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Emerging 21st-Century Educational Challenges and Opportunities: An Appreciative Inquiry of Public Education In The U.S. Virgin Islands

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EMERGING 21st-CENTURY EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Dissertation Abstract

Emerging 21st-Century Educational Challenges and Opportunities:
An Appreciative Inquiry of Public Education In The U.S. Virgin Islands

This study explored the critical challenges and opportunities in K–12 public education in the U.S. Virgins Islands (USVI). Specifically, this study sought to understand the USVI education leaders' experiences in their public education system as a whole, the challenges and opportunities they faced, their perceptions of the institution's greatest strengths, and their perceptions on the future of education in the territory. This research also explored which factors influence educational-leadership success in the USVI.

The study employed appreciative inquiry as a theoretical framework. Application of the core principles of appreciative inquiry laid the foundation for a narrative-based qualitative inquiry into educational success in the USVI. Central questions that guided this research were (a) What are the perceived experiences of education leaders in the USVI public education system? (b) How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands? (c) To what extent have U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgin Islands' education system? (d) What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change?

Eight participants shared their experiences and perceptions of leadership in the USVI. The findings of this study identified various leadership challenges in USVI public education as well as best practices in leadership and learning. Due to their intimate connections to and in the public education system, participants felt personally and

collectively responsible for their leadership actions They all recognized the uniqueness of leadership in an insular territory. They understood the challenges of implementing policies of imposed macrolevel sanctions in a highly political and dynamic mesolevel structure. Armed with this understanding and "collective will," they were able to mitigate and overcome these challenges and act at the microsystem level to positively impact academic success in the USVI.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God, the Ancestors and all of the Deities and the legacy and hard work of all those who educate in the trenches. I dedicate this research to public education leaders of the U.S. Virgin Islands. You inspire greatness. May your legacy live on and serve you and the people well.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Overview

Specific educational challenges threaten the U.S. Virgin Islands' (USVI) educational system and society in general (Claxton, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). The 2008 Kids Count Report estimated the territory's high school drop-out rate was 13.8% versus 7% on the mainland in 2006 (Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands [CFVI], 2008). In the same year, the territory's "detached youth" rate—unemployed youth who are not in school— soared to 22.8%, a dramatic increase from 5.4% in 1997, in contrast to 8% in the United States. According to this report the economic situation for older youth is quite disheartening, with more than a third of youth in the ages 18–24 without a high school diploma. The report further mentions that a mere 6.7% of all classes in the territory were taught by a "highly qualified teacher" according to the No Child Left Behind and Virgin Islands Board of Education qualifications.

With high school drop-out rates nearly double that of the mainland, the detached-youth rate almost three times that of the mainland, and the challenges of No Child Left Behind, leading education institutions in the USVI can be considered quite challenging. In the USVI, these statistics reflect a profound problem in that "it is comparatively more difficult for small societies to digest negative youth outcomes of that magnitude and the ultimate cost is the loss of a generation, rendering these societies unable to reproduce themselves" (Jules, 2008, p. 203). Small geographic size, modest natural resources, and immense societal challenges make educational leadership in the USVI a challenging yet essential mechanism to transform stagnant social entities into vibrant, growing societies.

Education leaders in the United States and abroad are charged with the daunting responsibility of delivering high-quality learning programs designed to prepare students of all ages for productive participation in a competitive global marketplace. As one researcher stated of this phenomena in the Caribbean context, "Small states are not only faced with the challenge of overcoming educational deficits that are the postcolonial legacy but they are also faced with the promise and peril of globalization" (Jules, 2008, p. 204). Small, insular areas must find ways to move beyond these challenges and prepare their societies for the future.

For the USVI, like other territories, small societies, or small island developing states, sociopolitical location may prove to be a major constraint on development. Simply stated, these areas are literally and figuratively too small for failure. The fragility of microsocieties such as the USVI heightens the importance of setting educational strategies for success. There is a call for "Caribbean educators to be bold in their thinking and to be willing to question and rethink the foundations of education in small societies" (Jules, 2008, p. 204).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the critical challenges and opportunities in K–12 public education in the U.S. Virgins Islands. By drawing on the experiences of key education leaders of this time, this study intended to record the past, explore current challenges, and forecast the future of emerging 21st century education in the territory. For this research, public education in the USVI was generally defined as the organized delivery of standard education based on U.S. federal and territorial mandates of K–12 on the three major islands of the territory, St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. It

also includes the sole public tertiary institution of higher learning, the University of the Virgin Islands. An initial goal of the research was to provide information on Virgin Islands public education that may identify strengths and opportunities in the practices of current and past leaders, leading to improved leadership practices and institutional capacity building. This researcher also explored which factors influence educational leadership success in the USVI.

Background and Need for the Study

The pursuit of social, economic, and educational opportunity in the United States has not gone without its share of challenges and opportunities, and the USVI is no exception. Many of the harshest social realities in the mainland United States may appear magnified in the societal context of the USVI. According to the Virgin Islands 2008 Kids Count data report and U.S. Census Bureau information, the per capita income in 2006 for individuals living in the Virgin Islands was $16,286, in comparison to the national rate of $36,714 (CFVI, 2008). The U.S. per capita income is more than double that of the USVI.

Although the overall median family income in the territory increased in 2006 to $38,914, it pales in comparison to the national family median income of $58,407 (CFVI, 2008). Moreover, the Black median family income is $38,914, whereas the White median family income is at $57,802, though people of African decent comprise 82% of the population whereas Whites represent 3.6% of the population (CFVI, 2008).

Family structures on the USVI are also experiencing severe strains. Single-parent households persist, but unlike in the past when extended family structures compensated for absenteeism of biological family members, today many single-parent households struggle with the dynamics of incomplete nuclear families. A daunting 29.5% of all

Virgin Islands children were living in poverty in 2006, the lowest percentage in 12 years, though still much higher than the national child poverty rate of 18% (CFVI, 2008). Figure 1 reflects VI children's family structures in 2006 (CFVI, 2008, p. 9)

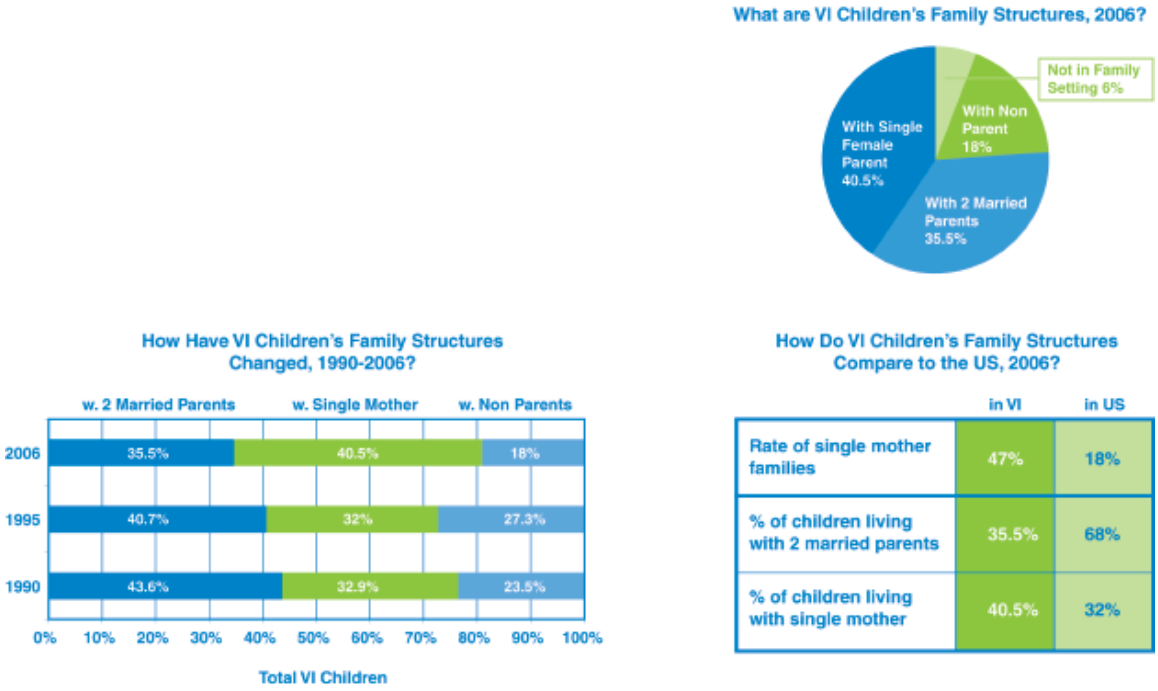

Figure 1. Virgin Islands children's family structures.

The information contained in Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of USVI family structures in 2006. The rate of single-mother families in the Virgin Islands was 47%, in comparison to 18% on the mainland United States. Moreover, the crime rate in the territory currently makes this "America's Paradise" one of the most dangerous places under the U.S. flag. As of November 6, 2009, there had been 53 homicides and five missing people out of a population of 110,000, and local community members widely discuss their dismay with the territory's current ranking of third in the world for homicides, after Iraq and Colombia.

These societal problems represent unlimited challenges and opportunities for leaders in every social and political domain and it is not surprising that communities often look to education as a venue for social change. Many social reformers have come to view education as a precondition for societal development and a vehicle and means of changing social conditions (DuBois, 1935; Freire, 2001; Rostow, 1971). According to the 2007 U.S. census data on educational attainment and U.S. median earnings, the median income of an individual without a high school diploma is under $25,000; that amount increases by nearly $8,000 with a high school diploma, and nearly doubles with the attainment of a degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). In addition to possible increases in income, educational attainment has also been found to have a positive impact on crime prevention and public safety.

Leaders' behaviors are often influenced by the dynamics of culture; the value of this research was its focus on educational-leadership challenges and opportunities in the USVI (Brown & Conrad, 2007). In this research, the social and political history and location of the phenomena were of utmost importance. Education in the United States is complex, and education in the USVI may have proven to be more complex, due to the nuances associated with being a U.S. possession. Because of USVI status as an unincorporated territory, its educational institutions are subject to the same federal mandates as educational institutions on the mainland. These mandates may represent a uniform policy at the federal level, but there is great diversity in the execution of the mandates at the institutional level. The information gathered from the reflections of leaders in the territory provided valuable insight on leadership in this context.

There is also a tendency to cast the experiences of the USVI population as part of the larger African American ethnic group. This is due in part to the population having U.S. citizenship, with an overwhelming number of people of African descent who share a colonial transatlantic slave past with their African American U.S. counterparts. Although the USVI may have similar variables to the mainland, the intersection of geography, history, and societal variables may lead to a different leadership dynamic, particularly in the case of education. It is of utmost importance to understand context and nuances of educational leadership in the territory. In this dissertation, I decidedly resisted the tendency to generalize and make deterministic statements about the overall population and instead allowed the narratives of leaders' experiences to navigate, empower, and enlighten the educational community. Exploring the perceptions of these leaders revealed valuable lessons for developing solutions for USVI realities while illuminating societal values and methods of working together to harness the territory's opportunities and solve some of its unique challenges.

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical framework for this research was based on appreciative inquiry. Researchers have described appreciative inquiry in a myriad of ways. According to Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008),

> appreciative inquiry (AI) is the cooperative coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (p. 3)

For Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010)

> Appreciative inquiry is the study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organizational change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, success, values, hopes and dreams are themselves transformational. (p. 1)

Appreciative inquiry can also be referred to as a "strategy for change in systemic leadership that builds on organizational strengths, not deficits" (Holland & Markova, 2005, p. 30).

Inherent in the theoretical framework of appreciative inquiry is the assumption that "in every society, organization, or group, something works" (Reed, 2007, p. 27). Appreciative inquiry, as a theoretic construct, honors the human spirit by asking questions that allow people and organizations to maintain best practices (Hammond, 1998). Moreover, this theoretical framework enables organizations to begin the creation of images of where they want to go by focusing on what they do well (Holland & Markova, 2005).

In the *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, authors Cooperrider et al. (2008) detailed the following five foundational principles on which appreciative inquiry rests: the constructionist principle, the principle of simultaneity, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (p. 8). The constructionist principle asserts, "to be effective as executives, leaders, change agents, and so on, one must be adept in the art of reading, understanding, and analyzing organizations as living, human constructions" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 8). This principle represents a critical realization for those engaged in the appreciative-inquiry process. The principle of simultaneity "recognizes that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments; they can and should be simultaneous" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 9). In appreciative inquiry, inquiry and change are interdependent.

The poetic principle views organizations as "open book[s] … constantly being coauthored" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 9). The anticipatory principle is based on the idea that

> the image of the future guides what might be called the current behavior of any organism or organization. Much like a movie projected in a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 9).

Lastly, the positive principle further asserts

> momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding, attitudes such as hope, inspiration, and the sheer joy of creating with one another. Organizations, as human constructions, are largely affirmative systems and thus are responsive to positive thought and positive knowledge (Cooperrider et al., 2008, pp. 9, 10).

Application of the aforementioned principles of appreciative inquiry laid the foundation for a positive, strengths-based inquiry into organizational development and change. A thorough understanding of these principles in action and their implications for educational practice allowed me to focus on discovering the best practices of leaders in public education institutions in the USVI.

Research Questions

The central questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What are the perceived experiences of education leaders in the USVI public education system?
2. How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands?
3. To what extent have U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgin Islands' education system?

4. What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change?

Definition of Terms

To clarify their meaning in this research, terms are defined as follows:

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): "Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, is a federal standard set by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that is used to measure student performance though annual testing" (Lewin, 2010, p. 5).

Appreciative inquiry:

> Appreciative inquiry is the cooperative coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 3)

Caribbean basin: The Caribbean is conceptually a cultural region that is geographically defined by the Caribbean Sea and includes the Caribbean sea, the Caribbean archipelago, the Bahamas, and adjacent landmasses from the Yucatan Peninsula, Central America, and coastal region of northern South America (Knight, 1990).

College of the Virgin Islands: The College of the Virgin Islands, charted in 1962, is the first and only institution of higher education in the USVI. (Dookhan, 1981; Willocks, 1995).

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU): A historically Black college or university is defined as "any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was and is the education of black Americans" (Higher Education Act of 1965).

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP): "The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), founded in 1921, is a professional organization serving elementary and middle school principals and other education leaders throughout the United States, Canada, and overseas" (NAESP, 2010).

Pan-Caribbean: The Pan-Caribbean is defined as "the land masses which meet the Caribbean Sea" (Skelton, 2004, p. 3).

Unincorporated territory: An unincorporated territory refers to organized areas or territories of the United States that are not incorporated nor are they considered commonwealths (Miller, Vandome, & McBrewster, 2009). American Samoa, Guam, and the USVI are U.S. unincorporated territories.

United States Virgin Islands: The USVI are a group of islands located in the Caribbean that are considered U.S. territories. St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, and Water Islands make up the USVI (Willocks, 1995).

University of the Virgin Islands (UVI): University of the Virgin Islands is the name given to the College of the Virgin Islands in 1986 (Dookhan, 1994; Willocks, 1995).

Virgin Islands Territorial Assessment of Learning: The Virgin Islands Territorial Assessment of Learning "is a standardized test taken once a year that scores students on their reading and math skills" (Lewin, 2010, p. 5).

Delimitations and Limitations

This research includes narratives from leaders of all public education institutions in the USVI. To narrow the scope of the study, this research was confined to interviews of key public education leaders in the territory during the period of 1999–2009.

A limitation of this type of research was the sample size. The use of purposeful sampling with a limited number of subjects prevents generalizability. Therefore, this study will not be generalizable to all areas of educational leadership. However, this study does provide rich descriptions of the lived realities and experiences of participants. Another possible delimiting factor of this research may be the researcher's personal and professional bias related to public education in general, and public education in the USVI, in particular. The selection of a qualitative research methodology with a narrative focus may lend itself to high levels of subjectivity in describing the research phenomena. In addition, the use of an appreciative-inquiry interview strategy may further increase participant subjectivity.

Significance of the Study

This research explored the experiences of key education leaders in the USVI from 1999 to 2009. A study of educational leadership in the USVI was important for several reasons. First, an initial goal of the research was to provide information on USVI public education that may identify strengths and opportunities in current and past leadership situations, leading to improved leadership practices and institutional capacity building. Second, this research specifically explored the factors that influence educational leadership success in the USVI.

This research was also significant because understanding the dynamics of USVI educational institutions may provide new and current education leaders an opportunity to learn from the vast experiences of their predecessors. Most importantly, a focus on the best practices in these public education institutions may also provide a platform on which to begin to build a solid future for 21st century education in the territory. This study also

endeavored to add to the body of educational research on higher education institutions that serve students of color in particular, and educational leadership in general. Moreover, other areas with large populations of people of African descent and other territories or small societies may also benefit from the discoveries in this phenomenological examination of education in an insular area.

Summary

The implications of the current high volume of data related to low academic performance and overall dissatisfaction with public education in the USVI are of deep concern to the researcher and the educational community. The underlying premise for this research is its theoretical framework of appreciative inquiry, searching for what works in organizations. Although the public education system in the USVI has challenges, exploring the experiences of education leaders in the territory may provide guidance for future USVI education leaders and hope to other education leaders around the world.

This research was divided into five chapters. Chapter I includes a review of the research problem and purpose of the study, complete with theoretical rationale and discussion of the significance of the study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature related to the context and relevant research themes, and Chapter III describes the research methodology. Chapter IV includes the presentation of the research findings. Lastly, Chapter V provides an in-depth discussion of the research findings, presents conclusions, and offers insights on implications, applications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This literature review was designed to provide a thorough historical background of the social and political context of educational leadership in the USVI. By exploring the experiences of key education leaders, this study intended to record the past, explore current challenges, and forecast the future of 21st century education in the territory. The review of the literature is organized into five central themes. First, the review begins with background of the colonial history of the USVI. Next, the review specifically examines the history of public education in the territory, from the Danish colonial period to the United States. After establishing a solid historical foundation, the review provides an overview of USVI public schools today and highlights current challenges and opportunities for leaders in the Virgin Islands context. Next, the review provides an overview of the literature related to tertiary education in the territory and the establishment of the first and only HBCU outside of the mainland United States. Finally, the review concludes with an overview of the role of elementary school principals in the 21st century.

Colonial History of the U.S. Virgin Islands

The USVI is a group of islands and islets located in the center of the Caribbean archipelago. The Caribbean is sometimes referred to as the Pan-Caribbean and is defined as “the land masses which meet the Caribbean Sea” (Skelton, 2004, p. 3). Researchers have reported as few as 50 to as many as 100 small islands that make up the USVI. St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, and Water Island are the four major inhabited islands of the

USVI. Formerly known as the Danish West Indies, these islands were transferred from Denmark to the United States on March 31, 1917 for $25,000,000 in gold bullion (Dookhan, 1994).

The USVI share a distinct colonial history. The islands' pre-Columbian inhabitants included the Ciboneys, the Arawaks, Tainos, and Caribs (Boyer, 1983; Dookhan, 1994; Miller et al., 2009; Willocks, 1995). However, many of these original inhabitants were exterminated, driven out of the area, or killed by diseases introduced by Europeans in search of gold, precious metals, and colonies to acquire (Boyer, 1983; Dookhan, 1994; Miller et al., 2009). European colonization of the territory was met with intense battles and acts of hostile resistance by the Caribs. This reputation of power and fierceness of the Caribs led then Spanish King Charles V to order the indigenous people to be "treated as enemies and exterminated" (Dookhan, 1994, p. 28). This reputation was also a pivotal factor in the Spaniards' refusal to settle in most of the Lesser Antilles, Virgin Islands, and Tobago.

From the time of Columbus' 1493 arrival and for more than 50 years thereafter, there was an exodus of the remaining Caribs. They escaped further Spanish domination by retreating to other islands in the Caribbean region (Willocks, 1995). By the time of Danish colonization in 1672, there were only a few indigenous inhabitants found in the Virgin Islands (Dookhan, 1994) and those reportedly disappeared shortly after colonization (Boyer, 1983). Historian Boyer (1983) wrote, "The metropolitan powers of Europe competed to exert domination over the Caribbean, but none was able to achieve dominance. They were able, however, to destroy almost all of the Indians (indigenous people)" (p. 1).

From 1550 until 1670, the Pan-Caribbean region underwent a major transition due to incessant European metropolitan conflicts that pitted European colonial powers against each other. These conflicts also allowed weaker states to exploit Spanish imperial vulnerability in the Caribbean (Hall, 1992). Thus, the Caribbean faced periods of severe piracy and pilferage from not just the Spanish, but also from French, Dutch, and British buccaneers. This instability allowed for only transitional settlements in the 17th century. However, after the conflicts ended, Britain, France, Holland, and Denmark began to consider establishing classic colonies in the Caribbean basin based on the plantation mode of production and chattel slavery (Hall, 1992). Unlike the model established in United States, the Caribbean planter class tended to be transient and absentee, especially in British, French, Dutch, and Danish colonies.

The classic colonies in the Pan-Caribbean developed very similar features that emerged from a common history of the transatlantic slave-trade system, African slavery, and cash crop plantations. In the specific case of the Virgin Islands, despite their proximity to Puerto Rico, the Spaniards believed the islands were useless due to their small size, hilly terrain, and lack of gold and silver. This belief opened the door for other Europeans to work first as pirates and later as classic colonists dedicated to sugar-cane production, thus providing the Danes the perfect colonization opportunity (Boyer, 1983; Dookhan, 1994; Hall, 1992).

In the late 17th century, Denmark sought to establish an empire of its own in the Caribbean, and after one failed settlement attempt in 1665, the Danish West India Company successfully took possession of the islands by commercial company charter for the purpose of running plantations (Hall, 1992). Many Danes died in the maiden journeys

to the Danish West Indies, but other European colonists arrived, primarily of Dutch origin, and Dutch became the language of choice (Boyer, 1983). With the two pillars of the Danish West Indian economy being a commercial seaport in St. Thomas and sugar plantations in St. Croix, the stage was set for the extension of the trans-Atlantic slave trade into the territory to provide slave labor for the plantations (Hall, 1992; Miller et al., 2009). Danish West Indian society grew along parallel lines to the British, French, and Dutch Caribbean colonies. Danish Governor General von Scholten was instrumental in the abolition of slavery in 1848 but even the so-called emancipated remained in slave-like working conditions, particularly on St. Croix (Hall, 1992).

The United States purchased the former Danish West Indies in 1917, primarily for strategic military purposes. The United States had long desired to prevent enemy expansion in the Caribbean Basin, and the purchase of the islands was a well considered act of strategic denial. Similar to the experiences of other insular areas, jurisdiction of the USVI was placed in the hands of the U.S. Navy; thus Naval commanders were the first appointed governors. These leaders continued to use the Danish Colonial Law of 1906 to govern the territory, and under naval rule, racial prejudice intensified (Boyer, 1983).

Despite the existence of racial conflict, the territory experienced many improvements in the areas of infrastructure, health, social services, and education under naval rule. There was expansion in the use of vaccinations, repair of swampy areas to prevent malaria from mosquito infestations, and the establishment of the area's first local police and fire departments (Boyer, 1983; Dookhan, 1994). Naval administrative rule was a continuation of the authoritarian model the Danes had used, so there were few major socioeconomic or political changes. The native population experienced a political loss, as

no clear provisions were made for their indigenous or native status, civil rights, or citizenship. As other insular territorial peoples were to find out, a new concept of "unincorporated territorial status" had begun to be formulated after 1902 and only in 1922 was the concept finally agreed on by the U.S. federal government (Miller et al., 2009). This unincorporated territorial status would lead to the creation of a federal territorial relationship that would constrain territorial decision making yet offer new incentives to resolve education challenges.

The Sociopolitical Location of the U.S. Virgin Islands Today

According to 2000 census information, the USVI population is approximately 109,000 people, with approximate populations of 51,000 in St. Thomas, 53,000 on St. Croix, 4,200 in St. John, and fewer than 200 on Water Island (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Although the region has had its share of battles with social implications of colonialism and natural disasters such as hurricanes and flooding, it is still affectionately know as "America's Paradise," boasting beautiful beaches, fine dining, and shopping in the world. Tourism is the main industry of the territory, as it has been for many years (Miller et al., 2009). According to a recent report published by the USVI Bureau of Economic Research, there was an increase in tourism by air and cruise ship in October 2009, but the bureau records an overall decline in cruise and air-passenger arrivals and hotel occupancy rates for 2009. Other significant sources of economic activity include a petrochemical refinery, rum production, and financial services.

