effort of workers to be funny. Practical jokes, goofing around, and pranks are some examples of horseplay. Horseplay may be funny to the person and others around them, but it is not funny to the victim. Horseplay within an organization can cause serious trouble. First, it could damage property or cause someone to get hurt. Second, it can cause people within the organization to have psychological problems. Further, horseplay can also ruin collaboration and productivity within the organization (Duncan, Smeltzer, & Leap, 1990).

Harassment is a conscious or continual action that is "not welcome, not asked for, and not returned" (Webb, 1997 p.27). Harassment done by the leading members within an organization degrades people throughout the organization. Harassment can decrease efficiency within the group and even hamper the advancement of women and minorities within the organization (Morreall, 1997). Often there is a small difference between a humorous situation and one that can turn into harassment. For example, comments made by workers in a joking manner may not be irritating at first, but if done again and again, it may cause serious negative damage to the worker being berated (Webb, 1997). That is why the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gives us a roadmap to follow so that humor doesn't turn into harassment.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the law dealing with harassment in the workplace. It reads:

Ethnic slurs and other verbal or physical conduct relating to an individual's national origin constitute harassment when this conduct: (1) Has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment; (2) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance; or (3) otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment opportunities (Civil Rights Act of 1964 29 CFR § 1606.8 (b)).

Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of Sec. 703 of Title VII. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when... (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment (Civil Rights Act of 1964 29 CFR § 1604.11 (a)).

Taking the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into account, schools and workplaces alike have concrete guidelines so that misusing humor does not become harassment. These same schools and workplaces reveal a variety of races, religions, and nationalities. Care should be taken when using humor with others in the workplace. All employees need to be sensitive to the needs and values of each different group within an organization (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). Further, extreme concern should be taken with the use of humor toward the opposite sex. Members of the opposite sex may not see the same humor in something. Women routinely have taken the role of appreciative audience for



humor and do not often take the role of joke teller. Further, this may have negative impact for males who may tell jokes those female employees within the organization find offensive (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). It is easy to remember that when humor or laughter in which one person or group of people are left out, is never acceptable in the workplace (Pollio & Bainum, 1983).

Most educators who advocate for the use of humor in teaching and leadership are careful to note that humorous ridicule and sarcasm are forms of hostile humor. Ridicule and sarcasm are more destructive than constructive. These should never be used on students too young to understand the meaning of the hostile humor. Further, using these negative forms of humor as an educational corrective never works because they cause long-term effects to the self-esteem of students (Bryant & Zillmann, 1989).

### **Humor and the Middle Level Public Schools**

If humor needed a place in schools, it is the middle school. It is at the middle school where administrators and teachers have to provide avenues for humor and play. “Humor facilitates learning, play encourages memory retention, and laughter relieves the stress that inhibits cognitive processing” (Morrison, 2012, p. 35). Humor in elementary and high schools is very important as well, but humor is vital in the middle school. The main reason humor is so critical in the middle school is the ages of the child and the cognitive level the brain is at. The middle school child's brain is starting to form its formal operations connections and beginning to develop intuitive thought processes:

Formal thought reaches its fruition during adolescence. The adolescent, unlike the child, is an individual who thinks beyond the present and forms theories about everything, delighting especially in considerations of that which is not... This reflexive thought, which is characteristic of the adolescent, exists from the age of 11-12 years, from the time, that is, when the subject becomes capable of reasoning in a hypothetico-deductive manner (Piaget, 1950, p. 163).

Key tenets such as trustworthiness, openness, accountability, authenticity, identity, cooperation, participation, flexibility, and responsibility are visible in the positive and open middle school climate. Each of these important points helps describe an open and healthy school. Each of these key tenets has a direct impact on middle school students. Students who are immersed in the open and healthy school are more apt to include these key tenets into their formal thought processes as adults (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Knowledge is not the only thing that students are learning in a middle school. They are also learning life-long social skills. The middle school student has to make sense of social interactions around them and then use them to fit their personality. Piaget gives us key insight into how these changes come about:

Society changes the very structure of the individual, because it not only compels him to recognize facts, but also provides him with a ready-made system of signs, which modify his thought; it presents him with new values and it imposes on him an infinite series of obligations. It is therefore quite evident that social life affects

intelligence through the three media of language (signs), the content of interaction (intellectual values), and rules imposed on thought (collective logical or pre-logical norms) (Piaget, 1950, p. 171).

During adolescence, the brain neurons begin to make connections. During this critical time period, the middle school-aged students start to construct formal operations about life and develop logic. He or she has to use their knowledge in the midst of their social interactions to decide their own personal groupings of ideas. It is at this point when middle school children begin to learn about cooperation and start to develop their own thoughts about their point of view (Piaget, 1950).

Besides promoting a new point of view, humor is also directly linked to developing, sustaining, and ensuring creativity among adolescents. Humorous stimuli are all around us. Students who interact with those stimuli develop life-long skills to become more creative. Further, promoting humor in the classroom initiates the release of tension and thereby reduces the social anxiety felt in a classroom. With the social anxiety gone, students can feel freer to express their thoughts, think outside the box, and become creative thinkers (Ziv, 1984).

Humor gives us mental flexibility. This allows us to see things from different perspectives, have tolerance for ambiguity, to take risks willingly, to adapt to change, learn from our mistakes, and solve problems in new ways (Morreall, 1997). As people age, they become more mentally rigid. Therefore, the early years of someone's life are essential times for the use humor and becoming mentally flexible. Young adolescents are

starting to form new concepts on how to categorize things and events in their lives. They are learning how to find new ways to deal with situations around them. Humor allows the adolescent to see things in different ways, respond to situations in different ways, and adapt to changes in their lives (Morreall, 1997).

The climate of the school is the communal personality held by members within that school. If the values of the school are open, healthy, happy, humorous, and trustworthy, then the adolescent mind will be using those values to formulate their point of view. This shared identity is engaging, open, innovative, and cohesive. The morale of the school is, therefore, positive, open for new ideas, efficient, and effective (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

## **Part II: Humor and Leadership**

In section one, we saw the role humor plays in our everyday lives. In section two, a connection will be made between humor and leadership. This section will be split into three main categories: Educational leadership methods and trends; the role of humor and leadership in today's workplaces and schools; and humor and leadership styles.

“Humor as a tool has been around for quite a while, but used as a toy because no one has ever developed a set of instructions” (Malone, 1980, p. 360). In this section, we will discover the importance of humor and its role in leadership within a school. Having a “good sense of humor is an important characteristic for effective leadership, along with other abilities such as intelligence, creativity, persuasiveness, good speaking ability, and social skills” (Martin, 2007 p. 367). In fact, the key to be an effective leader is “to be

able to adapt their leadership style to the situation, while maintaining a sense of humor” (Palestini, 2013, p. xi). This study may provide a clearer view of the connection between humor and leadership.

## **Leadership**

The role of the leader has undergone significant changes from authoritative, to managerial, to democratic, to charismatic (Carter and Cunningham, 1997). It is within this continually changing dynamic that humor may play a key role in leadership. In the book, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to build the leadership-powered company*, the authors describe the pathway of a leader through the passageways of a pipe. As leaders pass through each section, they grow as a leader which gives them the needed skills to tackle the next stage of the pipeline (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2011). A principal's leadership growth is very similar to the pipeline that the authors above describe. These thoughts lead us down the pipeline to leadership types.

Evans (2002) illustrates three main leadership types: laissez-fair, democratic, and authoritarian. Laissez-fair leaders let the organization run itself, offering very little direction. These types of leaders don't offer any true leadership in the organization. A democratic leader uses the power of the people within the organization to help them make decisions. A good democratic leader however, needs to be clear with others and set boundaries in the organization and work to set attainable, yet lofty goals. The authoritarian leader oversees the organization and directs them with a strict manner. This type of leader has clear and non-negotiable guidelines (Evans, 2002).

Leadership is much like being a parent: Neither are precise, but this should not deter us from understanding each. Goleman (2000) explains that there are six leadership styles that can shed some light on understanding leadership: They are: Coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching. In the affiliative style, the leader explains to people in their organization that they come first. Using the affiliative style, the leader reaps excellent communication, overwhelming loyalty, flexibility, and high rewards (Goleman, 2000). It is within this style where humor has its place. With high rewards as a goal, it is easy to see the connection between using humor to improve school climate.

The charismatic leader has a skill that is tangible within the organization. A charismatic leader fosters the staff and student's "values, goals, needs, and aspirations" (Nadler & Tushman, 1995 p. 109) and helps them on their quest toward self-actualization. A charismatic leader leads the way to helping people see where the organization is going. "By creating vision, the leader provides a vehicle for people to develop commitment, a common goal around which people can rally, and a way for people to feel successful" (Nadler & Tushman, 1995 p. 109). The charismatic leader has a certain power to help others around them feel enthusiasm to drive toward their shared vision and goals (Nadler & Tushman, 1995). In fact, the ability of humor can significantly impact a leader's ability to create a better working environment (Morrison, 2012).

Transformational leadership is a term that came out of the 1980s and 1990s when many schools around the country were trying to restructure to reform and improve

student achievement (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Transformational leadership is focused on increasing the motivation and achievement of staff within an organization. Transformational leaders have a way of working with everyone in the organization in mutual support in order to achieve a higher collective goal. Transformational principals help foster others within the organization to be leaders themselves. These principals work hard to promote a school climate to increase innovation and improve productivity (Couto, 1995).

Today's leader must lead in the midst of diverse and powerful interests demanding attention. A school leader must establish trust, focus attention on student learning, and create a positive school climate if they hope to be successful. Good leadership also relies on good personal skills, effective communication, and exceptional rapport with their employees (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Further, “using humor to build and maintain relationships is an invaluable skill” (Morrison, 2012 p. 10).

Creating rapport with employees can make or break a leader. There is no better way to build him/herself up than by using self-effacing humor at key times. Poking fun at oneself reflects strength and confidence. To do so is a sign of self-confidence. It shows that you are sure of yourself as a leader enough to laugh at yourself (Righter, 2010). Using this kind of humor as a leader can create a positive feeling within the organization, make people feel that you are more approachable, and can create strong bonds with people within the organization. Self-effacing humor is a key leadership trait that can do wonders (Kushner, 1990). For example, former New York governor Mario Cuomo used this tool in a speech to create rapport with his constituents:

As I left Albany to come down here tonight, my wife gave me some last-minute advice. She said, 'I know it's a difficult subject and a tough group. But don't be intimidated. And don't try to be charming, witty, or intellectual. Just be yourself.' (Kushner, 1990 p. 81).