Due to the United States' purchase of the islands from Denmark, the area became known as the USVI or American Virgin Islands, and the area officially became an unincorporated U.S. territory (Miller et al., 2009). An unincorporated territory refers to

an organized area or territory of the United States that is not incorporated nor is considered a commonwealth (Miller et al., 2009). American Samoa, Guam, and the USVI are U.S. unincorporated territories. The USVI designation as an unincorporated territory means that it is subject to the Territorial Clause of the U.S. Constitution and Congress has plenary power over the territory. In international law and United Nations standards, all unincorporated territories are dependent territories and, in effect, colonies. Similar to residents of other unincorporated territories, the people of the USVI have struggled with their political status and political development.

There have been ongoing struggles to reform the territory from its original stage as simply a territory governed by the Navy using Danish colonial laws, to a modestly reformed U.S. territory with many political institutions, laws, public policies, and practices that resemble mainland states. Although steady reforms have taken place over the past 93 years of U.S. territorial status, Virgin Islands society still has ongoing debates over political status, formulation of a constitution, federal relations, and political development. Today, the territory is in midst its fifth attempt to create a constitution. Most of the provisions in the draft document are similar to those in any U.S. state or territory. However, the greatest hurdle has always been the issue of native rights (Leary, 1992; Poinski, 2009, 2010).

As previously mentioned, when the islands were transferred in 1917, there was no clear delineation of "native or indigenous" islanders, and unlike other territories, the Virgin Islands were inhabited primarily by two main groups: descendants of Europeans and descendants of Africans. There is no current evidence of a nationalist movement or Danish West Indian identity movement, and the early reformers of the USVI did not

stress nationalist development. Present Governor deJongh, like many other political leaders, is wary of the present constitution process, as the current draft includes language that favors "Native Virgin Islanders." Although the majority of members of the Fifth Constitutional Convention voted in favor of a proposed draft constitution and submitted it to the governor to pass on to Congress, the governor chose not to forward the draft until he was later forced to do so by legal order. One third of the members of the Constitutional Convention, along with the governor, appeared before a congressional committee in Washington DC to give their varying opinions on the matter (Poinski, 2009, 2010). This fifth constitutional attempt has reached an impasse. In effect, this result has perpetuated the political status quo and maintained the current dependent relationship between the USVI and the federal government.

Without a widespread nationalist or independent sentiment in the political system, the "native or indigenous" issue has the dual capacity of uniting Virgin Islanders whose ancestors predate the transfer, but dividing those whose ancestral originals are elsewhere. Although people of African descent are the majority in the USVI and have been since the introduction of chattel slavery, this majority status does not represent a homogenous group of people. The majority population represents a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. According to 2000 census data, approximately one third of the USVI population was foreign born with the majority of those coming from various islands in the Caribbean basin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Even among those born in the territory, the census data reported that over half of the census respondents' parents were foreign born, reflecting the immense cultural diversity of the territory (U.S. Bureau of the

Census, 2003). Due to enormous diversity in class, ethnic origin, and even language, there is no effective way of making generalizations about the USVI people.

Background of Public Education in the U.S. Virgin Islands

The leaders in the Danish colonial period established sophisticated education models and were, in many respects, ahead of their time. In the publication of "Emancipation: A Second Look," a cultural heritage project funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, author Murphy (1981) conducted primary research of documents held at the Royal Danish Archives. In the report, "Educating the Emancipated: Schooling in the Danish West Indies in the Nineteenth Century," Murphy outlined the early development of public schools in the Danish West Indies based on a mix of Lancastrian, Moravian, and Burgher school systems. Other research confirmed early educational development in the territory (Hall, 1992). Von Scholten, first governor general of the Danish West Indies, was instrumental in the early integration of Black students into the public education system, and research records the education of students of color in the region as early as 1802. Many years prior, the Moravians educated the enslaved (Hall, 1992; Murphy, 1981). Von Scholten also led the establishment of taxes or "obligations" for public education and the research shows evidence of the establishment of early educational governance systems such as curriculum planning and budgets (Murphy, 1981). Governor von Scholten also made the decision to educate students, slaves, and free people in English (Hall, 1992).

The education system was changed dramatically with the transfer of ownership to the Unites States in 1917. Although Danish colonial laws were still in effect at the time, the naval officers and the first American Governor Admiral Oliver began the process of

"civilizing" the people. This civilization process was initiated with the Americanization of the schools (Boyer, 1983). "No effort was made to adapt a school system to the indigenous culture. Instead, an America director of education was imported from the States to revamp the educational system" (Boyer, 1983, p. 122). This process of Americanization led to changes such as the 1922 establishment of elementary grades and curriculum and in 1923 the creation of a junior high school and related curricula taken directly from existing American school systems. Later, high school classes were established, and the territory's first high school graduation was in 1931 (Boyer, 1983). The first formal adult-education courses were established in 1941 (Boyer, 1982). Researchers cite substantial increases in literacy as a result of the import of the American education systems (Boyer, 1982, 1983). Yet, there was clearly an assertion of the purpose of schooling in the USVI as "acculturation to the standards of the ruling power" and the leaders of the time were focused on this goal (Boyer, 1983, p. 122). As previously noted, there were improvements in education under Naval rule, such as decreases in illiteracy and increases in annual expenditures for education (Boyer, 1982).

U.S. Virgin Islands Schools

Today, public schools in the USVI are divided into two districts, the St. Thomas–St. John District and the St. Croix District. According to the USVI Department of Education, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation 2009 enrollment reports, there were 15,493 students enrolled in the territory's schools. The St. Thomas–St. John District has a total of 17 schools, 13 elementary schools, two junior high or middle schools, and two high schools. The St. Croix District has a total of 15 schools with 10 elementary schools, three junior high schools, and two high schools. Of the more than 15,000

students enrolled in VI public schools, students of African descent compose the majority of the learners at approximately 83% of total student population, with students of Hispanic descent at approximately 16%. Asian, East Indian, and White students make up less than 2% of the total student enrollment. Figure 2 reflects data compiled from 2009 enrollment reports on ethnicity in the territory's public schools.

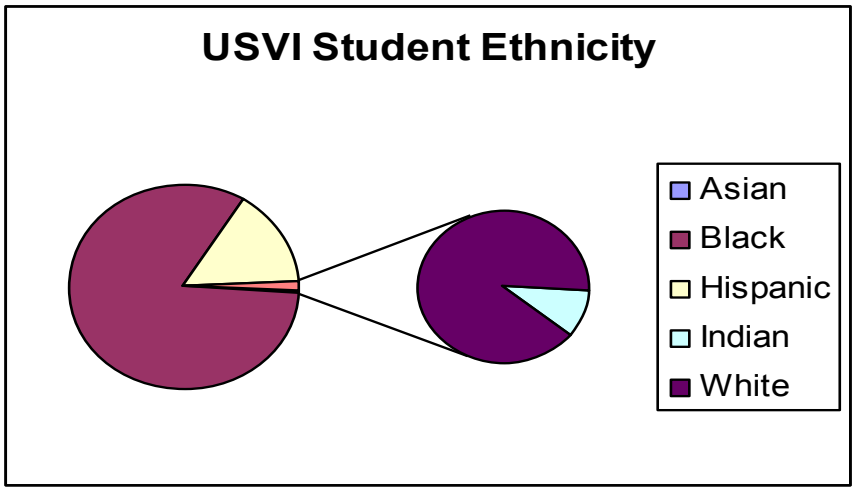

Figure 2. U.S. Virgin Islands student ethnicity.

The data in Figure 2 do not reflect ethnic subgroups in these larger ethnic groups. Information related to these groups may serve to help educators better serve these students.

According to the USVI 2008–2009 No Child Left Behind Territorial report card, there were 1,227 teachers, 55.8% of whom were certified. The data on AYP reflects severe deficiencies. Only 14 schools in the territory met AYP targets for the 2008–2009 academic year. Neither the middle schools nor high schools in the territory met AYP targets. The 10 schools in the St. Thomas–St. John district that met AYP standards are E. Benjamin Oliver, Evelyn Marcelli, Gladys Abraham, Guy Benjamin, J. Antonio Jarvis, Joseph Gomez, Joseph Sibilly, Leonard Dober, Ulla Muller, and Yvonne Bowsky. The

four schools in the St. Croix district that met AYP standards are Alexander Henderson, Alfredo Andrews, Pearl Larsen, and Ricardo Richards. A detailed description of AYP targets by district is available in Appendix A.

Local newspaper articles related to education in the territory during the past 10 years report progress in the midst of great challenges (Claxton, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Lewin, 2010; Morrison, 2006a, 2006b). There have been ongoing debates on social promotion, the advancement of students from middle school to high school regardless of academic proficiency. There have also been struggles with accreditation, but today, all 33 schools have received accreditation from Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. In addition to the area public schools, St. Thomas has two private schools and eight parochial schools. St. John offers one private school option and St. Croix offers five private schools and 13 parochial schools.

Education Leadership and Governance in the U.S. Virgin Islands

A 1983 report on state structures of elementary- and secondary-education governance reflected significant differences in governance structures at the state level. The author of this report, Burnes, listed four major models of education governance structures by state. In the Model 1 structure, the governor appoints the board of education and the board of education appoints the chief; 15 states have a Model 1 governance structure. In the Model 2 structure the board of education is elected and the board of education appoints the chief; 11 states are reported to have this model of governance structure. In the Model 3 structure there is an appointed board of education and the chief is elected; 12 states have adopted this structure. Lastly, in the Model 4 structure there is an appointed board of education and chief; this model is used by five states (Burnes,

1983, p. 4). Education-governance structure in the USVI differs from the four models of education-governance structures of the mainland United States referenced in this report. Burnes reported the following on the USVI education-governance structure: "In the Virgin Islands, the state board is elected at large and the chief is appointed by the governor" (Burnes, 1983, p. 3). The following figure reflects the structural model of education governance in the USVI:

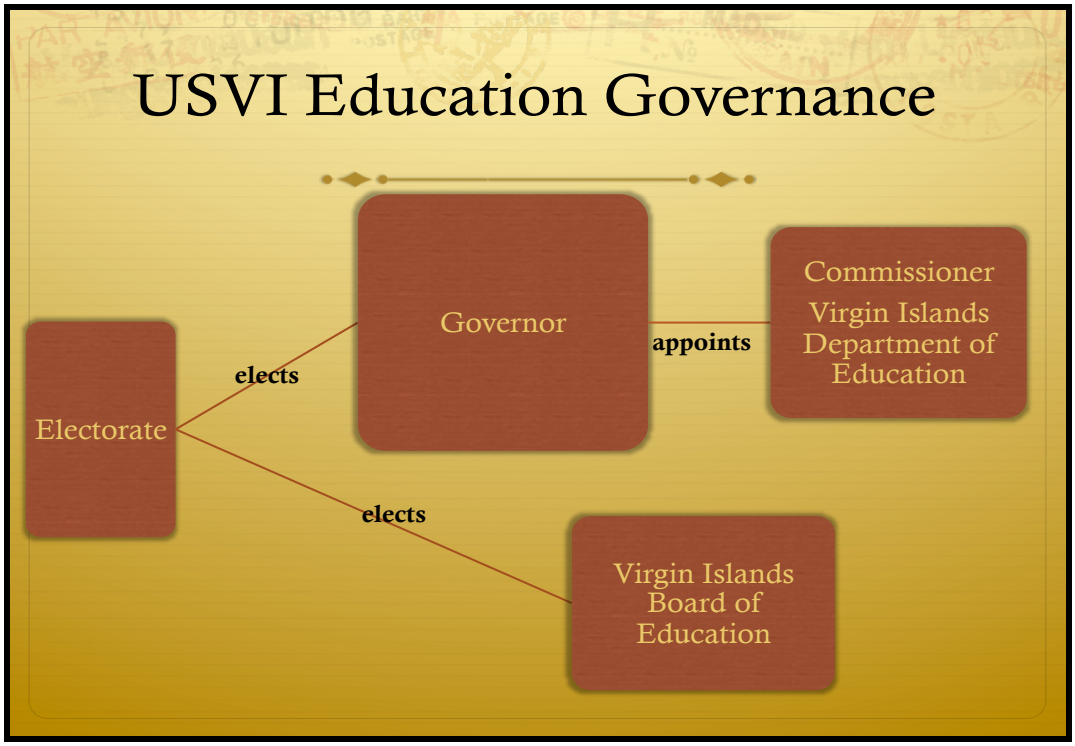

Figure 3. U.S. Virgin Islands education-governance structure.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDOE) acts as both the State Education Agency and Local Education Agency for the territory. The commissioner (chief) of education is appointed by the governor "with the advice and consent of The Legislature, and holds office during the continuance in office of the Governor by whom he is appointed and until his successor is appointed and qualified, unless sooner removed by the Governor" (Harris, 1973, p. 225). There are two school districts, the St. Thomas–

St. John District and the St. Croix District and two superintendents, one per insular district, based on island of reference. According to the U.S. Department of Education, VIDOE is responsible for administration of all public education programs and facilities in the territory. A sample of VIDOE organizational committee structure with information on state activity centers and district activity centers under the direction of the commissioner's office is available in Appendix B.

The Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBOE) has nine members, four from each district, with another member from the island of St. John. According to its published bylaws, VIBOE's primary role in the USVI context is the certification of teachers in the territory and offering loans and scholarships to the territory's students. Unlike other boards of education on the mainland, VIBOE is an elected advisory board. In other words, it does not have the power to create policy or to govern the public education system. A comprehensive report on state departments of education refers to the VIBOE as, "an independent agency within the Department of Education for administrative purposes only" (Harris et al., 1973, p. 225). Unlike boards in the U.S. mainland, this model of governance delegates power to the executive branch, with the governor and the commissioner of education. A sample of VIBOE organizational committee structure with information, mission, and vision is available in Appendix C.

Research specifically related to the effectiveness of education leadership and governance in the USVI is sparse. One of the most comprehensive bodies of research related specifically to education in the USVI is a dissertation written by Dr. Turnbull (1976), former governor and renowned education leader in the territory. Dr. Turnbull's research involved a historical analysis of the structural development of public education

in the USVI from 1917 to 1970. The scholarship of Dr. Joseph (2001) added to the body of research in USVI public education leadership and governance specifically related to education governance and leadership in the USVI. Dr. Joseph's works built on the work of Dr. Turnbull's research and extended the exploration of the USVI education governance structure from the end of Dr. Turnbull's research period of 1970 to the year 2000.

Critical U.S. Virgin Islands Education Challenges and Opportunities (1999–2009)

Like many public schools operating under the U.S. flag, the USVI public education system is filled with challenges and opportunities. During the past 10 years, public schools in the territory have worked diligently to receive accreditation from Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Lewin, 2012; Shea, 2011). There also have also been efforts on the part of administration to improve teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention. Still the territory has significant challenges that impact leadership success. The greatest of these involves efficient financial management of federal funds. Due to ongoing issues with fiscal management, the USVI was compelled to enter into a compliance agreement with the U.S. Department of Education (Department of Education, Compliance Agreement, 2007; West, 2010). This compliance agreement is a comprehensive 3-year agreement that allows VIDOE sufficient time to address major concerns related to the allocation of federal education funds and programs. Due to the governance structure of the USVI, many fiscal challenges are due, in part, to the intersection of VIDOE with of agencies in the Virgin Islands government. The goal of this agreement was to develop comprehensive and systemwide solutions to the ongoing

challenges associated with allocation of federal funds in the USVI (Department of Education, Compliance Agreement, 2007; West, 2010).

The major issues addressed in this agreement are related to the four broad administrative areas of program planning, design and evaluation, financial management, human capital and property management, and procurement. The singular, unifying goal of this agreement is improvement of education for Virgin Islands students. Due to a history of unsatisfactory fulfillment of requirements related to terms and conditions placed on grantees of federal funds, the USVI received a "high risk grantee" designation, which included a mandate of third-party fiduciary grant administration (Department of Education, Compliance Agreement, 2007; West, 2010). Today, the territory is in severe jeopardy of losing federal funding for its many public education program.

Tertiary Education in the U.S. Virgin Islands

UVI is the only tertiary educational institution in the USVI. Former Governor Paiewonsky was instrumental in the establishment of the college. Affectionately known as the "education governor," in an inauguration speech Paiewonsky described the need for a college in the territory:

> to supply to our people the benefits of higher education, not only to help the individual but also to carry out our part in the national responsibility to improve our leadership through better trained minds. With aid from Washington, we can create and develop a college or university to serve the needs of the Virgin Islands and our friendly neighbors. (Paiewonsky, 1990, p. 356)

After nearly 2 years of planning and under Paiewonsky's leadership, the College of the Virgin Islands was charted on March 16, 1962.

The College of the Virgin Islands began as a 2-year college offering associate's-degree programs. Classes began on the island of St. Thomas on July 1, 1963, with 45 full-time and 283 part-time students enrolled, and classes on the St. Croix campus began the

summer of the following year (Paiewonsky, 1990). The university established relationships with other universities in the mainland United States and Puerto Rico before establishing its own bachelor's-degree programs in 1968 and master's-degree programs in 1973. The primary goal of establishing the college and creating advanced-degree programs was to retain local talent and invest in the development of the territory; the concern with losing those who were most well educated was a factor in expanding educational offerings (Dookhan, 1981; Paiewonsky, 1990). "A territorial college was clearly necessary, if the Virgin Islands were to prevent the brain drain and retain the people of talent essential for development" (Paiewonsky, 1990, p. 356). In 1986, the university was renamed UVI and Congress gave the university HBCU designation. Today UVI is the only HBCU outside of the mainland United States.

There is also a significant amount of literature on the history and origins of HBCUs, but little has been written about UVI, the only HBCU located outside of the U.S. mainland. Although UVI is a designated HBCU, the USVI context is distinct: although African Americans are a U.S. national minority, the African or Black Caribbean population is the majority group in the territory. The societal dynamics and culture are African Caribbean, whereas the influence and impact of the U.S. connection cannot be ignored. HBCU status in this context may have a different impact on institutional and student success and this research provides insights into the sociopolitical context of this phenomenon.

The 21st-Century Elementary School Principal

The U.S. mainland influence on education in the USVI may give the appearance of similar school structures. However, the position of the principal has not remained

static. The role of principal has expanded and evolved considerably from principal-teacher to instructional leader to professional administrator over the past 150 years and it continues to be a dynamic profession (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Wirt, 2004). The dynamic nature of the profession is due, in part, to educational-leadership response to changes in federal mandates in U.S. schools and the growing complexity of the role. In the 1990s, the role of principal began to shift to accountability for student performance, which was reinforced through performance-based funding (Doud & Keller, 1998; Sergiovanni et al., 2004).

Overall, principals reported a high level of stress related to their leadership roles in general and to mounting pressures related to testing and accountability in particular (Sergiovanni et al., 2004). This "burgeoning accountability movement" with its incessant demands has forced some researchers to ask, "Why would anyone want the job of principal?" (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 1). Researchers Tucker and Codding (2002) further asserted,

> The expectation that the principal will lead the school to levels of student achievement that are unprecedented for that school, for students from that social background, for children for whom English is not their native language, with budgets that meager—all this seems to be the stuff of fantasy for the principal in the vise. If the principal and faculty had known how to produce unprecedented improvements in student performance before, they would have done it. (p. 1)

In addition to these mounting external pressures related to accountability, many principals face a myriad of internal challenges such as "teacher autonomy, lack of time, teacher expectations for leadership that differ from external expectations, and the traditional structure of the role" (Sergiovanni et al., 2004, p. 23).

The principal in the 21st century holds a highly complex and challenging leadership position, and the role of elementary principals in particular has been examined

at length by NAESP. Formerly a department of the National Education Association, NAESP has been conducting research on elementary school principals since 1928 and the association's most recent report titled *The K–8 Principal in 2008: A Ten Year Study* is NAESP's eighth report on elementary school principals.

According to the 2008 NAESP report, today's principals are more likely to be White females around 50 years of age (Protheroe, 2009). Principals today have about 10 years of experience in the role and over 25 years experience in education, with a master's degree. The average salary for today's principal is over $84,000, but with the increased responsibilities related to the role, this amount is not substantial. According to the report, average principal salaries in 1950s were approximately $50,000 in today's dollars, but with adjustments for inflation and adjustments for increased work hours on weekdays and weekends, the reported increases in salary are relative (Protheroe, 2009). "Compensation is not seen as being in balance with the time needed to do the job well, competing demands, and the levels of stress" (Protheroe, 2009, p. 174). Moreover, two-thirds of the respondents in the study reported having no assistant principal in their building (Protheroe, 2009, p. 6), thereby exacerbating salary concerns. Also, having only one leader concentrates authority and responsibility in the hands of individuals rather than allowing delegated power to a leadership team.

The top five areas that today's principals spend time on are supervision/staff contact, interaction with students, discipline/student management, improvement of instruction through support of teachers, and addressing the needs of individual students. Although principals spend the least amount of time engaged in professional-development opportunities, professional educational attainment of elementary school principals is a

priority, with over 99% of respondents having earned a master's degree or higher (Tucker & Codding, 2002, pp. 38, 66). However, many questions have been raised on the effectiveness of school administrator-preparation programs (Tucker & Codding, 2002).

Today's elementary school principals are plagued by a barrage of concerns. Table 1 depicts the major areas of concern shared by more than 50% of the principals surveyed in the 2008 NAESP report (Protheroe, 2009, p. 116).

Table 1

Characteristics of Concern by 50% or More Principals

Areas of concern by principals	%
Providing a continuum of services for students who are at risk	78.7
Student assessment	71.5
Instructional practice	69.6
Professional development of staff	68.3
Students not performing to their potential	67.8
Fragmentation of my time	66.8
Financial resources	64.6
Increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems	63.1
Including assessment results of students with disabilities for purposes of AYP	62.1
Level of teacher performance	59.3
Implementing state mandates	54.7
Promoting inclusion/collaboration in regard to instruction of students with disabilities	52.9
Implementing federal mandates	50.6

Table 1 reflects considerable concerns on the part of principals related to resources, mandates, and student performance. Mounting pressures related to the role have resulted in some principals feeling less secure about their jobs (Protheroe, 2009, p. 128). Concerns about job security coupled with issues of principal recruitment, early retirement, stressful working conditions, and ongoing salary concerns may lead to

significant elementary principal shortages in the future (Doud & Keller, 1998; Protheroe, 2009, p. 168; Sergiovanni et al., 2004). Despite the challenges, elementary school principals are committed to their chosen profession and hopeful (Protheroe, 2009, p. 152; Sergiovanni et al., 2004). The insights of the abovementioned scholars may are useful for examining the role of principals in the USVI.

Available Scholarship

Although much has been written related to principals and school effectiveness and accountability, there are gaps in the research on USVI public education. A review of the literature related specifically to educational leadership in the USVI yielded a total of 10 dissertations, two of which were mentioned in the previous section on education governance in the USVI (Joseph, 2001; Turnbull, 1976). Of the remaining eight dissertations, two were related to USVI public education leadership; one on the preparation of public education principals in the St. Thomas–St. John district (Newton, 1994), and the other on the relationship between perceived elementary-principal instructional-leadership skills and school effectiveness (Thomas-Hodge, 1994). The remaining four dissertations were helpful in understanding education as a whole in the USVI. These dissertations studied teachers and school quality and student achievement in USVI public elementary schools (Wheatley, 1993), Catholic schools in the USVI (Griffith, 1995), technology schooling at a private school in the USVI (Drost, 2002), university students' perceptions of quality and implications for managerial practice (Williams, 2004), the identification and assessment of goals of a community college in the USVI (Wallace, 1998), and a program for USVI public school students with limited English proficiency (J. M. Thomas, 1992).

Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore the critical challenges and opportunities associated with public education in the USVI. This review of the literature was designed to situate the phenomenon in the USVI social and political context. Seminal works on the colonial history and education in the USVI were reviewed. Contemporary information on USVI education was also examined as well as relevant studies on the role of elementary school principals in the 21st century. Local newspaper articles related to education in the territory during the proposed research period were also reviewed.