As one can see, from an authoritative style to using self-depreciating humor, educational leaders have come a long way. It is within this shifting educational leadership paradigm in which humor may have its greatest merits. Humor may be one of the tools for leaders to lead with.

### **Humor as a Leadership Tool**

President Dwight Eisenhower gives a great example of leadership with a piece of string. Putting the string on the table, he would push one end toward the other. The string did not go anywhere. Then he took the front end of the string and gently pulled it. If he pulled the string, it would go anywhere he wanted. Leadership provides a direction, a sense of purpose, and a vision. Leadership that is too directive is demeaning, creates resentment, and develops low morale throughout the company (Ross, 1992).

Leadership is much different than management. In their recent book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*, Bolman and Deal (2013) describe skills of an effective leader within the context of the four-frame model: Structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The authors argue that leaders who apply the four frames while giving and getting information, making decisions, influencing people, and building relationships are deeper and stronger leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2013). They also



state that leaders need to be effective communicators, lead through conflict, motivate others, and develop a sense of trust within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Further, they illustrate the success of many organizations as traced back to their leader's thinking and using multiframe thinking within their approach. The authors propose that leaders must be aware of, understand, and know how to use many different frames when understanding the interconnections of their organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Humor is just one small part that shows its importance in all of the four frames.

Humor might be the way for leaders to step outside of their narrow thinking, reframe their thinking, and find solutions to complicated issues. Humor might be the way to go beyond simple mindlessness and one-way thinking to bring imagination back into leadership.

In a study by Hopkins (2008), the top ten traits of school leaders were surveyed. They were in order of importance:

1. Has a stated vision for the school and a plan to achieve that vision.
2. Clearly states goals and expectations for students, staff, and parents.
3. Is visible; gets out of the office; is seen all over the school.
4. Is trustworthy and is straight with students and staff.
5. Helps develop leadership skills in others.
6. Develops strong teachers; cultivates good teaching practice.

7. Shows that he or she is not in charge alone; involves others in the decision making.

8. Has a sense of humor.

9. Is a role model for students and staff.

10. Offers meaningful kindness and positive complements to staff and students (Hopkins, 2008).

Humor was such an important leadership tool that it was listed as one of the top ten attributes a school principal can have! Humor is the glue with which principals can form friendly bonds with their teachers and students (Hopkins, 2008). A leader's sense of humor will "build rapport, grab and hold attention, help people relax, bridge gaps in understanding-and ultimately persuade" (Ross, 1992 p. 57). Further, "humor is a powerful skill, one that can enhance productivity, build relationships, boost revenue, improve health, and increase happiness" (Tarvin, 2012, p. i). Humor plays an important role in human relations and human relationships between co-workers. Humor has a way of making everyone in the organization feel that we are in this together (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). The use of humor by educational leaders may be just the way to gently pull on the string.

### **Humor and Leadership Styles**

To determine exactly how humor might allow principals to lead more successfully, we need to understand the ways in which humor may be used by a leader.

To find how humor could be measured in a valid and reliable way, Babad (1974) indentified four humor styles. He developed a study of a New England women's college students (N=1,816) and divided his subjects into four main groups based around information he received from their friends and acquaintances. The four groups are: the appreciator, the producer, the reproducer, and the nonhumorous. The appreciator is someone who shows a readiness to laugh, a person who enjoys the humor of others and seeks out humorous situation. The producer is a person who invents humor, makes up jokes and funny stories. The reproducer however, rarely tells jokes on their own and very seldom makes up funny stories or jokes. The reproducer is a person who retells the humor that they heard from the producer. The nonhumorous person is one who finds it difficult to laugh and tells jokes. This person rarely creates humor and does not often seek our humor or humorous situations (Babad, 1974).

Of the 1,816 students that were used for Babad's initial study, 987 students stated that they had been one of the above four types at least once. Babad further narrowed his sample to 81 students who were invited to be in the study. Of the 81 invited, 77 women chose to be a part of the study. Each of the female students was given humor appreciation test, an active humor test, and a creativity test. Further, each was then asked to provide a self-report on her humor behavior. Babad found that the four humor categories were well differentiated from each other and that the subjects perceived themselves in much the same way as others perceived them (Babad, 1974).

There can be no doubt that there is a substantial connection between the use of humor and effective leadership. Leadership trends constantly push us into new and

exciting directions. With humor, our drive toward continuous improvement may be enhanced. With this literature review, we also need to determine the connectedness of principal humor style to school climate.

### **Part III: The Impact of Humor on School Climate**

In part one, the various roles humor plays on the human psyche was investigated. In part two, the role humor plays with leadership within a school was discovered. In this section, humor and the impact it plays on school climate will be presented.

The atmosphere of the school has been of importance to educators for more than a century:

School climate is the heart and soul of a school. It is about that essence of a school that leads a child, a teacher, an administrator, a staff member to love the school and to look forward to being there each school day. School climate is about that quality of a school that helps each individual feel personal worth, dignity and importance, while simultaneously helping create a sense of belonging to something beyond ourselves. The climate of a school can foster resilience or become a risk factor in the lives of people who work and learn in a place called school.

A school's climate can define the quality of a school that creates healthy learning places; nurtures children's and parents' dreams and aspirations; stimulates teachers' creativity and enthusiasm, and elevates all of its members. It is about the special quality of a school that the voices of the children and youth

speak to when they explain why they love their schools (Freidberg & Stein, 1999 p. 11).

Climate is the enduring quality of the school environment that people experience and that affects their behavior (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). This feeling does not come from the edifice of the building, but instead it comes directly from the people that work and interact together within the building (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Working together as a cohesive group is a key component of any strong, healthy organization. The openness of a work environment thus is vital to employees. When employees feel an open and healthy climate, the workers respond with creativity and commitment (Ross, 1992).

Now, how can school leaders use humor in the school workplace to improve school climate? Principals have an extremely hard job in finding new and exciting ways to offer opportunities for teachers to decrease exhaustion, while at the same time improving school climate. The main reasons that teachers suffer burnout are low salaries, poor working conditions, lack of preparation time, and lack of mentoring support in the early years (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Further, Ross in his 1992 book: *That's a good one! Corporate leadership with humor* states that when employees are allowed to feel comfortable in an open organization and allowed to use their talents and creativity they are far more productive and maintain a higher morale. Working people spend about forty percent of their lives in their workplace. So, it is vital for employees to feel valued and able to take risks. The use of humor as a leadership tool may be essential for principals to maintain positive and productive relationships within their schools. In addition, Ross states that a strong leader is able to motivate his or her workers to work together toward a

common goal. The more leaders show care and respect through humorous and positive interactions with their staff the more teamwork, respect, laughter, and achievement are exhibited by the organization (Ross, 1992).

### **School Climate Measurements**

This section is split into three main sections: School climate measurement research, principal humor and school climate research, and principal humor styles and climate research.

The first group to look at school climate and schools was Halpin and Croft in their 1963 study (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). In it, they measured elementary school climates by using the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ). This questionnaire identified six climate types ranging from closed climate to open climate. Their findings characterized closed school climates as environments that had high disengagement, high hindrance, low esprit, low intimacy, high aloofness, high production emphasis, low thrust, and low consideration. Conversely, Halpin and Croft characterized open school climates as low disengagement, high hindrance, high esprit, high intimacy, low aloofness, low production emphasis, high thrust, and high consideration (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Another early researcher developed a model to determine a school's climate that is still very pertinent today. In the model, Parsons (1967) described four basic problems that schools must overcome to remain and stay healthy. Schools must adapt, set and meet goals, develop a culture of togetherness, and maintain a value system (Parsons, 1967). Further, a healthy school must have collegial leadership together with an academic

emphasis where teachers and leaders are working together in harmony (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). This harmony happens when employees can have fun while doing exceptional work (Ross, 1992). Therefore, the personality of the leader is an essential element to an open school climate.

Another key stepping stone in measuring organizational climate was found by Litwin and Stringer (1968) in their book, *Motivation and Organizational Climate*. In it, they identified eight dimensions to measure organizational climate. The key components to organizational climate according to their work are: Structure, responsibility, rewards, support, risk, conflict, identity, and standards (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Further, Litwin and Stringer categorized organizations into three main types of climates: Power-motivated climate, affiliation-oriented climate, and achievement-oriented climate. Their findings suggest that the climate that is most often associated with high performance and high individual satisfaction was the achievement-oriented climate (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Later, Stringer (2002) determined there are five “determinants” that affect climate. The determinants of climate are: Leadership practices, organizational arrangements, strategy, external environment, and historical forces. The first three can be determined by the leader and staff within a school, while the last are out of their hands (Stringer, 2002). Humor may have an effect on each of the three determinants of school climate.

Likert & Likert (1976) tracked organizational climate within a school when they developed the Profile of Organizational Characteristics (POC). In their book, they describe the System 1-4 continuum. Their findings suggest that System 4 is the best type

of management system. This system is characterized by being democratic in nature where people work together in groups to find consensus on difficult issues. The authors found that when groups work together to solve problems, motivation within the group rises and the organization can focus on their key processes. These consensus groups, then, are the key to establishing a healthy climate. The groups work to bring together the formal and informal parts of the organization so that they can work together toward important goals and stop any informal undercurrents working against the organization (Likert & Likert, 1976).

In 1998, the OCDQ was revised for middle schools by Hoy and Sabo (1998) resulting in the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM). Middle schools are distinct from elementary and secondary schools (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). In fact, middle schools are considerably different in form and function from junior high schools. Typical middle schools have interdisciplinary team structures, a child-centered philosophy, heterogeneous groupings of students, specializations of subjects, interdisciplinary activities, time, and flexibility (George & Alexander, 2003). In the OCDQ-RM, Hoy and Sabo (1998) measure 50 items of six climate characteristics: Supportive principal behavior, collegial teacher behavior, directive principal behavior, restrictive principal behavior, committed teacher behavior, disengaged teacher behavior. Each of these six climate characteristics lends great insight into the climate of a middle school. The OCDQ-RM gives us a feel for the distinctive character of an open school climate. A middle school with an open climate is characterized by having a high amount of thrust and esprit and low amount of disengagement (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).



## **Principal Humor and School Climate**

School climate is “like the air we breathe” (Freiberg, 1999 p. 1). The human component within the organization, then, is the key to an open and healthy climate. For example, a leader's use of humor is the most effective signal that they approve of openness. When there is a feeling of openness, people in the organization are more democratic, exploratory, candid, and more apt to take chances on something creative (Ross, 1992).

Humor exemplified by the principal may be effective to promote a positive school climate in tough situations. For humor helps keep things in perspective. It deflects and reduces stress in the workplace and reduces burnout. Burnout can lead to ineffective leadership by the school principal and lead to a negative school climate exemplified by others around the principal (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). Humor can also be used by school leaders to convey a negative message in such a way as the staff member clearly understands the message while feeling safe at the same time. Humor may help leaders deflect potentially negative situations and make a point without having uncomfortable situations with others (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). The use of humor can soften the blow, show improper action by the employee with gentleness, and highlight the need for change with a positive light (Ross, 1992). The ability to bring a problem under control becomes one of a principal's central tasks. Humor can be utilized to provide a non-threatening way to convey the negative message (Lefcourt, 2001). Sometimes humor is all that is needed to open the lines of communication and keep the positive school climate

open and healthy. When a school climate is healthy and open staff is more productive, principals are more flexible, and students achieve at high levels (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

### **Principal Humor Styles and School Climate**

Humor styles of principals may have an impact on school climate and may give us key insight into how exactly principal humor style impacts a school's climate. As we have seen from the above research, the research is saturated with school climate research. There are smaller amounts of studies examining the interconnectedness of humor and school climate. Even fewer studies have explored humor styles and school climate, however no study has looked directly at the intersection of principal humor style to school climate within middle schools.

Babad (1974) was the first researcher to identify different humor styles. He grouped humor styles into four main groups. As mentioned and described above, the four groups are: the appreciator, the producer, the reproducer, and the nonhumorous.

The first researcher to examine humor and school climate was Ziegler (1982). In her study, she did not use Babad's humor styles, but instead measured principal humor with the IPAT Humor Test. She then selected teachers randomly from each school to respond to the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ-12, Form XII) and the Profile of a School (POS). The purpose of her study was to find differences of leadership styles and school climate as perceived by teachers. Although her study examined a small suburban school district, she did not distinguish her results into different grade levels so her results cannot be generalized into age groups. Her results found that there is a

significant difference (reject Null at .10) in leadership styles of principals to some humor factors as perceived by teachers. Further, she found that there are significant differences in school climates with different humor styles as perceived by teachers (Ziegler, 1982).

Philbrick (1989) took Babad's four humor styles and transferred them into schools. In her study, she examined humor and leadership styles of elementary school principals and the differences in their perceived effectiveness. Each of the 78 elementary school principals was given her developed version of the humor styles based on Babad's work (1974). She asked the elementary school principals to complete her Principal Humor Survey and Fielder's Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) Scale (Fielder, 1967) to measure leadership effectiveness by principals with different humor styles. She found that elementary school principals who rated themselves as producers of humor tended to be task-oriented in leadership style. In addition, she found that principals with the appreciator humor style most often had a relationship-oriented leadership style. Further, she found a significant difference between a principal's gender and humor style. Women were most often appreciators of humor, while males were either appreciators or producers of humor. There was no relationship between leadership style and gender or perceived humor style and leader effectiveness (Philbrick, 1989).

Williams (1994) was another researcher that examined the relationship between principal humor style and school climate in high schools. In his study, he sought to find out the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of high school principals' humor styles and school climate. Unlike Ziegler (1982), Williams (1994) did use Babad's four humor style types in his investigation. He used correlation analysis to see the degree of

association between the dependent variable (school climate) and the independent variable (principal humor style). His findings discovered a significant relationship between teacher perceptions of principal humor styles and school climates. Further, he found that appreciator and producer principal humor styles were generally linked with healthy school environments and nonhumorous and reproducer styles of principal humor were connected with unhealthy school climates (Williams, 1994).

Koonce (1997) examined the relationship between principal humor style and school climate in elementary schools. The major purpose of his study was to extend the knowledge base and find the relationship between elementary principal humor style and school climate. He used the Humor Style Survey (Babad, 1974; Philbrick, 1989) and The Organizational Health Inventory - Elementary Version (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991) in elementary schools in Virginia. Using analysis for variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analysis, he found that elementary teachers perceived elementary principals to have an appreciator humor style. Additionally, he found that elementary principals' humor styles influence healthy school climates (Koonce, 1997).

In this section, we discovered the evolving nature of humor within a school though some of the building blocks of research built by the above researchers. The measurement of humor has come a long way since Halpin and Croft's 1963 monumental foundation work. Humor can be measured through a variety of ways and manners, but it is the link between humor and school climate that is most interesting. From the research above, it is clear to see the direct connection between humor and school climate. However, none of the above studies examined middle schools and it is within this void

that this study examined principal humor style and school climate. Humor style exemplified by the principal may be one of the factors that develops and maintains a healthy and open school climate.

### **Implications and Summary**

If humor is mankind's greatest gift like Mark Twain said, then why not use it? Humor has been around since the beginning of human time, yet it remains an elusive characteristic within schools. Humor has much health and mental benefits, and a multitude of uses, yet costs nothing. Yet, people still do not use it to their advantage. Understanding humor and the human psyche, realizing the need for humor in school leadership, and analyzing the requirement for humor in our schools to promote a positive school climate are essential to our growth as educators. Humor might be the way.

This study provides another piece of information that has the potential to positively impact school leaders, educators, and the students. This chapter presented information in the areas of humor, humor and leadership, and humor and school climate. Middle school principals who seek to keep their school climate positive, healthy, and open may utilize the tool of humor to help them find that balance.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to investigate the relationship between principals' perceived humor style and school climate in middle schools. In this chapter, a description of the research sample population, design, instrumentation, and procedures used to collect and analyze the data are presented.

#### Research Questions

1. What were the principals' self reported humor styles?
2. What were the corresponding school climates of each school?
3. What was the relationship between principals' self-reported humor style (independent variable) and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate (dependent variable)?

#### Population and Sample

The population for this study was the 346 middle schools in Wisconsin. Each middle school was contacted at least three attempts using both phone calls and emails to seek permission for participation. During the process of obtaining permission, principals were offered their school's climate scores as an incentive for participating. Of the 346 middle schools, 16 schools did not meet the selection criteria in that they were a combination of elementary-middle, middle-high, or they were a charter, voucher, private

or other type of school. Sixty-eight middle schools declined the invitation to participate in this research. Most schools that declined to participate cited that time was the major factor in not participating. Others stated that they were going through significant changes and did not want to give the climate survey in the midst of this change. Some middle school principals stated that they did not feel comfortable giving the surveys to their staff. One hundred thirty-seven middle schools did not respond after at least three attempts by the author. The author tried various ways to connect with the principals, contacted them on different days and times, and used both phone calls and emails. The lack of participation by these schools may further illustrate the lack of time of the principals. The author was unable to make contact with seven middle schools due to disconnected phone numbers, spam filters, or for some unknown reason. Two middle schools were not included because of a conflict of interest with the author. Ultimately, 116 middle schools gave their permission to participate in the research and they made up the sample. The participating 116 schools were sent an email through Qualtrics software.

### **Description of the Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the knowledge base and add to the field of humor research by studying the relationship between identified humor styles of middle school principals and school climate as perceived by teachers in middle schools. Therefore a quantitative research design was chosen. In quantitative research,

the goal is to provide statistical descriptions, relationships, and explanations.

Quantitative techniques are used with experimental, descriptive, and correlational

designs as a way to summarize a large number of observations and to indicate numerically the amount of error in collecting and reporting the data (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001 p. 40).

Organizational climate was chosen to be measured because climate is defined by shared perceptions of behavior (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). Organizational climate, therefore, is the dependent variable due to the fact that the researcher wants to determine how climate is influenced by the principal's humor style. The goal of studying climate is to determine effective strategies of change and the impact that it may have on people and organizations (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

Two surveys administered to participating principals and teachers in their schools. One survey was given to the principals to obtain sociometric data about principal humor type and another survey was given to teachers to gain information about teacher perceptions of the school climate. The statistical measure used was analysis of variance (ANOVA) due to the fact that it was the most appropriate methods for collecting and analyzing the data needed to answer the research questions. ANOVA was chosen to be the best method to determine if the mean of principal humor style and mean of school climate were significantly different. In addition,

sociometric data seem to be the most valid, particularly when humor is studied as a social interactive phenomenon, and not as a cognitive phenomenon. A person's humor behavior, in their natural environment, its affect on others, and the way



that a person is perceived by their acquaintances, can best be captured by obtaining the sociometric humor ratings of peers (Babad, 1974 p. 619).

## **Data Procedures**

### How were the data collected?

In each of the participating middle schools, Qualtrics survey software was used to send each principal an email with a link to both the Humor Styles Survey and Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire - Revised for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM). Instructions in the email stated that principals take the Humor Styles Survey and then forward the OCDQ-RM to their middle school teaching staff using their school email. Data were also collected through the Qualtrics software.

The first email was sent out to the participating 116 middle school principals on Saturday, March 23, 2013. Each week, another email was sent out to the principals who did not respond. After two weeks, the author called each of the principals that had still not responded. During the last week of the survey being active, the author sent out a final reminder email and also made another contact by phone to each principal who had not completed the surveys yet. The survey was closed on Friday, May 3, 2013. It remained open for 42 days. The author decided to leave it open longer than one month due to the fact that various schools had their spring breaks within this time frame. Of the 116 middle schools, 100 principals and 1,008 teachers participated in the surveys across the state of Wisconsin.

### How were the data compiled?

The data from the Humor Styles Survey and the OCDQ-RM was compiled through Qualtrics survey software. After the closure date, data were downloaded to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 software (SPSS Corporation, 2012). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the statistical relationship between the principal's self-reported humor style (independent variable) and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate (dependent variable).