The researcher identified several gaps in the literature as they related to the context of the study. There is a significant body of literature available on the challenges and opportunities associated with education on the U.S. mainland. However, little research exists on the specific education challenges in U.S. territories. There is also a small body of research available on the history of the USVI (Skelton, 2004; C. Y. Thomas, 1988; Willocks, 1995) and on the education system in the territory (Boyer, 1982; Dookhan, 1994; Francis, 1981; Murphy, 1981; Paiewonsky, 1981), but very little has been written on the period leading into the 21st century (1985–2000). There is also a significant amount of literature on the history and origins of HBCUs, but little has been written about UVI, the only HBCU located outside of the U.S. mainland.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the critical challenges and opportunities in public education in the USVI from 1999 to 2009. By drawing on the experiences of key education leaders, this study sought to record the past, explore current challenges, and forecast the future of emerging 21st-century education in the territory.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology with a narrative research form of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is designed to "uncover or discover the meanings people have constructed about a particular phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002a, p. 19, 2002b). I sought to understand the particular phenomenon through the perspectives of key stakeholders. Therefore, employing an interpretive qualitative perspective was an effective and appropriate methodology to facilitate understanding of the subject matter in context.

Narrative research focuses specifically on collecting stories, sharing individual experiences, and conducting a critical analysis of the meanings of these experiences (Creswell, 2008). "The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the 'other' who make up the organization or carry out the process" (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to examine both the individual or personal experiences as well as the social experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2008). "A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through

examining personal and institutional documents, through observations, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of the existing literature" (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). I used document analysis, interviews, informal conversations, and field notes to more fully understand and interpret the lived reality of the participants engaged in this study.

Research Setting

This research took place in various USVI public education institutions. Five of the eight interviews were conducted at the participant's campus or place of employment. One interview was conducted at an offsite location more convenient for the participant, and two interviews were conducted by telephone, due to extenuating circumstances.

Population and Sample

A purposeful sample of USVI education leaders was selected. Eight USVI leaders of public education participated in semistructured interviews. Participants included four Virgin Islands public school principals and four other local public-education leaders. These interviewees were identified by professional referrals and personal resources. All participants met the following criteria:

1. Participants had to have served as an education leader in a USVI public school during the research period (1999–2009);
2. Participants were willing to participate in a face-to-face recorded interview;
3. Participants were required to complete a participant background profile delineating age, ethnicity, educational level, years of service, and educational leadership role;

4. Preference was given to those education leaders who were affiliated with USVI public schools that achieved AYP requirements defined in No Child Left Behind federal mandates during the research period (1999–2010).

Before conducting this research, I obtained approval from the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS; see Appendix D). Upon IRBPHS approval, I provided each participant with an overview of the research being conducted, and a written commitment to confidentiality and subject anonymity. I also obtained written permission to conduct interviews (see Appendix E).

Instrumentation

I conducted eight interviews with USVI public school education leaders. An appreciative-inquiry interview protocol was implemented using an interview guide as a "script for inquiry" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 151). Using the appreciative-inquiry interview guide, I began with a brief explanation of the appreciative-inquiry process. To familiarize participants with the overall structure of the interview, I distributed the interview questions well in advance of each scheduled interview, enabling participants to thoroughly review the questions prior to the interviews and to provide time for thoughtful consideration of the topic and their responses. I began the interview process with broad questions to elicit information about the participant's background and to build rapport. The interviews continued with in-depth questions related specifically to the research topic.

I created summary sheets in Microsoft Excel to collect and organize relevant interview data. Participants were asked to complete a brief participant profile delineating age, ethnicity, educational level, years of service, and educational leadership role. All

interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. My goal was to capture verbatim responses from participants. Data were also collected using researcher observations and field notes.

Data Collection

Creswell (2008) stated, "In qualitative research, we identify our participants and sites based on places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon" (p. 213). Participants in this study were USVI education leaders who served in public schools in the territory during the research period of 1999–2009. These interviewees were identified by professional referrals or personal resources and invited to participate in the study. The following research questions and related interview questions were used to support the appreciative-inquiry data-collection strategy:

Research Question 1: What are the perceived experiences of the educational Leaders in the USVI public education system?

- Tell me about your history with the USVI public educational system.
- What were your first impressions?
- What excited you about USVI public education?

Research Question 2: How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands?

- Tell me about challenges you have experienced as an educational leader in the USVI
- What are the factors that contributed to those challenges?
- How were you able to overcome these challenges?

- Describe a peak experience or high point in your tenure as a USVI education leader.
- What are the factors that contributed to this positive experience?

Research Question 3: To what extent have the U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgin Islands' education system?

- Tell me about your experience of the impact of U.S. federal education mandates on the USVI public education system.
- How were you and your team able to successfully achieve AYP?

Research Question 4: What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change?

- Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself and your abilities as an education leader?
- What do you value most about your team and institution?
- Describe the USVI public education system's greatest strengths and opportunities?
- Operating from its strengths, where do you envision the institution of USVI public education 5 years from now?
- How can you and/or your team contribute to the institution's success?

Following is a detailed outline of the data-collection strategies used in this study:

1. All participants were prescreened to determine eligibility for the study. Participants had to meet the following eligibility requirements:
    - Participants had to have served as an education leader in a USVI public school during the research period (1999–2009);

- Participants had to be willing to participate in a face-to-face recorded interview;
- Participants had to agree to complete a participant background profile delineating age, ethnicity, educational level, years of service, and educational leadership role;

2. I made contact with each eligible participant directly by telephone or e-mail and a list of eligible participants was generated.
3. I e-mailed a participant-information file. Following is a list of the documents included in this file:
   - A letter to participants introducing the researcher and the study (see Appendix F);
   - A consent form outlining the research purpose, procedures, risks/discomforts, potential benefits, costs/financial considerations, pay/reimbursements, and contact information for the researcher and advisor (see Appendix E);
   - A participant background questionnaire (see Appendix G);
   - A list of interview questions (see Appendix H); and
   - A document outlining the human subjects bill of rights (see Appendix I)
4. I spoke to each participant to schedule an interview.
5. After obtaining written consent from all interviewees and providing an overview of the appreciative-inquiry protocol, I conducted eight one-on-one, open-ended qualitative interviews. These interviews were 1–2 hours in length.

All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, I took field notes, and the data were transcribed for thematic coding and analysis.

6. All data collected from participant interviews were stored in secured location at my home office.

Data Analysis

"There is no substitute for total immersion in the data" (Seidman, 2006, p. 128). In qualitative data analysis, researchers must "organize and prepare the data for analysis," review the data thoroughly, and analyze the data "with a coding process" (Creswell, 2003, pp. 191, 192). The data-analysis process was guided by the procedures described by Creswell (2003) and the process began by gathering and organizing all of the data collected from the interviews.

First, I printed copies of each interview transcript and created a file for each participant containing all pertinent documents. I also created digital files for each participant to store digital interview recordings and digital transcripts as a backup. I continued the data-analysis process with a thorough review of hard copies of each interview transcript while listening to the digital recordings. This process allowed me to make any necessary corrections to the transcripts and gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall interview (Creswell, 2007).

The goal was to uncover relevant themes from the interviews, to make meaning of the data collected. I reviewed the transcripts multiple times to begin to code the data. "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). I then began a manual-coding

process of assigning descriptive codes to the data in the margins of the transcripts. This extensive list of descriptive codes with related narratives was later transferred to interview summary sheets created in Microsoft Excel. These interview summary sheets, helped to further "reduce and interpret the meaning and, through dialogue, confirm that these are the interviewees' meanings" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 117). Finally, I organized the data into themes to further condense and interpret the interviewees' meanings (Saldana, 2009). Relevant themes emerged from the interviews leading to recommendations for future leaders and suggestions for future research.

Human-Subjects Protection and Ethical Considerations

I provided participants with a full description of the intent of the research and advised all participants of their rights as subjects of academic research. I requested and received approval from the IRBPHS (see Appendices D, E, and I). In addition, I obtained written permission from each participant involved in the study. Moreover, I ensured that the research methods employed did not further marginalize the subjects in particular or the population in general.

Background of the Researcher

I am an African American female and a former HBCU student. I am passionate about HBCUs and their capacity to serve the community. I completed my K–12 education in a rural community in Texas. I also served as a member of the Texas and California Air National Guard. While serving as an Air National Guard member, I obtained a bachelor's degree in human development and later earned a master's degree in educational leadership and policy studies at California State University. My experience as an educator is quite varied. I taught adult learners in correctional education facilities,

hotels, healthcare, and corporate service industries as well as traditional academic settings. I currently serve as a learning and development professional.

I also served as an adjunct faculty member at UVI and am a long-term resident of the territory. In many ways I occupy insider and outsider status simultaneously. Because I am a long-term resident, my insider status affords me the capacity to seek out those individuals with whom I already have established relationships to understand the phenomenon more clearly. Also, I am married to a local person, which may have allowed for more "political" access, due to long-term familial and interpersonal relationships. In contrast, in the USVI context, I am often reminded of my "Yankee" status, which means I was born in the mainland.

Although I am a long-term resident, I understand I am not a local person. This outsider status may have impacted my access to participants and information. I experienced the field-notes process as an opportunity to attempt to make a distinction between what I discovered during the interview process, the document-analysis process, and my thoughts and perceptions about the information uncovered in the research. Although I this dissertation is my entrance to this research journey, I have already uncovered inner conflicts related to race, ethnicity, and culture. Some of these conflicts include witnessing the deplorable conditions of many local public schools and related concerns of funding and staffing at all levels of Virgin Islands public education. I also have several questions about the work of HBCUs preserved to address a population still "left behind" in juxtaposition to desegregation laws. Conflicts notwithstanding, I am excited about this study and I believe this work is just the beginning in education leadership in the USVI.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

This study explored the critical challenges and opportunities in public education in the USVI from 1999 to 2009. Specifically, this study explored the perceptions of key public education leaders' experiences in the USVI public education system as a whole, the challenges and opportunities they faced as leaders, the impacts of U.S. federal mandates, their perceptions of the institution's greatest strengths, and implications for change. Drawing on the experiences of these education leaders, I sought to record the past, explore current challenges, and forecast the future of 21st-century education success in the territory.

This chapter provides profiles of the eight research participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Presentation of the research findings is organized by research question, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the themes that emerged from narratives.

Participant Profiles

Eight participants shared their experiences and reflections on the research topic. Due to the location of the research and the distinctions of size and population, the depiction of the profiles is designed to maintain the anonymity of each participant to the degree possible in this unique context. Table 2 provides an overview of participants' backgrounds.

Table 2

Background of Research Participants

Name	Gender	Place of birth	Age	Educational background
Asabi	Female	U.S. Virgin Islands	50–59	PhD
Akanbi	Male	Eastern Caribbean	60–69	PhD
Morenikeji	Female	Eastern Caribbean	50–59	Masters
Omobolaji	Female	U.S. Virgin Islands	50–59	Masters
Enitan	Male	U.S. Virgin Islands	60–69	Masters
Olutimileyin	Female	U.S. Virgin Islands	40–49	PhD in progress
Enirotimi	Male	Eastern Caribbean	50–59	JD
Akanji	Male	U.S. Virgin Islands	40–49	PhD

The background of the participants varied. Four of the participants were female and four were male. Four of the participants were born on the island of St. Thomas, one was born on the island of St. Croix, two were born on the island of St. Kitts, and one hailed from the island of Nevis. The ages of participants ranged from 47 to 65. The education level of participants varied as well; three of the participants' had earned PhDs, one a JD, three had one or more master's degrees and one was a PhD student. All participants served as leaders of USVI institutions of public education during the research period of 1999–2009. The leadership roles of participants also varied. Four participants served as principals during the time of the interviews. The other participants held various territorial education-leadership roles during the study period. There was some overlap in leadership roles during the research period.

The researcher chose pseudonyms from the Yoruba language of Nigeria. The Yoruba names assigned to each participant reflected the researcher's perception of the participants after conducting the interviews. Following is a more detailed description of the participants beginning with the first participant interviewed:

Education Leader 1: Asabi

"Out here you're on the fire, you're on the front line, you're on fire all the time, and it's very, very hectic but I love it. I must say I love it" (Asabi). Asabi is a Yoruba name given to an uncommon woman who is a protector and a pacesetter. This pseudonym is descriptive of this leader's passion and dedication to education. Asabi was a well-respected elementary school principal at the time of the study. She began her career in education as a teacher over 30 years ago and she has held various site-level educational-leadership and territorial-leadership roles. She is married with children and very active in her church, community, and civic activities.

Asabi reflects on a high point in her tenure as an education leader in the USVI stating, "Well I think my high point is getting this principal position. I think getting a principal position is a very, very high point because you get to lead a school" (Asabi).

Education Leader 2: Akanbi

> I don't see myself as any big principal, you know? God has made this possible for me, and I'm grateful to him, and I just need to touch other people and pass it on—and that's why when people come and—I say, "Sure, I will help. Whatever I can do to help, I'll do to help," so that other people can be inspired. (Akanbi)

Akanbi is a Yoruba name given to person who comes to the world with an assignment and survives in turbulent times. This pseudonym is descriptive of this leader's unwavering commitment to education, leadership, and justice. Akanbi is a long-time education leader in the territory and was a principal at the time of the study. Akanbi is married and a proud parent.

Akanbi reflects on a high point in his tenure as an education leader in the USVI when students from his school won a district essay competition stating, " I really felt so

proud of my students. I felt so proud of my students. That was, to me, a peak experience" (Akanbi).

Education Leader 3: Morenikeji

> I believe in public school. I believe in our children. Maybe because of the fact that we have to educate everybody; private schools take what they want, and if you're not what they want, they put you to the door. Or they take you and if you do something that they don't want, then they put you to the door. We have to take everybody. I believe that everybody can have some level of success, so I believe in the public school system and giving that level of success. (Morenikeji)

Morenikeji is a Yoruba name that describes a person who has a partner and who is never alone. This particular pseudonym is descriptive of this leader's collaborative leadership style. Morenikeji entered the USVI public education system as a student at the College of the Virgin Islands and began her education career on the island as a teacher. Morenikeji held various site-level education-leadership roles and was principal of a high-performing elementary school at the time of the study. Morenikeji spoke of being a mother and a proud grandmother. She is married with children and she spoke with great fondness about her grandchild.

Morenikeji reflected on a high point in her tenure as an education leader in the USVI:

> I think one of my high points as a leader is actually when you can either lead students to change—and not change because you tell them what they should do, but when you actually get them to think about what they have done and they can take responsibility for what they have done and then take ownership of where they need to go. That I really have enjoyed. That I saw more when I was at the high school level at [location omitted], because there were high school students and I used to supervise basically seniors. But still, it was really rewarding for me when you have to sit and have a rapport with a child in your office, and at the end of the conversation a bulb has gone on in their head and you can see them change. (Morenikeji)

Education Leader 4: Omobolaji

> Let me tell you, God gave me a lot of gifts, but my biggest gift is teaching. Oh my God. It's a love affair that cannot end. I teach Sunday school now because I can't teach regularly. I have to teach somebody something. (Omobolaji)

Omobolaji is a Yoruba name given to a person born with honor or one whose honor is inherited or ordained. This pseudonym was applicable in that it describes this participant's ascension to educational leadership in the USVI. Omobolaji entered USVI public schools at the high school level after being educated in parochial schools K–8. She also was a student at the College of the Virgin Islands. Omobolaji began her education career as a teacher and ascended from the classroom directly to an executive-level education-leadership role. She served on the VIBOE in an executive capacity during the study period. Omobolaji is married with children. When asked about a peak experience or high point in her career as an education leader, Omobolaji stated, "I've had quite a bit, really. I guess the peak experience would be going from the classroom to the commissionership" (Omobolaji).

Education Leader 5: Enitan

"I could've gone other places. But like I said, it was a latent calling and I just liked the education ambiance. I got the feeling that you contributed to success of many students" (Enitan). Enitan is a Yoruba name given to a person of story, an elder who is renowned. This pseudonym was applicable in that it describes this participant's quick-witted, outspoken, and entertaining style during the interview process. Enitan entered St. Thomas public schools in seventh grade. He began his education career as a teacher when he came back to St. Thomas after completing a bachelor's degree on the mainland. Enitan held various site-level, district, and territorial leadership roles through his career and served in the legislative branch of government with education as his purview during the

time of the research period. He is married with children. When asked to recall a peak experiences or high points in his career as an education leader Enitan stated,

> One of the high points was getting [high school name omitted] reaccredited after more than 10 years. But it was a little not being satisfied with the whole thing because it was accredited conditionally because of [issues with] some of the teachers themselves, high absentee rate among teachers, students. (Enitan)

Education Leader 6: Olutimileyin

"The first thing you have to do is recognize what is your mission when you get there. I have a clear mission" (Olutimileyin). Olutimileyin is a Yoruba name that describes a person who is supported by God. This pseudonym was applicable in that it describes this leader's ability to navigate the complex leadership domain of USVI public education. Olutimileyin was the youngest of the eight participants. She entered public education as a high school teacher and she was a student in USVI private schools K–12. She has held various site and district education-leadership roles and she was a principal of a successful elementary school at the time of the interview. Olutimileyin is married with children.

Olutimileyin reflected on a high point in her tenure as an education leader in the USVI:

> I think it's getting programs that I want put in place. And once I get a notion in my head, I want to get it done. When I went in as [district education leadership role omitted], one of the things that I noticed is that we're not meeting and we still are not meeting the needs of a number of our students. Every child cannot be an academic student. They can't do the academic track. And if you're not college bound, there's very few spaces in the vocational program and they didn't have meaningful programs. I may not want to be a mechanic. I may not want to be a nurse's aide and I may not want to be a hairdresser. [Now] there's other options available and the programs that we had were very weak. They told me I could not open a vocational school in a year. I did it. And we offered classes like phlebotomy and that's still in existence. We ramped up the hairdressing program because the students who were coming through that program were not meeting certification and we had to ramp it up so that we set the curriculum and it was aligned to the testing that the students would receive when they left the program. I

> built the marine program at [school name omitted]. They couldn't find an instructor, they didn't have books; they couldn't get it off the ground. I got it off the ground and got a boat donated to the district free of charge, fully donated. (Olutimileyin)

Education Leader 7: Enirotimi

"My thinking is that everybody brings value and when people recognize that you recognize that they have value as well, then I think it's a great place to begin" relationships (Enirotimi). Enirotimi is a Yoruba name that describes the kind of person who stands by others. The name depicts a spirit of togetherness. This pseudonym was applicable in that it describes this participant's leadership style and personality. Olutimileyin became a student in USVI public schools at the sixth-grade level after attending parochial schools. After high school graduation he attended the College of the Virgin Islands and after 2 years moved to the mainland to further his education. Olutimileyin worked for the Department of Education and held an executive-level position with the board of education during the research period. His marital status is unknown.

Enirotimi reflected on a peak experience in his career as an education leader in the USVI:

> Well I think when I joined the Department of Education, several things were pending or needed a lot of my attention. One of them was the issue of students who were receiving special-education services. The department had been sued by a group of students, it was a class action suit by students who were charging that they were not receiving the services that were specified in the individual-educational programs. And I think one of the things that I felt very good about was putting those issues in the spotlight and helping to address the needs and concerns about those students and their parents. I think we made great improvements in the delivery of service during that time so I'm very, very happy about that. (Enirotimi)

Education Leader 8: Akanji

"I'm a very passionate person who's not afraid to tackle the tough issues, even if I have to stand alone" (Akanji). Akanji is a Yoruba name that describes a person suited to help others. Further, the name describes a person often solicited for support who does not fail. This pseudonym was applicable in that it describes this participant's experiences as a public education leader. Akanji entered the public schools of the St. Thomas district at the first-grade level and continued through high school. He completed his bachelor's degree at the College of the Virgin Islands and moved to the mainland to complete graduate studies. Akanji held various leadership positions at UVI and served on the USVI Board of Education during the research period. He is married with one child.

Akanji reflects on a peak experience in his career as an education leader in the USVI:

> The greatest experience was when the Middle States [accrediting body] lifted the probation from the high schools and properly stated that our high schools are [were] going to be accredited. … They were impressed with the concerted effort taken to resolve all the issues, the highest points in the board. I think there was a tangible demonstration of the power of consensus of stakeholders where there is a level of an agreement that they're going to do what they said they're going to do, which is to put public education first. They will make whatever adjustments, reforms, modifications, and then they're going to remain persistent to the very end. And it demonstrated that the society has the capacity to resolve its educational problems, if it puts its nose to the doorpost and really gets down to business. And then it shows that in the past clearly what created the crisis is that when consensus was broken and the political will had waned; it just couldn't get it together. And it just shows that once the two ingredients are there [consensus and will], it can achieve success. (Akanji)

Findings by Research Questions

Findings: Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, What are the perceived experiences of the educational leaders in the USVI public education system? This question, along with data extracted

from the demographic questionnaires, sought to understand the participants' personal history with the USVI public education system, when and where they entered the system and what excited them about public education in the territory. Three major themes emerged from the data collected: Student Impressions, Professional Impressions, and Job Satisfaction: Making an Impact.

Student Impressions

The participants' history in public education in the USVI was varied. Their experiences were inevitably impacted by when and where they entered the USVI public education system, and other subjective factors in respondents' lives. Some of these dynamic influences include the time of their experiences and a host of other personal and social variables. The analysis of the data indicated two primary routes of introduction to the system. Four participants entered the system as students in the K–12 public schools; two entered as students at the UVI and these two participants spoke only of their experiences as educational professionals; the remaining two participants entered the USVI K–12 public education system as educational professionals. Of those participants who recalled their experiences as K–12 public students in the USVI, the participants' experiences were largely positive.

Omobolaji spoke of the good relationships she experienced with peers and teachers as a student in USVI public schools:

> I had a tremendous set of students I met in ninth grade in my homeroom. I had the best homeroom teacher that you could have on the planet, and I had some of the greatest experiences with my homeroom. We were like a family. I could tell you everybody's birthday in my homeroom to this day. Yeah, that's how close we were. (Omobolaji).

Omobolaji also discussed her impressions regarding the intellect of her public school classmates in relation to her experience as a private-school student stating,

> I thought coming from a private school that I would've been ahead academically, but who was bright in my homeroom? [The students] They were very, very bright and very learned. You didn't know the difference. They were a great set of students. (Omobolaji)

Enitan spoke of his early impressions regarding respect and reverence for education:

> Education was revered and respected and I guess it was a carryover from the old days in the system. And of course, people considered education as the key to improving your quality of life, so strong emphasis was placed, because many of the parents, young or old, never completed school. And therefore, they had an obsession that their offspring, their children, do that [complete school] because they understood the importance. … So it was hammered in your head. And so if you were able to yield not to the temptation to quit and go look for work, you were considered successful. (Enitan)

Enirotimi recalled his experience moving from a very positive parochial school experience to a different but also positive public school as follows:

> Well the private school was a church [parochial] school. That's the first thing. It was a small school, and the relationships were very intimate on that school level. It was a very welcoming school because it was a very different time in the Virgin Islands. It was a time when there was a lot of stigma attached to people who were coming here because the perception really was that people were just coming to work and their consideration of them as families was not really a big thing in this society. So the private school, the smallness of it, the intimacy of it, the quality of the instructors, their caring spirit, it was a very nurturing place. And the public school I think was the first time that I really came into contact with large numbers of Virgin Islanders, people who were from the territory, and I think really that that's when my assimilation really began. It was a positive experience for me. (Enirotimi)

Enirotimi also spoke in great detail about his experiences with teachers in USVI public schools and of how public educators helped instill a sense of cultural pride and self-esteem:

> I had really great teachers in the public schools. It was a difficult time because we were at that period when people were becoming much more conscious as African people and so the instructors were very helpful in helping us understand who we were, you know, our ancestry and what our people had gone through to bring us to this point and how to think about your responsibilities to them [ancestors], even though when you begin to get exposed to ideas of slavery and discrimination and

> segregation, how that can really make a young person experience a range of emotions that aren't all of the times manageable. So I think our instructors were very good in helping to guide us through the way to feel about our ancestry and our specialness in this region. (Enirotimi)

Akanji first entered USVI public schools as a first-grade student. Akanji had challenges assimilating into formal education due to his history as a foster child:

> For me, school occurred exactly the same time I was placed in foster care so it was associated in my mind as a strange and rude awakening that living in this new household means that I have to go to school. Because before that, I didn't go to school. ... I was never in school before and I didn't have any experience in kindergarten, no preschool. So the first weeks were a little traumatic for me, you know, a little traumatic. I just played. I [later] realized school is a part of this new routine and I didn't quite understand what school meant, and both my brother and I were moved to three schools within 2 years so we weren't quite sure what to expect. (Akanji)

Akanji further recalled how USVI public schools were experienced as a stabilizing force and how his teachers comforted him and aided him in the school assimilation process:

> I was moved from three schools in just 2 years. So by the time I was in third grade, I was still struggling to understand what I was doing and I believe my teachers really went the extra mile to assist and they made me feel very comfortable. And by third and fourth grade, I'd become accustomed and acclimatized to public school and I began to excel. And by the time I was in fifth and sixth grade, I began to take off; I began to really thrive because of the stability of the school. (Akanji)

For the four participants who shared their experiences as students in K–12 public education, there was consensus on school being an overwhelmingly positive experience. Although they entered the USVI public education system at different ages and with different socioeconomic backgrounds, they all mentioned positive experiences with their classmates and teachers and they all acknowledged having an early respect for education.