### How were the data scored?

School climate was measured using the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire, Revised for Middle Schools (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). The OCDQ-RM measures school climate in six subtests: Supportive (S), directive (D), restrictive (R), collegial (C), committed (Com), and disengaged (D).

Each item in the 50-item survey was scored 1, 2, 3, or 4 by the teachers. Items 21 and 50 were reverse coded. Then, each of the teachers' scores for each school was summed. This was calculated by adding each respondent's score for each item for each of the six subtests for each school and dividing by the total number of respondents at that school. Supportive (S) items included: 1, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19, 24, 32, 36, 44, 49. Directive (D) items include: 9, 20, 33, 37, 38, 41. Restrictive (R) items included: 3, 4, 39, 42. Collegial (C) items included: 2, 13, 14, 16, 22, 25, 34, 35, 40, 43, 45. Committed (Com) items included: 5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 21, 46, 47, 48. Disengaged (Dis) items included: 8, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 50. The averaged items for each teacher in each school for each of

the six subtests represent the climate profile of the school (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). To compare each school with other schools, the school score must be standardized from our entire sample.

The average scores for each climate subtest and standard deviations from the entire Wisconsin sample are listed in Table 1.

<b>Climate Subtest</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Range</b>
Supportive behavior (S)	29.99	7.23	11.00	44.00	33.00
Directive behavior (D)	10.51	2.75	5.00	24.00	19.00
Restrictive behavior (R)	8.79	2.65	3.00	16.00	13.00
Collegial behavior (C)	29.36	5.50	13.00	44.00	31.00
Committed behavior (Com)	28.40	4.35	12.00	36.00	24.00
Disengaged behavior (Dis)	14.68	3.86	9.00	33.00	24.00

To standardize each of Wisconsin's schools used in this study the author used the following formulas for each of the six climate scores:

$$\text{Standard Score for Supportive (SdS for S)} = 100 (S - 29.99) / 7.23 + 500$$

$$\text{SdS for D} = 100 (D - 10.51) / 2.75 + 500$$

$$\text{SdS for R} = 100 (R - 8.79) / 2.65 + 500$$

$$\text{SdS for C} = 100 (C - 29.36) / 5.50 + 500$$

$$\text{SdS for Com} = 100 (\text{Com} - 28.40) / 4.35 + 500$$

$$\text{SdS for Dis} = 100 (\text{Dis} - 14.68) / 3.86 + 500$$

Using the mean of 500, if a school scored 600 on supportive behavior, then it would be one standard deviation above the average score on supportive behavior of all schools used in the Wisconsin sample. That is, the principal is more supportive than 84% of other principals. Table 2 indicates the range of climate scores for principal and teacher openness.

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Table 2

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*Principal and Teacher Openness Range of Climate Scores*

Range	School Climate
Above 550	High
525-550	Above Average
511-524	Slightly Above Average
490-510	Average
476-489	Slightly Below Average
450-475	Below Average
Below 450	Low

Hoy & Sabo, (1998)

Then, the principal, teacher, and total openness measures were calculated using the following formulas:

$$\text{Principal Openness} = ((\text{SdS for S}) + (1000 - \text{SdS for D}) + (1000 - \text{SdS for R})) / 3$$

$$\text{Teacher Openness} = ((\text{SdS for C}) + (\text{SdS for Com}) + (1000 - \text{SdS for Dis})) / 3$$

$$\text{Total Openness} = \text{Principal Openness} + \text{Teacher Openness}$$

Just as the “average” openness of the principal and teachers were represented with a score of 500, the “average” school was represented by a score of 1000. Table 3 illustrates the range of climate scores for total openness.

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Table 3

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*Total Openness Range of Climate Scores*

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Range	School Climate
Above 1100	High
1050-1100	Above Average
1022-1049	Slightly Above Average
980-1021	Average
952-979	Slightly Below Average
900-951	Below Average
Below 900	Low

Hoy & Sabo, (1998)

#### How were the data aggregated?

The descriptive data were aggregated into demographic data of principals and teachers, school type, general information from each school, principal humor style, and school climate scores.

#### How were the data compared?

After the data were compiled, comparisons were made to begin to analyze the data through the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis of the data and results of the study are presented in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4**

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to extend the field of humor research by (1) determining the principal humor style; (2) find out the corresponding school climate; and (3) understanding the relationship between principal humor style (independent variable) and the teachers' perception of the school climate (dependent variable) using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

#### **Characteristics of Subjects**

After obtaining permission from 116 middle school principals to conduct research in their school, 100 principals responded with submitted surveys. Of the 100 principal surveys submitted, 97 were found to be fully completed surveys. Only the surveys that were fully completed were selected. In the email to each principal, simple instructions were given to forward the climate survey on to their middle school teaching staff. Of the 1,008 submitted teacher surveys, 778 teacher surveys were found to be fully completed. Only those that were fully completed were selected. Then, to provide an adequate representation of the data, only middle schools that had five or more fully completed teacher surveys were selected. Dr. Hoy indicated to the author that small samples less than five teachers per school did not illustrate a meaningful statistical relationship between principal humor style and school climate (W. K. Hoy, personal communication, January 15, 2012). After this process was completed, 48 schools remained with more than five fully completed teacher surveys per school. This sample of 48 schools was

considered valid since Dr. Hoy indicated to the author that at least 40 schools were necessary for validity (W. K. Hoy, personal communication, January 15, 2012).

The sample of 48 participating schools was provided their school's composite climate scores for principal openness, teacher openness, and total openness as well as information about how to interpret their scores for continuous improvement.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data in this study. Data were cleaned up through the process of selecting only complete surveys, typing in numerical values instead of words that were typed by respondents, and grouping teacher surveys into their school groups. For ease of use, the author arranged each school alphabetically and coded with a school ID number. For the purpose of this dissertation and for the open use of all, the computer generated randomized ID numbers for each school. Inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses for this study. The level of significance for this study was set at .05. The data were then analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

### **Major Findings**

This section presents the major findings of the study. The research question addressed by this study and the hypothesis is discussed.

**Research Question 1:** What is the self-reported humor style of each principal in this study?

**Finding:**

Table 4 illustrates principals' self-reported humor style.

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Nonhumorous(1)	0	0
Appreciator(2)	19	39.6
Producer(3)	21	43.7
Reproducer(4)	8	16.7
Total	48	100

An analysis of the Table 4 indicates that the majority (83.3%) of the principals rated themselves as either an appreciator or producer. No principal rated him/herself as nonhumorous. This finding may indicate that each of the principals perceives that humor has some value in leadership. It may also indicate that having some sense of humor (appreciator, producer, or reproducer) in a middle school setting may be perceived as beneficial to staff, students, and school climate by school principals.

**Research Question 2:** What are the perceived climate scores of each of the schools?

Table 5 presents the standardized mean climate scores for each of the six subtests and the principal openness, teacher openness, and combined total as perceived by teachers within each school.



Table 5  
*Mean Standardized Climate Scores*

School Number	Supportive	Directive	Restrictive	Collegial	Committed	Disengaged	Principal Openness	Teacher Openness	Total Openness
1	534.7	546.8	511.6	555.0	578.0	456.2	492.0	558.9	1050.9
2	500.1	475.8	429.5	496.1	492.4	486.1	531.5	500.8	1032.3
3	446.1	500.4	507.8	507.1	454.5	582.0	479.2	459.8	939.1
4	543.3	543.5	504.7	549.3	527.0	496.2	498.3	526.7	1025.0
5	565.9	488.9	457.1	547.1	497.8	446.4	539.9	532.8	1072.7
6	566.5	437.8	472.7	546.5	495.2	502.9	551.9	512.9	1064.9
7	588.2	559.7	513.8	560.2	536.6	475.3	504.8	540.4	1045.3
8	479.1	450.9	536.5	459.9	511.8	523.6	497.2	482.7	979.9
9	499.1	486.6	491.7	468.7	433.2	480.3	506.9	473.8	980.7
10	567.4	516.1	430.7	589.0	522.0	436.2	540.1	558.2	1098.4
11	421.1	475.2	511.5	512.8	531.6	475.8	478.1	522.8	100.9
12	573.9	487.5	432.4	475.2	506.0	473.5	551.2	502.5	1053.8
13	539.3	505.6	438.7	487.3	544.3	477.8	531.6	517.9	1049.5
14	541.6	526.8	474.9	457.0	453.3	543.6	513.2	455.5	968.8
15	493.0	522.4	564.9	518.0	519.0	490.8	468.8	515.5	984.1
16	492.6	490.5	561.3	378.3	420.8	620.3	480.2	392.9	873.2
17	517.4	504.1	522.0	472.9	470.5	466.0	497.0	492.5	989.5
18	512.7	565.6	463.3	490.0	441.6	515.1	494.5	472.1	966.7
19	553.1	463.2	407.3	514.5	463.8	469.2	560.8	503.0	1063.8
20	573.0	459.0	484.6	553.3	528.6	544.9	543.0	512.3	1055.4
21	438.4	540.5	528.3	446.4	508.8	517.7	456.5	479.1	935.7
22	524.7	462.1	511.4	502.4	511.5	476.5	517.0	512.4	1029.5
23	487.8	477.4	453.4	502.7	530.6	478.3	518.9	518.3	1037.3
24	490.9	439.0	514.1	487.3	502.1	533.9	512.5	485.1	997.7
25	523.6	463.2	443.8	518.7	488.3	484.7	538.8	507.4	1046.3
26	583.1	481.4	504.4	514.8	565.8	475.1	532.3	535.1	1067.5
27	505.7	516.1	542.1	589.8	541.8	464.5	482.4	555.7	1038.2
28	508.1	489.1	468.2	531.5	523.3	471.2	516.9	527.8	1044.8
29	446.1	535.9	496.5	536.9	479.2	492.5	471.2	507.8	979.0
30	403.3	517.7	643.6	420.7	444.7	487.3	413.9	459.3	873.3
31	466.9	468.7	485.2	466.1	510.2	477.0	504.3	499.7	1004.0
32	493.2	522.9	532.1	515.3	549.7	493.2	479.3	523.9	1003.3
33	453.7	440.8	510.1	450.6	405.5	602.5	500.9	417.8	918.8
34	492.2	569.7	502.5	501.1	595.7	522.8	473.3	524.6	997.9
35	548.5	517.7	503.1	447.9	407.4	521.0	509.1	444.7	953.9
36	520.0	504.1	524.3	471.7	469.1	524.2	497.1	472.2	969.3
37	463.8	545.0	446.6	451.3	535.2	503.2	490.7	494.4	985.1
38	522.4	574.3	484.8	503.4	536.6	479.3	487.1	520.2	1008.0
39	460.9	439.0	495.3	429.8	463.8	525.3	508.8	456.1	964.9
40	480.9	579.2	528.1	521.2	564.9	468.2	457.8	539.3	997.1
41	438.4	526.1	557.1	420.7	506.6	541.9	451.6	461.8	913.4
42	374.3	537.6	593.5	529.6	478.1	468.9	414.4	506.9	921.3
43	467.1	479.0	485.2	401.3	435.5	473.5	503.9	454.4	958.4
44	522.6	476.9	413.6	398.0	395.9	543.6	544.0	416.7	960.7
45	433.2	420.8	482.7	351.1	360.4	542.6	509.8	389.6	899.5
46	483.7	508.7	486.6	504.6	460.5	464.3	496.1	500.2	996.3
47	412.5	445.1	558.1	578.0	479.2	512.4	469.7	514.9	984.7
48	486.3	471.7	442.5	539.3	495.2	544.3	523.9	496.7	1020.7
Min	374.3	420.8	407.3	351.1	360.4	436.2	413.9	389.6	873.2
Max	588.2	579.2	643.6	589.8	595.7	620.3	560.8	558.9	1098.4
Std D	50.24	40.33	47.04	53.81	50.12	38.80	32.39	39.67	53.03
Mean	498.9	499.0	496.9	493.1	493.2	501.0	500.8	494.9	995.8

To put Table 5 into some perspective, Table 6 shows the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of the individual teachers' perceptions of the school climate.

Climate Subtest	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Supportive	237.34	693.78	499.76	100.00
Directive	299.77	990.19	500.16	100.39
Restrictive	281.70	771.80	499.56	100.37
Collegial	202.94	765.61	500.33	100.36
Committed	123.06	674.51	499.69	100.20
Disengaged	352.71	974.20	500.14	100.21
Principal Openness	231.13	651.76	500.00	64.29
Teacher Openness	169.06	695.80	499.96	78.34
Total Openness	418.55	1281.26	999.97	112.56

An analysis of Tables 5 and 6 shows that although there is a wide range of minimum and maximum climate scores, most of the schools' climate scores are clustered within one standard deviation from the mean. Although variations were seen on the individual level within this population of teachers, most of the overall schools' climate scores were generally similar.

**Research Question 3:** What is the relationship, if any, between principal humor style (independent variable) and the teacher perceived school climate (dependent variable)?

Table 7 illustrates the principal humor style type and the corresponding mean openness climate scores.

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>Principal Openness</b>			
Appreciator (2)	342	488.6	66.5
Producer (3)	316	512.6	58.9
Reproducer (4)	120	499.3	64.0
Total	778	500.0	64.0
<b>Teacher Openness</b>			
2	342	498.5	76.7
3	316	501.8	78.4
4	120	499.0	81.8
Total	778	500.0	78.1
<b>Total Openness</b>			
2	342	987.1	111.7
3	316	1014.5	109.0
4	120	998.3	117.7
Total	778	1000.0	112.1

Note. None of the 48 principals selected the nonhumorous humor style.

For supportive, collegial, committed, principal openness, teacher openness, and openness total, a mean score of 500 and higher implied a healthy, open school climate while a score below 500 suggests an unhealthy, closed school climate. However, for directive, restrictive, and disengaged, the opposite is true. For example, having a score of 440 for directive was a characteristic of an open, healthy school climate.

An analysis of Table 7 shows the mean of the school climate openness was larger with a principal that had the producer humor style. This may indicate the positive relationship between a humorous principal and open and healthy school climate.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the relationship between the variables. A hypothesis was formulated to determine the relationship between principal humor style (independent variable) and school climate (dependent variable).

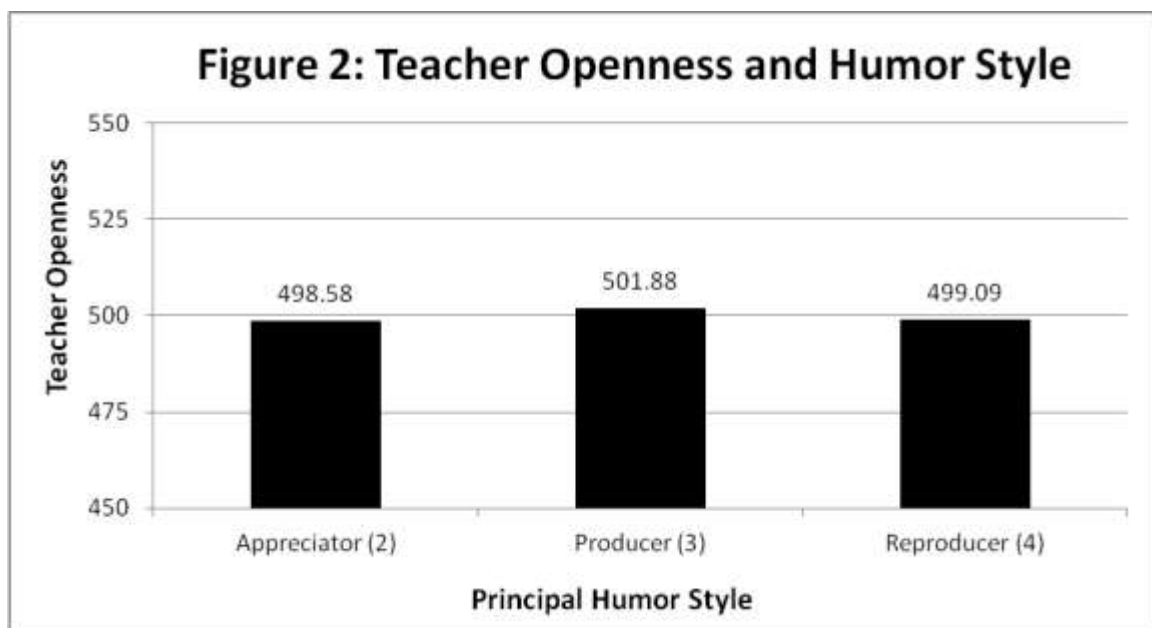
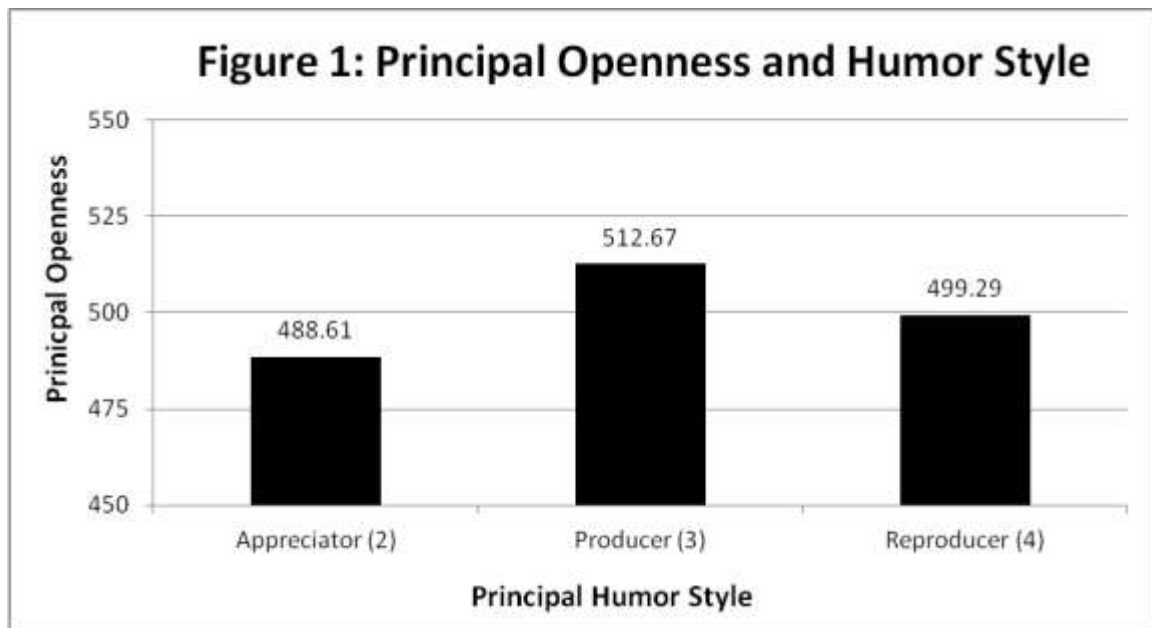
**Hypothesis 1:**

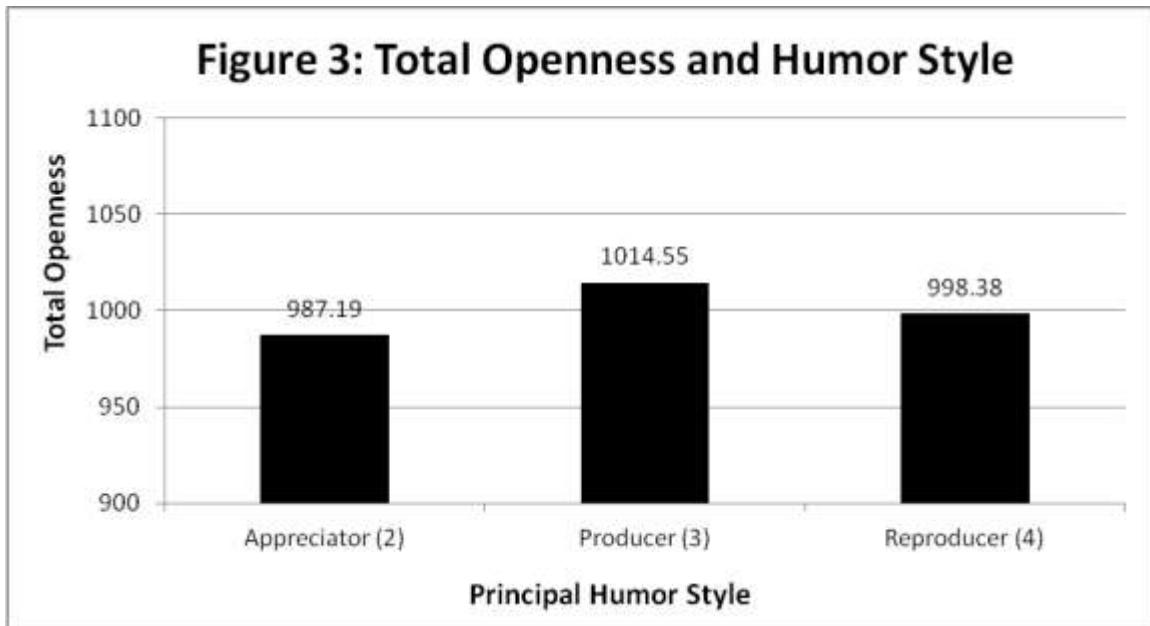
1. There is no statistically significant relationship between principals' humor style (independent variable) and school climate (dependent variable).