Professional Impressions

Although Morenikeji and Olutimileyin attended the local public university, they specifically spoke of their experiences with the USVI public education system from their perspectives as new teachers. Four of the participants in this study spoke to their experiences and impressions of the USVI public education system as education professionals. Of these four participants, one entered the system as a principal and the remaining three entered as teachers. These participants described their initial professional experiences as negative. Asabi spoke of her impressions related to treatment of teachers and how those impressions informed her practice as a leader:

> So my first impression was they weren't treating teachers right in our schools. Today my teachers will tell you I support teachers to the hilt, because the success of children lies in the preparation of teachers, academic success for children lies in preparation of teachers, academic preparation. Teachers who are certified, who are degreed, who have made a difference in students lives, it's because they are prepared to teach and they're prepared each and every day. They do their lesson plans. (Asabi)

Akanbi also spoke of the importance of teacher preparedness. He reflected on several negative experiences related to teacher preparation stating:

> I was also surprised at the level of preparedness of some of the teachers. That struck me. … People [Teachers] couldn't [didn't] even speak the English language. You know, they were—teachers were prone to speak, you know, everyday language. (Akanbi)

Akanbi received formal education at a teacher's college and displayed great passion regarding the importance of teachers learning to teach and prioritize their own academic development stating, "if you're becoming a teacher, you [must] prepare yourself academically first, and then you become a teacher" (Akanbi).

Olutimileyin also shared her impressions as a new teacher. She discussed her experiences as a teacher in relationship to her experiences as a former private school student:

> You know, the first thing that startled me was, I guess it would be the social aspects of it. In private school you're very limited in the students that you get to associate with. Very often they have the same demographics as you do. Public school isn't like that. Frankly, you never get to see many of the children that are in the public school system [in private schools in the USVI]. You don't—and I'm going to say "type" for this moment … but you don't see this type of child in the private school system; at least I didn't encounter it. When I got to [school name omitted]—and that was in 1985 … we were having three and four fights a day. Yeah, it was ridiculous, I mean, and fights would break out for nothing. It was girls and it was boys fighting. You had instances where teen pregnancy was very popular in the eighties and so in any given classroom that I had, I would have three to four girls pregnant at a time. And they were allowed to come to school and it was actually encouraged. Because of my age, one of the first things that struck me is that I was younger than some of the students that I was teaching. (Olutimileyin)

Morenikeji recalled her experiences as a first-time teacher in USVI public schools, her impressions of the volatile school environment, and how she was able to gain respect as a teacher:

> I was like, "Wow!" Really, because I entered what was then [school name omitted] and actually it was coined Vietnam because there was a lot of fights there. There were a lot of kids who were over age on the junior high level. So it lent itself to an environment that was rather volatile. Yes. But, funny enough, I gained the respect of the students. I guess one of the things, I live by a premise that you treat people's children the way you would want your own child to be treated, and there is always some good in the worst of us. (Morenikeji)

For the four participants who shared their experiences as professionals in K–12 public education, their initial impressions of the school environment were negative. They experienced teachers being treated poorly, teachers lacking in preparedness, and a very volatile academic environment. Although their initial experiences were negative, they had a desire to remain in their roles and continue their journeys as USVI educators.

Job Satisfaction: Making an Impact

The participants' impressions of USVI public education may have varied based on when they entered the system, but regardless of whether they entered the system as a student or professional, they all seemed to share a love of the children and they believed in their students' abilities to succeed. The participants all shared a love of public education in the USVI context. They loved their unique student population and they shared a desire to have a positive impact on students' lives. They also enjoyed great job satisfaction and enjoyed impacting education in the Territory. They all appeared to have a great respect and reverence for education in general and USVI public education, in particular. They all reported feeling excited about education and leading.

All participants spoke of a deep admiration for the children they served in the Virgin Islands. Asabi spoke of her love for the children and preparing future leaders:

> It's the children of the Virgin Islands. It's always about the students, it's always about the children of the Virgin Islands. And even up to today I am adamant that we are the ones who prepared these children for the future. When we are old and gray, they will be the leaders of tomorrow and we have to insure that this territory, this beautiful Caribbean Island of the Virgin Islands is well taken care of by well-educated people, and we do that by starting at the foundational level with kindergarten. (Asabi)

Akanbi spoke of the joy of working with young Virgin Islands student: "I love working with little children, K to 6. The innocence, their willingness to come and hug you. And when you praise them, they—and the support of the parents. And that these are children you can really shape" (Akanbi).

Olutimileyin spoke of the eagerness of her students and of their potential as learners and her ability to relate to them:

> How eager [the students are to learn]! You know, once you demonstrated to students that you actually cared, you demonstrated what you wanted to get them from— And you had to tell them specifically, particularly in the earlier classes

> where I had students that were academically challenged, not special-education students, but these were kids that you have in 12th grade and they have second- and third-grade reading levels. Then what you have to do with these kids is give them a specific plan of action. I've got you here and I want you to end up here. This is where we're going to try and get [you] to. And once you gave them a specific plan of action and you demonstrated caring for their future and their performance, many times these kids were very, very eager to learn. They came from environments where people dismissed them from the time they could bathe themselves and feed themselves. Additionally, I was a very young teacher and so could relate to them a little better than teachers who had been in the system 20 and 30 years. (Olutimileyin)

The participants shared a love of public education in the USVI context. They loved their unique student population and they shared a desire to have a positive impact on students' lives. They also enjoyed great job satisfaction and enjoyed impacting education in the Territory. Although they experienced many challenges, these participants chose to serve. Enitan spoke of feeling job satisfaction despite numerous challenges. As previously mentioned in his participant profile, Enitan described education as "a latent calling" and described the intrinsic value of impacting students' lives:

> I can't walk the streets today unless some kid says, "Mr. [name omitted]." Some remember me as the "Chief." And it gives you a good feeling that you made a contribution. Some have become lawyers, doctors, judges, so it gives you a feeling that you really contributed, a substantial contribution. Even though it wasn't paying any money, I got gratification from knowing that I was improving the lives of others. (Enitan)

Morenikeji spoke of job satisfaction, despite the challenging school environment stating,

> I guess after interacting with the children during that first year, even though it was called Vietnam, I just liked what I did. I realized that I was making an impact, so I just went into a second year, then a third, and it just continued. (Morenikeji)

Omobolaji spoke of job satisfaction in her territorial leadership role and the academic progress in the Territory:

> What excites me is that I'm one of the lucky people. I go to every school from Coral Bay to Frederiksted, so I probably have been in the schools more than

> [others] because we go every year to each one. What I see if there is a super class of students who are getting the best that any school system can offer, there is another class of students who are gifted, but not highly motivated, so they'd be like your B and C students. And then I see students who struggle through the system and fall by the wayside. We get some of them and so on. … I'm always encouraged because … [I see] a lot of progress. (Omobolaji)

Enirotimi spoke of his transition from the private sector into USVI public education leadership and his excitement about making an impact on education in the Territory:

> Well the exciting for me was coming from a private law firm, I was really a bit tired of just dealing with the issues of people and their money and their land and those kinds of things, and there was a desire to [serve]. … I mean, I was a product of the school system. I had a good knowledge of how it functioned and some thoughts about how it should function, and I think I was excited about being a part of it and helping to impact the territory on a very basic level, which is, I mean, all about—children, in some shape or form, have contact with the Department of Education, even those who go to private schools. So I mean, it's a very, very important entity. (Enirotimi)

Akanji also spoke of wanting to contribute to the education success in the Territory:

> I knew I had the capacity to transform education because of my knowledge of the historic *Brown v. The Board of Education* in the mainland. I knew there's a history on the mainland of ed boards playing a very profound role in curriculum, in school construction and moving a society forward. And I saw the importance of a high-quality education. I saw how my preparation in the Virgin Islands allowed me to do well [abroad] and I realized by the same token, I wanted to play a positive role in this community, and my attentions began [to lean] towards public education. That's where a society makes a massive change. So I looked at the Board of Education as a potential arena in which I could serve and try to make some profound changes. And I was very much excited to play a role given the climate … a national climate concerning [education reform]…and one of the biggest issues that the board promoted was the issue of education reform. … I wanted to serve in an arena that I know I had some expertise, I had some passion, knowledge, and I wanted to be a part of the progress forward. (Akanji)

All participants in this study clearly articulated their satisfaction in their role of education leaders in the USVI. Although they acknowledged facing a myriad of challenges, they cited their students, the children of the USVI as the primary factor in

their professional satisfaction, coupled with the many rewards of making a positive impact on education in the Territory.

Summary of Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question in this study explored experiences of key USVI education leaders. The first theme that emerged was the influence of participants' experiences as students in the public education system. The second theme that emerged was the influence of participants' experiences as education professions in the USVI context. They all appeared to have a great respect and reverence for education in general and USVI public education, in particular. They all reported feeling excited about education and leading. Finally, job satisfaction and the ability to make an impact was explored. Even those whose initial impressions of the system were unfavorable still chose to serve in a leadership capacity due to the intrinsic rewards.

Findings: Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands? This question sought to uncover the specific challenges public education leaders face in the USVI and to describe strategies employed by these leaders to mitigate and/or overcome these challenges. Three major themes emerged from the data: The Politics of Employment in the USVI, Systemic Challenges, and Strategies for Overcoming Challenges. Details of the findings for Research Question 2 will be organized by the aforementioned themes.

The Politics of Employment in the USVI

Many of the participants experienced various challenges related to employment dynamics and hiring practices in USVI public education. Several of the participants

spoke about their challenges related to political appointments of personnel to key educational-leadership roles. These participants often used the word "politics" as a general descriptor for political appointments and/or preferential treatment and hiring preferences based on political affiliation. Six participants specifically mentioned politics or the political appointments of leaders as a challenge. Enitan spoke of the challenges he experienced related to appointments based on politics:

> The biggest challenge I experienced was political appointees, placing people in positions without consultation with the leadership of the schools, even at the Commissioner level. People who were connected politically, they did more harm to the system than good because they weren't placed there because of their knowledge base or their experiences or their expertise. They were placed there because of the political support they may have rendered to politicians. And that was the biggest—and I still complain about up to today—that's one of the biggest, biggest hindrances in education, putting people in leadership positions. (Enitan)

Enitan felt these appointments had a "demoralizing" effect on teachers and staff and he spoke of his experience of being denied certain positions due to political affiliations. Enitan felt that these types of appointments had a negative impact on the entire system and led to having a number of unqualified people in key education leadership roles. He also believed that the number of unqualified people in these roles contributed to inefficiencies and inertia in the educational system in the USVI.

Akanji also mentioned the "politics" and the use of a "spoils and patronage system" as contributing factors in some of the systemic challenges faced by USVI public education leaders stating,

> The Virgin Islands uses a spoils and patronage system and every time a new political leadership emerges, they place people in positions of power and authority who are unprepared to lead when they get a position, only because they supported the prevailing side. (Akanji)

Olutimileyin also described her challenges related to politics and political placement of unskilled personnel:

> The most recent challenge that I have had as an educational leader is that I've been a victim of politics. I have a [colleague] that does not, cannot tolerate my presence, and so she has done just about everything to try and interfere with my progress. And so you constantly have to remain one step ahead. I've been [assigned various staff] that has no skill level. It's a person that interviewed four or five times, had the lowest scores, was placed by politics [in the position] and that person was placed with me. And now I'm running the school and I have absolutely no assistance. I was placed in a school that was an extremely hostile environment. The principal that everybody loved was removed from there forcibly and I was placed in the school. So when I initially got there I only had two speaking to me out of a staff of about a hundred. I'd say, "Good morning" and they'd ignore me and I'd have to turn around and go, "I know you were busy and didn't hear me but good morning," and force them to speak to me. By the first year I had turned around half the staff. (Olutimileyin)

Olutimileyin also discussed the challenges of insularity and staffing she experienced in her education leadership role stating,

> And the second challenge I would have is that because we live in an insular territory, I have to take whatever [staff] I get and it's not always the [staff] that you get. I mean, one, it's already one big joke to send—anything [anyone] that anybody else doesn't want is sent to my school. (Olutimileyin)

Akanbi shared his experience of being denied roles due to politics. He mentioned the following related to politics and preferential hiring based on birthplace or "born here" concerns:

> [Politics] is first. It is one of the big [challenges]. They never forget you. … [I] was promised that I would go to [school name omitted] as a principal there. But there was a lot of island politics, [people saying] that I'm not born here, I shouldn't be given the larger junior high school. And I was a bit disturbed, because, prior to that, I was told I would go there, and the fact that I worked there before, I was looking forward to going back there. (Akanbi)

Akanbi continued the story describing that a family of another principal made a call lobbying for a relative to get the position he was promised. Akanbi recalled,

> [She said] she should get [the position] because I am not from here; I'm from [name of island omitted], and she was born here. Okay? So it was determined by the governor that was a great moment to move me. So when I got that last-minute e-mail notice, and they were rushing to make sure it was 10 days before the end of school year, because you should be told at least 10 days before the end of school year. (Akanbi)

Morenikeji also spoke of experiences of dealing with ill treatment related to "born here" or "demographics" in the USVI stating,

> Very candidly, some of it is actually demographics, because of the fact that every so often—it's unfortunate, but it rears its ugly head by virtue of the fact that I was not born here. It sounds trivial, but it's a fact. ... That, in itself, presents a challenge because there are some people who go that route and make these comments. … Unfortunately, it is something that was actually more rampant years ago. They actually referred to persons who were not born in the U.S. Virgin Islands as "aliens." They refer to those persons derogatively. Somehow, there was the feeling that everybody who came from one of the Caribbean Islands to the Virgin Islands only came here because you couldn't do any better and you needed to make yourself economically better by coming here, and that's not always the case. Because that was perpetrated, it's been passed down from grandmother to mother to children to grandchildren, so that sometimes you find that people say it without even stopping to think of the ramifications of what they're saying or where it came from. … Another term they would use is, "You island people." Not stopping to consider the fact that St. Thomas is an island, St. Croix is an island, and St. John is an island. ... "You island people." That, too, raises its ugly head. Even working here, I have two other administrators: one is from [Eastern Caribbean island name omitted] and one is from [Eastern Caribbean island name omitted]. I've heard it since I'm here, "Three island people here running the school." (Morenikeji)

Enirotimi spoke about challenges related to the "uncontrollables" in selection and staffing in the USVI context. He described being particularly concerned with the "frequency of change" at the commission level of the VIDOE:

> On the level of the Department of Education, working at the Department of Education, I think the dynamics of employment, the way how people are selected for positions, the idea of how much you can't control. I mean, I think that's a big aspect of it. I think the frequency of change at the level of the commissioner is really one that troubles me, because pretty much every election you have a new commissioner and maybe even in between, depending on the relationship of the commissioner to the governor and whether or not the governor is pleased with his or her performance. So I remember working at the Department of Education. Let's see, I was there for 8 years, 1995 to 2003. I think in that 8-year period we probably had six people who were either acting commissioners or commissioners during that tenure. I mean, that averages what, about a year and something for each person. And yeah, it was six because I've counted them several times. So when that happens, you have the question of whether you can have any consistency in your approach to solving problems because each person comes in with new ideas, a new agenda, a different frame of reference about what is important, a different understanding of what has been done, what has been

> accomplished, what the challenges are. So that was a major issue for me. (Enirotimi)

In summary, the majority of the participants in this study cited "politics" or political appointment of key personnel as the primary contributing factor to the challenges they face as education leaders in the USVI. Over half of the participants spoke of being personally victimized by unfair hiring practices. Those participants who experienced these challenges mentioned lack of qualified person and strained interpersonal relations as two of the primary consequences associated with these unfair hiring practices.

Systemic Challenges

The participants mentioned various systemic challenges as leaders in USVI public education institutions. Four leaders cited fiscal concerns as another great challenge in the USVI context. Asabi mentioned the challenges she experienced with inadequate resources and creating facilities that are conducive to learning:

> The challenges are always having the necessary materials and supplies and equipment in the classrooms. That is always the challenge. The challenge is that we never have the necessary components to teach from, so the textbooks and the workbooks and the music instruments, and those things are always a problem. … But … the biggest challenge I was saying is the facility, you know. Our schools in the Virgin Islands need to be conducive to our children learning. And I remember I had been away to an arts conference one year and the arts coordinator at the microphone said she could never understand it. Here we bring these beautiful children into the world and then we drop them off to schools that do not look conducive to learning, and we do nothing about it. Well, you know, the challenge is that we need to always insure that our classrooms are conducive to the learning that we want to take place, and I've worked really hard on that. When I got here there were classrooms, they may have had air conditioners that were rusted or not working, so all our classrooms' air conditioners are now working. (Asabi)

Akanji spoke of four major challenges he experienced as a member of the VIBOE. He spoke of four systemic challenges that impacted USVI public education: school accreditation, facilities, fiscal transparency, and curriculum:

> It was precisely during that board tenure that we had this great hurdle of dealing with high schools struggling with the accreditation and the implementation of No Child Left Behind. It was a very important space and it was a task of the board to insure that teachers were certified, which was a struggle because such a position that is as easy as many perceive, to push for certification of teachers the board had to make sure that its policies were well laid out, that teachers knew what was desired of them. The board would have to also assist with planning resources to assist teachers in acquiring, whether it's college classes or continuing credits, whatever it took so that the teachers can be prepared. Even more, the board had to be firm and be willing to essentially weed out nonperforming instructors. That was a very difficult task and the board began it then. I'm not sure if it was completely successful because it was an ongoing process. It's not a finite issue.
>
> The second issue is the board had to be vigilant on the issue of school facilities. Many of our facilities were damaged due to hurricanes in 1990s and the board had to be very vigilant that the repair teams that were fixing these school facilities were not just doing substandard patchwork but were trying their best to make sure that the infrastructure was acceptable and allowed a healthy, safe learning environment. That's a very important issue. In fact Middle States demanded that our school facilities be revisited because some of them were quite decrepit.
>
> A third issue too was the board tried its best to improve the fiscal situation by holding the commissioner's foot to the fire in terms of having some transparency with spending, but that was very difficult because the way our system is, the commissioner is answerable only to the governor. But the board tried to create a new culture to allow better transparency.
>
> And fourth, and this is the biggest issue, is the issue of curriculum. The board had approved a curriculum in 2000 and it was in the process of revisiting that curriculum but it was incomplete, because we weren't quite sure, you know, how to get the best of both worlds, which is to have the most modern curriculum that's equivalent to the mainland and adaptable to the Caribbean context. So we were trying to be very proactive in moving the education system forward. (Akanji)

Omobolaji experienced other related systemic challenges in her role at the VIBOE. She described the challenges related to bureaucratic systems, the slow rate of change, and the current job market:

> Our biggest challenge is that our reform movement is going too slowly. The system—outside of block scheduling, which didn't happen when I was in high school—is basically the same. And guess what? In some areas, it actually has gone backwards because the vocational ed program is like—they call it career technical ed, so make sure you've got the right lingo. But it means squat when you see the condition of our labs. It's really terrible. Terrible. I went from years where I used to teach boys all afternoon. I'd have three classes of 27 boys,

> because they were all taking shop in the morning. Now, the shop programs have just plummeted. The places are run down. The student involvement is next to nothing. It's just a disaster. … Yeah, down at a time when you need to be graduating students with a skill. … It's just ridiculously hard. … When we graduated from high school and college, you could just run to the U.S. with your paper [degree] in your hand and people would hire you. You'd have 15 jobs to choose from. Now, all of that has changed. With all my credentials and all my experience, I can't go anyplace and get a teaching job. They're laying off teachers all over the U.S. (Omobolaji)

The participants in this study discussed the many systemic challenges they faced in their roles as education leaders. Many of the systemic challenges cited were those that appeared to be out of the participants' personal sphere of influence such as supplies and facilities issues, navigating bureaucratic, highly centralized government systems, and the state of the economy.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

The participants reported employing a variety of strategies to overcome many of the challenges they faced as leaders. Some of the concerns related to the dynamics of employment in the USVI; public education seemed to be uncontrollable, or at least outside of many of the participants' direct spheres of influence. Therefore, the participants focused their energies on the things under their direct control: being good leaders and working closely with their teams to positively impact results at their sites. By focusing on being the best they could be and working well with their teams, they were able to overcome or at least mitigate some of the negative impact associated with the issues related to politics and political selections.

Omobolaji spoke of politics and education in the USVI stating,

> When I hear people talking about taking politics out of education, how is it possible? I'm sitting here in an office with nine people who are elected. Give me a break! It's not possible. What you have to do is mitigate it to the point where it works in your favor and not to your detriment. (Omobolaji)

Akanbi spoke of having a "fighting spirit" and being prepared academically and sufficiently self-assured to overcome challenges:

> Well, I think for me, for me, I've got a very strong background in education. I've studied history, sociology … but I'm very comfortable with me. Besides, I think I inherited a lot of my father's characteristics. My father was a fighter, a man who was assured in himself, and I think I'm very assured of me. I'm, you know ... And I'm comfortable fighting too [if I have to fight]. (Akanbi)

When asked about strategies employed to overcome challenges Enitan stated,

> As a good administrator you must be able to take a sensible risk, be a risk taker. I don't care what the authorities say. If I see that is going to compromise operations, I'm going to be a risk taker. (Enitan)

The four participants who served as principals during the research period spoke of having collaborative leadership styles and making themselves available to teachers and staff. To drive positive change in the midst of challenges, these leaders put academics first, sought commitment from teachers and staff on new initiatives and worked collaboratively to accomplish goals.

As previously mentioned, the VIDOE was experiencing many fiscal challenges. As a result of these challenges, the department was forced to enter a third-party fiduciary agreement with the USDOE. Several leaders involved in this study were particularly adept and creative in overcoming some of their fiscal challenges experienced at the school level. Asabi spoke about proper justification of needs, stating, "I ask, I justify, I write. … Provide the data, always provide the necessary data, and that's what I do" (Asabi). She described her experience, presenting a solid justification for needs to receive Title V funds for a school project:

> My school-improvement team wanted cameras for our teachers in the classroom. We wanted to purchase cameras, these little cameras. That's what we wanted and we wanted one for every teacher so that when they are doing educational projects or, like last week, Friday we had our STEM Fair, our Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics STEM Fair. We wanted the teachers to be able to

> record those experiences in their classrooms. And we sent the requisition through and they denied our use of the Title V funds for the project. And they said, "You have to justify the need." So we went up online and we found the research, we found several school districts that use this to document their programs and their projects and their activities where school children are involved. And as a result, their classes did better in their standardized scores and made their adequate yearly progress. Why? Because from year to year they show a growth in their projects and activities. Their curriculum components that they teach in the classroom are moved further each step of the way because they're documenting and they are able to show the documentation through pictures and through having the necessary information to share with the community and with parents. (Asabi)

When unable to get district and support from the superintendent to develop a new athletic program, Olutimileyin solicited support from the private sector. She described using her relationship skills:

> I had to go and find private sponsors to make this happen, and that's what I'm very good at. I have a husband that has a very good relationship with businesses and individuals in the community and when I can't [get district funds/support], I can use him for contacts. (Olutimileyin)

Both Asabi and Olutimileyin spoke of lobbying the legislature to receive fiscal support for programs. They also spoke about the creative use of federal funding to get the support they needed to drive academic success.