**Finding:**

According to the perceptions of teachers, school climate was affected by the principals' humor style. The one-way ANOVA, [ $F(2, 775) = 11.93, MSE = 47555.1, p = .00$ ] demonstrated statistically significant mean differences at the ( $p < .05$  level) between the two groups of principal openness and principal humor style. Further, a significant mean difference was found between the two groups of total openness and principal humor style ANOVA, [ $F(2, 775) = 4.95, MSE = 955.5, p = .01$ ]. Due to the statistically significant results above, we reject the null hypothesis above. In other words, there was a significant statistical mean difference between the principal openness and the principal humor style as well as a significant statistical mean difference between the total openness and the principal humor style. That is, our ANOVA numbers can be treated as valid statistical measures of variation. Due to the fact that the author found statistically significant results, a post hoc test was performed.

The Least Significant Difference Test (LSD) post hoc test was performed to determine which mean differences were significant and which were not (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007). The LSD test indicated there was a significant difference between the means of the producer humor style and the means of principal openness, teacher openness, and openness total. Figures 1, 2, and 3 graphically show the post hoc results:





The findings generated by this study indicated possible trends for middle school principals regarding humor style and school climate. A summary of these findings and their implications are discussed in chapter 5.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the findings and conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to fill a void in educational research by investigating the relationship between principal humor style and school climate as perceived by teachers. The study was based on a review of the literature that illustrated the role humor plays in our lives, how humor and leadership are connected, and what impact humor has on school climate.

The sample for this study was 48 middle school principals and 778 middle school teachers across the state of Wisconsin. In this study each of the principals self-reported their humor style and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate were measured. Data were obtained through the distribution of two survey instruments to each participating principal. The survey instruments were: The Humor Style Survey (Babad, 1974) and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). Principals completed the Humor Style Survey and forwarded the climate survey link to their middle school teaching staffs. All data were collected through the author's Qualtrics statistical software account through the

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Data were then uploaded to SPSS 21.1 for data computation and data analysis.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine whether a significant difference existed between the means of principal humor style (independent variable) and the school climate (dependent variable). In testing the hypothesis, the level of significance was set at the .05 level.

## **Conclusions**

**Research Question # 1:** What are the principals' self reported humor styles?

**Finding:** The majority of principals reported themselves to have a producer humor style N=21 (43.7%). Most other principals reported appreciator humor style N=19 (39.6%) while some principals revealed the reproducer humor style N=8 (16.7%). No principals rated themselves as nonhumorous. This was also found to be the case in Vickers (2004) study whereby no principal identified himself or herself to be nonhumorous. This may indicate that principals perceive humor to be a valuable leadership quality. The author chose to have principals self-report their humor style just as Babad (1974) had his participants self report their humor styles in the development of the Humor Style Survey.

**Research Question # 2:** What is the school climate of middle schools as perceived by teachers?

**Findings:** The individual teachers' perceptions of the total openness of the school climate ranged from 418.5 on the low end to 1281.2 on the high end with 1000.0 indicating the combined principal and teacher openness mean. Individual teachers' perceptions of



principal openness ranged from 231.1 to 651.7 with 500.0 representing the mean.

Individual teachers' perceptions of the teacher openness ranged from 169.0 to 695.8 with 500.0 indicating the mean.

To give a more complete look at the school climate, individual teachers' perceptions of the school climate were averaged for each school. Mean school climates among the 48 middle schools varied from closed and unhealthy (873.2) to open and healthy (1098.4) with 1000.0 representing the mean. Principal openness ranged from 413.9 to 560.8 and teacher openness ranged from 389.6 to 558.9 with 500.0 indicating the mean. This illustrates the tremendous diversity of teachers, principals, and school climate. Despite this diversity, the majority of schools were within one standard deviation of the mean.

**Research Question # 3:** What is the relationship between principal humor style (independent variable) and the school climate (dependent variable) as perceived by teachers?

**Hypothesis #1:** There is no statistical significant relationship between principal self report humor style and teacher perceived school climate.

**Findings:** Using ANOVA, there was found to be a significant relationship between principal humor style and principal openness. There was also a statistically significant relationship between principal humor style and total openness. Following the statistically significant results, post hoc tests were run to determine which mean differences were significant. The Least Significant Difference (LSD) test indicated that there were significant differences between the means of the producer humor style and the means of

principal openness, teacher openness, and openness total. These findings indicate the importance of humor style and its affect on school climate.

Vickers (2004), Koonce (1997), Williams (1994), Kent (1993), and Philbrick (1989) found similar results in elementary and high schools. These principals' humor styles statistically affected their corresponding schools' climate. There are two key differences that exist between the studies listed above and the author's study.

First, the above studies used the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991) instead of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). The author chose the OCDQ because school climate was the focus of this investigation using climate as a way to see the "personality" of a school (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). And, "if the aim is to describe perceptions of behavior of organizational members with the purpose of managing and changing it, then a climate approach seems more desirable" (Hoy & Sabo, 1998 p. 6). Further, these studies had previously been done using the OHI and the niche in the research was very small. The only difference in the previous studies would be that the author could focus on middle schools. Taking these key points into context, the author decided on using the OCDQ which was revised for middle schools in 1998 (OCDQ-RM) (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

The second major difference between the previous studies, with the exception of Philbrick (1989), was the fact that they primarily used teachers' perceptions of the principals' humor style. Just as Philbrick (1989), the author chose to use principals' self

reported humor style due to the fact that Babad (1974) used respondents own ratings of their humor style in the development of the Humor Style Survey.

## **Discussion**

If Mark Twain once said that humor is mankind's greatest blessing and if school climate "is like the air we breathe" (Freidberg, 1999 p. 1), then it seemed natural to study the nexus of humor and school climate.

The intersection of principal humor style and school climate appears to be like an organic piece to the educational improvement puzzle. It is within this previously unstudied niche in which this study exists. The significance of this study cannot be overlooked because it filled a chasm in the educational knowledge base. It breached the gap of our understanding of a positive school climate by tying school climate with middle school principal humor styles by offering a baseline into the role humor plays within the middle school environment.

The review of literature indicated the positive effects of school climate as well as the fundamental way humans and humor are linked, "humor is probably the most significant characteristic of the human mind" (deBono, 1994, p. 55). The cognitive appraisal theory was utilized within this study because it examined humor styles exhibited by principals. Trying to determine how humor varied from person to person, Babad (1974) developed four main humor style types: nonhumorous, appreciator, producer, and reproducer.

The research reviewed indicated the positive effects of humor in the workplace. This study echoed the literature base by determining that having a principal that is humorous has been shown to have a positive impact on school climate. Humor was found in the literature to reduce stress, increase work performance (Fahlman, 1997) as well as to motivate people, and develop trust and improve communication within the workplace (Ross, 1992). Further, humor in the workplace was also found to be used by school leaders to enhance their message meaningful and easy to remember (Black and English, 2001).

Humor was found to be important in the workplace, but vital in schools because “humor facilitates learning, play encourages memory retention, and laughter relieves the stress that inhibits cognitive processing” (Morrison, 2012, p. 35). School leaders set the vision of the school and humor can significantly impact a leader’s ability to create a better working environment (Morrison, 2012). This working environment in schools is called climate. “School climate is the heart and soul of a school” (Freidberg & Stein, 1999, p.11). When a school climate is healthy and open, staff are more productive, principals are more flexible, and students achieve at high levels (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

After examining the crossroads of mankind's greatest gift and the air we breathe, humor was found to make a statistically significant difference in Wisconsin middle schools. The findings from this study enhance our knowledge by examining how utilizing humor can create an open and healthy learning environment. Understanding humor in the human mind, realizing the need for humor in school leadership, and analyzing the requirement for humor in our schools to promote a positive school climate

are fundamental to our growth as educators. In the review of literature, the use of humor was shown to have a positive impact on school climate. It was also shown to be the case in this study.

This study proves that teachers' perceptions of the school climate improve when principals utilize humor. Using humor as a leadership tool is a cost-effective and healthy way to improve not only school climate, but the mental and physical health of those within the educational organization.

The ANOVA results of this research show that there is indeed a statistically significant connection between the humor style a principal exhibits and principal openness and openness total. These data show that administrators may improve school climate by using humor to create an open and healthy school climate. It was further demonstrated in this study that principals that rated him/herself as the producer humor style had more open and healthy school climates than principals with appreciator and reproducers humor styles seen previously in Figures 1-3. Producers of humor exhibited more supportive, collegial, and committed attributes. Further, producers of humor were also found to be less directive, restrictive, and disengaged. Teachers perceptions of the school climate may have reflected what they attributes they felt from their principal. For example, if their principal was generally more supportive, collegial, and committed, then teachers within that school may be more apt to exhibit similar open and healthy characteristics. Principals who were producers of humor may have permeated this supportive, collegial, and committed sentiment throughout the school which led to a more open and healthy school climate. Interestingly, no principal in this middle school study

self reported him/herself to be nonhumorous. This may indicate that humor plays a role in his/her middle school leadership qualities. All of the surveyed principals perceived themselves as incorporating some type of humor (producer, appreciator, and reproducer) into their everyday interactions with students, teachers, parents, and community members. Using humor has shown to be an effective way to create an open and healthy school climate. After a thorough review of the literature, it was shown that humor and humans are directly linked. From the results of this study, it cannot be denied that humor is an important part of an open and healthy school climate.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this section is to offer suggestions for application in the field of educational leadership. Based on the findings and conclusions from this research, it is suggested that principals and teachers alike take the Humor Styles Survey and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools. The results would show their humor style and help to determine the school climate. Their results can provide key insights into positive elements of school climate. The results could also help lead collaborative discussions regarding open and healthy school climates for their staff and students. In addition, principals might consider allocating time for the appropriate use of humor during staff meetings for principals and staff, parent teacher organizational meetings, and during the orientation process of new staff. The actions of principals utilizing humor may influence positive teacher-teacher, and positive teacher-student interactions.

It is also suggested that principals make a conscious effort to use appropriate humor in all aspects of the school environment. The findings from this study enhance our knowledge base by identifying key aspects of principal humor style and school climate. Administrators may improve their school climate by supporting staff through the use of humor.

The results also advocate that educational leadership courses include key tenets of humor research and its relationship with school climate research in their course work and discussions. These collaborations may illicit discussions of the benefits of using humor in a middle school setting.

School district leadership can also benefit from the findings of this research. It is encouraged that they distribute information about the benefits of an open and healthy school climate as well as the benefits of using humor as a leadership tool to continually support staff and students. Planning in-service activities around these benefits may lead to an open and honest discussion, as well as lead to effective positive actions within middle schools. Further, district leadership could make humor and school climate an important ingredient during recruitment, selection, and improvement of both principals and teachers.

### **Recommendations**

This study generated many avenues for future study. Replication of this study in elementary, high schools, parochial, charter, or voucher schools would help broaden what is known about the complex relationship between principal humor style and school

climate. Further, one could further investigate whether school climate would be influenced by principals' years of experience or gender; as well as, whether the school's setting (i.e. urban, suburban, rural) affects principal humor or climate. It would also be important to investigate the similarities and differences if this study was repeated in schools in other states or overseas to widen the body of empirical research on the relationship between principal humor style and school climate. One could also replicate this study using the Organizational Health Inventory-Revised for Middle Schools and compare the results to this study.

This study examined the quantitative nature of principal humor style and school climate, but it would also be interesting to investigate this relationship using the qualitative paradigm. One could conduct in-depth interviews of teachers and principals to fully illustrate the complex relationship between principal humor style and school climate. One could also focus on two opposite schools, one open and healthy, the other closed and unhealthy. Using interviews, develop a theory or themes that develop to provide school educational administrators and university educational administrators of education programs a more humanistic look at the multifaceted relationship between principal humor style and school climate. In addition, one could use a mixed-methods approach using both a quantitative approach to determine the teachers' perceptions of principal humor style with teachers' perceptions of the school climate and a qualitative approach examining the meaning behind the perceptions. This may help to more fully understand the complex connection between principal humor style and school climate.



Another fascinating way one could study principal humor style and school climate is to use both principal self report humor style and teachers' perceptions of principal humor style. Identifying similarities and differences would be an important step in completely understanding principal humor style and its role on school climate.

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APPENDIX A  
HUMOR STYLE SURVEY

**Humor Style Survey**

School \_\_\_\_\_ School Enrollment: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please put an "X" next to the category that best represents your humor style. You may check more than one category unless you check the category number 1.**

\_\_\_\_ 1. Someone who finds it difficult to laugh; seldom tells jokes or creates humor; seldom seeks out humorous situation, or seldom laughs at others humor.

\_\_\_\_ 2. Someone who shows readiness to laugh; enjoys the humor of others and seeks out humorous situation; seldom tells jokes, seldom makes up jokes or humorous stories himself or herself.

\_\_\_\_ 3. Someone who invents humor; makes up jokes or witty amusing stories, or creates humorous situations.

\_\_\_\_ 4. Someone who retells others' amusing stories or jokes, or reenacts amusing situations, the "joke teller."

# \_\_\_\_ If you checked more than one category, which one of those checked best describes your humor style.

Please put an "X" beside the one category which describes you.

Gender:      \_\_\_\_ female      \_\_\_\_ male

Age:      \_\_\_\_ 20-29 yrs old      \_\_\_\_ 40-49 yrs old      \_\_\_\_ 60-69 yrs old

            \_\_\_\_ 30-39 yrs old      \_\_\_\_ 50-59 yrs old      \_\_\_\_ 70 + yrs old

I have worked as principal for:

            \_\_\_\_ 0-2 yrs      \_\_\_\_ 3-5 yrs      \_\_\_\_ 6-9 yrs      \_\_\_\_ 10+ yrs

Please put a "X" next to the appropriate racial group:

\_\_\_\_ Asian/Pacific Islander      \_\_\_\_ Black, Not Hispanic      \_\_\_\_ Hispanic

\_\_\_\_ White, Not Hispanic      \_\_\_\_ American Indian/Alaska Native

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APENDIX B

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE DESCRIPTION QUESTIONNAIRE-REVISED FOR  
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

**OCDQ-RM (Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Revised for Middle Schools)**

**DIRECTIONS: THE FOLLOWING ARE STATEMENTS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL. PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH STATEMENT CHARACTERIZES YOUR SCHOOL BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.**

**RO= RARELY OCCURS    SO=SOMETIME OCCURS    O=OFTEN OCCURS  
VFO=VERY OFTEN OCCURS**

1. The principal compliments teachers..... RO    SO    O    VFO
2. Teachers have parties for each other..... RO    SO    O    VFO
3. Teachers are burdened with busywork..... RO    SO    O    VFO
4. Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching..... RO    SO    O    VFO
5. Teachers "go the extra mile" with their students..... RO    SO    O    VFO
6. Teachers are committed to helping their students..... RO    SO    O    VFO
7. Teachers help students on their own time..... RO    SO    O    VFO
8. Teachers interrupt other teachers who are talking in staff meetings..... RO    SO    O    VFO
9. The principal rules with an iron fist..... RO    SO    O    VFO
10. The principal encourages teacher autonomy..... RO    SO    O    VFO
11. The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers..... RO    SO    O    VFO
12. The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed..... RO    SO    O    VFO
13. Teachers invite other faculty members to visit them at home..... RO    SO    O    VFO
14. Teachers socialize with each other on a regular basis..... RO    SO    O    VFO



15. The principal uses constructive criticism..... RO SO O VFO
16. Teachers who have personal problems receive support from other staff members..... RO SO O VFO
17. Teachers stay after school to tutor students who need help..... RO SO O VFO
18. Teachers accept additional duties if students will benefit..... RO SO O VFO
19. The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty..... RO SO O VFO
20. The principal supervises teachers closely..... RO SO O VFO
21. Teachers leave school immediately after school is over..... RO SO O VFO
22. Most of the teachers here accept the faults of their colleagues..... RO SO O VFO
23. Teachers exert group pressure on non-conforming faculty members..... RO SO O VFO
24. The principal listens to and accepts teachers' suggestions..... RO SO O VFO
25. Teachers have fun socializing together during school time..... RO SO O VFO
26. Teachers ramble when they talk at faculty meetings..... RO SO O VFO
27. Teachers are rude to other staff members..... RO SO O VFO
28. Teachers make "wise cracks" to each other during meetings..... RO SO O VFO
29. Teachers mock teachers who are different..... RO SO O VFO
30. Teachers don't listen to other teachers..... RO SO O VFO

31. Teachers like to hear gossip about other staff members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
32. The principal treats teachers as equals.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
33. The principal corrects teachers' mistakes.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
34. Teachers provide strong social support for colleagues.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
35. Teachers respect the professional competence of their colleagues.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
36. The principal goes out of his/her way to show appreciation to teachers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
37. The principal keeps a close check on sign-in times.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
38. The principal monitors everything teachers do.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
39. Administrative paperwork is burdensome at this school.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
40. Teachers help and support each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
41. The principal closely checks teacher activities.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
42. Assigned non-teaching duties are excessive.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
43. The interactions between team/unit members are cooperative.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
44. The principal accepts and implements ideas suggested by faculty members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
45. Members of team/units consider other members to be their friends.....	RO	SO	O	VFO

46. Extra help is available to students who need help..... RO SO O VFO
47. Teachers volunteer to sponsor after school activities..... RO SO O VFO
48. Teachers spend time after school with students who have individual problems..... RO SO O VFO
49. The principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself..... RO SO O VFO
50. Teachers are polite to one ..... RO SO O VFO

OCDQ-RM survey taken from Hoy, W. K., & Sabo, D. J. (1998) *Quality middle schools:*

*Open and healthy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL INFORMATION

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Table 8

*School Type*

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Type	Frequency	Percent
1=Rural	33	68.8
2=Suburban	11	22.9
3=Urban	4	8.3
Total	48	100.0

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Note. Some larger urban school districts declined to participate in this research.