The leaders in this study also spoke of harnessing the power of collaboration in dealing effectively with systemic challenges. Those participants who worked at the systemic level (VIBOE/VIDOE) discussed hard work and collaboration to solve the issues. Enirotimi spoke of using a combination of preparation, experience, and relationship building to overcome challenges:

> Well, I think from my personal standpoint, one would be the kind of education and preparation that I had had, the experience, my personal connection with the system. And I think I have a great ability to negotiate relationships and to build consensus among people. I think I work very well with all the people with whom I find myself working with in whatever setting. (Enirotimi)

Akanji discussed USVI educational-leadership responses to several major challenges at the systemic level during the period of the study. He shared how the stakeholders rallied together to overcome challenges with the change of the commissioner, accreditation concerns, and the third-party fiduciary agreement:

> So these three things combined forced a level transformation so that despite the flaws, despite the internal problems, there was a desire to resolve the issues in some form or some fashion. And with that in place, the board did its best to expedite any reform that the external forces demanded. So if the Federal Department of Education wanted the board to expedite certification, the board did it. If they wanted the board to assist in much more vigilant intervention on school visits, they did everything that was necessary to make sure that the system functioned. And at the end … every stakeholder began to take the Department of Education much more seriously and we started to see some forward movement and the inertia started to be put to the wayside for a while. And with a new commissioner, [name omitted], there was a concerted effort to address every single problem that was before the Department of Education. There was a real desire to fix the problem. (Akanji)

Morenikeji discussed challenges she experienced related to working with parents and low expectations of students,

> One of the challenges is dealing with adults. … Even with your staff, very often adults don't like to be told where they're going wrong, and it's always the students who are "at fault." It's very difficult sometimes to get some adults to recognize where they need to make a paradigm shift in what they do or how they do things, because they don't take that in a very welcoming way. Then you do have some parents who it's a little difficult to reach them, in terms of trying to get them to see what they should be doing with their child to help the child to achieve success. We've come across so many parents that sometimes abdicate their responsibility to the school and just feel like, "I took you to school and that's it. I expect the school to take over from there." So that's one of the problems I see with some of the parents, recognizing that children learn a lot from what adults do, so we have to be cognizant of the examples we set for them, the way we speak to them, the places we take them, what they hear and things like that. (Morenikeji)

When asked how she was able to overcome the challenges she encountered, Morenikeji stated the following:

> I don't know if it's a matter of overcoming, but it's just the mindset I have. I enjoy what I do. I honestly think that I can make a difference. So with those two things in mind—making a difference, enjoying what you do and making a

> difference—I'm talking about a difference in the lives of our youngsters. No matter where I work, that is actually what drives me every day. As I tell people, I actually get a literal high coming to work. (Morenikeji)

The participants in this study clearly described the challenges they faced as public education leaders in the USVI and they also articulated their ability to overcome these challenges. These leaders cited working collaboratively and relationship building as keys to mitigating and overcoming challenges. They also mentioned the importance of creativity and developing solid business cases to overcome various fiscal concerns.

Summary of Research Question 2 Findings

The second research question in this study explored the challenges experienced by key USVI public education leaders. The first theme that emerged from the findings was the influence of politics on employment in the USVI context. The second theme that emerged was the systemic challenges that impacted educational leadership in the USVI. The third theme that emerged related to strategies used to mitigate and overcome challenges. The participants in this study used a myriad of strategies to overcome the various challenges they experienced as education leaders in the USVI. Although some of the challenges seemed insurmountable, these leaders shared a personal determination and will to work at both the site and systems levels to impact positive change in public education in the USVI.

Findings: Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, To what extent have the U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgins Islands' educational system? This question sought to understand how key education leaders experienced the impact of federal mandates on their roles as leaders and to understand the factors that contributed to the achievement of AYP in some USVI public schools. The findings from Question 3 were organized by the

following themes: Federal Education Mandates in the USVI Context and Academic Success Strategies.

Federal Education Mandates in the USVI Context

All participants reported that the U.S. federal mandates on education significantly impacted the Virgin Islands educational system and their roles as leaders. The participants' overall perceptions of the impacts of the mandates varied from negative to positive. Even those participants who largely perceived the impacts as negative believed the mandates had some positive aspect. Enitan and Akanbi perceived the federal mandates on education as primarily having a negative impact on education in the USVI. Enitan elaborated on his impressions of federal education mandates negatively impacting the system from as early as 1960:

> And their input in the system—Americanized the system—from that point on we've been having problems, from that point on, where [our] rigid education system was watered down to what we have now. And for the sake [of] federal funding, you could get federal funding if you do this [or that]… There are some states like Utah, and those states take very little federal funds because they want to remain in control. Because remember the Constitution placed education under the domain of the states. But the states take the federal funds to ease their budget and we have done the same thing here and accept all kind of changes that are culturally different than what [we] experience is going on. And when you asked me that question it just burned me because they mess up the whole damn system. (Enitan)

Enitan expressed his displeasure of the "Americanization" of the USVI public education system due to federal mandates and he also believed the No Child Left Behind Act was ineffective and not well supported. He believed the act was damaging due to the "risk of not being in compliance" and "what [non-compliance] meant in terms of receiving federal dollars." He agreed with current President Obama's intention of modifying the act to make it more effective.

Akanbi echoed Enitan's sentiments regarding the "Americanization" of the USVI education system. He referred to the impact as "recolonization" stating passionately,

> They've really shifted education here, and that is probably part of the big thrust in culture shift, because some of the people who are coming in are looking at this area not as a place with its own culture; they're looking and seeing a place that needs to be more Americanized. And they're bringing in more and more people, and that's the attitude. It's recolonization. … You set your mandates up, but an island community is different from the United States. … The other thing, which has been pointed out, and has been pointed out in—exams, which are set in the United States, have cultural differences. (Akanbi)

Although Akanbi also expressed his displeasure with education mandates, he did not appear to be completely against the mandates and testing:

> Okay. I'm not saying that some of the mandates are bad, because you see, a lot of your—some of the—the leaders in education have not—they are not leaders; they don't do what they ought to do, period. And, as a leader, you have to become efficient, you have to lead, you have to have vision where you are going. And so some of those mandates push them in those directions. So, in that case, yes. But the mandates which are going to change you to become somebody else, I have problems with those. (Akanbi)

Akanbi also mentioned seeing an improvement in K–3 student reading since the mandates.

Omobolaji believed the mandates were "punitive" in the USVI context stating,

> I guess I'm not the person to talk about the feds, because I think they are extremely punitive on the Virgin Islands, and it's simply because they still look at us as a colony. … So [the feds] just inundate us with a lot of—see, we get a lot of federal money, but it all comes with strings. It's how fast we can dance. (Omobolaji)

Omobolaji mentioned several challenges related to implementing federal mandates in the USVI but reported overall improvements in systems stating, "At first [implementation of federal mandates] was very problematic, but I've seen systematic improvement in our department functions."

Olutimileyin said the following regarding the impact of federal mandates:

> I think the No Child Left Behind Act is an excellent act. … Its intent was great and still is great and it's that it's trying to break the achievement gap. And No Child Left Behind was to help bridge that gap. So in its intent it was excellent.

Although Olutimileyin believed in the intent of the No Child Left Behind Act, she believed it lacked adequate resources and she perceived obvious gaps in implementation in the USVI:

> My problem with acts like No Child Left Behind, and even like the mandates that we're under now in terms of cleaning up how we apply for federal funds, matching programs, making sure the programs are innovative programs and comply with the mandates, which is something that wasn't done before 2007, but their intent is great; but no program should ever be put in place and it is not fully funded or you don't provide all the resources you need. We were getting new textbooks in the district. We're not going to get the textbooks now. They've ordered the textbooks. They're going to be holding the textbooks for a year. Now you know how quickly things change in textbooks. … No Child Left Behind said every elementary classroom should have reduced class sizes. Here in the Virgin Islands we're bulking up classes to 30 children per class. It doesn't make sense. No Child Left Behind says every elementary classroom should have a paraprofessional or a teacher's aide, particularly in kindergarten. Virgin Islands government says, "No, we can't afford to hire all those people." Even though they just got funding, they took large amounts of money for that Teacher Recovery Act, on our funding, and we still haven't gotten additional teachers. They shut a school and they're trying to figure out what to do with all the teachers. (Olutimileyin)

Of those who felt these mandates had some negative impact on education, the participants seemed to be most concerned with the rigidness of the mandates and the lack of attention to the unique structure of the USVI public education system as a mitigating factor to successful implementation. Morenikeji described her experiences with the impact of federal education mandates as "challenging," particularly due to the nuances associated with implementation in the USVI public education context:

> I can understand where the federal government is coming from with respect to accountability, both financially and academically. But at the same time, it can be challenging in light of the fact that we are a territory that's unique, that's different from most states. The way we function is very different. For example, here, the board doesn't run the schools. In the States, the boards run the school. The

> funding for schools is different here than it is in the States, but we are under the same mandates that the regular states go through. (Morenikeji)

Morenikeji further described the differences in funding and structural differences in pubic education in the USVI:

> When I say "funding," what I mean is that here whatever funds come into schools, if it's not federal funds, all local funds come from what the senators and the governor decide is the allotment for the Department of Education. Whereas in the States, a lot of it comes from property taxes, which some areas have versus other areas and that type of funding. And as a result, it lends itself to our different type of structure within the school system. For example, the superintendents here and the commissioners serve at the pleasure of the governor. They don't have that in the States. But at the same time, the federal funding that's given relates to Title III, Title I or whatever. They put their rules and guidelines in place, oblivious of how the structure of the education system actually is. That makes a difference. (Morenikeji)

Enirotimi believed many of the challenges experienced by USVI education leaders on mandates had many positive results at the systems level. He believed challenges such as mandated associated with compliance agreements provided an opportunity for U.S. Department of Education officials to recognize the uniqueness of implementation of federal mandates in the USVI:

> Well I think during the tenure we had a lot of interaction with the federal government because we were in a compliance agreement with the Division of Special Education: we had a compliance agreement with the overall Department, we had the issues of teacher certification, which certainly involved, required federal input. … When you hear people talk about well the federal government this or the federal government, it's almost like this federal government is a big brother kind of thing and they know how to fix everything. And but I don't think that. I mean, I think they're just human beings just like everybody else and sometimes they're lax in terms of following through and follow-up and so forth. But I think when we had so many challenges, when they were involved on so many levels; it was also a great opportunity to help them recognize the challenges that we face in the Virgin Islands. (Enirotimi)

The aforementioned findings describe participants feeling that mandates had both positive and negative impacts on education in the territory. Akanji agreed with the dual nature of the federal mandates:

> Federal mandates are two-edged machetes. On one hand they're good in a sense that they demand at a local—for public schools rise to a certain national standard and it forces us to be within the same society, the same culture, the same civilization of other Americans. And in that sense it is good. So it keeps us somewhat in sync. The negative aspect is when these mandates do not come with any funding or the funding that they offer is based upon a biannual budget or is based upon the presumption that we can pay for the program and then get reimbursed by the federal government later. And that's the problem. The difficult part is execution of the program and that's where I see a problem. (Akanji)

One leader involved in the study perceived the U.S. federal mandates as having an overwhelming positive impact on education in the territory. Asabi mentioned the importance of federal mandates and the positive impacts stating,

> the mandates are important for our children; for example, the first time that we had a mandate that our schools have to pass standardized tests, you know? We had never done standardized tests in the territory. Then [there was] another mandate to meet the adequate yearly progress.

Although Asabi discussed concerns related to budgeting federal funds, she had a positive perception of the impact of federal mandates and she felt the mandates had a positive impact in student achievement. She also discussed setting goals at her school beyond what was expected according to AYP.

The findings reflect the significant impact of U.S. federal mandates on participants' roles as leaders in USVI public education. Although the data reflect significant concerns regarding implementation of these mandates in the USVI, the mandates have increased accountability in the public education system, raised expectations, and resulted in positive student outcomes.

Academic-Success Strategies

As previously noted in the findings from Research Question 1, participants shared a belief in the USVI public education system and in their students' abilities to succeed. Their belief in the system and their students was further reiterated in their reflections

related to the impact of federal mandates in general and the achievement of AYP in particular. For example, Enitan shared that education leaders in the USVI had always been fighting to raise student achievement and he felt AYP was an "appendage to what we were trying to accomplish."

The leaders in this study shared several success strategies for positive student achievement and achieving AYP in the territory. When asked how she was able to achieve AYP, Asabi stated,

> How was I able to do it? Like I told you, I love children. That's number one. The joy of children is what gives me my wake-up call every day, even if I am sick. … Well then you have to be there every day for them. The joy of these children coming every day! … Meeting adequate yearly progress, staying on top of the teachers, supporting them to the hilt. That's what you want to do. You want to insure that they have all the necessary components with which to teach and having a great conducive environment with which to teach from. That's tops in my books. And being there for them. (Asabi)

Asabi expressed a pride in her students as she reflected on her experiences of running into former students at the airport during summer break and hearing them proudly declare their intention to go college. Asabi also spoke of the need to affirm students, especially African American males, and give them confidence in their abilities:

> You've got to tell them from kindergarten that they're going to college. African American males are in crisis in our islands. They're killing each other. And you've got to tell them from the time they're born that they're going to college, you've got to continue to stress that they're going to do very well, that they are bright and gifted, just like everybody else. They're not dumb and stupid. Our children are not. So we've got to move them forward by telling them positive things all the way. (Asabi)

Akanbi spoke of the importance of solid leadership and good staffing in academic achievement:

> [The principal has] to get all the people on board, in terms of your teachers. You need good staff—that is important—because if you've got poor staff, you have to do monitoring. Not going over with a big stick, but you have to let people know: there are deadlines; there are things you have to do. And you have to get good

> academic leaders, like … the reading coach or the math coach, people who can go in the classroom, see what's happening, work with the teachers; people who can work with the teachers, getting them on task and in line. … Those are important, as a principal. (Akanbi)

Akanbi mentioned the necessity of setting clear goals and effectively communicating those goals to his team to get commitment and drive success. He also spoke of striving to inspire his staff and students every day.

Morenikeji believed that a "shift" in teaching had to be made to harness academic success. She discussed the importance of using teaching best practices to help her team achieve AYP:

> I guess we have to sit down and look at, what are best practices in teaching? That's what we really have to look at and implement those best practices. It's not easy because, again, you have to make that paradigm shift. If you went to school and a teacher taught you one way, most people have a tendency to teach the way their teachers taught them. Then you find that you have to make that shift in what you do. You have to be more accountable for students. You have to make sure that our low-performance students get the intervention that's needed to help them to do better. A lot of times we taught more to the whole class, and the shift now has to be made to understand that, yes, you can teach the whole class, but you have to also remember that after a while you've lost the entire class if you talk too much. The chalk and talk no longer works. We are living in a digital age, so we have to make that shift in recognizing that we have to teach our children, recognizing that they are digital learners. That's a shift that has to be made. (Morenikeji)

Morenikeji also discussed the importance of supporting teacher development and leveraging instructional teams for success stating, "You can't do it by yourself. You have to have that instructional team that's going to help you. Instructional teams can be, for example, literacy coaches, math teacher leaders, so they fit into the picture of helping."

Omobolaji spoke of very stable teaching staff and positive mindsets of some teachers and leaders stating,

> There are some schools, I swear, they just have good attitudes But that's what I've found. I've found good attitudes, good parent support, and I've found principals who drive academic programs … those principals who drive academics every day.

> What I've seen are just teachers who are committed, and when the innovations come, they go from the PD [professional development] to the implementation. A lot of our PD stops at the PD. Maybe we might have one or two people who might implement, but the schools that do best are the ones that get the PD and then the principal insists they use the techniques and the different approaches. That really drives [success].

Omobolaji also spoke of the importance of alternative teacher-certification programs and training for academic success.

When asked how her school made AYP, Olutimileyin stated, "You know, we focus instruction." She described the strategies she used at the beginning of each school year to drive success at her school:

> I don't like to meet with large groups when I need to focus teachers' attention—and I'm going to meet by grade level and we're going to take our [Virgin Islands Territorial Assessment of Learning] scores, and this has been a very large part of our success. You have principals that cannot read data. At my school we use data to drive instruction. And the first meeting I'm going to have with my teachers, my literacy coach, my math coach and the counselor, is to look at how each grade level did. We look at the grade-level scores, first of all, and look at the skills that these children are lacking in and the skills that the children do well in. … This is done when the teachers first come back, before the children come into school. We use a morning, we do that and then the teachers, we look at their class roster and we give them the scores. Because remember, it's another grade. The second graders are now third graders. We'll give the third-grade teacher the scores of the children that she had, the composite that actually shows her where their strengths were, where their weaknesses are. Now she can then, with the help of the lit coach or the math coach, if she can't do it on her own, she can then target instruction in those weak areas. We're not teaching to the test because we're not looking at the test. We are looking at skill levels … and that's a big distinction. … Oh, no, we don't teach to the test. That's stupid. Because when they change the test—you know, they could change the test tomorrow and your kids will do poorly. You want to attack the skill level and that's important, so that it doesn't translate in increased test scores alone, because that's important but it also addresses itself or shows itself in daily performance. (Olutimileyin)

The aforementioned findings are those of participants who reflected on various strategies they implemented as principals that lead to academic success and achieving AYP. They all reported being very involved on a regular basis in the academics and they all had high expectations of their staff and students.

Enirotimi spoke of academic success from his experience at the systems level, working with and observing school leaders:

> Well I think from my experience, I had personal experience with some of the principals and they were very, very dedicated to their students. And that's kind of a funny thing because then it sounds like the people who didn't were not. But just from what I found, I found them to be great team leaders. They were able to motivate the other people in their schools. I think they took personal interest in the students, I mean, activities that celebrated the students when they made AYP and that put them in the spotlight, I think, making the students understand how important it was to them to [achieve AYP]. (Enirotimi)

Enirotimi recalled his role with the USVI Department of Education and strategies for success and further highlighted the impact of strong principals:

> When I left the Department, I think we had spent a lot of time with the adoption of the testing instruments, augmenting them to suit our curriculum and our system. We spent a lot of time building teams within the schools, school-improvement teams and identifying resources that were needed at the schools. And I think those principals who stayed at the forefront of that were more comfortable with what the requirements were and were more comfortable in their ability and confidence to meet those goals. And I think when you have the information and when you believe that you can do it and you convey that to other people who are working with you and you pull in, too, community resources, you know, getting businesses to help you, whether the teachers are going to be working overtime maybe to bring them lunch, or whatever little thing you can get to motivate people to do better, I think all of those may be factors. Your familiarity with the testing instruments, your familiarity with your own curriculum, your willingness to tweak it and to get in the classrooms, look at lesson plans and pull teachers up where you need to and give them the support where you need to, I think all of those are probably factors in them doing well. (Enirotimi)

Akanji also spoke about AYP achievement and academic success from a systems perspective. He observed commitment on the part of key USVI public education stakeholders. He believed these stakeholders were able to seize the opportunities they were given to succeed and attributed the success to "consensus and will" stating, education leaders

> were wise enough to realize that there's a period in which they can get things done and they seized the moment and they were able to use the period and use

> their connections to whomever in the system or in the government or in the society to actually make it happen.

Akanji also believed smaller classes and parental involvement could contribute to school success in the USVI.

Enitan mentioned the importance of strategic partnerships for success. He spoke about the development of a strategic partnership with UVI to positively impact student achievement and reduce the need to remediate students at the college level. All participants who spoke of academic success from the perspective of their roles at the systems level of USVI public education specifically mentioned principals and strong school leadership as key factors in academic success and AYP achievement in the Territory.

Summary of Research Question 3 Findings

The third research question in this study explored the impact of U.S. federal education mandates in the USVI. The first theme that emerged from the findings was leaders' perceptions of the impact of federal education mandates in the USVI. Positive experiences were primarily connected to raising expectations of education teams and students. Even those participants who largely perceived the impacts as negative believed the mandates yielded at least some small measure of success or improvement on academics. Overall experiences were negative in regard to implementation yet positive in improving student outcomes. The second theme that emerged related to strategies education leaders used to achieve academic success and AYP. Solid school leadership and collaboration were cited as important factors in academic success.

Findings: Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was, What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change? This question sought to discover what USVI educational leaders valued most about themselves as leaders and what they valued most about their teams and institutions. This question also endeavored to uncover their impressions of the USVI public education system's greatest strengths and opportunities and its implications for positive change. The findings from this question are organized by the following themes: Leadership Attributes, Abilities, and Styles; Perceptions of Value; and Strengths, Opportunities, and Collective Vision.

Leadership Attributes, Abilities, and Styles

The leaders in this study were asked to put humility aside and consider what they valued most about their abilities as leaders. The participants' responses appeared to reflect a combination of their attributes and abilities as leaders and their unique leadership styles. When asked what she valued most about herself as a leader, Asabi valued "knowing the academics" and her ability to "wear many hats." She also spoke about being a good student herself and how she worked to appease her teachers. In addition, she valued her ability to know "where to take students," building on their unlimited potential. Asabi considered herself a lifelong learner:

> Learning is a lifelong experience. It doesn't stop just because you're in elementary school and it won't stop when you go on to junior high and high school. It is a lifelong process and experience, and [I] am still studying up to today. (Asabi)

Akanbi spoke of valuing his ability to overcome many challenges in life. He recalled his humble beginnings. Although he was unable to attend high school due to

economic reasons, his family valued education greatly. He recalled his early excitement about education; his persistence and overall enjoyment of academic development:

> I think my experiences, having started in [island name omitted] a very humble situation. Like I said, I didn't go to high school. And I challenged myself along the way. I look back, and maybe—I look back—my parents. You know, I had a sister who went to high school, and she would bring home the live books, and she would read to us at night, and that got me excited in education, reading. And so when the library came—would come once a week in my area—but my mother—my father would be out, especially on weekends, you know—my mother would buy drinks and would share the drinks, and we would sit around and listen to my sister as she read the books, and which was really exciting for us. But one thing, although my father wasn't there for that, if I said to my father—my father was a carpenter, but he also worked the land, grew cotton, sugarcane, and so on—but when he sold his crops, and I said, "Daddy, I want a book," he never said to me, "No." And that's where I came from. It wasn't easy; it was a struggle for me. But I've held my own, became a teacher in [neighboring island] that went on to Teachers College … and had a lot of friends who, while I was a young teacher, we used to compete with one another in terms of academics. So we challenged one another in terms of geography, English, and so on. And that's where I came from. So academic development has always been something that—has always been something that I enjoy. (Akanbi)

Although this interview question did not explicitly ask leaders to describe their particular leadership styles, several leaders valued their unique style of leadership. Morenikeji spoke about making adjustments to her leadership approach to fit various situations she encounters as a leader:

> I think it's just my leadership style, the way I reach out to people, talk to people. That's what I think it is. You've got to get people on board, behind you, and you have to find a way to do it so that they take ownership of what has to be done and don't start to think, "Well, I'm not doing it for you. We are all in this together, doing it for the children." That's what I try to get across.
>
> There are times when you have to be authoritative. There are times when you have to have that collaboration. And there are times when you have to just sit back and let them take ownership and lead. And I think it's just a matter of recognizing when each moment is—what is needed for the moment and let that tend to flow. (Morenikeji)

Morenikeji also valued having a "personal touch" with her team and working to build and sustain successful collegial relationships:

> And I think you also have to have that personal touch, because I also live with the premise that I will not get you to produce if I don't make you feel that I value you as a person. If you're having other situations that I can help you with—for example, illness in your family or you being ill or something—if I can't help you with that, then you're not going to give me the best in the classroom. (Morenikeji)

Morenikeji further shared an example of the type of care and consideration she has for her team, coupled with a sincere desire to serve them:

> I try to be that person who reaches out to you. It doesn't mean people always cherish it, but I don't have a problem picking up the phone and calling you and saying, "I haven't seen you at work for the past few days. I realize you've called in sick. I'm just checking to see how you're feeling." If you come to tell me you have a situation, like your mum has been just diagnosed with cancer, I make it my business to touch base with you and find out how things are going, and even sometimes dig deep and find something I can say that can be of some comfort, that help you. That's me because I want the best from you, but if I make you feel that I only need you to come to work, and as long as you're here and give me what you have to give me and I don't need to hear anything else outside, then after a while it makes people feel that, "As long as her work gets done, she doesn't care." And then people begin to shut down, and I don't want that, so I really try to reach out to people. Make them realize that I care about the whole you. (Morenikeji)

Omobolaji valued her ability to sustain long-term relationships. She described the benefits of having "educational tentacles" stating,

> I am a great networker. It's nothing for me to pick up the phone and call … I could go to the custodial level in schools with friendships I've had all my life. … You need them. You need educational tentacles. I know children from [since they were] children. … There are still a lot of people at UVI I know. There are still a lot of people at the high school and elementary level that I know. A lot of them now are my former students. So when I want to know what's going on at [school name omitted], I call up [name omitted] who was in my class in high school and at UVI. (Omobolaji)

Enitan valued his ability to be a demanding leader with high expectations for his team and himself:

> I think if you read my biography, I'm very demanding. I don't settle for mediocrity. I'd be satisfied if you give me your best even though you were not successful, but you demonstrated your best. If I can give you my best, I expect that of you. And I think that's what people would say. "He was no nonsense." I demand the best of you because I'm going to give you my best. If I could come to

> work every day, you could come to work every day. As I told you earlier, I worked for 25 years, day and night. And if I can do that, you can do that. I told a teacher one time, I said, "Man, you're wasting the government time. You're supposed to be teaching. Do you want me to teach and take your pay?" I didn't intend to be rude but I wanted to make a point that you're here not for the glory. You're here to create an impression, [develop] impressionable minds, and that requires being sincere, forthright, and do the job. (Enitan)

Enitan also spoke of his leadership style not being "traditional" and favoring collaboration; making adjustments to one's leadership style as needed:

> You'll run the risk of being a traditionalist. That's why some principals here gets in trouble; because they feel that because of the principal, they have jurisdiction and all the ideas, a monopoly on all the ideas, and feel as though they're weak if they go to the staff and ask for opinions or share decisions. They don't want that. So the thing is that you must—and this is important because then you're studying leadership. The thing is that you must decide, as an administrator, what type of leadership or leadership styles you think would be appropriate for a particular school. (Enitan)

Olutimileyin highly valued her spirit of discernment and her ability to "cut through the B.S. cause I don't really have time." Olutimileyin also spoke of valuing her persistence and determination stating, "If people tell me I can't do something, that's when I find ways to get it done." She also believed much of her success could be attributed to a very strong support system. Olutimileyin also spoke of having a sincere belief in every child's ability to achieve academic success and she felt that this belief in children and their ability was a determining factor in learning success:

> That we believe, truly believe that our children can achieve. I think that's one of the single most deciding factors in a classroom that can determine whether learning takes place or not. You have to believe that the children will learn. (Olutimileyin)

When asked what he valued most about himself as a leader, Enirotimi described overcoming a feeling of being an "outsider" and discovering a new sense of belonging and commitment to the society,

> Well you know, I came to this place and for a long time I felt like an outsider and I think the first challenge for me was to not feel like that anymore. And so when you kind of come in from that place, then you embrace the society and you want to see the best for it. And so I think that's where I would begin, you know, wanting the best for this place, which is my home, and coming from a background of people, my parents and my grandparents, who put a really, really great emphasis on education. I mean, my grandparents did not believe that education was going to get you a better job. They didn't think you were going to make more money because you had an education. They thought an education made you a better person, you know, made you a better human being. And so I value that. And so when I see children who do not, who might not be exposed to people who make them think that, then that is troublesome for me and I want to be a part of a system that tells them that this is what education is about, this is what it does. It makes you a better person. And I feel like I was very fortunate in the system here. The teachers I had were absolutely wonderful teachers. The principals, you know, as well. So I had a great educational experience. So the part of me that wants to give other people that, other children that, I think is my best part. I just feel I had extremely good fortune, I had good educational opportunities and I think I work well with people and I respect and value people, and my willingness to work. I mean, if you want to work all night, you know I'm there, you know? Whatever it takes.

Akanji spoke of valuing his unique leadership attributes and his ability to handle challenges:

> Well I'm a very passionate person who's not afraid to tackle the tough issues, even if I have to stand alone. When I was in the board, I was given the task to engage in public education, public information, and I was responsible for spreading the idea of an empowered board that would govern the entire public education system. And it was a very difficult task because many people rejected it because, you know, again due to inertia, they're accustomed to the governor having immense power over the entire executive branch and the board is merely an advisory entity. Although legally it has some power, it ought to have more power. And I was willing to go throughout the community promoting the idea, trying to get people to buy into the issue, buy into the concept that the board of education ought to be in the front lines, transforming the educational system and promoting modern schools. It was a difficult task, it was an unpopular task. … I could take on this task and not take it to heart that [if] people don't, you know, like me if [when] I deal with hard issues. So I think that was an achievement even though the issue was lost. That means the people on the board never changed their mind and still it offered a different view to the general public on where we ought to go and, you know, the seeds were sewn. (Akanji)

The participants in this study all reflected on what they valued most about

themselves as leaders. The findings revealed a host of important leadership attributes held by participants. They reported being knowledgeable about academics and possessing the passion and determination to work toward education success. They further mentioned their ability to nurture and sustain long-term relations. These attributes made them more impactful in their roles as leaders in the Territory.

Perceptions of Value

The participants were also asked what they valued most about their teams and the institution of public education. The majority of responses showed participants valued their relationships with students and the learning staff. Akanbi reflected on developing effective relationships with his teachers and serving as mentor. He also said the following about the value of seeing the students grow, aspire, and dream because they have had positive role models:

> That, ultimately, there are students like the little boy I told you who said he wants to be an engineer. There are other students become doctors, lawyers, et cetera. And you meet them years older—there are children who have dreams, because they have been exposed to positive models. As a matter of fact, when I came here first, I was told that—when I come in for a formal day like this, I always wear my tie, you know? [I value] The children, and to see them grow and aspire, to see them set dreams for themselves. (Akanbi)

Akanbi also spoke about taking time out of his day to '"sit with [students],' you know, … even when they mess up, I call them to my office, and we sit down, we talk." And he asks the students, "How can I help you"? Akanbi clearly wants to serve his students and his staff and develop personal relationships with them.

Morenikeji displayed of a strong belief in public education when she discussed valuing the public education system and the students. She also echoed the sentiments Asabi noted in the previous section regarding the thought that every student can succeed; she reiterated a commitment to doing her best for the children:

> I believe in public school. … I believe that everybody can have some level of success, so I believe in the public school system and giving that level of success. Most of the people I've worked with have come to that realization, that this is what we're about in public education and we have to give it our best. We have to be an instructional team. We have to actually get our teachers on board recognizing that we are here for the children. One of the things that might seem simple, but I try to share, is that we're getting older and these are the children who are going to be either our doctors, our nurses, the gas station attendant, the cashier someplace, and we want to know that what we are putting out there, that we have to depend on later. We have given them our best, rather than something that is sloppy and we have to be hurt in the long run. And if you don't give your best, these are the ones who come sometimes as the criminals on the street and they don't take very kindly to what you did to them when they were in school. So always function with that mindset, "I've got to give them my best because I want to know that if I have to fall into their hands for whatever reason, they're going to give me their best because they remember what I did." Those are the things that make me feel that I did the right thing by people's children. That's how I want all educators to actually feel. (Morenikeji)

Olutimileyin also spoke of the necessity of leaders and educational teams having a belief in student achievement:

> That we believe, truly believe that our children can achieve: I think that's one of the single, most deciding factors in a classroom that can determine whether learning takes place or not. You have to believe that the children will learn. (Olutimileyin)

Like several of the other leaders, Olutimileyin highly valued the role of teachers in the public education system. She offered the following story related to teacher responsibilities:

> I listened to a superintendent from New Mexico one time. He talked and he had the room. And he said, "You know, one of the problems in education is that"—and let me do the short story—"is that these children come to school and they can't write their names." And people started nodding yes and he said, "They come to school and they can't say the alphabet." And they nodded yes. And he went through colors and shapes and it got louder and people were "yes, yes." He said, "You know, that's the problem right there. That's your job. Teach them." And I tell my teachers that story every year. I remind them their job is to teach. I don't want to hear about whose parent is a crack addict. I don't want to hear about whose parents don't help them to do homework. I don't care because we don't hire parents to teach. We hire teachers to teach. (Olutimileyin)

Both Asabi and Omobolaji spoke about the quality and qualifications of staff. When asked what she valued most about her team Asabi replied,

> What I value most about my team is, first of all, that they are well qualified. Many of my faculty members are certified in teaching or have passed the praxis, and that is so important. Those who didn't pass the praxis did the HOUSSE [alternative teacher-certification program], which [involves] presenting your portfolio of all your documents and all of your supporting information. (Asabi)

Omobolaji spoke of staff being "well informed," qualified and "well intentioned." She spoke about her colleagues with admiration:

> Our chair is a lifelong educator. She's a brilliant woman. She knows education. She's still teaching at UVI. She teaches in the education division. She can't be on the certification committee because she's teaching those students, but she is a visionary when it comes to education. She understands what should be happening. But, of course, she only has one vote. That's the thing. I have a couple other career educators. One is a retired superintendent. The other one is a retired principal. So they have voices that reflect long experience and so on. (Omobolaji)

Omobolaji reiterated the concern that "sometimes politics gets in the way … but I think that the board has done a rather good job of mitigating the politics so that the board can function."

Four of the participants spoke specifically about valuing their relationship with their staff, team and colleagues. Enirotimi spoke of the character of his colleagues and their work ethic:

> I worked with some very dynamic people, and most of them had a public education in their background. Most of them had attended the public schools of the Virgin Islands. We took a bashing by the public because a lot of the times people can only respond to what they see. So maybe you get bashed because the school isn't painted or the grass isn't cut or whatever, but people don't know that you're in there with these federal people, you know, just wanting not to scream, you know, right? So they don't see the part that is taking you at the level of soul and spirit. And so I think that's probably what gets my attention, the people who you work with who are undervalued and who people do not see the great strength and the great passion and commitment that they bring to what they do. And I think I was fortunate to be working with a number of individuals who were very passionate and very engaged and very involved in just trying to make things work and trying to make things better. During the period of time we had lost

> accreditation at our public high schools and the effort that it took to bring that back, I mean, that just took … we would work into the morning and would just, whether it was to prepare to meet some federal deadline for this or something from the Middle States Association or contracts, arguing with contractors about whether they had performed what we needed them to, bringing in contractors [and strategic partners] … just like tremendous work. It was tremendous effort that it required to set the stage for AYP, to do the Accountability Workbook, to do all the things that were required of the federal government, to have them review us and tell us, "No, you need to go back to this thing" or "you did very well on that thing," etc., etc. So that was a tremendous amount of work that nobody, many people—not nobody—but many people don't see. Many people are looking at the outside. Many people hear the criticisms, many people don't know if the criticisms are valid or if they are on point. (Enirotimi)

Enitan valued working with his colleagues and shared decision-making. Akanji spoke of the VIBOE as a "meaningful partner" in success and positive change in the USVI:

> The board of education has the potential and I saw in that potential that I was able to play a role of educating the public on a new board, a new and empowered board, that would tackle the issues that were before the Virgin Islands people. And even though that campaign did not lead to an empowered board, it did allow the board to become more active [so] it could play a meaningful role in the turnaround that was needed for the public schools, so that the four high schools would get accreditation and … the reforms that had to have been implemented, there was a kind of climate of change that was initiated with the board being a meaningful partner. (Akanji)

Akanji also valued the role of the institution of public education and its meaningful contribution to the society:

> Well the institution is an important entity that allows humble people, working-class people, the masses, to acquire the skills, the expertise, the knowledge to uplift themselves to become modern people, to become enlightened and to acquire better jobs, become meaningful entrepreneurs and to simply enter the 21st Century. (Akanji)

The participants in this study passionately articulated their perceptions of value in their teams and with the overall institution of public education in the USVI. The participants specifically spoke of valuing the people who make up the institution of public education in the territory. They acknowledged the role of teachers in academic

success and the competence and great work ethic of their colleagues. They overwhelmingly expressed a high level of respect and admiration for their students and their staff.

Strengths, Opportunities, and Collective Vision

The participants in this study were asked to describe the USVI pubic education system's greatest strengths and opportunities. All of the participants believed the greatest strength of the USVI public education system was human capital. Akanji described human capital as the following,

> The greatest strengths that our schools have would be the human capital, which would be the teachers and professionals, the principals, assistant principals, the paraprofessionals. The people actually work there every day doing their best to mold students and shape their learning experiences and insure that they can acquire the necessary training that is important for their enlightenment. That's the number one important positive thing. (Akanji)

All participants spoke of the strength and capacity of the people who make up the institution of public education in the USVI: The educational leaders at both the systems and site levels, the instructional teams, staff, and students.

Enirotimi mentioned the diversity of the people of the USVI as a great strength as well as access to resources:

> Well I think there's a great strength in our diversity. I think there is so much talent that's in the Virgin Islands, so much talent that can be brought to bear on public education. We have people here from every country that you could imagine, every ethnic group that you can imagine. We have a virtual laboratory in terms of language. So I think there's a great value in our people that I don't know that we've really tapped into. That's one. I think from the place of our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Caribbean, we have the greatest access to resources and to money and we have a great opportunity to impact the region in terms of what we do here educationally.

In contrast, one participant believed diversity and a stable-race demographic (African-Caribbean origin) was both a strength and an opportunity. Olutimileyin spoke about the stability of student demographics overall and challenges with recruitment:

> A lot of our people don't move out. People have to move in. So our demographics only change when people are coming in. … You can keep a very stable demographic base. For the most part, my school is heterogeneously Black, West Indian children. That's of a benefit to me. Then I know that my ESL classes are largely Santo Dominicans [from the Dominican Republic] or Hispanics and French. Once you know the demographics of the people that you're going to work with, you really can target a lot of instruction for them. But by the same token, that insular nature of our island is the same thing that kills us, because I'm stuck with the [low performing staff] I have. What am I going to do? Go to Puerto Rico and find teachers? You know, it's just not done. One of the biggest things that upsets people here is that we have to go to the Philippines to get excellent special-education teachers. (Olutimileyin)

Enitan discussed the institution's strength of clarity of mission and persistence:

> I think the greatest strength is the persistence, very persistent. May not [always] be successful but they recognize their goal and objectives and they're striving. And when you look at the statistics, they're striving, they're striving. So they're cognizant of what their mission is, what the goals are, what objectives are and I think they have developed benchmarks and templates to do just that. (Enitan)

Another strength that fell under the category of human capital is the power of educational legacy. Enirotimi spoke about educational legacy in the USVI context:

> We also have the opportunity to lead more, to take more strength and pride in who we are as a people, the great struggle that we have, that we are the recipients of, that we are the beneficiaries of, all of the hard work that went before us. I mean, we have an educational legacy in the Virgin Islands that I think is tremendous and we need to recognize that, because I really believe that when you see the value of who you are at the core is when you can really impact the future and what you can be in times to come. (Enirotimi)

After reflecting what they valued most about themselves as leaders, their team and the institution, and after considering the institution's greatest strengths and opportunities, the participants were asked to envision the USVI public education institution in 5 years. They were asked to ponder what the system would be like,

operating from its many strengths. The participants' responses were focused in the area of academic improvements and increased student achievement. Both of these improvements were closely related to increased accountability. The collective vision for USVI public education included performance-based compensation for site education teams, and better prepared students, staff, and leaders. In addition, systems improvements would include more localized hiring authority to build the best education teams possible and more empowerment and financial resources at the local school/site level.

Summary of Research Question 4 Findings

The fourth research question in this study explored factors that contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and success. The first theme that emerged from the findings was leaders' perceptions of what they valued most about themselves as leaders. The finding related to this theme depicted a combination of their leadership attributes, abilities, and styles. The second theme that emerged related to the leaders' perceptions of value in the USVI public education institution. Finally, participants' reflections on the strengths, opportunities, and visions for success were explored. All of the participants perceived human capital as the greatest strength of the USVI public education system and the collective vision they held for the institution of public education was one that included more empowered school leaders, decentralized governance, and continuous improvement in student academic outcomes.

Summary of Chapter 4

This study explored the critical challenges and opportunities in public education in the U.S. Virgins Islands from the perspectives of key education leaders who served the institution during the research period of 1999–2009. Specifically, this study explored

these public education leaders' experiences and perceptions of the USVI public education system, the challenges and opportunities they faced as leaders, and the impacts of U.S. federal mandates. This study also explored the leaders' perceptions of the USVI public education institution's greatest strengths and implications for change. Drawing on the experiences of these education leaders, this study sought to record the past, explore current challenges, and project a vision for 21st century education success in the territory.

This chapter provided a thorough review of the research findings. There were a total of eight participants involved in this study. The presentation of the research findings began with a profile of each participant and continued with a detailed representation of the findings and discussion of themes that emerged from the data.

The first research question explored the perceptions of the education leaders who participated in this study. The themes of student impressions, professional impressions, and job impact: making an impact emerged from the data collected. Four of the participants reflected on their experiences as students in USVI public schools and four shared reflections on their initial experiences as education professionals. Although some of their initial professional experiences were negative, primarily due to violence they witnessed in some schools and concerns with teachers, some of these negative experienced could be attributed to the age at which these participants began their teaching experience and their relative inexperience with public schools. Despite the challenges cited, the findings detailed pure passion in the hearts of these leaders and a commitment to serving the children of the USVI and to having a positive impact on education in the Territory.

The second research questions afforded participants an opportunity to reflect on the challenges they encountered as leaders in public education. The themes of politics of employment, systemic challenges, and strategies for overcoming challenges emerged from the data collected. Six of the participants cited "politics" and unfair hiring practices as a considerable challenge. Three spoke of being personally victimized by the unfair practices. Participants further spoke of the challenges they faced as a result of the unique education governance structure in the USVI, on difficulties of managing bureaucracies, and on the slow rate of change in the Territory. Several participants specifically mentioned how "politics" and unfair hiring practices led to a lack of unqualified people in key leadership roles and how this has led to more system inertia. These leaders revealed a myriad of strategies implemented to overcome the challenges inherent in their roles as leaders in the USVI. They worked collaboratively, harnessing the power of relationship building and teamwork to get things done.

The third research questions asked participants to consider the impact of U.S. federal education mandates on the roles. The emerging themes revealed the participants impressions of the mandates and the strategies they implement for academic success and achieving AYP. Although the participants varied on how they perceived the mandates, they all reported their roles were significantly impacted by the mandates. The data showed that while USVI school leaders had always been focused on improved academic outcomes, the mandates instituted a greater level of accountability. The participants cited hard work, collaboration, and strong school leaders as essential elements of academic success.

Finally, the fourth research question asked participants to reflect on what they valued as leaders. The findings were organized according to the emerging themes of leadership attributes, abilities, and styles; perceptions of value; and strengths, opportunities, and collective vision. The data revealed a core believe in the people of the USVI. The participants believed in themselves and their abilities to lead. They believed in their students and their potential. They believed in their colleagues and they held them in high regard. Many of these leaders and their colleagues were products of the USVI public schools or intimately connected to the system. They spoke passionately about being a part of a successful educational legacy and took pride and honor in doing so. Human capital was cited as the greatest strength of the institution of public education in the USVI. The leaders who participated in this study held a collective vision of empowerment and continued success for themselves and the children of the Territory.

The following chapter of this study offers a thorough discussion of the findings. The chapter continues with a report of the research conclusions and implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the profession and for further research and final thoughts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of education leaders in the USVI. This study sought to understand the critical challenges and opportunities public education leaders faced during the period of 1999–2009. Specifically, this study sought to understand the leaders' experiences in the USVI public education system as a whole, the challenges and opportunities they faced, their perceptions of the institution's greatest strengths and their perceptions on the future of education in the territory. The review of scholarly literature on colonial history and education in the USVI, contemporary USVI education, and the role of principals served as a contextual framework of the study. This study employed appreciative inquiry as a theoretical framework. Application of the core principles of appreciative inquiry laid the foundation for a narrative-based qualitative inquiry into educational success in the USVI.

Eight participants shared their experiences and perceptions of leadership in the USVI. The following research questions were used to support the appreciative-inquiry qualitative strategy:

1. What are the perceived experiences of the educational leaders in the USVI public education system?
2. How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands?
3. To what extent have U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgin Islands' education system?

4. What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change?

This study sought to answer the aforementioned questions. Several important themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected from interviews and supporting documents. The themes that came forth from the findings of this study were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendation. Next, it will provide recommendations for future research and practice. This chapter will conclude with final reflections from the researcher.

Discussion

The findings and related themes were detailed in Chapter 4. The emerging themes from each research question are reflected in Figure 4. A discussion of the findings by research question with an emphasis on the aforementioned themes follows.

Research Question 1: Overall Impressions

The first research question in the study was What are the perceived experiences of the educational leaders in the USVI public education system? The participants in this study reflected on their personal history and experiences with the USVI public education system; three themes emerged. First, participants reflected on their impressions as students. Next, participants discussed their professional experiences. Finally, they passionately discussed their satisfaction with their roles as leaders and feelings of making an impact.

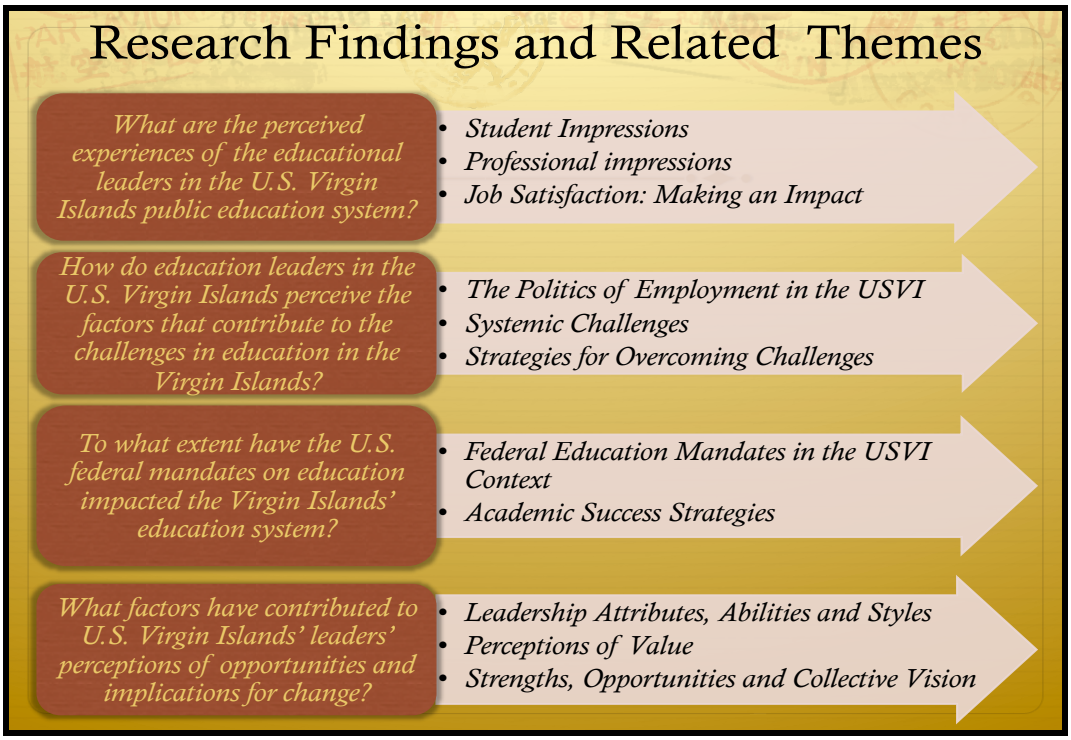

Figure 4. List of research findings with related themes.

Student Impressions

The participants' history in public education in the USVI varied. Their overall impressions of the public education system were reflective of their experiences with the system. Figure 5 reflects the distribution of participant education by type of school.

Six of the eight participants had some experience with the USVI K–12 public education system as students. The participant with the longest K–12 public school experience entered the system in the first grade. The other participants spent their early school years in private or parochial schools in the territory or abroad. As previously mentioned, some participants had experience in more than one school type.

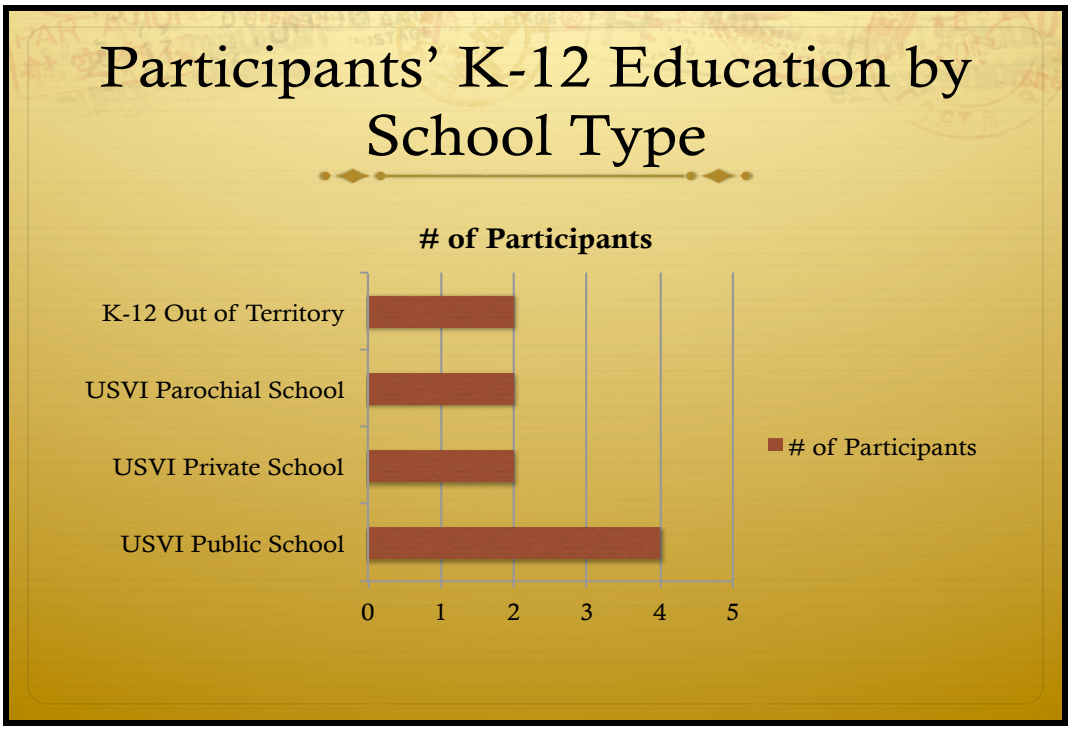

Figure 5. Distribution of participant education by type of school. Some participants had experience in more than one school type.

Of those participants who recalled their experiences as K–12 public school students in the USVI, experiences were overwhelmingly positive. Participants described public school in the USVI as a place where they formed lasting relationships with their classmates and teachers. For these participants, public school was a place to connect and grow academically and socially. School was a place they felt at home. It is important to note the impact of the participants' positive relationships with their teachers on their impressions of the public education system in the USVI. As mentioned in Chapter 4, participants' interactions with teachers affirmed their identities and sense of self-worth. These positive impressions influenced their decisions to serve in a leadership capacity.

Professional Impressions

The findings from this study showed a contrast between the initial impressions of those participants who interacted with the USVI public education system as students and

the impressions of those who entered the system as professionals. Like the findings related to participants' experiences as students, participants' professional experiences with public education in the USVI also varied. Their overall impressions of the public education system were influenced by their professional experiences and roles. Figure 6 reflects the distribution of participant professional education experience by role.

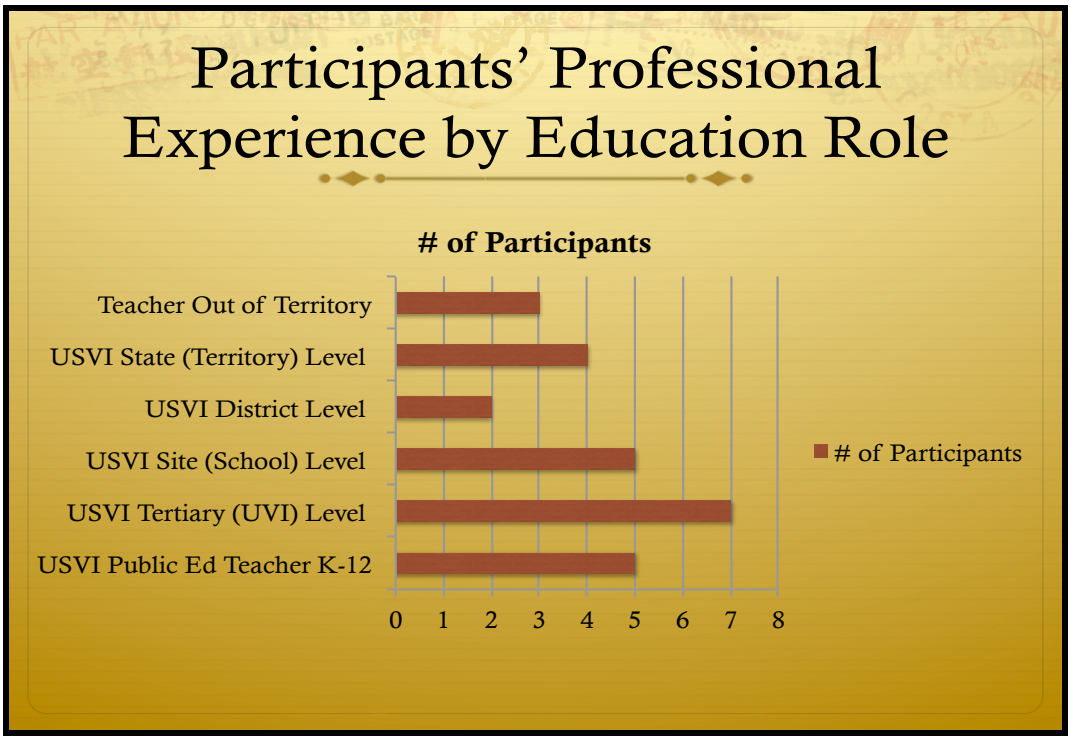

Figure 6. Distribution of participant professional experience in education by role. All participants had professional experiences in more than one role.

Four of the participants in this study spoke about their experiences and impressions of the USVI public education system as education professionals. As professionals in the USVI public education system, participants' initial experiences were negative. Some of the negative experiences they reported included poor treatment of teachers, lack of preparation of some teachers, excessive teen pregnancies, and violence in schools. All four of the participants who reported negative initial professional experiences did not attend K–12 public schools in the USVI.

Job Satisfaction: Making an Impact

The findings from this study reflected a unified commitment to public education by all participants. They shared a love of public education in the USVI. Despite negative professional impressions, these participants were won over by their students and their desire to have a positive impact on the lives of their students and on public education in the Territory. They all enjoyed marked job satisfaction and enjoyed impacting education in the Territory. The leaders' commitment to the profession, despite experiencing challenges is consistent with the literature (Protheroe, 2009, Sergiovanni et al., 2004). When participants were asked to assume leadership roles, they did so without hesitation. Even those whose initial impressions of the system were negative still chose to serve in a leadership capacity. These leaders possessed a deep desire to serve. For these leaders, making an impact was the impetus for serving as public education leaders in the USVI.

Research Question 2: Challenges

The second research question in the study was, How do education leaders in the USVI perceive the factors that contribute to the challenges in education in the Virgin Islands? The participants in this study reflected on the challenges they faced as public education leaders in the USVI and described strategies they employed to mitigate or overcome these challenges; three major themes emerged. First, participants described the politics of employment in the USVI. Next, they described the various systemic challenges they encountered. Lastly, participants shared strategies for overcoming challenges.

The Politics of Employment in the USVI

The findings from this study reflected several challenges related to employment dynamics and hiring practices in USVI public education. As cited in the previous

chapter's findings, the participants chose the word "politics" as a general descriptor for political appointments and/or preferential treatment and hiring preferences based on political affiliation. Six participants specifically mentioned politics or the political appointments of leaders as a major challenge faced by education leaders in the USVI. More than half of the participants spoke of being victimized by politics in hiring practices. Three participants spoke of the challenge of preferential hiring of individuals who were "born here" or Virgin Islanders by birth and the subsequent unfair treatment of outsiders. The findings also included employment challenges related to insularity and its affect on recruitment and selection in the USVI. One participant also mentioned the frequency of change at the commissioner level as troubling. Participants in this study felt the challenges of employment in the USVI resulted in a lack of unqualified personnel in key educational leadership roles, demoralization of staff, and strained interpersonal relationships.

Systemic Challenges

The findings from this study reflected several major challenges at the systems level that negatively impacted the participants' roles as education leaders. Some of these challenges included participants' concerns about budgeting and other fiscal challenges, school accreditation, lack of sufficient academic resources, and facilities issues. Several participants spoke of bureaucratic systems and "inertia" to describe the slow rate of change at the systems level. Several participants mentioned the use of a "spoils and patronage system" as a contributing factors to some of the systemic challenges leaders experienced.

Some of the challenges experienced by the participants appear to be a result of the unique leadership context in which they operated. For example, the USVI public education governance structure posed several challenges. In this structure, the governor has the authority to appoint key education leaders and wields considerable influence in recruitment and selection. In the USVI, the commissioner of education is seen as one of the most powerful commissioners in the territory. VIDOE employs the largest number of government employees of all government agencies.

The challenges faced by leaders in the study can be examined using an ecological-systems-theory model. An ecological-systems theory is useful in describing complex systems (Johnson, 2008). Figure 7 extends ecological-systems theory to the analysis of challenges USVI education leaders experienced.

Figure 7 represents my interpretation of ecological-systems theory in the USVI. The challenges participants faced related to interactions with students and staff and concerns that occurred at the school level could be referenced as microsystem challenges. The concerns leaders experienced related to interactions with the VIDOE, VIBOE, and the USVI educational structure could be referenced as mesosystem influences. Lastly, those challenges related to the implementation of federal mandates and interactions with USDOE officials could be referenced as macrosystem influences. The literature supports the use of ecological-systems theory in understanding the complex nature of human and organizational development; this research extended ecological-systems theory to the analysis of schools and school districts (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Johnson, 2008).

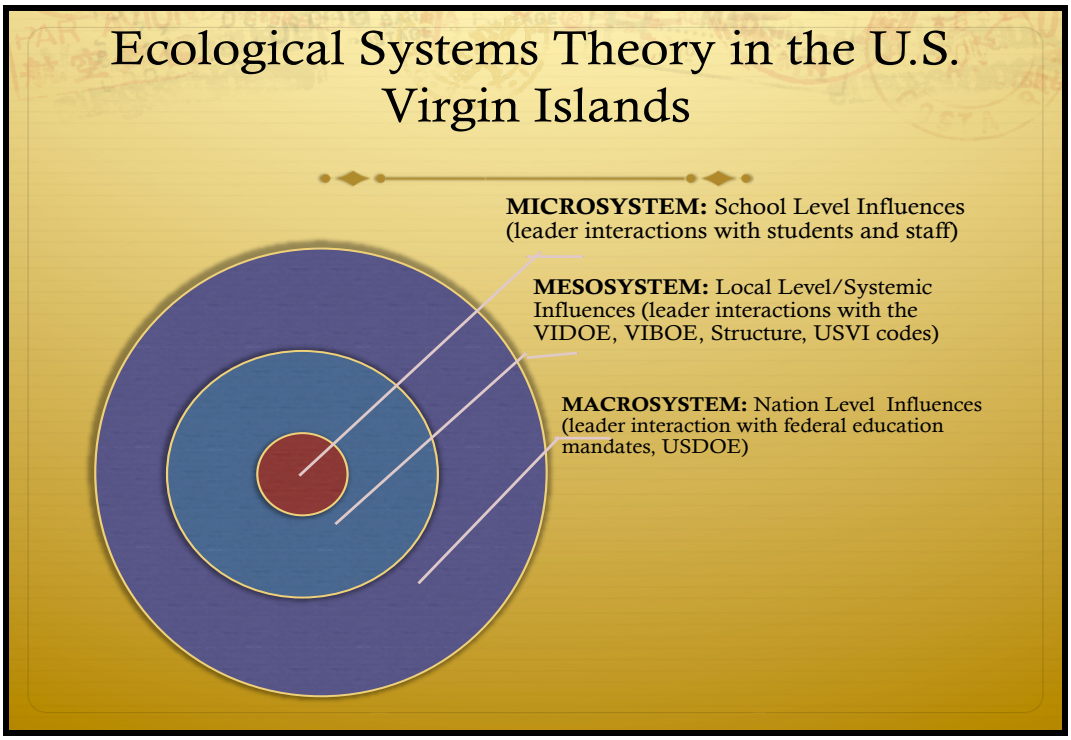

Figure 7. Ecological-systems theory in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

The participants in this study discussed a variety of strategies used to overcome the challenges they faced as leaders. For the majority of participants, the challenges related to the politics of employment and hiring practices seemed out of their immediate purview. One participant believed politics and education in the USVI were interconnected. The participants involved in this study did not allow politics to deter them from success. They seemed to possess an internal coping strategy that allowed them to understand the role of politics in education in the USVI and work to mitigate any negative impacts.

These leaders focused on developing strategies for overcoming the various challenges they faced. It is important to note that the leaders involved in this study focused the bulk of their energies on impacting things at the microsystems level: being

good academic leaders, insisting on success at the school level and making a positive impact on students lives. Other effective strategies for overcoming the major challenges facing education leaders in the USVI included working collaboratively with key education stakeholders, putting academics first, and involving teachers and staff in new initiatives. Also, several leaders involved in this study were particularly adept at developing strategies to overcome some of the fiscal challenges they experienced at the site level. Overall, the leaders involved in this study shared a personal determination and will to work at both the micro- and mesosystem levels to impact positive change in public education in the USVI.

Research Question 3: Federal Education Mandates

The third research question in this study asked, *To what extent have U.S. federal mandates on education impacted the Virgin Islands' education system?* Two primary themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data. First, participants discussed the perceptions of the impact of U.S. federal education mandates on public education in the USVI. Then, participants shared their strategies to achieve academic success.

Federal Education Mandates in the USVI Context

All participants involved in this study reported that U.S. federal mandates on education significantly impacted the Virgin Islands educational system and their roles as leaders. The participants' perceptions of the impacts of these mandates were overwhelmingly positive. The positive impact mentioned most frequently by participants related to raising expectations for education leaders, instructional teams, and students. Although the findings revealed positive impressions related to federal mandates improving student outcomes and increasing accountability, participants' perceptions

regarding implementation of federal mandates in the USVI was negative. The participants' negative impressions in implementing federal mandates are supported by existing literature (Peterson & Rabe, 1987; Spring, 2005). However, I was unable to locate literature related to the specific challenges associated with implementing federal education mandates in insular territories such as the USVI.

Although most participants understood the need for fiscal and academic accountability in public education, they felt strongly that the structure and funding in the USVI public education system differed significantly from that of institutions on the mainland. The negative opinions mentioned in this study related primarily to the lack of understanding of these differences on the part of the U.S. Department of Education officials, inadequate support for successful program implementation, and issues with funding. There were also three participants involved in this study who perceived the mandates existed primarily to "Americanize" the USVI public education system and felt the mandates were "punitive" in the USVI context. Participants also mentioned concerns related to the cultural relevancy of standardized tests. Each participant reported at least some positive impact of the mandates at the school and systems levels; these positive aspects were linked to improvements in academic achievement.

Academic-Success Strategies

Successful implementation of U.S. federal mandates in the USVI and the achievement of AYP at successful schools was due in large part to much hard work and dedication. Enirotimi mentioned,

> It was tremendous effort that it required to set the stage for AYP, to do the Accountability Workbook, to do all the things that were required of the federal government, to have them review us and tell us, "No, you need to go back to this thing" or "you did very well on that thing," etc., etc. So that was a tremendous

> amount of work … but many people don't see. Many people are looking at the outside. Many people [only] hear the criticisms.

The four participants who served as principals during the research period all achieved AYP at their schools during the research period. When asked how they were able to achieve AYP at their respective schools, these participants shared first-hand experiences related to the strategies they implemented to achieve academic success. The other leaders involved in the study who served at the education-systems administrative level during the research period shared their observations from the systems-leadership perspective.

The participants employed various strategies to achieve academic success. First, they began with a belief that every child could achieve; this was a key factor for student success. They also mentioned the necessity of affirming students' ability to achieve. Other factors reported to have a positive impact on student achievement in USVI public schools included principals acting as academic leaders, strong instructional teams, and having impressive teachers. Participants also lauded the importance of targeted instruction to improve skills levels, rather than teaching to the test.

Those participants who served at the systems level credited passionate principals and other academic leaders as a key factor in academic success in USVI public schools. These leaders had genuine care and concern for students and their teams and were able to motivate them. They were also able to communicate the importance of academic achievement to students. Some systems-level factors that were reported to have a positive impact on USVI public education included the institution of school-improvements teams, improving testing instruments, "consensus and will," and the development of key strategic partnerships, such as with UVI.

Research Question 4: Values, Strengths and Vision

The fourth research question in this study was, What factors have contributed to USVI leaders' perceptions of opportunities and implications for change? Research participants reflected on what they valued and their perceptions of strengths and opportunities in the USVI public education system; three themes emerged. First, participants examined what they valued most about themselves as leaders. Next, they explored what they valued most about the institution. Finally, they shared reflections on the strengths, opportunities, and visions for public education in the USVI. All participants perceived human capital as the greatest strength of the USVI public education system.

Leadership Attributes, Abilities, and Styles

The participants in this study were asked to put humility aside and reflect on what they valued most about their leadership abilities. They passionately offered their perceptions on the attributes and abilities they possessed as successful leaders of USVI public education institutions and their styles of leadership. The participants valued their overall knowledge of the academics and were passionate about academic development and lifelong learning. They reported have a genuine "care and concern" for their staff and students. They also valued their abilities to use a "personal touch" with their students and staff. The ability to show care and concern for others and work in collaboration with others enabled these leaders to build, nurture, and sustain lasting relationships. Participants also valued their strength and persistence as leaders and their ability to "tackle the tough issues." They believed in the value of public education in the USVI and felt a sense of personal responsibility for the institution's success. Most importantly, they

believed in the potential of each and every student and shared a deep desire to positively impact student lives.

Although the interview questions for this study did not explicitly ask the leaders to describe their particular leadership styles, several leaders valued their unique style of leadership. Several valued their ability to adjust their leadership styles based on the situations they encountered as leaders. Others highly valued their commitment to serve the students, staff, and community. The narratives presented in the study reflect the highly dynamic nature of public education in the USVI. Participants' descriptions of their leadership styles related closest to situational-leadership theories (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993) and are applicable to leaders' actions across various systems levels (D. Thomas & Bainbridge, 2002).

Perceptions of Value

The participants in the study were asked to reflect on what they valued most about their teams and the institution of public education in the USVI. They reported finding value in their relationships with students and staff. They also found value in being mentored and serving as mentors. They valued one another as colleagues and working collaboratively for academic success. Specifically, they admired the competence of their teachers, belief in public education, focus on serving students, and serious work ethic.

Strengths, Opportunities, and Collective Vision

Participants in this study were asked to describe the USVI pubic education system's greatest strengths and opportunities. The findings in the previous chapter cited human capital as the greatest strength of the USVI public education system. Educational

legacy was also noted as a key strength. Enirotimi spoke on the role of educational legacy and its impact on the future:

> We have an educational legacy in the Virgin Islands that I think is tremendous and we need to recognize that, because I really believe that when you see the value of who you are at the core is when you can really impact the future and what you can be in times to come. (Enirotimi)

All participants spoke enthusiastically of the strength, capability, diversity, and persistence of the people who make up the institution of public education in the USVI: educational leaders at the systems and site levels, the instructional teams, staff, and students.

After reflecting on what they valued and after considering the institution's greatest strengths and opportunities, participants were asked to envision the USVI public education institution in 5 years, operating from its strengths. The participants' collective vision for public education in the USVI included greater academic achievement; better prepared students, staff, and leaders; increased accountability; and performance-based compensation for site education teams. Visions for systems improvements included more localized hiring authority in order to build the best education teams possible, and more empowerment and financial resources at the local school/site level.

Conclusions

The findings from this research led to conclusions primarily in two areas: the role of appreciative inquiry and narrative in the experiences of public education leaders serving in the USVI and academic achievement in the USVI context. This research used appreciative inquiry as a theoretical construct and its principles guided the development of the research questions. The power of appreciative inquiry in qualitative research is in asking questions that allow people and organizations to maintain best practices while

honoring the human spirit (Hammond, 1998). Appreciative inquiry enables organizations to begin the creation of images of where they want to go by focusing on what they do well (Holland & Markova, 2005). The participants in this study were indeed able to imagine a vision of where they wanted their institution to go and they were able to connect as humans to their roles in helping the institution reach this collective vision. Due to their intimate connections to the systems, the participants felt personally and collectively responsible for their actions in the system and they wanted the best for themselves and the institution of public education in the USVI. Their rich narratives of commitment and interdependence significantly impacted this research. There was intentionality in the way they served as leaders.

Ricoeur's definition of "ethical intention" as "aiming at the "good life" with and for others, in just institutions" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 172) provides a platform on which to examine the experiences of these leaders. Ricoeur stated,

> The "good life" is what should be mentioned first because it is the very object of the ethical aim. Whatever the image that each of us has of a full life, the apex is the ultimate end of our action. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 164)

Most importantly, related to the participants in this study, is the understanding of the "essentially ethical notion of self-constancy. Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can *count* on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another." He wrote "responsibility unites both meanings: 'counting on' and 'being accountable for'" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 164). The participant narratives in this research held the aforementioned notions of "aiming for the good life," "self-constancy," and "accountability" and this informed their actions as leaders.

The leaders in this study also recognized how context deeply impacted their experiences as leaders. None of the participants attempted to lead in a vacuum. All of them recognized the uniqueness of leadership in an insular territory. They understood the challenges of implementing policies imposed as macrolevel sanctions in a highly political and dynamic mesolevel structure. Armed with this understanding and "collective will," they were able to mitigate and overcome these challenges and act at the microsystem level to positively impact academic success in the USVI.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Profession

I offer the following recommendations for those who aspire to attain educational-leadership positions in the USVI and for the institution as a whole:

1. Leading education institutions is challenging in many contexts and the USVI in no exception. Individuals who aspire to become education leaders in the USVI might endeavor to understand the complexities related to politics and the institutional structure in the territory. It might be helpful to become familiar with the colonial history of the area and the Caribbean culture.
2. This research uncovered significant concerns related to employment dynamics and recruitment and selection of key education leaders in the USVI. It is recommended that the key stakeholders in USVI education design and participate in a stakeholder analysis to assess the implications of restructuring the USVI public education system to allow more local (site) control of recruitment and selection. This discussion should also include the possibility

of extending power of recruitment and selection of key educational leaders to the VIBOE.

3. As mentioned in the study, there have been some ongoing concerns related to social promotion. Therefore, is recommended that a mode of assessing high school student academic abilities prior to graduation from high school is established and implemented in USVI public schools. In addition, it is important for students graduating from the USVI public schools to be prepared to succeed in academic- and vocation-education programs, enter the workforce, and become entrepreneurs. It is further recommended that the VIDOE and VIBOE work collaboratively UVI and the business sector to provide students with internships and other opportunities designed to prepare these students for their future endeavors.
4. Some participants in this study discussed the need for a place where leadership skills could be honed and developed. It is recommended that the VIBOE and VIDEO extend its partnership with UVI and discuss the creation of a leadership institute to serve the developmental needs of current and aspiring leaders in the territory and surrounding areas. This institute may serve to contribute to the development of a leadership pipeline for the territory.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the sparse availability of research available on educational and organizational leadership in the USVI, I offer the following recommendations for future research related to this study:

1. It is recommended that scholars engage in research related to human-capital theory and educational leadership. The participants agreed that human capital was the great strength of the USVI public education institution. Further, research on the aforementioned theories may yield best practices for the best use of this most precious resource.
2. There is a need for further research on effective leadership styles in insular areas. Due to the smallness of these microsocieties, leaders may need to employ certain leadership styles for optimum effectiveness in their roles.
3. School and academic success involves teams working together toward success. This research discussed the perceptions of education leaders' challenges and successes in USVI public schools. This research could be extended to public education teachers in the territory. It is possible that teachers' perceptions of success and the public education system could be different from those of its leaders.
4. Further research might involve an examination of critical race theory and African American education philosophy and implications in the USVI. This research could more effectively situate the concept of race in the Territory. It could also determine if and how it impacts leadership practices.

Final Reflections

As I reflect on the findings of this research and my experiences with the participants, I am deeply humbled. I simply did not expect the research to impact my life the way that it has. I am overwhelmed and impressed by the passion these leaders possessed and their intense feelings of responsibility to the children and people of the

Virgin Islands. This research has instilled in me deep reverence and a great respect for the work of public school educators and leaders in the USVI and abroad. I am inspired to continue to serve as an educator and participate in research methodologies that uncover best practices in our education institutions. Specifically, I am interested in exposing those hidden and often-overlooked pockets of success that exist in every learning community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS TERRITORY

2010-2011 NCLB Report Card

Overall AYP

Virgin Islands Department of Education

Reading Grades 3-8	Participation Rate			Proficiency Rate (Proficient and Advanced)						Attendance Rate		
Student Groups	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**2009-10 %**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**TargetMet with 99% CI**	**Safe Harbor**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**TargetMet (Yes/No)**
All												
All Students	7118	99.5%	Yes	42.7	3044	46.1	No	No	No	7819	97.5	Yes
Ethnicity												
Black	5564	99.5%	Yes	43.9	2439	47.4	No	No	No	6054	97.7	Yes
Hispanic	1403	99.7%	Yes	33.9	518	39.5	No	No	Yes	1542	96.7	Yes
Other												
Limited English Proficiency	233	99.6%	Yes	16.7	24	13.3	No	No	N/A	327	96.6	Yes
Students with Disabilities	533	97.8%	Yes	11.8	111	21.3	No	No	Yes	601	92.9	No

Mathematics Grades 3-8	Participation Rate			Proficiency Rate (Proficient and Advanced)						Attendance Rate		
Student Groups	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**2009-10 %**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**TargetMet with 99% CI**	**Safe Harbor**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**TargetMet (Yes/No)**
All												
All Students	7192	99.5%	Yes	52.8	3719	56.1	Yes	N/A	N/A	7819	97.5	Yes
Ethnicity												
Black	5584	99.5%	Yes	53.5	2892	56.2	Yes	N/A	N/A	6054	97.7	Yes
Hispanic	1453	99.7%	Yes	47.2	723	54.0	Yes	N/A	N/A	1542	96.7	Yes
Other												
Limited English Proficiency	292	99.7%	Yes	29.7	76	37.1	No	No	No	327	96.6	Yes

Reading Grade 11	Participation Rate			Proficiency Rate (Proficient and Advanced)						Graduation Rate		
Student Groups	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**2009-10 %**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**TargetMet with 99% CI**	**Safe Harbor**	**# of Students**	**2009-10 %**	**TargetMet (Yes/No)**
All												
All Students	1067	97.4%	Yes	38.7	397	38.4	No	No	N/A	864	60.7	Yes
Ethnicity												
Black	900	97.5%	Yes	41.0	345	39.8	No	No	N/A	765	63.6	Yes
Hispanic	152	96.2%	Yes	21.4	43	28.7	No	No	Yes	89	44.7	Yes
Other												
Limited English Proficiency	22	84.6%	D	4.0	...	4.6	D	D	D	22	29.3	D
Students with Disabilities	73	94.8%	No	4.2	...	9.7	No	No	No	56	28.3	Yes

Mathematics Grade 11	Participation Rate			Proficiency Rate (Proficient and Advanced)						Graduation Rate		
Student Groups	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**2009-10 %**	**# of Students**	**2010-11 %**	**Target Met (Yes / No)**	**TargetMet with 99% CI**	**Safe Harbor**	**# of Students**	**2009-10 %**	**TargetMet (Yes/No)**
All												
All Students	1073	97.4%	Yes	47.9	552	53.2	Yes	N/A	N/A	864	60.7	Yes
Ethnicity												
Black	904	97.5%	Yes	48.9	473	54.2	Yes	N/A	N/A	765	63.6	Yes
Hispanic	154	96.3%	Yes	39.3	69	46.0	No	Yes	N/A	89	44.7	Yes
Other												
Limited English Proficiency	23	85.2%	D	28.0	...	22.7	D	D	D	22	29.3	D
Students with Disabilities	73	94.8%	No	12.5	15	20.8	No	No	No	56	28.3	Yes

Reading:

Grade 3-8 : Participation Rate Target is 95.0%. Proficiency Rate Target for Reading Grade Span 3-8 is 53.3

Grade 11 : Participation Rate Target is 95.0%. Proficiency Rate Target for Reading Grade Span 11 is 55.6

Math:

Grade 3-8 : Participation Rate Target is 95.0%. Proficiency Rate Target for Mathematics Grade Span 3-8 is 53.8

Grade 11 : Participation Rate Target is 95.0%. Proficiency Rate Target for Mathematics Grade Span 11 is 52.0

All Students: Attendance Rate Target is 95.0% or had a 1% increase over last year.

Graduation Rate Target is based on the 2009-10 graduation rate calculations, progress will be defined as any increase from 2007-08 to 2008-09 school years . For schools years 2010/11-2012-13 schools will need to meet a 2% increase from the 2008-09 Graduation Rate, followed by a 3% increase for the school years 2013/14 - 2015/16. For School year 2015-16 a determination on new target goals by the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Education will be made and published.

NOTES: Any differences in Proficiency percentages on the Overall AYP profile tables and the Our Students' Overall Results are due to the requirements to report the performance of all students who were assessed, but only make AYP determinations on those students who met "Full Academic Year" criteria.

What is Safe Harbor? - If a school or a subgroup does not meet the AMO target goal, a safe harbor analysis is conducted to determine if the group has made substantial improvement. Safe harbor analyses consider the percent reduction in non-proficient students a school or subgroup has made since the previous school year as well as group performance on the other indicator. If a school or a subgroup demonstrates a 10% reduction in the percentage of non proficient students and the group being evaluated meets the other indicator criteria, AYP criteria are considered as being met for that group.

Blank: = No data to report on.
D= N<30, AYP determination withheld due to validity and reliability issues. Determination made as data are rolled up to higher levels and consolidated for future years.
N/A = Safe Harbor is not applicable if the Proficiency target was met also (or) Science AYP determination is not being made this year.
Yes, in the Target Met with CI column indicates that AYP determination was met using the upper value of a 99% statistical Confidence Interval.
Yes, in the Safe Harbor column indicates that target was met using upper value of a 75% statistical Confidence Interval for Safe Harbor calculations.
Yes, in the Safe Harbor column indicates that a target was met applying the Safe Harbor parameters to the student group for that indicator field.

To make AYP, all indicators must be met.

"..." : N<10, therefore, data are not reported for confidentiality concerns and are included at higher levels

District Report of Adequate Yearly Progress

	Met AYP ?		
	Reading	Math	Number of Schools In Need of Improvement
St. Thomas / St. John District	No	No	7
St. Croix District	No	No	10

School Report of Adequate Yearly Progress

Elementary Schools (ES) Grades K-6
***Elementary & Junior High Grades K-8**

	Indicators		Participation			Met AYP ?		
School Name	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Graduation - Attendance	AYP	Identified for Improvement	No. of Years Identified
St. Thomas / St. John								
Leonard Dober Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Joseph Sibilly Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Lockhart Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3
Ulla F. Muller Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Jane E. Tuitt Elementary	D	D	Yes	Yes	Yes	D	No	0
Evelyn Marcelli Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Joseph Gomez Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	0
Gladys A. Abraham Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Yvonne Bowsky Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
E. Benjamin Oliver Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Guy Benjamin Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Julius E. Sprauve Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3
St. Croix								
Juanita Gardine Elementary	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4
Charles H. Emanuel Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4
Eulalie Rivera Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3
Lew Muckle Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0

	Indicators		Participation			Met AYP ?		
Claude O. Markoe Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4
Alexander Henderson Elementary	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	4
Pearl B. Larsen Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Alfredo Andrews Elementary	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	0
Evelyn M. Williams Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0
Ricardo A. Richards Elementary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	0

Junior High (JHS) Grades 7-8
****Middle School (MS) Grades 6-8**

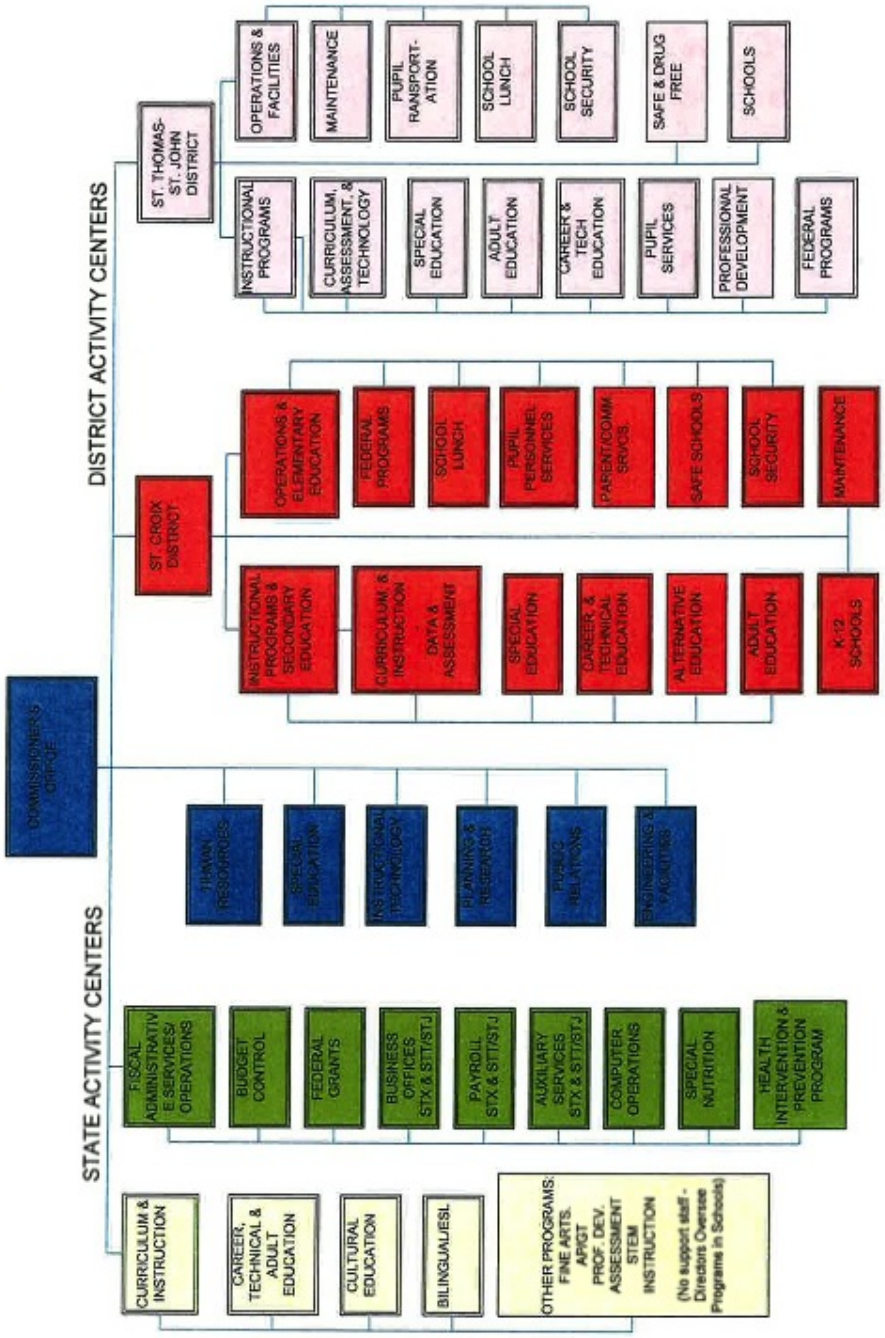
	Indicators		Participation			Met AYP ?		
School Name	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Graduation - Attendance	AYP	Identified for Improvement	No. of Years Identified
St. Thomas / St. John								
Bertha C. Boschulte Middle	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4
Addelita Cancryn Junior High	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	4
Julius E. Sprauve Junior High	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4
St. Croix								
John H. Woodson Junior High	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	4
Arthur A. Richards Junior High	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4
Elena L. Christian Junior High	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	4

High School (HS) Grades 9-12

	Indicators		Participation			Met AYP ?		
School Name	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Graduation - Attendance	AYP	Identified for Improvement	No. of Years Identified
St. Thomas / St. John								
Charlotte Amalie High	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3
Ivanna Eudora Kean High	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	2
St. Croix								
St. Croix Central High	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	4
St. Croix Educational Complex High	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	3

APPENDIX B: USVI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ORGANIZATION CHART:

ACTIVITY CENTERS AND PROGRAMS



APPENDIX C: VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION

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16TH VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION
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MISSION STATEMENT

The Virgin Islands Board of Education is committed to its vision and will promote the transformation of the structure of existing public education through: 1. governance over the public education system; 2. Improved student, parent, teacher relationship; 3. comprehensive community engagement; 4. standards that promote high academic achievement; 5. creation of an environment that is conducive to effective communication; 6. enhanced quality of professional development for all; 7. provision of adequate resources to achieve our vision, goals and objectives.

VISION STATEMENT

To ensure that each child is provided with the best quality education which promotes our history and culture, guarantees academic achievement and builds strong communities

APPENDIX D

IRBPHS INITIAL APPLICATION

Name of Applicant: Sheree N. Bryant
USF Identification Number: 11294531
University Title: Graduate Student
School or College: School of Education
Department or Group: Department of Leadership Studies, Organization and Leadership Program
Home or Campus Address (please include full street or P.O. Box, City, and Zip): P.O. Box 6074, St. Thomas, VI 00804
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Name(s) and University Title(s) of Other Investigators:
Name of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Patricia Mitchell
University Title: Professor
Home or Campus Address: 2130 Fulton St., S.F., CA 94117
Home or Campus Phone: (415) 422-2079
Electronic Mail Address(s): Mitchell@usfca.edu
Project Title: 21st Century Educational Challenges and Opportunities: An Appreciative Inquiry of Public Education in the United States Virgin Islands
Respond to items 1 - 11 white paper, single-sided, typed in black ink and using standard 12 point font.
Responses to items 1 -11 should be stapled to this Initial Application form.
1. Background and Rationale
2. Description of Sample
3. Recruitment Procedure
4. Subject Consent Process
5. Procedures
6. Potential Risks to Subjects
7. Minimization of Potential Risk
8. Potential Benefits to Subjects
9. Costs to Subjects
10. Reimbursements/Compensation to Subjects
11. Confidentiality of Records

_____
Signature of Applicant Date

_____
Signature of Faculty Advisor* Date

*Your signature indicates that you accept responsibility for the research described, including work by students under your supervision. It further attests that you are fully aware of all procedures to be followed, will monitor the research, and will notify the IRBPHS of any significant problems or changes.

1. Background and Rationale. Many of the harshest social realities in the mainland U.S. may appear magnified in the U.S. Virgin Islands societal context. These societal problems represent unlimited challenges and opportunities for leaders in every social and political domain and it is not surprising that communities often look to education as a venue for social change. Many have come to view education as a precondition for societal development and a vehicle and means of changing social conditions. This qualitative study will explore the critical challenges and opportunities in K-12 public education in the U.S. Virgins Islands from 1999-2009. By drawing on the experiences of key educational leaders of this time, this study intends to record the past, explore current challenges, and forecast the future of twenty-first century education in the territory. Leaders' behaviors are often influenced by the dynamics of culture and the value of the proposed research is in its focus on educational leadership challenges and opportunities in the U.S. Virgin Islands context.

The theoretical framework for this research is based upon appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry can be referred to as a "strategy for change in systemic leadership that builds on organizational strengths, not deficits" (Holland & Markova, 2005, p. 30). Appreciative inquiry employs a strengths-based inquiry into organizational development and change and as such, allows the researcher to focus on best practices in the public education institutions in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This theoretical framework also enables organizations to

begin the creation of images of where they want to go by focusing on what they do well (Holland & Markova, 2005).

2. Description of Sample. The sample population will consist of U.S. Virgin Islands educational leaders who served in public schools in the territory during the research period of 1999-2009. Potential subjects include V.I. public school principals and other local public education leaders
3. Recruitment Procedure. The researcher intends to select 10 to 12 U.S. Virgin Islands educational leaders to participate in qualitative interviews. Potential subjects include V.I. public school principals and other local public education leaders. These potential interviewees will be identified by professional referrals or personal resources. The participants must meet the following criteria:
    a. Served or currently serving as an educational leader in a U.S. Virgin Islands public school during the research period (1999-2009);
    b. Willing to participate in a face-to-face recorded interview;
    c. Willing to complete a participant background profile delineating age, ethnicity, educational level, years of service and educational leadership role;
    d. Preference will be given to those educational leaders whose were affiliated with V.I. public schools that achieved adequate yearly progress requirements as defined in No Child Left Behind federal mandates during the research period (1999-2010).

4. Subject Consent Process. This research will require one-on-one, open-ended qualitative interviews. The researcher will obtain written permission from participants to conduct the interviews using a consent form (see attached Appendix B). The researcher will provide each participant with an overview of the research being conducted and commitment to confidentiality and subject anonymity. The researcher will also advise interviewees of the post research summary report which will be available to all participants at the conclusion of the research.
5. Procedures. The anticipated IRBPHS approval is February 2011. Upon receipt of approval from IRBPHS, the researcher with begin to schedule and conduct interviews. The researcher intends to complete all interviews between February 2001 and June 2011.

Participants will be identified by professional referrals or personal resources and selected to participate in the study. All participants will be pre-screened to determine eligibility for the study (see question 3) and must sign a consent form to volunteer to participate in the study. The researcher intends to provide participants with a full description of the intent of the research and advise each participant of his or her rights as a subject of academic research. Participants will also be advised of anticipated interview time (1-2 hours) and location of interview. Participants will also be advised of the availability of a post research summary report, which will be made available at the conclusion of the study.

6. Potential Risks to Subjects. Potential risks are inherent in the research process. All research participants will be advised of the following risks noted the consent form:
    a. Is it possible that some of the questions related to personal experiences with the U.S. Virgin Islands education system may make participants feel uncomfortable. All participants are free to decline to answer any interview questions and reserve the right to terminate participation in the study at any time.
    b. Participation in this research may mean a loss of confidentiality. All study records will be kept confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All study information will be coded and stored in locked files at all times. Only study personnel such as the researcher, dissertation committee or related parties will have access to the files.
    c. Participants will be interviewed from 1-2 hours and participants may become tired or bored as a result of the interviews.
7. Minimization of Potential Risk. All related research recordings, files and other documentation will only be shared with parties involved in the research. Participant responses will not be shared with any other parties not involved in the research. Participants the researcher will take care that the research methods employed are ethical and protect the identity of all participants.
8. Potential Benefits to Subjects. There are no direct benefits to subjects participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is to explore

the factors that influence educational leadership success in the U.S. Virgin Islands context.

9. Costs to Subjects. Study participants will not incur any financial costs as a result of taking part in this study.
10. Reimbursements/Compensation to Subjects. There will be no reimbursements or compensation to subjects as a result of taking part in this study.
11. Confidentiality of Records. All interview recordings, files and other documentation will be kept in a locked and secure location at the researcher's residence.

IRB APPROVAL

January 31, 2011

Dear Ms. Bryant:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS)at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #11-006). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
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IRBPHS – University of San Francisco
Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building – Room 017
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
(415) 422-6091 (Message)
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)
irbphs@usfca.edu
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http://www.usfca.edu/soe/students/irbphs/

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background
Mrs. Sheree Bryant, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a research study on educational leadership in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

I am being asked to participate because I have served as an educational leader in U.S. Virgin Islands public schools between 1999 and 2009. Specifically, Mrs. Bryant wants to discuss the following with me to aid in the research:

- My perceptions of the challenges and opportunities related to public education in the U.S. Virgin Islands
- My experiences as an educational leader in the U.S. Virgin Islands
- What factors contribute to current and future educational program success U.S.V.I. public schools

Procedures
If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will complete a brief demographic background questionnaire giving basic information about me, including age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, years of service and educational leadership role.
2. I will participate in recorded qualitative interviews with Sheree Bryant and/or other researchers, during which I will be asked questions about my experiences and perceptions as an educational leader in U.S.V.I. public schools.
3. I will participate in the interview at a mutually agreeable location between the researcher and myself.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions related to the personal experiences with the U.S. Virgin Islands education system may make me feel uncomfortable. I am free to decline to answer any interview questions and reserve the right to terminate participation in the study at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. All study records will be kept confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports publication resulting in the study. All study information will be coded and stored in locked files at all times. Only study personnel such as the researcher, dissertation committee or related parties will have access to the files.
3. I understand that I may be interviewed up to 1-2 hours. During the interview I may become tired or bored as a result of the interviews.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is to explore the factors that influence educational leadership success in the U.S. Virgin Islands context.

Costs/Financial Considerations
There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement
There will be no reimbursements or compensation to me as a result of taking part in the study.

Questions
If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I will first contact the researchers. Sheree Bryant can be reached at (340) 344-9880. I may also contact Mrs. Bryant's advisor, Dr. Patricia Mitchell at (415) 422-2079.

If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent
PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student (if applicable) or future employee at USF (if applicable). My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____
Subject's Signature Date

_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date of Signature

APPENDIX F

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Mr./Ms.:

My name is Sheree Bryant and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education, Organization and Leadership department at the University of San Francisco. I am interested in exploring the critical challenges and opportunities in K-12 public education in the U.S. Virgins Islands from the perspective educational leaders. You are being asked to participate in the research study because you serve as an educational leader in U.S. Virgin Islands public schools.

Your opinions and experiences are valuable. By volunteering to participate in this study, you will be able to share best practices and forecast a positive future for twenty-first century education in the territory. If you agree to be in this study, you will complete a brief demographic background questionnaire and you will participate in a one-on-one interview, lasting approximately 1 hour long, at a location of your choice.

I would be honored to have you participate in my study. I will be conducting interviews in spring 2011 and I will be providing interview questions in advance. Participation in this research is voluntary. If you have any questions, you may contact me at (340) 344-9880. At any time, you may contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Patricia Mitchell, at (415) 422-2079.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Kind regards,

Sheree Bryant
340-344-9880

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age?
2. Gender?
3. What is your race or ethnicity?
4. What is your place of birth?
5. How long have you resided in the U.S. Virgin Islands?
6. What is your educational level?
7. What leadership role(s) have you held in the U.S. Virgin Islands public education system and what are your years of service?
8. Where do you currently work?
9. What is your current job title?
10. Were you ever a student in the U.S. Virgin Islands public school system? If yes, please list the schools you attended.

APPENDIX H

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your history with the U.S. Virgin Islands public educational system.
2. What were your first impressions?
3. What excited you about U.S.V.I public education?
4. Tell me about challenges you have experienced in as an educational leader in the U.S.V.I.
5. What are the factors that contributed to those challenges?
6. How were you able to overcome these challenges?
7. Describe a peak experience or high point in your tenure as a U.S.V.I. educational leader.
8. What are the factors that contributed to this positive experience?
9. Tell me about your experience of the impact of U.S. federal education mandates on the U.S.V.I. public education system.
10. How were you and your team able to successfully achieve adequate yearly progress?
11. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself and your abilities as an educational leader?
12. What do you value most about your team and institution?
13. Describe the U.S.V.I. public education system's greatest strengths and opportunities?
14. Operating from its strengths, where do you envision the institution of U.S.V.I. public education in five years from now?
15. How can you and/or your team contribute to the institution's success?

APPENDIX I

HUMAN SUBJECTS BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

(1) To be told what the study is trying to find out;
(2) To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;
(3) To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;
(4) To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;
(5) To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;
(6) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;
(7) To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;
(8) To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;
(9) To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
(10) To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study. If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

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