Table 9  
General School Information

School ID Number	Principal Humor Style	SES % Free/Reduced Lunch	Rural, Suburban, Urban	Reading % Adv / Prof	Lang % Adv / Prof	Math % Adv / Prof	Science % Adv / Prof	Social % Adv / Prof	Total Students
1	3=Prod	12	Sub	54	74	67	93	92	302
2	3=Prod	49	Urban	36	54	47	72	76	101
3	2=App	24	Rural	49	75	57	92	87	83
4	2=App	46	Rural	50	64	46	90	92	92
5	3=Prod	21	Sub	65	74	76	86	88	235
6	2=App	19	Rural	50	76	58	85	93	91
7	3=Prod	37	Rural	37	62	40	81	81	123
8	2=App	52	Rural	33	45	33	71	73	143
9	3=Prod	72	Rural	41	67	50	94	87	46
10	3=Prod	21	Rural	55	79	67	92	92	95
11	2=App	46	Sub	33	56	42	76	80	241
12	4=Rep	53	Rural	36	52	55	77	81	31
13	2=App	28	Rural	32	48	43	72	73	60
14	3=Pro	29	Rural	63	69	58	89	89	140
15	2=App	20	Sub	51	68	69	86	88	302
16	3=Pro	49	Rural	37	50	41	79	81	108
17	3=Pro	39	Rural	53	76	67	90	90	104
18	4=Rep	13	Sub	60	77	65	90	91	154
19	3=Pro	59	Rural	38	65	43	83	84	80
20	3=Pro	24	Rural	54	72	66	86	89	248
21	2=App	21	Sub	59	73	62	85	86	243
22	3=Pro	48	Urban	43	72	41	87	87	251
23	4=Rep	46	Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—
24	3=Pro	39	Rural	50	59	46	80	72	46
25	2=App	34	Rural	41	70	61	91	93	107
26	3=Pro	32	Rural	48	67	57	86	82	85
27	4=Rep	15	Sub	53	73	61	88	89	176
28	3=Pro	47	Rural	37	64	58	83	86	118
29	2=App	38	Rural	49	66	43	83	91	53
30	2=App	33	Rural	31	34	37	69	74	35
31	2=App	54	Sub	33	59	34	69	84	176
32	4=Rep	19	Rural	59	64	51	88	93	69
33	4=Rep	20	Rural	47	64	64	87	90	100
34	3=Pro	26	Rural	35	69	53	90	94	68
35	2=App	49	Sub	36	59	37	76	82	87
36	3=Pro	54	Rural	47	54	42	75	79	79
37	2=App	33	Sub	45	58	48	77	82	312
38	3=Pro	78	Urban	21	40	26	65	67	259
39	4=Rep	70	Rural	53	60	33	60	73	15
40	2=App	41	Sub	27	61	38	78	76	74
41	2=App	80	Urban	19	34	25	56	67	230
42	3=Pro	56	Rural	38	58	60	76	82	45
43	2=App	51	Rural	32	46	36	75	82	44
44	3=Pro	44	Rural	30	67	41	77	82	61
45	3=Pro	54	Rural	25	42	36	80	77	163
46	2=App	39	Rural	38	55	51	66	89	71
47	4=Rep	31	Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—
48	2=App	30	Rural	36	57	41	66	77	104
Min	2	12	Rural	18.7	34.2	24.8	58.7	67.0	15
Max	4	80	Urban	64.7	78.9	75.7	93.5	94.1	312
StdDv	.7216	16.85	.6437	11.19	11.40	12.52	9.029	7.232	81.60
Mean	2.770	39.47	1.395	42.5	61.4	49.3	80.3	83.5	127.17

Note. Dashes represent data that was not available.

Note. Humor Styles Abbreviations: 1=Nonhumorous; 2=Appreciator; 3=Producer; 4=Reproducer

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	Factors	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	14	29.2
	Male	34	70.8
	Total	48	100
Age	22-30	1	2.1
	31-40	10	20.8
	41-50	21	43.6
	51-60	15	31.5
	61+	1	2.1
	Total	48	100
Years at Current School	0-5	27	56.2
	6-10	10	20.8
	11-15	8	16.7
	16-20	3	6.3
	20-25	0	0
	26+	0	0
	Total	48	100
Total Years of Principal Experience	0-5	16	33.3
	6-11	11	22.9
	12-15	12	25.0
	16-20	7	14.6
	21-25	2	4.2
	25+	0	0
	Total	48	100

Factor	Frequency	Percent
White, not of Hispanic origin	45	93.8
Black, not of Hispanic origin	0	0
Hispanic	1	2.1
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander	0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	2.1
Two or more races	1	2.1
Other	0	0
Total	48	100.00



Table 12  
*Teacher Demographic Information*

Gender		
Factor	Frequency	Percent
Female	574	74.4
Male	197	25.6
Total	771	100.0
N/A	7	
Age		
Factor	Frequency	Percent
22-30 years	98	14.2
31-40 years	215	31.3
41-50 years	240	34.8
51-60 years	127	18.5
61+ years	8	1.2
Total	688	100.0
N/A	90	
Years at Current School		
Factor	Frequency	Percent
0-5 years	243	36.5
6-10 years	178	26.7
11-15 years	114	17.1
16-20 years	88	13.2
21-25 years	18	2.7
26+ years	25	3.8
Total	666	100.0
N/A	113	
Years with Current Principal		
Factor	Frequency	Percent
0-5 years	529	72.6
6-10 years	136	18.7
11-15 years	52	7.1
16-20 years	11	1.5
21-25 years	1	.1
25+ years	0	0
Total	729	100.0
N/A	50	
Total Years of Teaching Experience		
Factor	Frequency	Percent
0-5 years	103	14.1
6-11 years	143	19.7
12-15 years	146	20.1
16-20 years	151	20.7
21-25 years	100	13.7
25+ years	85	11.7
Total	728	100.0
N/A	50	

Table 13

*Teacher Race*

Factor	Frequency	Percent
White, not of Hispanic origin	744	98
Black, not of Hispanic origin	2	.2
Hispanic	3	.4
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander	5	.6
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	.2
Two or more races	1	.1
Other	4	.5
Total	761	100.00
N/A	17	

APPENDIX E

PROFESSOR WAYNE HOY COMMUNICATIONS

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**From:** Wayne Hoy [[whoy@me.com](mailto:whoy@me.com)]  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 15, 2012 3:39 PM  
**To:** Greg Matthias  
**Subject:** Re: OCDQ-RM sample size questions

Hi Greg--

You have my permission to use the OCDQ-RM in you research. Check my web page [[www.waynekhoy.com](http://www.waynekhoy.com)] for the measure and its psychometric properties.

Let me respond to your specific questions:

1. For each school get a representative sample at least 6-10 teachers to respond to the climate measure.
2. The minimum number of schools I would guess is about 40 to get significant results if they are present. Actually more is better. However, even better, there are power statistic formulas that can guide you in your sample size. Read up on those formulas to justify how many schools to select.

Best wishes.

*Wayne*

**Wayne K. Hoy**  
**Fawcett Professor of**  
**Education Administration**

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# Curriculum Vitae

GREG MATTHIAS

## EDUCATION:

**PhD, Urban Education / Educational Administration / Curriculum & Instruction**

**University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, May 2014**

**Dissertation:** The relationship between principals' humor style and school climate in Wisconsin's public middle schools (Major Advisor: Dr. Gail Schneider)

**MS, Natural Resources/ Environmental Education**

**University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point, 2002- Cum Laude**

**Thesis:** Development of a Wetland Area Educational Site and Outdoor Curriculum Guide and Website (Major Advisor: Dr. Richard Wilke)

**BS, Major: Biology / Natural Science and Minors: History, Education**

**University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point, 1999, GPA: 3.07**

**DPI Licenses: Broadfield Science #71-601, Biological Life Science, #21, 39 605, Earth and Space Science #73-635, History #21, 39 725, Principal #51, Director of Instruction #10, Superintendent License #3**

## PROFESSIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

**Adjunct Professor, Carroll University, Waukesha, WI, Summer 2014**

- Teaching classes in the department of Biology and Natural Science
- Biology 319: Field Botany

**Life Science Teacher, Silverbrook Middle School, West Bend Public Schools,  
West Bend, WI, 8-04- Present**

- **Science Department Head**
- Seventh/ Eighth Grade Life and Physical Science Teacher
- **Lead Project Manager for Science Curricula alignment to WI State Standards**
- **Developer/ Organizer for Silverbrook Family Fishing Day (2<sup>nd</sup> Annual)**
- Boys Track and Field Coach

**Chemistry/Physics Teacher, Kau Middle and High School, South Hawaii Regional  
District, Pahala, Hawaii , 1-04- 6-04**

- Taught science courses in Chemistry and Physics
- Taught high school level Math

**Life Science Teacher, Riverside Middle School, Watertown Public Schools, Watertown,  
WI 8-01-6-03**

- **Taught science courses in Life Science, Genetics, and History**
- **Lead Project Manager in developing Outdoor Teaching Site**
- Lead Project Manager in Writing 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science curricula
- **Lead Project Manager for Field Trip to Lake Mills Fish Hatchery, Groundwater Treatment Facility, and City Wells**
- Assistant Project Manager for Textbook Committee
- Co-Leader of Science Field Trip to Florida
- Boys and Girls Track and Field Coach
- Boys Assistant Wrestling Coach

**Biology Teacher, Stewartville High School, Stewartville, MN 8-00- 6-01**

- **Taught science courses in Biology, Environmental Science, and Physical Science**
- **Created Wetland area teaching site to allow the school to comply with the federal Wetland Restoration Act**
- **Developed Outdoor Curriculum Guide and Website for integration into the Environmental Education curriculum**

**Biology Teacher, Lanesboro High School, Lanesboro, MN 8-99- 6-00**

- **Taught science courses in Biology, Advanced Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, and History to high school and middle school students**
- Head Cross-Country Coach and Assistant Track Coach
- **Lead Project Manager for development of Lanesboro Recycling Program**

**LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:****Superintendent Practicum, 2007-2009:**

- **School board/ Superintendent relations, Baldrige National Quality Program Practicum Project, Wisconsin Forward Quality Program Practicum Project**
- **Budget Development** and monitoring through **School Finance Practicum** experience and work with district Financial Director
- **District Policy** Re-Writing experience

**Principal Practicum, 2005-2007**

- **Leadership Team Member:** Writing the School Improvement Plan
- **Assistant Principal duties:** discipline, office procedures
- District Librarian Committee Member
- Performance Based Budgeting Committee Member
- Facilities Planning Committee Member for building a new middle school
- Business Leaders Committee for Career Day

**MEMBERSHIPS AND ORGANIZATIONS:**

- **West Bend School District Science Committee**
- **National Science Teachers Association**, Member, current
- **Wisconsin Association of Lakes**, Member, current
- **Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA)**, Member, current

**PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS:**

- Hobbies: SCUBA Rescue Diver, Ham Radio Amateur Extra, canoeing, fishing, camping, mountain biking
- Sports: Completion of two marathons and one half marathon, six-time varsity letter winner in Cross-Country and Track, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
- Languages: Intermediate Spanish skills
- Travel: Traveled to over twenty-five countries in Central/South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia