PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS REGARDING STRATEGIES TO BUILD TRUST AMONG STAFF TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Trust is essential between elementary school principals and teachers, for it is a necessary ingredient in well-functioning organizations, especially schools. The problem addressed in this phenomenological study was the lack of practical strategies for principals to build trust with teachers effectively and efficiently to facilitate positive change and, ultimately, to support student achievement. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how elementary school principals can quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. Through the literature review, the researcher examined historical definitions of trust and early trust studies, the creation of trust and strategies for developing trust, and trust and change process and contemporary trust studies. The researcher used a phenomenological approach to interview six elementary school principals who were employed by a high-performing, suburban school district in a western state. Through this study, the researcher uncovered many practical, useful, and effective strategies for principals to build trust with teachers. These strategies can be disseminated to new and veteran elementary school principals to help them to build and maintain trust with teachers. This study also revealed differences in the way that male and female leaders build trust with male and female teachers. The strategies that were discovered through these interviews can help principals build trust with teachers. In turn, this trust will create a positive school climate in which students will succeed.

Keywords: Trust, principals, teachers, school, gender
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

School reform has been at the forefront of public discourse since *A Nation at Risk* was published nearly 40 years ago (Gardner & The National Commission for Excellence in Education [National Commission], 1983). This document warned the American public that schools were underperforming and that the United States was losing its competitive edge and world dominance (Lichter, 2017). The opening sentences by Chairman Gardner and the other members of the National Commission addressed the American people: “Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (Gardner & National Commission, 1983, p. 5). The report recommended improvements in content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support (Gardner & National Commission, 1983; Ruff, 2019). The strong, alarmist language that was used in the report grabbed the attention of U.S. citizens and schools were thought to be worse off than they actually were (Kamenetz, 2018). Regardless, the report brought the state of American schools to the attention of the general populace.

Since 1983, legislation has continued to be introduced that has sought to improve schools by imposing assessments, standards, curriculum, teacher qualifications, and the like. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) enacted an enormous change for Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) educators (Klein, 2015). To close the achievement gap between White students and students of color, NCLB (2001) required standardized testing for pupils to measure achievement (Lichter, 2017). Schools whose students failed to meet identified benchmarks or to make adequate yearly progress were scrutinized and, if necessary, put under the control of the local state government (Lichter, 2017). No Child Left Behind (2001) also required that teachers be highly qualified. This meant that teachers had to have a certain number of college credits in
their chosen area of instruction (Klein, 2015). The implementation of NCLB (2001) meant major changes for public schools.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted by 41 states beginning in 2009 (Gewertz, 2015). The CCSS updated the United States standards and curriculum so that they were research-based and aligned nationwide to increase test scores (Gewertz, 2015). Additionally, the Obama administration enacted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (McCann et al., 2021). The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) required every state to have a methodological plan for meeting the needs of all students, especially those who are part of typically disadvantaged subgroups including special education, low income, limited English, and students of color (McCann et al., 2021). As with NCLB (2001), the intent of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) was to provide more equitable education to all students, which again meant more changes for K–12 educators (Dennis, 2016).

Trust is an essential ingredient in well-functioning organizations, especially schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust is needed if schools are to be successful in making transformational changes, particularly those needed to implement the above legislation (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Similarly, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) found that teachers who trusted their principals were more likely to have trusting relationships with students. When this trust was positive, students were more likely to achieve at higher levels (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a).

In this study, this researcher examined the evolution of definitions of trust, trust studies, characteristics of trustworthy leaders, how trust between principals and teachers is essential to successful schools, and, most importantly, student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Change scholars, Bass (1999) and Islam et al. (2021) identified trust as a key component of leading transformational change. Although much has been
written about the importance of trust in schools, there is yet a gap in the literature around practical strategies that principals can use to develop trust with their teachers. Therefore, in this study, this researcher aimed to close that gap.

**Definition of Key Terms**

In this study, this researcher examined how trust can be built between principals and teachers efficiently and effectively for the purposes of facilitating positive change. The key terms relevant to this study are defined in the following list. The first four terms are used to describe the characteristics of trustworthiness. The remaining four terms pertain to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study.

**Benevolence.** Benevolence is defined as “the confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected and not harmed by the trusted party” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 19).

**Competence.** “Competence is the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 30).

**Openness.** Openness is a process where leaders “make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence and control” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 25).

**Reliability.** “Reliability implies a sense of confidence that you can ‘rest assured’ that you can count on a person doing what is expected on a regular, consistent basis” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 29).

**Shared leadership.** Shared leadership is “an emergent phenomenon in which multiple members of a team take on leadership roles over time” (Krier, 2022, p. 901).

**Transformational leadership.** According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process in which “leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation” (p. 1). Transformational leaders persuade followers to transcend their own self-
interests for the good of the organization (Bass, 2008). Transformational leaders also motivate followers to focus on achievement and self-actualization (Burns, 1978).

**Trust.** Trust is “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 257) to facilitate instructional risk taking for the benefit of students in a school environment.

**Vulnerability.** Brown (2015) defined vulnerability as “the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (p. 19).

**Statement of the Problem**

The literature on trust and trust building does not address common trust-building practices for elementary school principals. Principals are told to be honest, vulnerable, reliable, competent, and benevolent (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Although a new principal can work on these things while running a school, they also need key strategies to reach all their teachers and to build trust systematically throughout the school. Despite the very clear importance of trust in schools (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b), the literature on trust and trust building does not adequately address common trust-building practices for elementary school principals when they enter a school. Tschannen-Moran’s (2014) studies have been focused on the importance of trust and characteristics of trustworthiness, as opposed to straightforward, clear strategies to build trust with the many teachers that are the heart of the school. The problem that was addressed in this study was the lack of practical strategies for principals to build trust with teachers effectively and efficiently to facilitate positive change and, ultimately, to support student achievement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how elementary school principals could quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. Principals
need a toolbox of strategies that they can use to build trust from the first day that they enter a school. They also need strategies that they can use throughout their principalship to maintain trust. By interviewing elementary school principals in the field, this researcher uncovered different strategies that male and female principals use to build trust with teachers.

**Research Question and Design**

The question that guided this study was designed to fill the gaps in the literature and to determine what practical, effective strategies principals could use to build trust with teachers. The following question guided this study:

- How do elementary school principals describe their trust-building practices with teachers to facilitate change efforts quickly to support the success of students?

This question was derived from the literature. Brezicha and Fuller (2019) noted that strong interpersonal relationships are needed in schools to implement lasting change. Daly and Finnegan (2012) also showed that trusting relationships between teachers and principals are needed for successful school improvement efforts. Using a phenomenological approach, this researcher interviewed six principals who were currently leading schools in a western state. Using qualitative techniques, this researcher recorded, transcribed, and coded the interviews to uncover themes regarding trust-building practices with teachers for the purpose of positive change in elementary schools.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), the conceptual framework is shaped by a researcher’s personal interests and goals. This researcher served as an elementary principal for several years. Trust was an important part of this researcher’s leadership and the foundation for transformational change. However, early in this researcher’s principalship several difficult personnel situations had to be addressed. This researcher’s actions were not conducive to
building trust with the rest of the staff, for they saw their colleagues leaving with very little explanation from their leader. While these situations and resulting actions were confidential, these situations and actions nonetheless spread fear throughout the school building. It took a very long time to rebuild trust that had barely been established to run the school effectively and, ultimately, to facilitate much needed change. This researcher’s hope through this research was to give both new and veteran principals straightforward strategies to build and grow trust throughout a school.

Conceptually, this study was rooted in the idea that trust is fundamental to any relationship, especially between teachers and principals (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019). Trust is required for the smooth operation of schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust is also the foundation of a positive school climate and interpersonal communication, and it is necessary for transformational changes (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Schools exist to support the needs of students; therefore, teachers and principals must work effectively together to “cultivate high performance” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis 2015a, p. 257). Daly et al. (2014) and Podsakoff et al. (1990) noted how trust is essential in creating an environment conducive to transformational change. Furthermore, Anderson (2017) reported that principals who lead with a transformational style inspire trust in teachers and that teachers and principals have a more trusting relationship. Trust and transformational leadership go hand in hand.

The guiding theoretical framework for this study was transformational leadership theory. This study was founded on the theory of transformational leadership as a necessary ingredient for quality, effective schools (Anderson, 2017). Burns (1978) first developed transformational leadership theory. Burns articulated that transformational leadership is a style of leading that transforms followers’ behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes to a higher level of performance,
achievement, and motivation. Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) described transformational leadership as a style of leading that motivates followers to do more than they ever thought was possible. With all the demands on schools to reform, teachers must feel empowered to make the changes that are required of them. Transformational leaders are needed to make schools places of continual learning and improvement for the benefit of all students.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This section addresses the assumptions, limitations, and scope of this study. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019) assumptions are what the researcher takes for granted in the study. Limitations are those features of the study that might affect the results of the study or the researcher's ability to generalize the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Lastly, according to Simon and Roes (2013), the scope pertains to the parameters of the study.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) described assumptions in qualitative research as beliefs and biases that might affect the study. They also noted that assumptions are what researchers hold to be true when they design the research study. In this study, this researcher assumed that the elementary school principals who were interviewed had used trust-building practices with their teachers. Trust-building relationships lie at the heart of successful school improvement (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019). Trust also is the lubricant that allows for the successful operation and positive climate of schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Furthermore, this researcher assumed that these principals valued transformational leadership and had engaged their staff in transformational change to benefit student achievement levels. According to Fullan (2020), elementary school leaders have a moral purpose to transform schools into learning centers that support all students. Additionally, this style supports subordinates by motivating them to do more than they ever thought possible (Bass & Avolio,
1994). Schools need exceptional leaders to collaborate with teachers to create environments of achievement for all students (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019).

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), limitations clarify the boundaries of the study including, but not limited to, time, location, and sample of the study. Limitations to this study included a small sample size, a geographical concentration, and varied levels of experience of the principals who were interviewed. First, this study only included a small sample size of six principals. The experiences documented here might not include all of the many ways that principals can build trust with teachers.

Additionally, all the principals for this study who were interviewed were from one small geographical area in a western state. Their experiences might have been different from those in other parts of the United States. The participants who were interviewed led elementary suburban schools which might have provided different experiences and practices than urban or rural schools. Another limitation of the study might have been the different levels of experience of the principals interviewed. These school leaders were varied in their time being principals, with some being more novice leaders, while others were more seasoned. The size of the schools they led were also different and that might also provide very different strategies for building trust with teachers.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) described the importance of identifying a study’s limitations. They noted that detailing limitations acknowledges the study’s transferability, application to practice, and the utility of a study’s findings. Additionally, they articulated the conditions that might weaken the study. The limitations already listed detail the targeted nature of this phenomenological research. The researcher believes that, despite these limitations the findings will inform the literature and assist principals in practice.
According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), it is important to clarify the boundaries of the study so that it remains focused. This study was limited to elementary school principals in a single school district. This researcher recruited only principals who valued trust building and had experience in this realm. Simon and Roes (2013) noted that the scope is the parameters of the research. This study was focused on the trust-building experiences of elementary school principals who valued facilitating positive change.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study was that it would provide practicing principals with practical strategies to build trust with teachers. Brown et al. (2016) found with high levels of trust in a school, teachers were more likely to use research-based methods in their teaching. Trust between principals and teachers led to teachers feeling more comfortable taking instructional risks. For schools to achieve at high levels, teachers must feel comfortable trying new strategies with students without “fear or humiliation of reprisal” (Brown et al., 2016, p. 85).

The significance of this study was that it could help principals, which in turn would help teachers and students. The strategies that were discovered through these interviews can help principals to build trust with teachers. In turn, this trust will create a positive school climate where students will succeed. If principals can build trusting relationships with their teachers, the school will be a positive place to work and learn (Kim & Kim, 2014). Students are far more likely to succeed in a school with a positive culture where the adults trust one another (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a).

Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) determined that trust is the foundation for the cooperative relationships that are needed for “cultivating high performance” (p. 257). In a school setting, especially in elementary schools, the relationship between teachers and principals is extremely important (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019). When teachers do not trust their
principal, teachers are more apt to use self-protective behaviors that ultimately impair instruction and the professional community of a school (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) also found that teachers who trusted their principals were more likely to have trusting relationships with students. When this trust was positive, students were more likely to achieve at higher levels.

Additionally, trustworthy behaviors between principals and teachers promote collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). With collaboration, there is a potential for better decisions, possibilities for great organizational learning, and more effective problem solving (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Furthermore, Schwabsky et al. (2020) looked at the conditions needed for academic optimism which they believed would lead to innovation and academic achievement. Again, they determined that a positive school climate with high levels of trust would promote collective teacher efficacy and, in turn, academic optimism. These qualities are needed to facilitate innovation in schools.

**Summary**

School reform efforts began with *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner & National Commission, 1983) and continued with the major legislative actions of No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015; Dennis, 2016). For transformational change to take place to support these laws, trust must occur between principals and teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). The problem that was addressed in this study was the lack of practical strategies for principals to build trust with teachers effectively and efficiently to facilitate positive change and, ultimately, to support student achievement. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how elementary school principals could quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. This researcher used a phenomenological approach which was grounded in the theoretical framework of transformational leadership and the conceptual
framework of trust based on her own personal experiences as an elementary school principal. This study is significant because trust is the basis for student achievement in schools (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a) and there was a gap in the literature for practical strategies that principals could use to develop that trust with teachers. Therefore, in this study, this researcher aimed to fill that gap and to support principals in leading successful schools. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature as it pertains to this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust is an integral component to human relationships (Brown et al., 2016). It is especially important in a school environment (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This is a setting that has traditionally been very isolating in that teachers close the door to their classroom and teach the students assigned to them each year without external influence (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhamadi, 2016). In an era of school reform (Lichter, 2017) and compounding student social, emotional, and behavioral challenges (Minkos & Gelbar, 2020), it is essential that principals be able to develop trust with their teachers quickly to support their needs in the classroom effectively. Without trust, schools flounder and cannot reach their goal of educating students effectively (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Conceptually, this study is rooted in the trust work of Tschannen-Moran (2014) who argued that while trust is a necessary element in any relationship, trust is especially necessary between teachers and principals in schools. Tschannen-Moran also reported that trust is necessary for the smooth operation of schools. In addition, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) found that trust is linked to a positive school climate and effective interpersonal communication. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy also advised that trust is needed if schools are to be successful in making transformational changes. The following will discuss this researcher’s personal interest in this study, research that supports this study, and theoretical framework that guided this study.

This study is also rooted in personal experience. This researcher is particularly interested in the need for trust between principals and teachers to enact transformative change because of the researcher’s own leadership experiences. This researcher encountered some confidential personnel issues early in the researcher’s principalship such that trust was strained throughout the school building. This researcher would have benefited greatly from a comprehensive list of
strategies to help rebuild trust where it was lost. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), it is these personal beliefs and experiences that frame intellectual work.

In the literature review, this researcher first examines historical definitions of trust and early trust studies. Then the creation of trust and strategies for developing trust are discussed. Finally, trust and change process and contemporary trust studies are explored. The literature that supports importance of trust between elementary school principals and teachers is vast and it is clear that trust is essential in successful schools (Tschanenn-Moran, 2014).

In an unprecedented time of school reform in which many students are falling further and further behind the academic standards (Onyema et al., 2020), exceptional school leadership is necessary for schools to be successful (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leadership, according to Burns (as cited in Avolio & Bass, 1988), is a leadership style that transforms followers’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to a higher level of motivation, achievement, and performance. Avolio and Bass (1988) built on that notion and articulated that transformational leadership “motivates others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible” (p. 3). School reforms require that unprecedented change take place in schools, and teachers must feel empowered to make these necessary changes.

Fullan (2020) discussed the importance of moral purpose when addressing change in organizations, describing it as “acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole” (p. 8). Elementary school leaders have a moral purpose to transform schools into learning centers that support all students. Fullan (2003) further addressed the importance of drastically changing school culture:

The criteria of moral purpose are the following: that all students and teachers benefit in terms of identified desirable goals, that the gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar for all is raised, that ever-deeper educational goals are pursued,
and that the culture of the school becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in. (p. 52)

Schools must become centers of continual improvement and learning to be able to address the many barriers to academic success that students face.

Kotter (2012) articulated the challenge of driving people “out of their comfort zones” (p. 5). Enacting lasting change requires relentless training, practice, application and understanding of the leader’s vision. According to Heath and Heath (2011), lasting change also needs to resonate with people’s feelings. Heath and Heath (2011) discussed how leaders must “influence not only their environment but their hearts and minds” (p. 5).

Trust is the foundation for transformational leadership and a necessary component of school leadership. Kwan (2019), Mayer and Gavin (2005), and Yuki (1989) argued that transformational leaders might motivate followers to participate in school culture above and beyond expectations because followers trust and respect them. Additionally, Hoch et al. (2016) and Podsakoff et al. (1990) identified trust in one’s leader an important component of transformational leadership. Furthermore, Anderson (2017) reported that principals who lead with a transformational style inspire trust in teachers and that teachers and principals have a more trusting relationship when principals lead with a transformational style. Trust and transformational leadership go hand in hand.

Furthermore, Schwabsky et al. (2020) looked at the conditions needed for academic optimism, which they believed leads to innovation and academic achievement. Schwabsky et al. (2020) determined that a positive school climate with high levels of trust promoted collective teacher efficacy and, in turn, academic optimism. These qualities are needed to facilitate innovation in schools. Therefore, the purpose of school leadership and the need for transformational leadership is to “cultivate high performance” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis,
A cooperative relationship between principals and teachers is essential so that they can work more effectively together to solve the many problems that students face (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This successful relationship can promote trust between teachers and students, which then engages students in learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trust, student achievement, and transformational leadership are all interconnected and necessary for the success of schools and the students within them.

This literature review examines the many facets of trust in schools. Although trust has been identified as an important part of successful organizations (Alfes et al., 2012), scholars have struggled with determining a clear definition of trust (King, 2021). This literature review also looks at how definitions of trust have evolved over time. Next, an early history of trust research is presented. It is important to understand how studies of trust have evolved and how trust between principals and teachers is essential to successful schools and, most importantly, student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2000).

Different aspects of building trust are considered next, as this researcher looks at different ways that trust can be built. First, principal character traits that are conducive to trust building are discussed. Scholars have converged on trustworthy characteristics such as benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Next, traits and actions that impair trust are considered. The practices of exhibiting vulnerability, using shared decision making, being visible in the school building, and removing staff (Kochanek, 2005) are discussed. Furthermore, the need for trust in implementing change in schools is explored. Change scholars (Bass, 1999; Islam et al., 2021) have identified trust as a key component of leading transformational change.
Historical Definitions of Trust

Trust is an essential component of a viable society (Deutsch, 1958), interpersonal relationships (Lewicki et al., 2006), and organizational effectiveness (Alfes et al., 2012). However, after decades of research, there is still no agreed-upon definition in the field that addresses trust across disciplines, nor is there one that specifically pertains to education (King, 2021). Early definitions of trust across disciplines were focused on the willingness to take risks. Many scholars have looked at the willingness to accept risks in an interdependent relationship (Deutsch, 1958; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Kee & Knox, 1970; Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). These scholars discussed different motivations for assuming varying levels of risk and acknowledged that some level of risk is needed in any functional relationship. Sheppard and Sherman (1998) went further to conceptualize different levels of risk taking in different types of interdependent relationships.

Another group of scholars focused on the need for vulnerability for trust to form between individuals. Brown (2018), who is very well known for research in vulnerability and shame, suggested leaders show personal sides of themselves to develop trust with their subordinates. Other scholars have also noted the importance of vulnerability in trusting relationships (Brown, 2018; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998; Serva et al., 2005). According to Brown (2018), human relationships have different levels of openness and vulnerability. Brown argued that full disclosure of personal matters is not needed to have successful professional relationships. However, some level of vulnerability is needed to build effective relationships. Mayer et al. (1995) suggested the following definition of trust:

The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (p. 134)
In the cognitive realm, researchers have described character traits that elicit trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). These include reliability, honesty, and integrity as well as dependability (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998). On the affective side, these authors have described how one has beliefs and feelings about another party, which elicit trust.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) described trust as “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (p. 257). This encapsulates many aspects of trust that are needed between principals and teachers to create a positive, nurturing school climate to benefit students. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also incorporated emotional and cognitive aspects of forming trust. Lastly, Tschannen-Moran (2014) described how teachers must feel that their principal is reliable, honest, competent, and dependable.

**Early History of Trust Studies**

The importance of trust in organizations has been recognized for more than 50 years (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975; Likert, 1967). However, researchers began to investigate in the 1980s the importance of trust in schools, specifically between principals and teachers. Hoy and Kupersmith (1984) and Hoy and Henderson (1983) started to study trust in schools. In their work, Hoy and Henderson (1983) identified three aspects of leader authenticity which included accountability, non-manipulation of others, and saliency of self over role, meaning exhibiting personality. Hoy and Kupersmith (1984) believed that principal authenticity is an important element in developing teacher trust. Hoy and Kupersmith (1984) studied trust in 45 elementary schools and 87 middle schools in New Jersey and noted a direct link between principal authenticity and teacher trust.

In several subsequent studies, researchers (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hoy et al., 1991; Tarter et al., 1989) found that openness in the school climate facilitates trust as well. Hoy and Sabo
(1998) and Tarter and Hoy (1988) looked at the relationship between organizational health and teacher trust in schools. In both studies, the researchers found a positive and significant correlation between organizational health and teacher trust in schools. Tarter and Hoy (1988) reported that principals are important in creating a positive school climate. Protecting teachers from undue pressures and supporting them collegially builds confidence and trust.

The link between school climate and trust inspired researchers to examine the link between trust in schools and organizational effectiveness. Hoy et al. (1992), Hoy and Ferguson, (1985), Miskel et al. (1979), and Miskel et al. (1983) all adapted the use of the Mott (1972) scale, a tool that was originally used in hospitals to evaluate organizational effectiveness, to measure effectiveness in schools (Hoy et al., 1991). In addition, they used the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire, a tool used to predict student achievement and teachers’ commitment to the school and found that a positive school climate is positively related to school effectiveness (Hoy et al., 1991). Subsequently, Hoy et al. (1991) and Hoy and Sabo (1998) were also able to find positive correlations between teacher trust in the principal with student achievement.

Studies in the 1990s were focused on principal attributes that created trust with teachers. Principals who admitted making mistakes, did not manipulate others, and acted authentically, generated trusting relationships (Hoy & Tartar, 1992). Additionally, principals who focused on developing interpersonal relationships with teachers were seen as trustworthy (Hoy et al., 1992). Hoy et al. (1992) also found that principals who were open, positive, authentic, and supportive created trusting relationships with school stakeholders.

Further studies at the turn of the century continued to link trust in schools with student achievement. Hoy et al. (2006) found that academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust were indicators of student academic achievement, regardless of socioeconomic status, previous achievement, or urbanicity. Goddard et al. (2001) had a very similar finding after
studying 47 urban schools and more than 2,500 elementary school students. They also found that the level of teacher trust is directly related to teachers’ perception that they can make a positive contribution to student learning outcomes.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998, 2000) built the facets of trust which have been foundational for researchers and leaders in the field. They determined that five facets of principal behavior helped create trust and a positive school climate. These facets included benevolence, honesty, competence, reliability, and openness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). These traits are examined in the creation of trust section of this literature review.

The following studies show how significant trust is in organizations, especially school environments. With all the modern demands on principals and teachers, an increasing number of researchers have confirmed that trust is the lubricant that allows schools to do the important work they need to do to support the various needs of students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). With increasing pressure to succeed, and despite many obstacles including the achievement gap and social, emotional, and behavioral concerns, trust is necessary for a positive school climate that fosters student success. Researchers in the early 2000s (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard et al., 2001; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) designed many studies to show the link between trust and effective schools. These researchers were very successful analyzing trust literature and designing comprehensive studies that involved hundreds of educators across the country.

However, the earliest trust research focused on the world of business and the importance of leaders having trusting relationships with their subordinates. Scholars noted that trust is an important component of leadership (Bass, 2008) and that trust can be moderated by managers (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Some researchers began hinting that leaders must have the trust of their subordinates to be effective (Burke et al., 2007) and that trust or lack of trust between leaders
and subordinates can facilitate or hinder organizational outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Whitener et al. (1998) even recommended that leaders who elicit trust in their subordinates should be rewarded.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) were some of the first researchers to study the importance of trust in a school setting. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy designed a study in which they found that school reforms can only be successfully implemented if there is trust between teachers and principals in the school setting. Their findings were the result of an extensive review of the literature on trust. They examined trust in the fields of psychology, sociology, organizational science, and education by reviewing experiments, longitudinal studies, interviews, and surveys that had been completed. They found that trust is an essential ingredient in well-functioning organizations, especially schools. They reported that trust is necessary for the smooth operation of schools. They also found that trust is linked to a positive school climate and effective interpersonal communication. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) advised that trust is needed if schools are to be successful in making transformational changes.

Tschannen-Moran (2001) linked trust and collaboration, arguing that collaboration is increasingly important in schools to implement reform efforts. Trust is needed throughout a school environment, especially between principals and teachers. Tschannen-Moran (2001) developed an instrument to measure collaboration in a school and linked the Trust Scales (see also Hoy & Kupersmith, 1984). Tschannen-Moran (2001) determined that schools with a high level of trust had a high level of collaboration. The benefits of collaboration are many. With collaboration, there is a potential for better decisions, possibilities for great organizational learning, and more effective problem solving (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Goddard et al. (2001) worked further on establishing a link between the need for trust and successful schools. After analyzing 47 schools, 452 teachers, and over 2,000 students, they
determined that trust was a positive predictor of high student achievement. Tschannen-Moran (2009) examined teacher professionalism and trust in schools. In a study of 80 middle schools in a mid-Atlantic state, Tschannen-Moran (2009) found, through portions of the state’s school climate measurement tool, that trust is linked to increased teacher professionalism. When teachers trust their principals, teachers are more likely to have greater enthusiasm for their work, more discretion to address student needs the way they feel is productive, and more trusting relationships with colleagues and other stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran, 2019). In a few short years, the leaders in trust research were able to show that trust was important for principals, teachers, students, and school climate.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) expounded on many of these themes, reinforcing the importance of trust in schools. Tschannen-Moran (2014) argued that, in schools where principals and teachers trust one another, they can work more effectively together to solve the many problems that students face in their communities. This in turn can promote trust between teachers and students, which engages students in learning. Berkovich (2018) analyzed more than 600 teacher and principal surveys. Berkovich found a statistically significant correlation between a teacher’s trust in their principal and the teacher’s positive relational well-being and willingness to contribute extra effort to the school. This was the first multidimensional study (looking at both cognitive and affective trust) of its kind.

**Creation of Trust**

Trust is extremely important in schools (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Schwabsky et al. (2020) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) showed that principals set the tone for a positive school climate in their buildings. When teachers trust principals, they are more likely to collaborate, take instructional risks, and better support their students (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). These qualities lead to improved student outcomes, which is the reason for
school reform measures (Goddard et al., 2001; Schwabisky et al., 2020). Tschannen-Moran (2014) described personal characteristics of principals that are beneficial for building trust in schools.

**Competence and Ability**

Early trust scholars identified the first of these as competence and ability (Butler, 1991; Mishra, 1996; Sitkin & Roth, 1993; Whitener et al., 1998; Williams, 2001). Ability as defined by Mayer et al. (1995) as “that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence with some specific domain” (p. 717). When leaders show that they have the ability and competence to lead in their field, they are more trustworthy to followers. Bukko et al. (2021) also found this to be the case in their study of principal–teacher trust. Competence is key in trust-building.

**Authenticity**

Forsyth et al. (2011) described the importance of authenticity in the principalship. Principals who take responsibility for their actions and admit when they have made mistakes show authenticity. Additionally, principals also show authenticity when they treat others with respect and act appropriately in leadership situations. Furthermore, Bass (2008) discussed the importance of authenticity in building trust, recommending that leaders extend genuine feelings and thoughts when interacting with their subordinates. Brown (2015) concurred with the importance of principals sharing their authentic selves with school stakeholders.

**Benevolence and Integrity**

Furthermore, benevolence and integrity are other desirable traits for trustworthiness according to early trust scholars. Benevolent leaders are those who are perceived to care genuinely about their subordinates and to convey authentic concern in relationships (Caldwell & Hayes, 2007). Leaders with integrity are explained in this context as “the trustor’s perception that
the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable” (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 719). Again, many early trust scholars agreed that showing care and concern for subordinates helps to build trust in organizations (Bukko et al., 2021; Butler, 1991; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Mishra, 1996; Sitkin & Roth, 1993; Whitener et al., 1998; Williams, 2001).

Tschannen-Moran (2014) built on these character traits and labeled the five facets of trust on which much of the author’s later work is based. Tschannen-Moran (2014) identified benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competency as the most important traits for a principal to use to build trust with subordinates. In a school setting, Tschannen-Moran (2014) detailed the importance of a principal showing benevolence, arguing that teachers have many demands placed on them and that care and concern from the principal goes a long way in creating a positive school climate and trusting relationships. Tschannen-Moran (2014) recommended that principals show interest and sensitivity to teachers’ needs and interests and that principals work hard to protect teachers’ rights. Bukko et al. (2021) found that benevolence was important as well for principals wanting to build trust with teachers. After interviewing and conducting focus groups in a high trust school in California, they found that many teachers stated that it was important that their principal demonstrate the belief that teachers want to do well. The participants shared that caring relationships are essential to build trust.

**Openness**

Openness is a facet of trust that is also very important. Tschannen-Moran (2014) and Brown (2015) suggested that leaders show vulnerability. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also described how communication is important when being open, arguing that leaders should be effective and clear communicators as well as be “accurate and forthcoming” (p. 28). Lastly, in being open Tschannen-Moran (2014) highly recommended that principals share decision making with employees. However, openness does not mean breaking confidentiality. Openness is also
very similar to the recommendations that Kouzes and Posner (2017) had for leaders of all organizations. Kouzes and Posner suggested that, to promote environments of trust, leaders should show vulnerability, share information, facilitate collaboration, show empathy, and develop common goals. Kouzes and Posner argued that trust needs to be present for workers to collaborate with one another and that collaboration is necessary for any successful organization.

Benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competency of the principal create trust in the school environment (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Bass (2008) concurred that loyalty, respect, openness, receptivity, discreetness, fairness, honesty, judgment, consistency, caring, moral character, and willingness to serve others promotes trust building (p. 259). Bukko et al. (2021) agreed that openness, competence, benevolence, reliability, and honesty are the keys to building trust in a school environment. Not only do principals need to be versed in research-based instructional methods, federal and state laws, and district policies, they also need skills in conflict resolution and initiating change (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Vulnerability and In-Person Interactions**

Other scholars argued that trust is formed by the actions of the leader. Frauke Meyer et al. (2017) and McKnight et al. (1998) argued that strong initial trust is built when there are frequent, positive, face-to-face interactions. Frauke Meyer et al. also argued that it is helpful if a leader has a positive reputation. Brown (2015) agreed that trust is built within small, personal interactions, suggesting that leaders show vulnerability during these interactions to appear more human. Brown also contended that being open and honest and to live one’s values invites trustworthy behavior. Frauke Meyer et al. (2017) and Hall et al. (2004) concurred that leader accountability, and hence trust, is a social process. However, they argued that social interactions either confirm or contradict the leader’s reputation that is already established, whereas Brown (2015) implied that trust is built from the ground up with interactions that contain leader vulnerability.
Impairment of Trust

One of the main factors that can break trust is dishonesty. When a leader is dishonest it is “read as an indictment of a person’s character” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 27). Tschannen-Moran (2014) noted that when a principal is found to be lying, teachers lose faith in anything the principal says. Trust can be very difficult to re-establish. Tschannen-Moran (2014) continued to explain that equally damaging to principal–teacher relationships is a disconnect between a leader’s words and actions. When principals do not follow up as they said they would, or their actions do not match their words, trust begins to erode. When this becomes a pattern, trust is equally difficult to re-establish (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Incompetence also leads to distrust (Balyer, 2017). Balyer (2017) found that teachers believe that principals who know little about education are untrustworthy. Additionally, those leaders who do not cultivate the voice of teachers in decision making and daily matters erode trust in a school building (Balyer, 2017). This can lead to a negative school culture where teachers do not trust their principals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). When principals fail to show care, concern, and compassion for their subordinates, trust can also deteriorate (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014). Rather than focusing on instruction and student achievement, trust deteriorates, and teachers engage in self-protective behaviors. The lack of trust trickles down through the school and can affect students’ learning.

Various leadership attributes can also lead to teachers’ distrust of the principal. Principals who micromanage teachers show implicitly that they do not trust the professionalism of their staff (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). When teachers do not feel trusted, they are less likely to trust in return. Additionally, when principals implement a proliferation of rules, the controlling behavior illustrates that the principal has little trust in the faculty (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). When communication is not open, teachers become suspicious of decisions and trust is negatively
affected (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014). Principals must be wary of the many things that can cause distrust.

**Strategies for Developing Trust**


**Vulnerability**

Brown (2018) described a strategy that leads with vulnerability, recommending that leaders share their story with teachers so that they will understand the leader’s reasons for wanting to lead. When leaders can share personal parts of their lives, others see them as human (Brown, 2018). In showing vulnerability, principals illustrate to teachers that they are taking a personal risk and that they already trust their followers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Frauke Meyer et al., 2017). In turn, teachers feel that it is safe for them to take risks and trust their leader (Twyford & Le Fevre, 2019). This is a viable strategy especially for new principals to open the channels of trust (Brown, 2018). However, it can only be used sparingly and must be done so with caution. Showing too much vulnerability or being too open about irrelevant personal information can cause others to feel uncomfortable and to shut down (Brown, 2018).
Shared Decision Making

Other researchers (Kochanek, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) articulated the importance of sharing decision making and being open about school business. These researchers discussed the need for teachers to be involved in decisions that affect them and to honor and value their opinions. According to Hauge et al. (2014) creating mechanisms for school leadership must be done with great care and leadership savvy to facilitate change effectively. However, Kochanek (2005) argued that sharing leadership in a school should only be done after trust is established between teachers and principals. Shared decision making is a great strategy for building trust within a building. However, principals must be well-versed with tools on effective meeting management for it to be done well (Lummis, 2001; Rashad, 2018). Hauge et al. (2014) also warned that school culture and structures can hinder this process. New principals must coach teachers and teams on how to support school decision making effectively (Hauge et al., 2014).

Trust scholars Kochanek (2005) and Mayger and Hochbein (2020) recommended that principals lead the creation of a strategic plan to build trust in a school community. Kochanek (2005) argued that this process can “serve as a vehicle for demonstrations of competence and integrity” (p. 29). Creating opportunities for shared leadership and having openness about the future direction of the school are behaviors that elicit trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Rashad (2018) and Yikici and Altinay (2017) also commented that trust is a needed element in strategic planning. First, this process is a very time-consuming one (Winand & Edelfson, 2018). To build a strategic plan collaboratively, reflecting on educational beliefs and prioritizing for the future, takes time. Many principals with multiple educational priorities and initiatives might be hard-pressed to find time to have these in-depth conversations with school stakeholders (Winand & Edelfson, 2018). In addition, this process is best served when some
foundational trust has already been established (Ghamrawi, 2013; Li et al., 2016; Yikici & Altinay, 2017). If a principal engages in this work too soon in their tenure, teachers might feel that the principal is trying to change too much too soon which might put teachers on the defensive. However, once a principal fully understands the school community and what its members value, this process can be very valuable and productive if time allows (Winand & Edelfson, 2018).

**Visibility**

Tschannen-Moran (2014) included vignettes of principals from stories of the years of researching trust in schools. The most successful principal was the one who invested time and resources into fostering relationships with teachers, students, and parents. This principal was visible throughout the school and at school events. By doing so, the principal created an environment with a strong sense of community.

**Removal of Ineffective Staff**

Other researchers suggested that principals remove incompetent or disagreeable staff members to promote a more positive school culture (Bryk & Scheinder, 2002; Kochanek, 2005; Rashad, 2018). This strategy is a complex one that can have positive effects, but it can also have negative effects. In many school systems removing a tenured teacher is very difficult to do (Shaked, 2019). Kahlenberg (2015) noted that tenured teachers need to engage in gross misconduct before they can be removed. Additionally, the removal process, which often is in the form of hearings, can take months or even years.

**Trust and the Change Process**

Schools are currently operating in a culture of reform and change (Lichter, 2017). An essential ingredient to usher in these reforms to bolster student achievement is trust. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) wrote, “Trust is required for many of the reforms taking shape in
American schools” (p. 585). Other scholars noted that trust is also important for implementing and sustaining school reforms (Daly et al., 2014). Blase and Blase (2001), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Schwabsky (2020) argued that it is unlikely that changes will be made without trust between principals and teachers. Tschannen-Moran (2014) found that without trust teachers avoid, neglect, or even refuse change.

When there is trust between principals and teachers there is an environment that is conducive to the growth necessary for change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Schwabsky, 2020). When there are high levels of trust, schools have “increased participation among faculty in school reform efforts, greater openness to innovations among teachers, increased outreach to parents, and even higher academic productivity in a school” (Kochanek, 2005, p. xv). Bryk and Schneider (2002) also found, in their 10-year study of 400 Chicago schools, that relational trust has many benefits for schools, including (a) reduced teacher vulnerability and uncertainty, which allows for creativity and innovation; (b) responsible risk taking; and (c) the ability to participate in change efforts. They also found that relational trust creates a school environment that sustains commitment and energy for school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Transformational leadership is considered the most appropriate leadership style to nurture followers’ needs during organizational change (Islam et al., 2021; Sharma & Krishnan, 2012). According to Bass (1999), transformational leaders communicate an effective vision, invite followers to participate in decision making, and support creative thinking and problem solving. Transformational leaders also strive to empower followers and are cognizant of followers’ individual needs (Bass, 1985). For transformational leaders, learning is valuable, problems are opportunities to learn, and all followers are sources of solutions and new ideas (Bass, 1985).

Many scholars concur that employee attitude and behavior play a very important role in managing effective organizational change (Gilley et al., 2009; Islam et al., 2021). Often during
large-scale changes employees feel cynicism and fear, demonstrate disengagement and burnout, and rebel against the process (Bass, 2008). However, when followers feel valued by their leader and experience benevolence in the relationship, they are more likely to trust in the changes occurring (Colquitt et al., 2012). Trust is needed for successful change to take place.

Teachers’ trust in principals is essential, for this influences their attitudes and actions with respect to any assigned tasks (Islam et al., 2021). According to Kim and Kim (2014), trust in leaders creates a foundation for a productive school. Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) argued that trust between principals and teachers creates open interactions which increase teachers’ perceptions of principals’ honesty, benevolence, and trustworthiness. Teachers’ self-efficacy also increases with principal trust (Lai et al., 2014). Ghamrawi (2013) and Li et al. (2016) asserted that, without trust, leaders would not be able to lead effectively. Lastly, Islam et al. (2021) recommended that transformational leaders work to create high levels of trust in their followers to be effective leaders. It is evident that trust and transformational change go hand and hand, making it even more important that principals have useful strategies for building trust.

**Contemporary Trust Studies**

Akman (2020) examined principals’ social justice behavior and how it is related to student motivation. More than 700 secondary school students completed surveys about their motivation. After analyzing the data, Akman determined that a significant correlation existed between social justice leadership, trust in principals, and motivation for school. Bektas et al. (2020) examined the relationship between teacher trust in principal and teacher professional learning. They surveyed more than 300 teachers. Bektas et al. (2020) found that trust in the school principal and teacher work motivation “mediate the effects of distributed leadership on teacher professional learning” (p. 1).
Alazmi and Alenezi (2020) examined the relationship between teacher’s trust in the school’s principal and organizational justice and teacher commitment. After surveying 200 teachers from 30 different schools, Alazmi and Alenezi found that teacher commitment is positively and significantly related to organizational justice and teachers’ trust in the principal. Alazmi and Alenezi suggested that principals be trained in how to build trust with teachers. They argued that, with this training, principals will be able to run schools effectively and promote teacher commitment.

Farnsworth et al. (2019) ventured to delve into the indirect relationship between teacher trust in principal and student achievement. The researchers surveyed teachers and principals from 60 schools regarding faculty trust in the principal and found that principal learning-centered leadership was significantly and positively related to teacher trust in the principal. Although this is another indirect connection to student learning and achievement, Farnsworth et al. recommended that principals engage in learning-centered leadership to cultivate the trust of their teachers.

Mansor et al. (2021) examined teachers’ roles in school decision making and their trust in the principal. After analyzing more than 600 teacher surveys, the authors found a positive correlation between teachers’ roles in decision making and the trustworthiness of the principal. Furthermore, principals who exhibited benevolence and moral leadership, as opposed to authoritarianism, affected teachers’ participation positively. Mansor et al. recommended that principals use a shared decision-making model in schools.

Bukko et al. (2021) designed a mixed methods study to examine teachers’ perceptions of principals’ trust-building characteristics and actions. Bukko et al.’s study collected data via focus group interviews and measurements of faculty stability. The authors determined that the five characteristics Tschannen-Moran (2014) identified—benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability,
and competence—helped to build a high trust environment. This environment supported teacher stability and retention.

Lastly, Lightner et al. (2021) examined the trust relationship between principals and literacy coaches. Lightner et al. used a qualitative approach to examine this relationship in schools that saw literacy gains for several consecutive years. The researchers found that trust allowed this team to work well together and to communicate a common vision for literacy reform. Students were able to show gains in literacy because of this partnership. Trust continues to be recognized as an essential component of effective schools and transformational change.

**Summary**

In this literature review, this researcher explained the conceptual and theoretical framework used for this study and examined the field of trust, particularly as it pertains to education. Specifically, this researcher examined how principals can efficiently and effectively build trust with their teachers to support change and a climate of strong academic achievement. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of practical strategies for principals to build trust with teachers effectively and efficiently to facilitate positive change and ultimately support student achievement. The literature review synthesized definitions of trust, early studies of trust research, the creation of trust, the impairment of trust, and evaluates recommended strategies to build trust. Lastly, this researcher has examined the importance of trust in leading transformational change in schools and current trust studies. Through the review of the literature, this researcher established that trust is a foundational and essential ingredient for successful schools and that previously identified strategies to build trust are ineffective, time-consuming, and might not be the best to use for today’s elementary school principals. In Chapter 3, the researcher discusses this study’s methodology.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Trust is an essential component in successful schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust between teachers and administrators helps to create a positive school climate (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Tschannen-Moran (2014) focused on the importance of trust and characteristics of trustworthiness, as opposed to straightforward, clear strategies principals could use to build trust with the many teachers that are the heart of the school. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of practical strategies for principals to build trust with teachers effectively and efficiently to facilitate positive change and, ultimately, to support student achievement. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how elementary school principals can quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. By interviewing elementary school principals in the field, this researcher uncovered different strategies that male and female principals can use to build trust with male and female teachers.

The literature framed the research question for this study. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), trust allows teachers and principals to work together for the common good of the school. Additionally, trust is needed to implement positive organizational changes (Anderson, 2017). The question that guided this study was designed to fill the gaps in the literature and to determine what practical, effective strategies principals could use to build trust with teachers. The following research question was answered:

- How do elementary school principals describe their trust-building practices with teachers to facilitate change efforts quickly to support the success of students?

Using a phenomenological approach, this researcher interviewed six principals who are currently leading schools in a suburban area of a mountain western state. Creely (2016) explained that the phenomenological approach provides a description of individuals’ lived
experiences and, most importantly, an exploration of the meanings and learning they derive from those lived experiences. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that the phenomenological approach focuses on studying a few participants extensively and examining a shared phenomenon that they have experienced. These principals’ firsthand accounts added depth and understanding to the phenomenon of the complex nature of building trust and facilitating change in elementary schools.

The phenomenological methodology is the most appropriate approach to this study. In interviewing elementary principals, this researcher documented their lived experiences as successful trust builders and successful transformational change leaders. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that the phenomenological approach focuses on studying a few participants extensively and examining a shared phenomenon that they have experienced. These principals’ firsthand accounts added depth and understanding to the complex nature of building trust and facilitating change in elementary schools.

This method also supports the theoretical framework of this research. The foundation of transformational leadership theory is transforming the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of followers to a higher level of performance, achievement, and motivation (Burns, 1978). It is a leadership style that motivates followers to do more than they ever thought possible (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Leaders cannot motivate followers if there is no trust. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), trust is required for the smooth operation of schools. It is also the foundation of positive school climate and interpersonal communication, and it is necessary for transformational changes (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The phenomenological approach captured these lived experiences in such a way that others could learn from their successes and challenges.
Site Information and Demographics

The school district selected for this study is a high-performing, suburban district in a western state. The pseudonym for the district is the Mountain View Independent School District. It encompasses more than 500 square miles from the suburban plains to the rural mountains that border the continental divide (Mountain View Independent School District, 2023). According to the website the district serves nearly 30,000 students. It is the largest employer in its county, employing nearly 3,000 staff to support students (Mountain View Independent School District, 2023). The 36 elementary schools in the district have a range of demographic diversity that includes schools that serve students who are primarily English-speaking to schools whose students are primarily Spanish-speaking learners, according to the website. The socioeconomic status of the schools is also very diverse, ranging from schools that serve students from very wealthy families to those whose students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch services (more than 40%) (Mountain View Independent School District, 2023).

Participants and Sampling

This researcher interviewed six principals from elementary schools from a suburban school district in a western state of the United States. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), interviewing six participants constitutes a sufficient pool for qualitative analysis. The interviewees met the following criteria:

- over the age of 18
- employee at a Mountain View School District in a western state of the United States
- were, at the time of the interview, an elementary school principal
- understood the importance of building trustworthy relationships with their teachers.
This researcher used purposeful sampling to recruit individuals for the study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), purposeful (or strategic) sampling means that researchers choose certain individuals to participate in a study. These individuals were chosen because they had the experiences or knowledge that were specific to the study. Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted that researchers often use the purposeful sampling approach to get the information needed to answer the study’s research questions.

In this study, this researcher recounted the experiences of six elementary school principals who built trust with their teachers. After obtaining a letter of support from the superintendent and approval from the Office of Research Integrity at the University of New England (Appendix A), this researcher emailed former colleagues from this school district directly to invite them to participate in the study (Appendix B). This researcher used the district website to find email addresses of possible participants. To begin, this researcher reached out to six candidates. One candidate declined to participate; therefore, this researcher reached one other principal to ensure that six interviews took place. It was important to this study that equal numbers of male and female principals were interviewed to determine whether any differences might exist in trust building for different genders. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how elementary school principals could quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change; therefore, it was important that the principals who were interviewed had led their staff through a change. As a former elementary school principal of the district, this researcher is aware of many leaders who have led their schools through positive change. Each participant received a $25 Visa gift card after their interview was completed.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Instruments used for this study were open-ended interview questions (Appendix C). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), the interview is the mainstay of qualitative research
because it provides individualized, deep, rich information to the researcher. A semi structured approach was used so that the researcher could delve into individuals’ experiences. Ravitch and Carl (2021) described this approach as customized replication, for key questions are shared with each interviewee yet probes and follow-up questions can be tailored to everyone’s experiences.

While recruiting participants for the study, this researcher collected personally identifiable information (e.g., name and email address) which was stored in a master list. This master list was kept separately from the study data collected during the interviews. The names and emails recorded on the master list were linked to a uniquely assigned pseudonym within the master list. All information was stored on this researcher’s password-protected computer to which only this researcher had access.

Once a participant expressed interest in the study, the researcher emailed them the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D). Before each interview began, a pseudonym was selected to protect the participant’s identity. Then, this researcher reviewed the Participant Information Sheet with each participant. This researcher then asked the participant to verbally agree to be a willing participant for this study. Data was only collected during one-on-one participant interviews using Zoom (2023). No information was taken without participant consent, and the participants checked the interview transcriptions for accuracy before the data analysis began. All recordings were kept on this researcher’s personal, password-protected computer. The transcripts were stripped of any personally identifiable information.

During the interview, this researcher was in a secure location in which no one could hear the interview while the camera was on. The participants had the right to keep their camera on or to turn it off and to be in a location of their choice. The participants also had the right to skip or not answer a question for any reason. Member checking was offered to each participant. Once this researcher emailed the participant their transcript each participant had seven calendar days to
complete member checking. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) member checks are used to demonstrate credibility further. In this process, study participants were offered the opportunity to examine and offer feedback on the data that they provided. If this researcher did not hear back from the participant on calendar day eight, then that transcript was coded as it was. After the member checking process was completed, all personal identifiable information (master list and printouts) was destroyed. Zoom® (2023) was used to record interviews. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were transcribed using Rev® (2023). All recordings and transcriptions were saved on this researcher’s password-protected computer. All other study data will be retained for three years after the completion of the study, and then destroyed. Only this researcher’s advisors and the Office of Research Integrity at the University of New England will have access to it.

**Data Analysis**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), coding is a process by which researchers add tags or labels to the data to break it into manageable units for analysis. This researcher coded the data using the descriptive method of coding. According to Saldaña (2009), descriptive coding summarizes the primary topic of the data being analyzed. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) recommended descriptive coding be used to engage in preliminary coding with reading, marking, and labeling the data. They suggested that researchers reread the data and codes to ensure that nothing was missed or coded inappropriately relevant to the participants’ experiences. This researcher used Atlas.ti® (2023) software to code and to assist in the analysis of the coding data. Each code was then grouped into categories. After codes and categories were evaluated, this researcher engaged in thematic analysis coding.

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues**

As with all qualitative research, this study has several limitations, delimitations, and possible ethical issues that should be addressed. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), it is
important to understand limitations, for they might affect the results of the study or the researcher’s ability to generalize the findings of the study. However, delimitations are the intentional choices of the researcher that define the boundaries of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The delimitations documented in the following subsections explain the scope of this study.

**Limitations**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), limitations “are those characteristics of design or methodology that affected or influenced the interpretation of the findings . . . Limitations of the study expose the conditions that may weaken the study” (p. 207). One limitation of this study is the potential lack of transferability to other school environments. This study was focused on the experiences of six elementary school principals from a suburban district. These experiences might not be transferable to other school environments (e.g., rural and urban schools). Additionally, the findings might also not be transferable to middle schools or high schools.

The qualitative nature of this study is also a limitation. This researcher focused on the principals’ perceptions of trust-building practices. Hence, the findings were derived from what principals believed were effective strategies in their work. This study did not evaluate their perceptions nor rank their importance. In the study, this researcher analyzed principals’ experiences with the hope that studying these experiences would help other principals in the field. Lastly, the sole perspective of principals in this study is a limitation. In this study, this researcher did not examine teachers’ perception or evaluation of trust-building practices. Therefore, the study is very one-sided and might give an incomplete picture of the trust-building process.
**Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries that the researcher put in place (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This study was guided by several delimitations. Delimitation one was that it was limited to principals of elementary schools. This researcher did not examine the trust-building practices of middle school or high school principals. Delimitation two was that it took place in a single, suburban school district. This was arranged because this researcher was familiar with the district and the leadership expectations of its elementary school principals. This researcher is a former employee and is knowledgeable of the values of the school and greater community that drive the leadership of these schools. This researcher understands the experiences of elementary school principals within the district and the expectations that motivate them.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical considerations for this study were informed by the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The commission issued three main guidelines to which all research involving human subjects must adhere. These principles included respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Within these guidelines, researchers must obtain informed consent from participants, do no harm to participants, and ensure that research procedures are conducted fairly and safely. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D) that detailed their rights, risks, and benefits of participating in the study. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and might include a loss of confidentiality. This risk was minimized by using a pseudonym for each of the participants’ names and by eliminating any identifying information from the study. The participants had the opportunity to
review their transcribed interview for accuracy and were given the choice to have their cameras off during the interview.

Trustworthiness

In this study, this researcher examined the trust-building and leadership practices of a small sample of elementary school principals from a single school district. Despite the small sample size and qualitative nature of the study, this researcher engaged in several different practices to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Therefore, this study is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. This researcher’s plan was to “reassure the reader that this study was of significance and value” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 203).

Credibility

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), credibility “refers to whether the participants’ perceptions match up with the researcher’s portrayal of them” (p. 202). To ensure credibility, this researcher accurately presented the participants’ perceptions and engaged in several practices. First and foremost, when transcripts were completed, this researcher engaged in member checking. The participants had seven calendar days to review their transcripts. If a participant chose not to respond, on calendar day eight, this researcher began coding the transcript. Additionally, this researcher used thick description to ensure that the study would contain the necessary details that readers would easily understand. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), thick description refers to a very detailed way of writing to describe important contextual factors thoroughly and accurately. Finally, this researcher monitored her own biases through reflection and journaling to limit them as much as possible. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the process of reflexivity is having an active awareness of one’s personal role and how it could possibly shape the research. This researcher is a former elementary school
principal who led her staff through transformational change. As such, this researcher actively listened to and analyzed the experiences of others without relying on personal experience.

**Transferability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), transferability is not solely concerned with large sample sizes. Instead, they noted the importance of whether the results could be related to the broader population. The experiences recounted here might be transferable to other school districts. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) also noted that the key to transferability is providing detailed information regarding background and context. Following this method, this researcher has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes might work for their own settings. Thus, thick description was used to capture as many details as possible. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that the description becomes a vehicle for communicating the full picture of the setting, participants, and their experiences. Ravitch and Karl (2021) concurred and advised that the detailed descriptions include both the data and the setting.

**Dependability**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), dependability refers to the data’s stability. By using appropriate methods, researchers can ensure that their data is dependable. By appropriate methods, Ravitch and Carl explained that a study’s research methods must be well thought-out and that these methods must answer the research questions. In this study, this researcher used purposeful sampling to recruit six principals who could relay exceptional experiences about trust building. Additionally, customized replication was used during the interview to delve deeply into participants’ experiences. According to Ravitch and Carl, customized replication is when the interviewer uses the same anchor questions with each participant, but then uses follow-up questions and probes that are unique to each interview to collect richer data.
Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) also suggested keeping an audit trail of all data collection and analysis. This includes keeping detailed and thorough explanations of how data was collected and analyzed. They also recommended taking field notes and reviewing transcripts with participants. This researcher took field notes and allowed participants an opportunity to review their transcripts before coding the data.

**Confirmability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), confirmability is ensuring that a researcher’s findings are derived from the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) suggested that researchers participate in triangulation strategies, researcher reflexivity processes, and external audits to ensure confirmability. Member checking is a triangulation strategy that is used with transcripts to ensure accurate data collection. This researcher used reflexive journaling to ensure that unconscious bias did not influence analysis of the data or conclusions derived from them (Turner, 2020).

**Summary**

In this phenomenological study, the participants shared lived experiences of principals who have built trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. The phenomenological approach described here was the most effective way to capture the successes and failures of practicing principals. Capturing their personal experiences shed light on straightforward strategies for other leaders to replicate and will add to the literature on trust building. By engaging in semi-structured interviews, this researcher also gathered information on the context that surrounds these trust-building techniques and their impact on the greater school environment. The role in which trust helped to foster transformational change and to bolster student achievement was also reported. Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of the researcher’s study.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this study, this researcher used a qualitative phenomenological approach. Semi structured interviews captured the principals’ firsthand accounts and added depth and understanding to the complex nature of building trust and facilitating change in elementary schools. The literature framed the research question for this study. Trust allows teachers and principals to work together for the common good of the school (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and it is needed to implement positive organizational changes (Anderson, 2017). This study was designed to fill the gaps in the literature and to determine what practical, effective strategies principals could use to build trust with teachers. The following research question was answered:

- How do elementary school principals describe their trust-building practices with teachers to facilitate change efforts quickly to support the success of students?

This chapter is comprised of three sections. In section one, this researcher provides an overview of the data collection and analysis methods. In section two, this researcher examines the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Lastly, in section three this researcher summarizes the findings of the study.

Analysis Method

Semi structured interviews conducted over Zoom® (2023) were used to collect data. The interview questions were grouped into the categories of introduction, defining trust, state of trust, creating trust, losing trust, and gender and trust. The interview questions were carefully crafted with feedback from (a) this researcher’s dissertation advisors, (b) the school district’s research office coordinator, and (c) a mock interview with a principal colleague, who was not a participant in this study. Six elementary school principals were interviewed for this study. The participants were comprised of three female elementary school principals and three male
elementary school principals. All participants had at least a decade in school administration and experience in their current buildings, which ranged from 1–14 years, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years experience in educational administration</th>
<th>Years experience in current building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table displays the gender and years of experience in school administration of each participant.

These interviews were then transcribed, using the audio transcription function in Zoom® (2023) and then Rev® (2023) software to create a written transcript. This researcher proofread each transcript before it was sent to each participant to be member checked for accuracy. This researcher also edited each transcript to delete any interruptions that were not pertinent to the interview. During one interview, the Internet connection was weak and Zoom® (2023) froze three times. This researcher deleted the “Can you hear me?” conversations. Additionally, two interviews were slightly interrupted by events at the schools where the participants worked. On different occasions, the participants’ administrative assistants briefly interrupted the participant to ask a question. These dialogues were deleted. Lastly, during one interview the researcher’s young child needed attention for five minutes. This conversation was deleted from the transcript.
Once the transcripts were member checked, this researcher engaged in the descriptive method of coding to begin a preliminary analysis of the data. Coding is a process of qualitative data analysis by which researchers add labels or tags to the data to break it into manageable units (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In the descriptive method, the researcher summarizes the primary topic of the piece of data being analyzed (Saldaña, 2009). Following the recommendations of Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), this researcher first engaged in preliminary coding by reading, marking, and labeling the data using the Atlas.ti® (2023) program. After the initial coding of all six interviews, some codes reoccurred often, while others were unique to a particular participant. Initially, 155 codes were used to analyze the data. This researcher evaluated all the codes and merged many that were redundant, and then initial categories began to emerge.

This researcher reread the transcripts and codes several times to ensure that nothing was missed or coded inappropriately, as recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). As codes were edited, reapplied, and reorganized, they were codified to create further meaning from the experiences of the participants (Saldaña, 2009). From these codes, categories and themes began to emerge as similar ideas were grouped together. Initial coding resulted in 155 codes. After codifying the codes, only 30 remaining codes were left. From these 30 codes, themes and subthemes clearly emerged.

Codes related to communication, vulnerability, and collaborative leadership were used most frequently throughout the transcripts. However, these terms addressed a multitude of different areas having to do with trust and its role in the principalship. For instance, participants spoke about communicating reasons for decision making, communicating one-on-one with teachers, communicating faculty celebrations and reprimands, communication systems, healthy dialogue, delicate conversations, and lack of listening and lack of communicating. Hence, the themes of (a) you have to trust, (b) building trust, (c) ebb and flow of trust, (d) being trustworthy,
(e) losing trust, and (f) trust and gender were better suited to capture the experiences of this study’s participants. Many of the communication, vulnerability, and collaborative leadership ideas are found throughout these six categories.

**Presentation of Results and Findings**

The codes that were most frequently used throughout the six transcripts related to communication, vulnerability, and shared leadership. However, these concepts were used to identify several different roles within trustworthy leadership. Hence, after repeated analysis, the following themes emerged to best capture the leadership experiences of this study’s participants: (a) you have to trust, (b) building trust, (c) ebb and flow of trust, (d) being trustworthy, (e) losing trust, and (f) trust and gender. Each theme is presented in the following sections.

**You Have to Trust**

Every participant spoke about trust between the principal and teachers as being a requirement in elementary schools. In this theme, the participants’ thoughts on the reasons that trust is important are discussed. The subthemes of teacher buy-in to school decision making, a culture of vulnerability, and a climate of open dialogue are examined. Participants spoke readily about the need for trust in elementary schools.

When asked if trust was a requirement in elementary schools, not a single participant hesitated. All participants unanimously agreed that trust was required in an elementary school between the school’s principal and its teachers to best serve students. Participant 2 articulated the need for trust very succinctly by saying, “Yes. I think that to lead a building effectively, you have to have trust. Yes.” Participants spoke of a need for foundational trust in the school building so that the principal and teachers could work together for the benefit of the students. This foundational trust also gives teachers reassurance that their principal will do what they say they will do and that teachers can rely on the principal’s support when it is needed. Participant 5 also
discussed the need for trust in the system when it was very stressed, as it has been in recent years because of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a local traumatic event where a wildfire burnt 1,000 homes to ash. Participant 5 recalled:

We are given and asked to do more than our comfort level, more than the time that we're being paid, influencing the most precious beings, which are elementary students. When we get in this discomfort zone of, I don’t feel good about this, or I am just exhausted, the only thing that people have left is trust in the system. We are the direct supporters of that system. So, when we’re at our lowest that’s all we have is this hope that we're doing the “right thing.” And so, if you do not have the trust between the staff when you’re at your lowest, which we’re constantly being pushed to lately, then you almost kind of give up and want to revert, revert back to what you’re comfortable with. So, it is absolutely integral. And I do feel like, if we kind of reverse it right now, there’s concern or we’re confused about trust from higher up, so then it makes us uneasy. So, it just provides the foundation for change in the positive way.

The participants agreed that trust was the foundation on which effective schools are built.

*Teacher Buy-In to School Decision Making*

Participants 2, 3, 4, and 6 also articulated the need for trust to have buy-in for school decisions. Participant 4 mentioned, “And so, I think that’s where trust building really comes in is do people feel like they have ownership and a voice in the work that we do, right?” Participant 2 also talked about the need for not having teachers blindly follow the principal. Instead, the best schools and the best decisions for students are made collaboratively with the expertise and experience of both teachers and principals combined. Participant 6 explained:

You cannot do a thing in your building until you have established trust with your staff.

You, it won’t go anywhere. You have to, and that’s building a relationship. So that’s part
of it. So, you are building these relationships, which includes trust. If you’re building good, solid relationships with people, they will most likely trust you. And you cannot do a thing until you have it. Nothing. Because it won’t last. It won’t last because you always have people in a building, staff members that will do whatever the principal says, right? They’ll do whatever they say, they’ll do it just how they are. They’ll follow the rules, but nothing will last because the others won’t do that. So, yeah, you have to have it.

Participant 1 also discussed the importance of not having teachers blindly follow the principal, but instead having them buy-in to school decisions. Participant 1 said, “I think to go deep in it, to get really full buy-in and for people to be vulnerable, you have to have that trust.” Trust is necessary for a healthy, collaborative, and positive school climate.

**A Culture of Vulnerability**

Most of the participants also discussed the importance of trust to create a culture of vulnerability and risk taking in a school building. Participant 6 explained:

I think if you have this trust between you, then I can take a risk with you, and you can take a risk with me. If I say, oh, we want to try this, and there’s no worry about failing, like the stigma failing. So, I think it’s a mutual respect and a willingness to take risks with each other like that.

The participants described the need for educators to be able to have the space to make mistakes. Participant 1 discussed a new district initiative, data-driven instruction. He described the importance of trust in creating a school climate where teachers could make mistakes while trying new instructional strategies. He also cited the importance of teachers being able to ask for help and support when they needed it. He relayed that it was critical to be able to go “deep in the work” because that’s where the “real change is going to happen.” A culture of trust allows teachers to be vulnerable and to take instructional risks for the benefit of students.
A Climate of Open Dialogue

Lastly, many of the participants discussed the importance of building trust so that there could be an open dialogue between principals and teachers. Participant 1 shared:

I would say it’s where we can have conversations and give feedback both ways and both people feel comfortable doing that so that ultimately in the end, we can do what’s best to support kids. So, whether the struggle is from an academic instructional standpoint or parent relationship standpoint, or interactions with kids, it’s just that ability to have the open dialogue back and forth.

All participants who were interviewed for this study identified themselves as collaborative leaders. Participants cited times when they had to be authoritative (e.g., during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic) and all participants wanted to engage teachers in the discourse of the school. The participants expressed that this healthy dialogue was what was best for students and best for the school overall. Participant 1 stated, “I think you have to have that initial level where you know, can have an open dialogue and that really, that conversation is because it's best for kids.” The participants valued an open dialogue and wanted teachers’ voices to be part of most of school decisions. Trust was the foundation for creating this culture.

Building Trust

This theme relays participants’ strategies on how they built trust when they started at a new school. The theme included the advice that principals gave to their novice colleagues for the very important process of building trust. The subthemes addressed in this theme included initial meetings, surveys, listening, aligning values, and vulnerability. Participants shared many experiences and strategies that were effective for them when they began at their schools.

The participants talked about how building trust starts during the interview process and never ends. Participant 5 shared:
So, we start the seed upon seeing a picture, and then experiences will deter or grow that.
So, I definitely feel like it starts from the very beginning and it’s very vulnerable itself in the fact that any little thing can warp trust.

When asked about when trust building began, Participant 1 stated, “I would say early and often.” Trust was very important to the participants, and it was something they fostered from the first day they interviewed for their positions.

Initial Meetings

Most of the participants spoke about meeting with all the teachers in their new school buildings before the year began. Some of the participants met with individual teachers and others offered to meet with small groups of teachers. Participant 5 offered an open invitation to all teachers to meet with her as they preferred, be it individually or in small groups. Participant 6 asked specific questions of the teachers during the meetings and took notes that she referred to as the year progressed. These questions included items such as how principals liked to be acknowledged and what they needed from their school leader. Lastly, Participant 4 spoke about the success of walking meetings. She explained:

The other thing that I brought in the beginning was walking meetings with staff, because I feel like in walking meetings, I’m lucky here because we have this great path that goes up to the rec center, but oftentimes when people are walking and sometimes it’s not having to make eye contact, they kind of divulge more information. So, I brought in walking meetings and really my first year was so much of listening and observing.

Each participant used this strategy but tailored it to their own personality.

Surveys

Two participants spoke about using surveys to get to know their school communities and begin to build trust. Participant 6 explained:
So, one of the things I’ve done, this is in both settings. When I was a principal in my previous district, too, I met with every staff member. I first have them fill out a little questionnaire. So, I kind of have that questionnaire just as far as some feedback. And some of those questions are around “What is it you need most from a leader?” or what, I can’t even remember all of them right now. But just so I understand, what do you essentially, what do you need? What do you need to feel supported? What are your best hopes in a leader? Something that effect. And so, I’ve got questions. So anyway, that’s just to kind of get to understand and know them. So that’s something I was intentional about in the beginning.

Participant 4 surveyed the parents of the school community to start to understand what they valued most. She recalled:

I also think in the beginning, I surveyed people more like I surveyed the community, just to really learn and understand the fabric of the school that exists currently, because you need to really learn and get the culture that you’re stepping into.

The participants used surveys to get to know their teachers and communities even more. This relationship building helped to build trust.

**Listening**

Many of the participants discussed the importance of truly listening to teachers and their concerns and suggestions. In fact, most of the participants gave that as their advice to novice principals about how best to build trust. Participants advised that new principals take the entire first year in a new building to truly listen to their teachers and learn about the school before trying to make any changes. Participant 6 shared:

Yeah. If you don’t listen to what they say, if you don’t get their opinion, you don’t collaborate, and you come in and you just change things. I’m pretty good at walking into
a building and knowing what it needs, pretty good at it. But it doesn’t matter because I need to stop and listen and wait. And it’s hard, especially if you know that kids can be doing better. They can be treated, not treated. Because if you’re not going to let a kid not be treated well, but you know what I mean, you could have more success if things were done a different way. You just have to wait. And you have to look and listen and talk and go to different groups and get people together. If you don’t do it, they’re never going to trust you. Never nor should they.

Participant 4 also discussed the importance of building a culture of trust. Participant 4 said, “It’s providing a space for listening, understanding and ensuring that perspectives are heard.” The participants valued listening as a key strategy to build trust.

**Aligning Values**

Participant 4 spoke about aligning values. She felt that the time that staff took to dig deep into their values was crucial in building trust. She explained:

And then I think working on aligned values, because I think when we did our work and revised our mission, I think that was a really grounding force that aligned us with our values. So, I think some of that values work in the beginning is really important because then when stuff is hard, then that gets you back to your why. That gets you back to the values and that keeps you rolling. What unifies you as a school. And I think you can begin to gather that insight and information [from] your first year and just asking a ton of questions, so you gather as much information as possible. So, then that can really, so then you have that in terms of making decisions, understanding who to pull in, who will your influencers be within the school.
She further explained how several years after this exercise the staff still relies on these shared values and they come back to these values during important decision-making work. Keeping shared values front and center helps ground their work.

**Vulnerability**

Some participants discussed the importance of showing vulnerability to their teachers to build trust. Participant 2 talked about how he opened up to his teachers about his background in education and his reason for serving as principal:

I talked about my experience as an educator, my background as a teacher, and how that has influenced where I am now and that I have that teacher lens, I have that parent lens with me, too, when I’m thinking about the work to be done. So, and being open with teachers, too, being willing to share, hey, there’s some things that are going on, too. I remember when I had a family illness, just being able to say to everybody, all right, I just want y’all to know this just as a personal note, if you see me out of the building a little bit more, here’s why. So that they could understand where you’re coming from that.

Participant 6 also shared that she showed vulnerability to her teachers: “I'm just me. If I cry in front of my staff, okay. I’m vulnerable.” Both participants felt that sharing parts of themselves with their teachers helped to build a trustworthy environment.

Lastly, Participant 2 shared a unique strategy that he had used for almost two decades. He spoke about scheduling a time to go into every teacher’s classroom. He told the teacher to leave for 30 minutes so they could have time to do some work. While he was with the students, he played a name game to learn everyone’s name. When the teacher returned, he was able to recite each child’s name. He felt that this showed the teacher that he truly cared about each child in their class and it also built trust with parents as oftentimes students went home and told their family that the principal knew their name. This participant felt that this was a very powerful
strategy to build trust with teachers at the beginning of the school year. He recommended it to
novice principals as it built trust with students, teachers, and parents.

**Ebb and Flow of Trust**

Participants described an ebb and flow in trustworthy relationships. They discussed how
the quality and quantity of trust can be changed over time and how relationships with teachers
always need to be actively maintained. Their primary strategies of maintaining trust through
communication, shared leadership, and visibility and hands-on leadership will be described here
as subthemes. Participants had many strategies to share.

**Communication**

As described in the previous section, participants stated that trust building begins at the
first impression. Participants also described that trust building never ends and that it continues to
be at the forefront of their day-to-day practices. They are always thinking about continuing to
build trustworthy relationships. Participant 2 described:

Trust building . . . starts right away. Again, if you’re a listening, caring, compassionate
person and you act in a manner that is trustworthy, you’ll build trust, and it never stops.
Like I can’t sit there and stop now and just say, I’m not going to, one of the things that
happens to principals with my level of experience is that you can get complacent, and you
can get tired of the job, and you can burn out. And if I were to do that, show signs of that,
yes, you would lose trust. So, I think the main thing is consistency. I think I’m the same
person who walked in the first day that I am today and some things of viewpoints in my
knowledge and everything’s evolved, but I’m the same person and people appreciate that
consistency. And I’m a highly positive, interactive, engaging person. You don’t need to
be that to build trust. You could be an introvert and quiet and more of a listener or not,
but as long as you’re consistent with that, you will gain trust.
Participants 1 and 6 described trust building as an ebb and flow. They described how it requires constant attention and can change depending on teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s trustworthiness. Participant 1 shared:

I think it can ebb and flow, especially if you’re in a building for a long period of time because you’re going to have to make some difficult decisions. And someone might feel like, because of the decision you made, that hurt them and that maybe they can’t trust you.

Participant 4 described the process of maintaining trust as a “dance.” She stated, “So, I think often as administrators, it’s a consistent kind of dance, but there’s an intentionality, an effort that’s required with that.”

The participants agreed that communication was one of the most important ways to maintain trust with teachers. The participants’ communication strategies included creating systems for open communication and clearly sharing the reasons for decision making. They also discussed making space for one-on-one conversations and using an operating agreement. An operating agreement in this context is a mutually agreed upon document that outlines how tough conversations take place. For instance, an operating agreement might include statements such as assume positive intent and go directly to the person with whom you have a disagreement.

Most participants talked in depth about creating and using systems for open communication. The participants relied heavily on school leadership teams to voice teachers’ opinions and relay information. Participant 6 shared:

I think we have a good system. Our leadership team is a good filtering zone that now we have this, what I just told you about, they can talk about it in smaller groups, and they can bring it back. Then their facilitator of their team can bring it back.
Participant 5 talked about the formation of the Faculty Affairs Committee. This is a more informal group that brings concerns to the principal and vice versa. This was another way that teachers could feel that their voices were being heard.

All participants shared the importance of clearly communicating the reasons for decision making, especially if the decisions had to be made in an authoritative manner. Participant 1 shared:

And then I think that when you do make that decision, you're just transparent about what it is and why it’s in the best interest of kids. And then I think afterwards you follow up with folks and just say like, hey, I’d love to talk to you more. Do you have questions? Or do you have wonderings? Here’s kind of my perspective on that situation. And open that door that if once a decision’s made doesn’t mean that we don’t talk about it anymore that we continue to seek to understand others’ perspectives and be open to that.

Participant 6 talked about how she tries to be as collaborative as possible. However, when decisions do need to be made in isolation, she ensures that she communicates the reasons for her decision making:

Collaboration, collaboration. Yeah, I think that’s what it is. I’m a huge communicator. I want them to know how I feel, and I want to know how they feel. And yeah, I don’t have anything to add. I think that’s it. I, that’s it. You just have to continue. I try never to do anything in isolation. And if I do or I have to make a decision on my own, then I say, I had to make this decision, and this is why I made it. And this is the background.

Participant 4 shared the benefits of using an operating agreement. She shared that this was a document created with teachers on which the faculty could fall back, especially in stressful situations. She explained:
One of the things that I finally got to two years ago, we spent and worked a really long time as a leadership team on our school-wide agreements and getting really clear on which ones are really important. And I feel like that was a really good building block for us, and something we always go back to that supports the sustainability of trust.

Again, all participants shared the importance of one-on-one conversations with teachers.

To ensure understanding, Participant 2 shared that he uses one-on-one conversations to follow-up with teachers after a decision is made. He said,

Anyone who doesn’t, in the end, I really try to work one-on-one with those people to really explain and why, and find out reasons before deeper than that. But again, in the end this is why this decision was made.

Participant 4 noted the importance of one-on-one meetings to continue to build trust and understanding. He shared, “Well, I think the one-on-one meetings are really key, right? Then you get to really listen and understand each individual person.” Participant 1 shared that his main principle of trust building was really going back to individual teachers and connecting with each one to be able to talk through both principal and teacher perspectives.

**Collaborative and Shared Leadership**

Another subtheme of maintaining trust was using a shared and collaborative leadership model. The participants shared time and time again about the importance of bringing teacher voices to the school decision-making process. Participant 2 summed up the need for collaboration very succintly by saying, “It has to be a collaborative relationship. We’re all in the same business, we’re all doing the same thing.”

Participant 4 described the importance of using a shared leadership model, even if it is time-consuming and needs continual attention. He described the back and forth between teachers, the leadership team, and the principal by saying:
And I feel like so much of trust building is actually distributed leadership, because that’s showing you’re trusting others to help, really support you in leading the school, and understand what the community cares about. We put together a data and instruction team. And so, as we moved forward through the process about what our data and instruction kind of process would look like, it wasn’t me making the decision. We presented to our staff, I collaborated extensively with our data and instruction team. And so really, they got feedback. We took that feedback from staff. We met several times and then put options out there. And so, I think staff sees that they have a say in our big decisions.

Participant 6 shared her experience with this same district initiative. The process was quite time-consuming and needed a lot of continual attention. She described how the entire staff came to a consensus about using one planning period a week to look at data. However, when the plan was supposed to go into effect, the teachers decided they no longer liked the idea. Then, the principal brought all voices back together to work collaboratively on a model that was more agreeable. Although there was push-back on the district initiative, they were able finally to move forward with a mutually agreed upon plan. Although this process was messy and very time consuming, she felt that shared decision making was one of the best ways to continue to maintain trust with teachers.

Participant 3 agreed that shared decision making was a very important way to build and maintain trust. He described that he and his staff created a decision-making matrix which guided the decision-making process. Participant 3 said:

So, our school has a well-thought-out decision-making model that speaks to when it needs to be a consensus-built decision, when it needs to be a trusted administrator decision, when it can be just a team decision. And so as long as we are able to follow that agreed upon path, I think generally we’re doing okay.
Visibility and Hands-On Leadership

Lastly, most of the participants spoke about being visible in the school building and being hands-on to maintain trust. The participants indicated that principals need to be out and about in a school helping with unpopular tasks, interacting with teachers and students, and being in classrooms to understand what teachers are doing daily. Participant 1 put this concept very succinctly by saying, “Yeah, really that visibility is key. Those small conversations they build up and gain that trust.” Participant 2 described different things he does to build trust using visibility and servant leadership:

And that trust building, it’s happening all the time. I mean, I’m constantly out and about in the school with even a 30-second or one-minute conversation. That’s a trust building moment . . . So, you’re constantly putting these little tokens in the bank, right? But that built the biggest amount of trust that, and the teachers have told me, being in the classroom and seeing what they’re doing builds trust . . . I come in, if you’re visible, help out in the class, help with recess, or substitute. I was in first grade today and one of the things I did this morning was this: for the first part of the morning [I] was substitute in first grade till the sub could get there. Well, didn’t people build trust with those kinds of things?

The participants described how they are constantly maintaining trust in their buildings, even those who have been leading their schools for a decade or more.

Being Trustworthy

During the interview process, the participants kept returning to traits that they felt created trustworthiness. These characteristics were reliability, taking responsibility, competency, and connection. These subthemes are discussed in this section. The participants had many examples of each character trait.
Reliability

All participants spoke about the importance of being reliable and keeping one’s word to build and maintain trust with teachers. Participant 4 put it very well:

And then it’s sticking to your schedule, walking your talk, making sure that your actions follow your words. It’s the credibility piece, too, right? Whatever I’m saying, I need to be modeling. Those are all trust building pieces. I follow through. Follow through I think is critical. You say something, you do it.

Participant 2 and Participant 3 also specifically mentioned teacher observations when talking about reliability. Each participant thought that it was extremely important to be at observations on time and to be present, for the teachers had worked very hard to prepare for these classroom visits. Participant 3 said, “And if I say I’m going to be at a teacher observation, I’m going to be there.” Participant 2 added:

And when you say you’re going to show up, you show up when you've got that evaluation scheduled for 10 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday. You’ll be there at 10 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday and present, not disheveled.

Participant 2 also explained that teachers have told him that the biggest way to earn their trust is to be in their classrooms.

Taking Responsibility

Participant 1 and Participant 2 also talked about the ability to take responsibility when mistakes are made. The participants thought this was a very important characteristic of leadership. Participant 2 explained:

Apologize when you make mistakes, okay, know that you’re not going to be perfect, but if you’re going around all day long apologizing for everything, you need to work on that, too. So [it]’s hard, it’s difficult to own that. And I was like, hey, I’m going to own it. If
I’m wrong, I’m wrong. I will take that. Because to me, that can quickly deteriorate a relationship if you’re not able to just take ownership for, hey, I made a mistake.

Participant 1 concurred with this sentiment: “Yeah, I think one that I haven't spoken to is taking ownership for when you’re wrong.” Participant 2 also shared his actions after reprimanding a teacher publicly:

So, to my credit, they said I took responsibility for it, I apologized for it, and I said, this is what I’m going to do differently. And I’ve been consistent since then. So, I think the trust is built back there, but if it happens again, I’m going to lose it faster again.

**Competency**

The concept of competency was also discussed quite a bit throughout the interviews. Some participants felt that they needed to show competency to gain the trust of their teachers. In the principalship, competency is complex. Principals not only need to be competent regarding instruction and classroom practices, but also in effectively running a building, including scheduling, following educational laws, and communicating with parents to name a few roles.

Participant 4 explained:

And one of the things we didn’t really talk about here is people do also really build trust with people and respect people who have knowledge about things. And if you understand instruction and you understand what good teachers do in the classroom, and you can give constructive feedback and you can provide new ideas, and you can be a visionary in some respects and do that, then people really respect that, too.

Participant 5 also agreed that showing competency was important. She said, “So, I try to have an awareness of what I feel looks like competency as a principal, which then results in what I think people will see.” Participants felt they needed to show competency to their teachers to build trust in their leadership abilities.
Connection

Throughout the interviews, the participants kept coming back to connection. They thought that making personal connections with teachers was very important and needed to be maintained on a regular basis. Participant 4 explained:

I just think this is a very hard profession, and it’s a people profession. And I think the bottom line is you have to love people. And I think through that love of people, you find ways to be able to connect and meet and meet people where they’re at, because everyone’s in a different space.

Participant 1 also shared, “And so, making those personal connections . . . I think is important and meaningful.” He also added, “I feel like it just comes down to finding what is that common connection that you can have conversations about.” He felt strongly that connections were key to building trustworthy relationships with individual teachers.

Losing Trust

The participants also had experiences related to losing trust that they were willing to share. Participant 3 stated:

I think it’s easier to lose trust than it is to gain trust. I think all it takes is one little moment that goes awry that really sets back that relationship and trust gets spilled up by years of experience and years of being able to count on each other.

They also had some sage advice on how not to lose trust with teachers. These tales and advice centered around a lack of communication, not supporting teachers, personnel decisions, and exhibiting untrustworthy behavior. These subthemes are discussed in this section.

Lack of Communication

Participant 6 shared a story about when she first started working at her school and how she lost her teachers’ trust in the first weeks of starting. She said that she asked the office
manager if the supply cabinets were locked, and the office manager said that they were. Teachers needed to request supplies. She explained:

And so, I locked the cabinets. You would’ve thought that that was like, and here it is, you don’t trust us. I’m like, what? So that was, I don’t know. It was a big mistake. So that silly little thing to me was silly. I’m like, okay, I’ll open the cabinets. But I really had to talk through that with them. Just explain. They told me that you always lock them, but for some people, they brought that up to me the whole year.

Her advice was “communicate, communicate, communicate.” She thought that principals needed to explain their reasoning for everything. She went on to explain that, if teachers did not know the rationale for a decision, they would make their own reasoning which was not necessarily a good thing. This takes a lot of time and effort to rectify because rumors spread very quickly.

*Not Supporting Teachers*

Participant 2 talked about how he reprimanded a teacher in front of her colleagues. In retrospect, he knew it was not the right thing to do, but his emotions around the situation got the better of him. He was annoyed at her handling of a parent situation and spoke to her about it in front of other teachers. The teacher was thoroughly embarrassed, did not feel supported, and no longer trusted the principal. He shared that it took a lot of time, a lot of consistency, and a lot of work to rebuild trust with that teacher. He advised to always show teachers support. However, he advised, when a situation arises, to handle it privately with the teacher. In his words:

They were upset. They didn’t think I had their back. They thought I embarrassed her in front of other people that didn’t, was not a good look. So even after 20 years of admin, we make mistakes like that. So, I’ve had to be really consistent since then. But if you behave in a trustworthy manner, you’re going to build back trust. So, to my credit, they said I took responsibility for it, I apologized for it, and I said, this is what I’m going to do
differently. And I’ve been consistent since then. So, I think the trust is built back there, but if it happens again, I'm going to lose it faster again. So there needs to be seven positive interactions before every negative interaction for you to stay in a positive side. So, I have to stay consistent.

**Personnel Decisions**

Participant 6 spoke about a personnel decision and how it broke trust with some teachers. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers in this district had the option to teach online or in person because of medical conditions. Throughout the district, there was a plethora of teachers who needed to teach online, so many teachers were moved to support other schools or the district online school. Although it was a district decision to move them to different schools, the teachers did not know that. The teachers at Participant 6’s school thought that she moved teachers that she did not like, and that lost much trust. She had to overcommunicate that the reasons were in the hands of district leadership.

**Exhibiting Untrustworthy Behavior**

Participant 5 shared a story about another school in the district where teachers did not trust their new leader. She described several characteristics that led to this leader losing the trust of her staff:

So, they have no trust in this particular person. And for whatever reason, they don’t feel like this person is competent. So, they’ve picked up something that makes them realize they’re incompetent. So that decreased trust. And then they are constantly finding ways where they don’t feel like the principal has their back and supports them in making decisions without really considering their input.

Overall, the participants cautioned that new leaders work very hard to not lose the trust of their staff. Participant 5 cautioned, “I think once trust is strained, I wouldn’t say mine has been
broken, but it is strained. It almost becomes the new filter of everything.” In the next section, this researcher relays the participants’ experiences with gender and trust.

**Gender and Trust**

In this section, this researcher summarizes the experiences that the participants shared about their own gender and overall trust-building strategies. In the next section, this researcher summarizes the subthemes of trust-building strategies with female teachers and male teachers. In the last section, this researcher reviews the advice that the participants gave to novice principals of their same gender.

**Overall Trust-Building Strategies and Gender**

Participants 2, 4, 5, and 6 thought that gender affected trust building with teachers. Participants 1 and 3 did not think that gender mattered at all when it came to building trust with teachers. The three female participants (Participants 4, 5, and 6) thought that male principals were viewed as more trustworthy than female principals. Participant 2, a male, thought that his gender was a benefit to earning the trust of the school community. The other two males, Participants 1 and 3, did not think gender played a role in trust building.

Participant 2 thought his gender was a benefit and was very insightful. He described his own personal journey and shared what he has reflected on after more than two decades in school administration:

I would say, okay, having done this for all these years and seeing the difference between male and female principals and supervising male and female principals, that I have benefited a lot from my gender and probably my White privilege in that, too. I realize now that I was seen as the “golden boy.” I don’t think I’ve had to work as hard as the females around me have. And I don’t think that that’s fair. And I don’t think that that’s
right. But I, being in a business where the majority are working with females for some reason, I have really been able to skate through some of that.

Participant 4, a female, thought very strongly that females had to work harder to build trust. She spoke about her husband, who is also a principal, and how much easier it has been for him to build trust with his teachers and the school community. Participant 4 said:

It’s so funny you asked this because my husband’s a principal, too, right? And we’ve had these conversations before, and in fact, I’ve had them with him and other female principals. I’m like, it takes females longer to build trust than it does males. And I said, “I’m sorry, man. You’ve got the tall male advantage going with the ties. I mean, because of it and Dr. Mike, right?” So, it’s like you're this immediate stamp of credibility and trust with all of those factors. I think as a female, it does take you longer to build trust . . . And so, I think that people are more critical of females, female leaders than they are male leaders. They will shrug stuff off and be like, oh, it’s not a big deal. But I think we are under a little bit more of a microscope than males are. And you either get the blame of, wow, she’s being too rigid, or, wow, she's too soft, right? It’s having to dance between those two all the time.

A second female, Participant 6, also thought that males had an easier time building trust but did not have a rationale for why that was so. Participant 6 said:

I don’t know. This is a big puzzle for me. I don’t know. I don’t know why it makes a difference. But I just feel like, because having worked for male principals myself, and I see my colleagues, and it could just be me as a person . . . But I think there’s something there, but I don’t know what it is.

The third female, Participant 5, also thought that gender had some impact on trust building, but she did not go into many specifics about why. Participant 5 said:
The answer is likely yes. My community, I mean, our teachers here literally are all female except for two. So, I feel like it would be different if I were female and the majority of our staff were male, I would definitely feel that I’d have to prove myself a little bit more. The remaining two male participants, Participants 1 and 3, did not think gender had any impact on their ability to build trust with teachers.

However, the male participants, Participants 1, 2, and 3, thought there were other impacts to being male in the predominantly female world of elementary school teachers. They had to be more cautious in relationships and interactions with female teachers. Participant 4 shared:

Yeah, those are interactions. You need to be very careful and thankfully for 27 years I’ve been consistent and everything like that. But that’s a reality, that changes how I interact with people on my end, how I consciously interact with them, making sure others are feeling comfortable and not putting anybody in a position to feel uncomfortable.

Participant 1 was also concerned that he did not want to seem too authoritative. Participant 1 said, “And then also, too, you don’t want to come off as the male who's the dominant male who tells everybody what to do, too.”

Participant 3 is quite tall, and he felt his size could be intimidating:

So, I do know that being in the elementary school world as a male teacher or a male principal that there’s a, there’s subtle differences that you don’t think about in leading a staff of primarily women, teachers and staff. And I think if I were to default to a very authoritarian style of things, I think that instead of trust you would have an atmosphere of fear in the building in addition to the gender size, too, I’m six foot four and not too many other, other people in the building are my size. So, I think that that can be a factor of intimidation, which doesn't lead them to trust either. If trust is meeting each other as equals to a point, then that power differential can be pretty pronounced.
Lastly, Participant 5 thought her age was more of a barrier than her gender. She explained that, over the years, many people remarked that she looked too young to be a principal. She explained that she frequently had to tell people how old she was to garner more respect and trust from members of the school community. She also noted that had she been a male principal, this most likely would not have been the case.

**Trust-Building Strategies with Male and Female Teachers**

Both male and female participants used different strategies to build trust with female and male teachers. Participant 2 described how his interactions with male and female teachers differed:

Yes. I spend a lot of time getting to know and getting the perspectives of my female teachers because I want to win their trust. I haven’t had a ton of male teachers, but there does seem to be at times a quicker bonding there. Although I’ve had male teachers that I’ve not had that kind of built trust with, and it was difficult. But a lot of my male teachers, I see myself in them. I’ve got one, he’s 30 years old and that’s feels like me back when I was that age. And so, when there’s male to male, there’s shortcuts you can take in building the trust, okay. But you can’t take that for granted. But sometimes there is now that it’s any more difficult to build trust with and connect with my female colleagues, but I just really want to make sure my female staff know that I respect their opinion and respect who they are and what they do. So, I tend to spend a little bit more time with them.

Participant 3 thought similarly:

Maybe in the way that small talk is made, I will talk about the hockey game with some of my male teachers, and I’ll talk about family and other things with female, with female
staff members. That’s probably an overgeneralization, but that does just seem to be where the small talk parts of daily conversations go.

Participant 4 thought that there were some subtle differences between how she interacted with male versus female teachers, but she also specified that she tried to personalize her approach to relationship building. Participant 4 said:

I think females are generally more emotional although I do have one male who’s pretty emotional. But I think it’s the communication style. What I’m very deliberate about and I think about is a person I’m working with, what is their communication style, how I meet them, where they’re at. So, some males are just more directive in their style, more analytic that I work with. And so that’s kind of my approach and my communication with them versus some females really need to work on the emotional piece kind of first, and then we could talk about the work. So, I think there’s a little bit of a difference, I think, between male and female, but I think what it comes down to is understanding the person and then hearing my approach based on who that person is. So, I don’t know that there’s necessarily a gender piece with it, but more of the females I’d say a little more emotive.

Participant 5 noted that her interactions with females versus males was also different. She described a different level of connection and more caution when connecting with males:

There’s a different level of connection, female to female that we... get it. We just have a different understanding of situations as a female. And then for the male connections, I sometimes feel like I put almost a little bit of a barrier to make sure I say the right things, too, where for female to female, I sometimes am a little more relaxed and [I] kind of talk from the heart. I need to make sure I’m not saying something offensive or considered harassment or, you know, have to watch certain things on that level, too. I did overall feel
like there’s just the tiniest more of a barrier between male female relationships than the female to female.

**Gender Advice for Novice Principals**

Lastly, most of the participants spoke about connecting individually with teachers and using a personalized approach to build trust. When asked what advice to give to novice principals of their same gender, the strategies the participants spoke of were diverse. Participant 2 cautioned that new leaders treat everyone with the same level of respect: “I would say make sure you treat everybody equally. Okay. And yeah, you treat everybody equally visually and behind closed doors and out in public.” Participant 5 shared that novice female principals should believe in themselves. Participant 5 said:

I think it would be more of the mindset advice to say it is more likely for us to assume that we’re in a situation that might be bigger for us to handle. And you need to know that you’ve got it. And if you don’t know how to come up with a solution immediately, you have the skillset to figure it out. So, go in with confidence and lean in versus allowing other things to kind of come in and do it on your behalf.

Finally, Participant 1 advised that to build trust with every teacher, new principals should build connections with every teacher. He cautioned to branch out and continue to connect with those staff members who are more challenging to connect with. Participant 1 stated:

I think it just, it would be finding that connection with every staff member that you can have that conversation with. And I think you do have to be careful. If for whatever reason, you’re more, it’s easier for you to connect with a specific staff member or specific staff members of a certain gender that you don’t just make that kind of your easy go-to because the conversation’s going to be really easy. Okay. Yeah, because there are some, you may not really have something in common to talk about, and you might have
to work a little bit harder to have a genuine conversation. And so, I think it’s just push yourself to make sure you’re outside your comfort area and able to have those conversations about things that maybe you know nothing about. So, instead of it being a conversation about you sharing a lot of your knowledge of the topic, it might be a lot of the conversations where you are asking to understand better and learn about whatever the content is.

The participants had varied views on how and whether gender affected their ability to build trust with teachers. However, they yet had a lot of applicable advice to novice principals on how to build trust regardless of gender. In the next section, this researcher summarizes this chapter.

**Summary**

After a thorough analysis of the 155 initial codes that were used, this researcher distilled the qualitative data down to six different themes. The themes included (a) you have to trust, (b) building trust, (c) ebb and flow of trust, (d) being trustworthy, (e) losing trust, and (f) trust and gender. Within each theme, different subthemes emerged. The participants provided rich data that was summarized in the above chapter. In the next chapter, this researcher concludes this study and provides recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Trust is an essential component of successful schools and is necessary between teachers and administrators to help create a positive school climate (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). It is also the foundation of interpersonal communication and is necessary for transformational changes (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Teachers who trust their principals are more likely to have trusting relationships with students, which in turn are more likely to support student achievement at higher levels (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Trust is needed in successful schools.

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry study was to understand how elementary school principals could quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. This researcher conducted six one-on-one interviews of elementary school principals to explore their perceptions of the following research question:

- How do elementary school principals describe their trust-building practices with teachers to facilitate change efforts quickly to support the success of students?

The data from these interviews were transcribed and then coded. Six themes and several subthemes emerged from this analysis. The themes were (a) you have to trust, (b) building trust, (c) ebb and flow of trust, (d) being trustworthy, (e) losing trust, and (f) trust and gender. Each theme is presented in the Interpretation and Importance of Findings section. The subthemes of you have to trust included (a) teacher buy-in to school decision making, (b) a culture of vulnerability, and (c) a climate of open dialogue. The subthemes of building trust were (a) initial meetings, (b) surveys, (c) listening, (d) aligning values, and (e) vulnerability. The subthemes of the ebb and flow of trust were (a) communication, (b) collaborative and shared leadership, and (c) visibility and hands-on leadership. The subthemes of being trustworthy were (a) reliability, (b) taking responsibility, (c) competency, and (d) connection. The subthemes of losing trust
included (a) lack of communication, (b) not supporting teachers, (c) personnel decisions, and (d) exhibiting untrustworthy behavior. Finally, the subthemes of gender and trust were (a) overall trust-building strategies and gender, (b) trust-building strategies with male teachers and female teachers, and (c) gender advice for novice principals. In the following section, the researcher addresses these findings as they relate to the literature.

**Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

In this study, this researcher explored the experiences of six elementary school principals regarding trust-building practices. Through the data analysis process, themes emerged regarding the importance of trust and strategies for principals to build trust effectively with their teachers. These themes answered this study’s research question. The themes that emerged from the interviews answered this question and were aligned with the literature.

**You Have to Trust**

Theme 1 was, as the participants agreed, that trust is needed to lead a school effectively. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) found that trust was required to implement the reforms needed in American schools. Other scholars noted that trust is also important for implementing and sustaining school reforms (Daly et al., 2014). Blase and Blase (2001), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Schwabsky (2020) argued that it is unlikely that changes will be made without trust between principals and teachers. Tschannen-Moran (2014) found that, without trust, teachers avoid, neglect, or even refuse change.

All participants felt that trust was required between principals and teachers, not only to facilitate positive change, but also for schools to be effective. When asked if trust was required in a school between the principals and teacher, Participant 4 stated, “Absolutely required.” Additionally, Participant 6 stated, “You cannot do a thing in your building until you have established trust with your staff . . . Nothing. Because it won’t last.” Participant 2 also agreed
that trust was required. He said, “Yes, I think to a degree you need to be able to build trust . . . Yes. I think that to lead a building effectively, you have to have trust. Yes.” Hence, the first theme that was identified was you have to trust. This theme aligned with the work of Kim and Kim (2014) who determined that, if principals can build trusting relationships with teachers, the school will be a positive place to work and learn. Subsequently, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) found that students are far more likely to succeed in a school with a positive culture where the adults trust one another. In the following section, this researcher examines how the subthemes of teacher buy-in, a culture of vulnerability, and open dialogue align with the literature.

**Teacher Buy-In to School Decision Making**

The participants spoke about teacher buy-in to school decision making. This study was founded on the theory of transformational leadership being a necessary ingredient for quality, effective schools (Anderson, 2017). Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) described transformational leadership as a style of leading that motivates followers to do more than they ever thought was possible. With all the demands on schools to reform, teachers must feel empowered to make the changes that are required of them. Transformational leaders are needed to make schools places of continual learning and improvement for the benefit of all students. Subsequently, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) determined that trust is the foundation for the cooperative relationships that are needed for “cultivating high performance” (p. 257). In a school setting, especially in elementary schools, the relationship between teachers and principals is extremely important (Brezisha & Fuller, 2019), as mentioned by this study’s participants.

The participants shared their experiences about collaborative decision making which led to transformational changes. Participant 2 explained, “People may comply, but they won’t be bought in. And I think everybody’s buy-in is what you want, and I think to get buy-in you need
trust.” Participant 4 echoed the sentiment. She shared, “And so, I think that’s where trust building really comes in is do people feel like they have ownership and a voice in the work that we do, right?” Participant 1 explained that, with trust and collaborative decision making, teachers buy-in to school changes and take ownership of new instructional strategies and techniques. This is where schools begin to improve and transform.

**A Culture of Vulnerability**

The participants also discussed the importance of trust in cultivating a school culture of vulnerability and risk taking, which was the second subtheme. Brown et al. (2016) found with high levels of trust in a school, teachers were more likely to use research-based methods in their teaching. Trust between principals and teachers led to teachers feeling more comfortable taking instructional risks. For schools to achieve at high levels, teachers must feel comfortable trying new strategies with students without “fear or humiliation of reprisal” (Brown et al., 2016, p. 85).

Participant 6 shared her thoughts about the importance of vulnerability and taking risks in an elementary school:

I think if you have this trust between you, then I can take a risk with you, and you can take a risk with me. If I say, “Oh, we want to try this,” and there’s no worry about failing, like the stigma failing. So, I think it’s a mutual respect and a willingness to take risks with each other like that . . . But then the other types of trust are like, “Can you be what you just said? Can you be vulnerable with me? Can you come to me and say like, “I’m having a hard time with this. Can you help me?” “Can you ask for help?” That kind of trust, are you able to do that?

Participant 1 also shared how important establishing trust was, especially for creating a culture of vulnerability:
I would say absolutely, in my opinion, a hundred percent required. This work that we do is incredibly, incredibly challenging. And to me, if you don’t establish trust with your staff to where they know that they can be vulnerable that they can make mistakes and that that’s okay.

When teachers feel supported enough that they can take instructional risks and be vulnerable to making mistakes, instruction can improve (Brown et al., 2016) as mentioned by this study’s participants. Without a culture of vulnerability schools will not change or improve.

**A Climate of Open Dialogue**

The participants spoke about how trust is needed to create a climate of open dialogue. Tschannen-Moran (2014) described how communication is important in schools, arguing that leaders should be effective and clear communicators as well as “accurate and forthcoming” (p. 28). Openness is also part of the recommendations Kouzes and Posner (2017) had for leaders of all organizations. To promote environments of trust, they suggested that leaders should show vulnerability, share information, facilitate collaboration, show empathy, and develop common goals. They argued that trust needs to be present for workers to collaborate with one another and that collaboration is necessary for any successful organization.

The participants in this study also shared about the importance of having an open dialogue between principals and teachers. They felt that trust is built during in-person conversations. Participant 5 shared, “So, I think really trust is built through the in-person, the dialogue.” Participant 1 spoke about the reasons for needing open dialogue in an elementary school. He felt that trust is needed:

To be able to have a productive dialogue back and forth and challenge each other’s thinking, but know that we were doing it because, not because we wanted to challenge
each other’s thinking, but because we really were trying to figure out the best way support a kid.

Furthermore, he spoke about the importance of principals modeling open dialogue so that teachers felt safe enough to do the same, while collaborating with one another. He shared:

That ability that you and I can dialogue together about, hey, what did you do? How did you work through those specific units around fractions or whatever it might be, where clearly my kids didn’t make that connection for whatever reason.

The participants felt that trust is essential in an elementary school between principals and teachers. They thought trust was of the utmost importance to ensure teacher buy-in to school decision making, to create a culture of vulnerability, and to facilitate open dialogue for the benefit of students. The literature (Kwan, 2019; Hoch et al., 2016) also supports these ideas and the role of foundational trust in supporting transformational change, as mentioned by this study’s participants.

**Building Trust**

The second theme that emerged from the data was building trust. Tschannen-Moran (2014) explained that trust between principals and teachers is of the utmost importance because they are interdependent of one another in their shared interest of educating students. Though the literature was focused on qualities of trustworthy leaders, participants in this study discussed strategies for building trust and when trust building begins with teachers. Participant 3 shared, “Trust building began with my staff in the interview process and then the first day I came down and interviewed each teacher before I ever started; it starts right away.” Participants spoke about initial meetings, surveys, listening, aligning values, and vulnerability. In this section, the researcher discusses how the literature supports these subthemes.
Initial Meetings

The participants talked about meeting individually with teachers to start to build trust. Meeting with individuals one-on-one to establish trust aligns with the literature. Frauke Meyer et al. (2017) and McKnight et al. (1998) argued that strong initial trust is built when there are frequent, positive, face-to-face interactions. Brown (2015) agreed that trust is built within small, personal interactions.

All participants spoke about how trust starts at the very beginning of a principal’s tenure in a school. Each participant shared that they hosted meetings with individual or small groups of teachers when they started at their current schools. Participant 5 shared, “I think meeting with individuals does establish relationships at the individual level.” Meeting individually with teachers is a time-consuming process, but it was a highly recommended strategy by the participants to build trust, as discussed by this study’s participants.

Surveys

Some participants coupled initial meetings with surveys of teachers. Although the literature did not specify using surveys, this strategy aligns with Brown (2015) who found that trust is built with small, personal interactions. Participant 6 shared her strategy: “But one of the things I did in the beginning . . . was [to] have them tell me, ‘What do you need from me? What do you need? Let’s make a list.’ And they did.” Participant 4 used a similar strategy, saying “I surveyed the community, just to really learn and understand the fabric of the school that exists currently, because you need to really learn and get the culture that you’re stepping into.”

Listening

The participants shared the importance of listening to teachers in cultivating a trust-filled environment. The literature does not articulate the importance of being a good listener to build trust. Instead, scholars have focused on leaders being open. Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested
that to promote environments of trust leaders should show vulnerability, share information, facilitate collaboration, show empathy, and develop common goals. They argued that trust needs to be present for workers to collaborate with one another and that collaboration is necessary for any successful organization. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also described how communication is important when being open, arguing that leaders should be effective and clear communicators as well as “accurate and forthcoming” (p. 28).

Participant 6 articulated, “You have to look and listen and talk and go to different groups and get people together. If you don’t do it, they’re never going to trust you. Never nor should they.” Participant 4 shared:

I need to be receptive to really listening to different perspectives, gathering different feedback so staff understand that they very much have a voice in decision making, too. And so, I think that’s where trust building really comes in is do people feel like they have ownership and a voice in the work that we do, right?

The participants shared that listening to teachers and the community was of the utmost importance when beginning to build trust.

**Aligning Values**

One participant spoke about the benefits of aligning staff values. Although the authors in the literature did not address this directly, they did have research on the benefits of strategic planning. Trust scholars Kochanek (2005) and Mayger and Hochbein (2020) recommended that principals lead the creation of a strategic plan to build trust in a school community. Winand and Edelfson (2018) found that, to build a strategic plan, schools should reflect on educational beliefs and prioritizing for the future, as discussed by this study’s participants.

Participant 4 thought her work aligning teachers’ values was key to building trust. She explained how the work was “really a grounding force” and it “aligned us with our values.” She
further shared how they continue to go back to their shared values. She explained, “When stuff is hard, then that gets you back to your why.” Even several years after going through the process of aligning their values, Participant 4 shared that it “keeps you rolling” during difficult decision making.

**Vulnerability**

Some participants shared how showing vulnerability with their teachers helped to build an environment of trust. This aligns with the literature. Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Frauke Meyer et al. (2017) found that, when principals show vulnerability, they illustrate to teachers that they are taking a personal risk and that they already trust their followers. Participant 6 shared that she does this from time to time. She shared, “I’m just me . . . I don’t think that I have to do anything different. I’m just me. If I cry in front of my staff, okay. I’m vulnerable.”

Brown (2018) suggested that principals show vulnerability by sharing their reasons for wanting to lead. Participant 3 used this strategy when he started at his school. Participant 3 said, “I talked about my experience as an educator, my background as a teacher, and that how that has influenced where I am now.” The participants felt that showing some vulnerability helped build trust with teachers. In the next section, the researcher explores strategies for maintaining trust.

**Ebb and Flow of Trust**

The participants described the importance of maintaining trust throughout their principalship. Brezicha and Fuller (2019) found that relational trust creates a school environment that sustains commitment and energy for school improvement. Participants 1 and 6 described the way that trust is maintained as an “ebb and flow.” This is because it changes over time and still needs active attention from principals. Participant 1 explained:

I think you can always enhance your relationships. And again, something that I was thinking about lately is that when you build those relationships and you have that sense of
trust, in my opinion, it’s like any relationship. You can’t start to neglect it because if you start to neglect it, then it does start to deteriorate. And I think obviously I would say building that initial set of trust can be easier when you lose someone’s trust. I think it’s difficult to regain it. I think it’ll take more time. And then I think there’s always on some level of, “Hey, the last time I trusted in [Participant 1] and then this happened. Is that going to happen again?” It is always going to probably be in somebody’s mind a little bit. But yeah, I think it can ebb and flow, especially if you’re in a building for a long period of time because you’re going to have to make some difficult decisions. And someone might feel like because of the decision you made that hurt them and that maybe they can’t trust you. Maybe they were vulnerable in sharing their perspective on something and it didn’t go their way or what they perceived should be the right way. And I think when things don’t go well, I think it’s incumbent upon us to reach back out and rebuild that relationship and that trust.

The subthemes that emerged from the data in this section were communication, shared decision making, visibility, and hands-on leadership. This researcher examines them here.

**Communication**

Trust scholars have described the importance of communication. Tschannen-Moran (2014) described how communication is important when being open, arguing that leaders should be effective and clear communicators as well as “accurate and forthcoming” (p. 28). Kouzes and Posner (2017) recommended that leaders share information to build trust. The participants in this study agreed that communication was key to maintaining trust, especially through unpopular decisions. Participant 6 explained:

I’m a huge communicator. I want to want them to know how I feel, and I want to know how they feel . . . You just have to continue. I try never to do anything in isolation. And if
I do or I have to make a decision on my own, then I say, I had to make this decision, and this is why I made it. And this is the background. But there’s not many of those, right?

Participant 4 also explained the importance of communicating throughout the school hierarchy. She said, “The one-on-one conversations, it’s the team conversations, it’s the whole staff. So, there’s a constant cycle of connecting on all those different levels and then ensuring lots.” Communicating frequently is a research-based strategy that is effective in schools as mentioned by this study’s participants.

Collaborative and Shared Leadership

Tschannen-Moran (2001) found that trustworthy behaviors between principals and teachers promote collaboration. With collaboration, there is a potential for better decisions, possibilities for great organizational learning, and more effective problem solving (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Other researchers articulated the importance of sharing decision making and being open about school business (Kochanek, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). They discussed the need for teachers to be involved in decisions that affect them and to honor and value their opinions. According to Hauge et al. (2014) creating mechanisms for school leadership must be done with great care and leadership savvy to facilitate change effectively.

The participants in this study also shared the importance of sharing leadership with teachers. Participant 4 expressed, “And I feel like so much of trust building is actually distributed leadership, because that’s showing you’re trusting others to help, really support you in leading the school.” Participant 6 talked about the mechanisms that she created in her school to facilitate shared decision making. She explained:

Our leadership team is a good filtering zone that now we have this, what I just told you about, they can talk about it in smaller groups, and they can bring it back. Then their facilitator of their team can bring it back.
When shared leadership systems are created purposefully, they are excellent ways not only to maintain trust with teachers, but also to run a school effectively.

**Visibility and Hands-On Leadership**

Another strategy that the participants shared was being visible throughout the school building and participating in hands-on leadership. Tschannen-Moran (2014) wrote about a principal who invested time and resources into fostering relationships with teachers, students, and parents. This principal was visible throughout the school and at school events. By doing so, the principal created a very trustworthy environment with a strong sense of community. The participants readily spoke of the importance of being visible throughout the school building. They also talked about helping wherever help was needed. These moments helped to strengthen trust. Participant 4 explained:

> And that trust building, it's happening all the time. I mean, I’m constantly out and about in the school with even a 30-second or 1-minute conversation. That’s a trust building moment or outside visibility. That’s a trust building moment. So, you’re constantly putting these little tokens in the bank.

Participant 2 shared what hands-on leadership looked like to him by saying, “I come in . . . help out in the class, help with recess, substitute . . . for the first part of the morning [I] was substitute in first grade till the sub could get there.” In the next section, the researcher shares the participants’ experiences about being trustworthy and compares them with the literature.

**Being Trustworthy**

The participants spoke about several characteristics that they thought helped them to exhibit trustworthiness. Many of these characteristics matched what Tschannen-Moran (2014) described as the five facets of trust. Tschannen-Moran (2014) found that the traits of benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competency were conducive to building trust
with teachers. The characteristics that the study participants described were reliability, taking
responsibility, competency, and connection. In the next section, this researcher discusses these
subthemes as they relate to the literature.

**Reliability**

Tschannen-Moran (2014) described reliability as one of the main facets of trust. Tschannen-Moran (2014) defined reliability as dependability that combines a sense of predictability with caring. A reliable person is one who can be counted on to do what is expected on a regular and consistent basis. By being reliable, Tschannen-Moran (2014) explained, teachers have increased trust and greater confidence in their principal. Participant 2 agreed with this sentiment. He shared what reliability meant to him, saying, “You need to be reliable. And when you say you’re going to show up, you show up.” Participant 3 also thought that reliability pertained to following through on what you’ve promised. He said, when talking about being trustworthy, “I can’t remember which writer said this, but just being impeccable with your word.” Although the daily life of an elementary school principal is very busy, it is critically important that principals follow through and do what they say they will do to continue to develop confidence and trust in their teachers.

**Taking Responsibility**

The literature about trust and participants spoke about the importance of taking responsibility for one’s actions, especially when one is in the wrong. Brown (2015) described the importance of authenticity in the principalship. Principals who take responsibility for their actions and admit when they have made mistakes show authenticity. Participant 1 shared:

So, it’s hard, it’s difficult to own that. And I was like, “Hey, I'm going to own it. If I’m wrong, I’m wrong. I will take that.” Because to me, that can quickly deteriorate a relationship if you’re not able to just take ownership for, “Hey, I made a mistake.”
Although competence in the principalship is important, it is equally important that principals take responsibility for their actions. Tschannen-Moran (2014) described this as accountability and not shifting the blame to others. Taking ownership for one’s actions is important in maintaining trust.

**Competency**

When leaders show that they have the ability and competence to lead in their field, they are more trustworthy to followers (Bukko et al., 2021). Competency in the principalship is complex. Not only do principals need to be versed in research-based instructional methods, federal and state laws, and district policies, they also need skills in conflict resolution and initiating change (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The participants in this study also described competence as an important characteristic of being trustworthy. Participant 5 shared, “So, I try to have an awareness of what I feel looks like competency as a principal, which then results in what I think people will see.” Participant 4 shared a similar sentiment, saying, “But as far as the level of trust, also, I feel like people’s competency plays a role in that, too.” Principals need to show their competence to maintain their teachers’ trust.

**Connection**

This study’s participants spoke a lot about connection with teachers. The literature describes this as benevolence or exhibiting a genuine care and concern for teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Researchers have described benevolent leaders as those who value connection. Caldwell and Hayes (2007) described benevolent leaders as leaders who are perceived to care genuinely about their subordinates and who convey authentic concern in relationships with subordinates. Tschannen-Moran (2014) wrote that benevolence promotes trust. Principals need to show consideration and sensitivity for teachers, protect their rights, and not use them for personal gain.
The participants in this study discussed the importance of connection in building and maintaining trustworthy relationships. Participant 4 shared, “And I think through that love of people, you find ways to be able to connect and meet and meet people where they’re at, because everyone’s in a different space.” Participant 1 also talked about how he valued connection:

I mean, it can be as simple as poking your head into classrooms Monday morning, see how things are going, and ask about maybe somebody’s kid had a sporting event, or somebody’s kid had a performance of some sort. And so, making those personal connections and I think is important and meaningful. You don’t just go in to show your face, you go in and have those little conversations about how was your weekend? What’s going well? What support do you need from me?

Many of the characteristics that the participants described—reliability, taking responsibility, competence, and connection—align with Tschannen-Moran’s (2014) five facets of trust, which are benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competency. In the next section, this researcher examines losing trust and how the participants’ experiences align with the findings of researchers.

**Losing Trust**

The participants also shared experiences of losing trust. These tales should serve as cautions to new and aspiring principals. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) found that teachers who do not trust their principal are more apt to use self-protective behaviors that ultimately impair instruction and the professional community of a school. Participant 3 described:

I think it’s easier to lose trust than it is to gain trust. I think all it takes is one little moment that goes awry that really sets back that relationship and trust gets spilled up by years of experience and years of being able to count on each other.
Maintaining trust is of the utmost importance. The subthemes discussed in this section are a lack of communication, not supporting teachers, personnel decisions, and exhibiting untrustworthy behavior. In the next section, this researcher summarizes these subthemes and compares them to the literature.

**Lack of Communication**

The participants shared times during their principalships in which a lack of communication caused them to lose some their teachers’ trust in them. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also found this to be true. Tschannen-Moran (2014) said that, when communication is not open, teachers become suspicious of decisions, and trust is negatively affected. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also described in the spirit of openness that principals should share appropriate decision making with teachers. This sharing helps to build and maintain trust, as mentioned by this study’s participants.

Participant 5 reminisced, “Communicating the why of a decision, but also communicating some of the details around, if you don’t communicate a decision, that teachers will definitely jump to the worst-case scenario for some reason.” In this situation she shared that she had to do much repair work with her teachers because misinformation was circulating around her school. She strongly advised communicating frequently about decision making. The participants also shared experiences where they were not open with decision making and were not as collaborative as they could have been. This also led to a loss of teachers’ trust. Participant 3 shared:

So, I do think about my earliest years as a principal and not knowing what to do in a moment of trial for our school and making a decision that was not as collaborative as it needed to be, and I just went with what I thought was the best way to go, and because I didn’t include all stakeholders effectively that was a trust losing moment.
Not Supporting Teachers

The participants shared that one way to lose trust was by not supporting teachers. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also found that trust deteriorates when principals fail to show care, concern, and compassion for their subordinates. Rather than focusing on instruction and student achievement, trust deteriorates, and teachers engage in self-protective behaviors. The lack of trust can ultimately affect students’ learning.

Participants 1, 2, and 4 all had cautionary tales about losing trust when not supporting teachers. Participant 1 shared, “I know that that’s one where you can quickly lose trust with teachers if they don’t feel like you’re supporting them.” Participant 2 also shared a time when teachers felt that he had not supported them. He shared a story about a teacher who did not communicate effectively with a parent. In his frustration, he reprimanded her in front of her colleagues. He recalled, “They were upset. They didn’t think I had their back. They thought I embarrassed her in front of other people and that was not a good look.” Finally, Participant 4 shared, “I think you can also lose staff trust if they're not included in critical conversations with parents.” When teachers do not feel supported, it is very challenging to build and maintain trust.

Personnel Decisions

The participants shared times in which they had to make personnel decisions and they lost staff trust. The literature does not describe anything specific about personnel decisions. However, Bryk and Scheinder (2002), Kochanek (2005), and Rashad (2018) mentioned the strategy of removing incompetent or disagreeable staff members to promote trust in a school. In addition, Tschannen-Moran (2014) highly recommended openness as a key way to build trust with teachers, but the author cautioned against breaking confidentiality. Communicating information about personnel decisions is something that must be handled with the utmost caution to give teachers pertinent information but not break the confidence of others.
When elementary school principals need to make decisions regarding personnel, trust can be lost. These situations tend to be tricky because there is a lot of confidential information involved that cannot be openly shared with the rest of the staff. There is a challenging balance between how open principals can be when communicating decisions. Participant 5 shared a scenario that involved personnel and how she lost some staff trust:

So, as a principal, we know that we have to move people at times. So, I sent out a survey having people do a first, second, third choice. And most of the time I’m able to just honor it. But we had lost three FTE [full-time equivalent, or 3 full-time positions] at that time that year, so people had to move. It wasn’t a choice. So, I hadn’t made a decision of who was going to be moving. And then I talked to everyone who needed to move, and then I presented it to the staff. And one of the staff members had gotten really upset because they thought that that should be a collaborative decision because, in the past, evidently, they had done some type of collaboration, which I’m the most collaborative person, and the outcome of making decisions as a staff who goes where typically ends up being about seniority or who feels like they have a right to certain positions. And so, I made the decision not to allow that to be a collaborative decision, and I just made it. And so, then I had to talk to the person who was most upset about it.

Exhibiting Untrustworthy Behavior

The participants shared experiences of exhibiting untrustworthy behavior that lost trust. Researchers (Balyer, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a) have also found that certain behaviors caused a loss of trust. Tschannen-Moran (2014) explained that dishonesty is one factor that can break trust. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also described how not being reliable can erode trust. Balyer (2017) found that incompetence leads to distrust. Additionally, leaders who do not cultivate the voice of teachers in decision making and daily
matters erode trust in a school building (Balyer, 2017). This erosion of trust can lead to a negative school culture where teachers do not trust their principals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Principals must continue to lead in an honest, reliable, open, and collaborative manner to cultivate the trust of their teachers.

Participant 2 shared, “So, I think listening is a big part of it. If you stop doing that, you’re going to lose trust if you behave in an untrustworthy way.” Participant 4 also thought that if principals were not reliable, they could lose trust. She explained:

To lose staff trust? Yeah. Yeah. I think you lose staff trust when you don’t follow up or follow through. You don’t follow up with your word. If you say you’re going to do something and then you don’t do it, then I think that’s how you can lose staff trust at any time.

Participant 4 also thought that principals could lose trust when they do not take responsibility for their actions. She shared, “I also think you lose trust by blaming when there’s blame and shame.”

The next section examines how gender affects trust building.

**Trust and Gender**

Participants had interesting insights on how their gender did or did not affect trust building with teachers. In this section, this researcher summarizes the perceptions that the principals had around their own gender and overall trust-building strategies. She also relays their experiences of trust-building strategies with female teachers and male teachers and the advice that the participants gave to novice principals of their same gender. This researcher next compares these experiences with the small amount of literature on gender and trust building.

Although much has been studied and written about gender bias in leadership (Hogue & Lord, 2007), very little has been researched about gender and trust. In the fields of business, politics, and education only a few studies have been completed examining the role that gender
plays in building trust with subordinates. Bevelander and Page (2011) found that, after surveying Master of Business Administration students several times over the course of their studies, that women in subordinate roles tend to trust women in leadership’s role less than they would a man in the same position. Bevelander and Page also found that women preferred to network with men. A comparative study (2011) examining the presidential candidacies of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton found that, although voters’ trust in a candidate was significant in their choice to vote for them, neither candidate was more or less trustworthy because of their gender (Quader, 2011).

**Overall Trust-Building Strategies and Gender**

Some participants felt that gender affected their ability to build trust with teachers. When looking at trust between principals and teachers, little has been examined about how the principal’s gender might or might not affect the creation of trust. Only a few studies have examined trust and gender in school environments, and the findings are generally inconclusive. Brezicha and Fuller (2019) found there was an inconsistent relationship between the gender of the teacher and gender of the principal. In other words, they did not find that a gender match with the two roles meant there was more or less trust. Brezicha and Fuller also acknowledged possible flaws with this finding, for the study was solely executed in North Carolina where, culturally, there might be more gender bias.

Three female participants and one male participant felt that their gender affected their trust-building strategies. The female participants felt that it took them longer to build trust and that it was more difficult to do so. Participant 4, a female, shared, “I’m like, it takes females longer to build trust than it does males.” Participant 2, a male, articulated:
I’ve been given the benefit of the doubt on some things that probably because of my
gender . . . Yeah. It’s a sad fact and not okay, but I recognize that that has benefited me in
a lot of ways.

Two male participants, Participants 1 and 3, did not think their gender affected their ability to
build trust.

Participant 2 thought that, as a male leader, he needed to be extra cautious when
interacting with female subordinates and children. He described negative impacts of his gender:

I do think there’s negatives in that, you know always have to make sure, obviously you
know, don’t want to be misinterpreted in anything. And got to be very careful with
students and how you interact with students, and you know never want to be alone with
the student . . . But that’s a reality, that changes how I interact with people on my end,
how I consciously interact with them, making sure others are feeling comfortable and not
putting anybody in a position to feel uncomfortable.

**Trust Building with Male and Female Teachers**

Some participants noticed differences between how they built trust differently with male
and female teachers. Jeras (2019) examined the level of trust male and female teachers had for
male and female principals. Jeras surveyed teachers at 29 schools in a single school district with
the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Survey. After analyzing the data, Jeras found that female
teacher trust was higher for male principals than it was for female principals. Jeras also found a
significant difference in the trust that males extended to female principals as opposed to male
principals.

However, participants in the researcher’s study felt that slight differences existed between
building trust with male or female teachers. Male participants felt that it was easier to build trust
(or bond) with male teachers. Participant 2, a male, shared:
I haven’t had a ton of male teachers, but there does seem to be at times a quicker bonding of that. Although I’ve had male teachers that I’ve not had that kind of built trust with, and it was difficult. But a lot of my male teachers, I see myself in them.

When building trust with female teachers, he explained a difference:

And yes, there is a little bit more of an emotional and, not to stereotype at all, but I want them to know that I’m on their side and I care about them and I’m listening to them and I’m a little bit more purposeful.

Participant 3 thought trust building was slightly different between male and female teachers. He shared, “Maybe in the way that small talk is made. I will talk about the hockey game with some of my male teachers and I’ll talk about family and other things with female, with female staff members.” However, he did not articulate any further differences.

Participant 6, a female, did not think there were differences between how she built trust with male or female teachers:

I don’t do it differently with the male teachers than I do with the female teachers. I treat everyone the same. And I think that’s part of the important thing. I had a professor years ago that said, you treat everyone the same. You don’t want anybody to ever, and they will of course, but you don’t want anybody to ever say, well, you treat this person one way, and you treat that person the other way . . . I just am who I am.

The participants had many thoughts about trust-building advice for new principals. In the next section, this researcher summarizes the participants’ thoughts about gender and novice principals.

**Gender Advice for Novice Principals**

The participants were asked what advice they would give to a novice principal of their same gender. The participants had a lot of advice to share. Jeras (2019) found an interesting
connection between trust and gender between teachers and principals. Jeras found that female teachers expressed more trust in male principals and male teachers expressed more trust in female principals.

The participants had sound advice for novice principals. Participant 2, a male, advised that school leaders treat all teachers the same, regardless of their gender. He explained, “I would say make sure you treat everybody equally. Okay. And yeah, you treat everybody equally. You treat everybody equally, visually and behind closed doors and out in public.”

Participant 5, a female, advised that female principals should lead with confidence. She shared:

I’ve realized I needed to think more like a typical male and the fact of just going in with confidence and then being confident that I have the skillset to figure it out. And so, I recognize that as females we’re a little bit more reserved and want to do more skill building before we make an extra step.

Studies examining how gender affects building trust are few and far between. Many are also inconclusive due to this is a new field in trust studies. The participants in this study also had various thoughts about the connection between trust and gender. Some of the participants thought there was a connection and others did not.

In this study, this researcher examined the experiences of six participants who were elementary school principals. The literature supported their experiences in trust building (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trust is essential in a school environment and there are many ways to build and maintain that trust. The experiences that the participants articulated offer many practical strategies that practicing principals can use immediately. This researcher’s hope was to fill that gap in the literature, and these experiences have done so and have successfully answered
this study’s research question. In the next section, this researcher explores the implications of this research and makes recommendations for action and recommendations for further study.

**Implications**

Since the 1980’s, schools have been called on continually to improve and reform to meet the needs of the student population (Lichter, 2017). To enact the change that is needed to effectively fulfill these requirements and the needs of the student body, principals must lead schools and facilitate transformational change (Anderson, 2017). Building trust with teachers is the first step in creating a positive school climate that is conducive to this constant need for change (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The results of this study confirm the importance of trust for leading effective schools.

The literature on trust between principals and teachers focuses on principal characteristics. Principals can build trust when they show that they are reliable, honest, vulnerable, open, competent, and take responsibility (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), as mentioned by this study’s participants. However, studies that address actual trust-building behaviors are vague, unclear, time-consuming, and overly academic. The reality of elementary schools is that principals need key strategies that are effective and efficient to reach all their teachers to begin to establish trust with individuals and ways to systematically develop that trust over their first year and beyond.

This study revealed practical, reasonable strategies that principals can use daily to build and maintain trust with teachers. These strategies are also ones that are tailored to elementary schools and have shown to be effective in school buildings. These strategies can be used from the first day of leading a new school and after a decade or more leading the same school. As participants shared, trust begins during the interview process and never ends.
Recommendations for Action

Building and maintaining trust takes an enormous amount of time and effort and is an essential part of the role of effective elementary school principals, as described by this study’s participants. The authors in the literature offered much information about the characteristics of trustworthiness (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), but they did not present many viable strategies that principals could use daily. However, the strategies uncovered in this study are practical, useful, and applicable in the world of elementary school leadership, as supported by the literature. These strategies are ones that principals could use regardless of their time in administration, time in their current building, or level of administrative expertise. They should be used as a reference for elementary school principals to use at different times during their tenure. In Table 2, strategies are summarized and organized by their theme and subthemes.

Table 2

Summary of Trust-Building Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Reason or strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have to trust</td>
<td>Teacher buy-in to school decision making</td>
<td>Trust is necessary for teachers to buy-in and take ownership of school decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A culture of vulnerability</td>
<td>Vulnerability is needed for teachers to try to new things in the classroom, make mistakes and take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A climate of open dialogue</td>
<td>Open dialogue is needed to foster a culture of collaboration where teachers’ voices are valued and included in school decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building trust</td>
<td>Initial meetings</td>
<td>• Meet one-on-one or in small groups when beginning a principalship.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Try ‘walking’ meetings for an added level of comfort.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Take notes to refer back to later on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Meet with students and learn their names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Subtheme</td>
<td>Reason or strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>• Survey teachers on what is important to them and what they need from a leader.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey the community to learn what is important to them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>• Listen, listen, listen! Especially the first year. This is key!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning values</td>
<td>• Take time to examine staff and community values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rely on these values during difficult decisions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>• Open up to teachers about your reasons for leading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be authentic and show emotion to teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebb and flow of trust</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>• Be as communicative as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create systems for communication throughout the school building.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative/shared leadership</td>
<td>• Use collaborative and shared leadership as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create systems that support shared decision making (i.e., Leadership teams, faculty affairs committees, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility/hands-on leadership</td>
<td>• Be visible throughout the school building on a daily basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Find opportunities to help teachers such as substituting, helping with lunch duty and recess, attending field trips, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being trustworthy</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>• Follow through with your word.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking responsibility</td>
<td>• Take ownership for your actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>• Engage in appropriate education and training for your role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not pretend to know more than you do.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>• Continually find ways to connect with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing trust</td>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
<td>• Communicate as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not supporting teachers</td>
<td>• Support teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Subtheme</td>
<td>Reason or strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel decisions</td>
<td>If disciplinary action is needed, do so in private.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting untrustworthy behavior</td>
<td>Be as communicative as possible with personnel decisions without breaking confidentiality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and trust</td>
<td>Exhibit trustworthy behavior and taking responsibility when a mistake is made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall trust-building strategies and gender</td>
<td>Find personal connections with teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust-building strategies with male and female teachers</td>
<td>For males, use caution and do not participate in harassing behaviors.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If female, lead with confidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use more emotive trust-building with female teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use more small talk with male teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Try to find a connection with all individual teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender advice for novice principals</td>
<td>Listen, listen, listen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate as much as possible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Find connections with teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believe in yourself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table summarizes trust-building strategies.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Very little has been written about how gender affects trust-building strategies. The three female participants interviewed for this study acknowledged that it seemed harder for them to build trust with teachers than with their male counterparts. One male participant shared that he felt that his gender positively affected his ability to build trust with teachers. This researcher recommends that further investigation take place on different strategies that principals of different genders can use to build trust with teachers.

Additionally, many of the participants noted that they built trust differently with male or female teachers. There have been few studies about how to build trust with teachers of different
genders. Therefore, this researcher also recommends further study on how gender affects perceptions of trustworthiness. Further research on these topics will help principals to understand how their gender affects their leadership style and trust-building strategies. Additional strategies could be uncovered that would support further principals of different genders in trust building, which would lead to effective schools.

Lastly, in this study, this researcher did not examine the participants of nonbinary genders. This researcher also did not record the perceptions of the participants who identified with a different gender than that assigned to them at birth. Furthermore, this researcher did not examine how principals could build trust with teachers of nonbinary genders. Further investigation could be done to support principals of all genders to build and maintain trust with teachers of all genders.

**Conclusion**

Trust is essential between elementary school principals and teachers. Trust is a necessary ingredient in well-functioning organizations, especially schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how elementary school principals could quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. The authors in the literature focused on characteristics of trustworthy principals and had few practical strategies for principals to use in schools. However, in this study, this researcher uncovered many practical, useful, and effective strategies for principals to build trust with teachers. One-on-one interviews were completed with six elementary school principals to answer this study’s research question. The implications of this study are very important to elementary schools. These strategies can be disseminated to new and veteran elementary school principals to help them to build and maintain trust with teachers. School
leaders can begin to use the short-term and long-term strategies right away. They can also use unique strategies for veteran leaders to continue to support trust building throughout their tenure.

This study revealed some differences in the way male and female leaders build trust. It showed that differences exist between building trust with male and female teachers. Recommendations for further study include examining these differences and providing more suggestions for leaders of all genders. These additional strategies will undoubtedly help principals to build even stronger levels of trust with their teachers. These findings are significant because these strategies can help principals, which in turn can help teachers and students. The strategies that were discovered through these interviews can help principals build trust with teachers. In turn, this trust will create a positive school climate in which students will succeed.
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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DATE OF LETTER: January 18, 2023
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Laurel Reckert Cole
FACULTY ADVISOR: Gizelle Luciano, Ed.D.
PROJECT NUMBER: 0123-09
RECORD NUMBER: 0123-09-01
PROJECT TITLE: Perceptions of Elementary School Principals Regarding Strategies to Build Trust Among Staff to Support Positive Change

SUBMISSION TYPE: Exempt Project
SUBMISSION DATE: 1/9/2023
ACTION: Determination of Exempt Status
DECISION DATE: 1/18/2023
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2 (ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Best Regards,

Bob Kennedy, MS
Director, Research Integrity
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Principal,

I hope this email finds you well and that the school year has been a successful one thus far. I am writing today because I am working on my doctoral dissertation at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. I am seeking six volunteers to be interviewed for my research project. I have approval from the superintendent for this project, and I am reaching out to you because you are an elementary school principal who values trust-building practices with teachers. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to understand how elementary school principals can quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. Participation will consist of an audio-recorded 90-minute Zoom interview. Interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time via Zoom. To protect your privacy and confidentiality you will have the option to turn your camera off and choose a pseudonym (alias).

The names of all participants, superintendents, districts, and schools collected for this study will remain confidential. At no time during this research study will any individuals, schools or districts be identified. Additionally, no cost will be incurred by the principals, school, or district. To compensate you for your time I would like to offer you a $25 Visa gift card. This will be provided after your interview is completed. This will be provided to you via email after your interview is completed.

Attached you will find the Participant Information Sheet to review. I appreciate your consideration of this request. Please feel free to contact me via this email address (lreckert@une.edu) or at 303-579-1424 if you are interested in participating in this study. I would like to complete the interviews by the end of January.

Most Sincerely,

Laurel Reckert Cole
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for your voluntary participation today!

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand how elementary school principals can quickly build trust with their teachers to facilitate positive change. This research project is being done as part of a dissertation.

As part of this study, all those participants involved, as well as the study site, will be kept strictly confidential. Before we begin, you will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to protect your identity. This pseudonym will be used throughout this study. You will also have the option to turn the camera portion of Zoom off while the interview is being recorded to further protect your identity. All recordings, transcripts, and personal identifiable information such as names, email addresses, phone numbers, and printouts will be stored on this researcher’s password protected computer. Lastly, all personal identifiable information will be kept in a master list which will be destroyed once transcripts have been member checked. All other data will be saved for three years after completing this study.

This interview will take approximately 60–90 minutes. You will be provided with a copy of your transcript following the data collection process with the ability to update, change, retract or add to the content. After I email you your transcript, you will have seven days to review your transcript for accuracy. If I do not hear back from you on day eight, then I will understand your transcript is accurate and ready to code. Additionally, you can withdraw from this study at any time.

I will now go over the Participant Information Sheet for the study with you. (Go over the Participant Information Sheet)

Do you have any questions or concerns?

Do you have a pseudonym you would like to use? ___________________

Do I have your permission to record this interview using Zoom’s recording feature? This transcript will be available to you. A $25 Visa gift card will be provided to you at the completion of the interview.

I will now start the recording.
Each question below will be introduced and explained, repeated, rephrased or skipped as requested.

Questions

Introductory Questions
- How long have you been a school administrator?
- How long have you been a principal at your current building?

Defining Trust
- My study is about the trust between principals and teachers. Could you define trust in this context?
- Are there different kinds of trust that can exist between different members of the school community? If so, what are those types of trust?
- Is it important for a principal to build trust with his or her teachers? Is it required?
  - Why or why not?
- Do you think trust can be gained or lost over time? Does the quantity or quality of trust change?
- Is trust needed to enact positive change in a school building?

State of Trust
- How would you define the current state of trust in your building? Do you feel that you have earned the trust of the teachers in your building?
- Have you conducted any studies (e.g., TLCC) on school climate? Do you mind sharing how your staff responded?
- Sometimes as a principal, you need to make a decision that is unpopular. Has a situation like this where you refused to compromise ever led to gaining or losing trust amongst your staff? What happened?

Gaining Trust
- When does building trust with staff begin? Does it ever really end?
- What are some principles of building trust among your staff?
- Can you share a story about when you first started at your school? How did you initially earn teachers’ trust?
- What would you recommend a rookie principal do to start actively building trust?

Losing Trust
- Are there some areas that are easier than others to lose staff trust? What are those areas?
- Can you share a story where you lost staff trust? What happened? Did you ever earn it back? If so, how? If not, what have been the barriers to doing so?
Do you have cautions for a rookie principal on the quickest ways to lose trust with teachers?

Gender
- Do you feel your gender affects your strategies of trust building? If so, how?
- Do you feel you have to work differently to earn trust because of your gender? If so, what are some things you have had to do?
- Have you noticed any differences in how you build trust with female teachers versus male teachers? If so, what are those differences?
- What advice do you have for a rookie principal of your same gender for building trust?

Conclusion
- Would you like to add anything else?

Please remember that you will receive an email with your transcript in a day or so for your review. After I email you your transcript, you will have seven days to check it for accuracy. If I do not hear back from you on day eight, then I will understand your transcript is accurate and ready to code. Thank you for your time!
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Version Date: January 18, 2023

IRB Project #: 0123-09

Title of Project: Perceptions of Elementary School Principals Regarding Strategies to Build Trust among Staff to Support Positive Change

Principal Investigator (PI): Laurel Reckert Cole

PI Contact Information: lreckertcole@une.edu; 303-579-1424

INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes. Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with important details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- The use of the word “we” in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The general purpose of this research project is to acquire an understanding of how principals build trust with teachers. Trust is of the utmost importance for creating environments that promote positive culture and student achievement. We have reviewed literature discussing the characteristics of trustworthy principals and found that few articles discussed strategies on how principals built trust with their teachers. Our hope is to interview six practicing principals who have built trust with their staff and have been able to facilitate positive change. Through these interviews we hope to gain insight on practical strategies that elementary school principals can use in practice to successfully build trust with their faculty.

WHY ARE YOU BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you:

- are over the age of 18,
- employee of a suburban school district in a western state of the United States,
- are currently an elementary school principal, and
- understand the importance of building trustworthy relationships with their teachers.
WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?
You will be asked to participate in a 90-minute interview about forming trusting relationships with teachers. The results of this study will be shared with district leadership, however, all data to be shared will be de-identified and presented in aggregate.

- You will be asked to participate in one semistructured interview with the principal investigator that will last approximately 90 minutes over Zoom.
- You can choose a pseudonym (alias) to be used in place of your name for the study.
- You will be given the opportunity to leave your camera on or off during the interview, and your interview will be audio recorded using Zoom.
- You will be emailed a copy of your interview transcript to review for accuracy. You will have seven calendar days to respond, or the PI will assume that you have no comments, and the transcript will be assumed to be accurate.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include a risk of a breach of confidentiality in research. Participants have the right to skip or not answer any questions, for any reason.

- Please see the ‘WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY?’ section below for steps we will take to minimize a breach of confidentiality from occurring.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
There are no likely benefits to you by being in this research project; however, the information we collect may help us understand how principals effectively and efficiently build trust with teachers.

WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
You will be receiving a $25 Visa gift card for taking part in this research project. This will be provided after your interview is completed. This will be provided to you via email after your interview is complete.

WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?
We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:
• Data will only be collected during one-on-one participant interviews using Zoom, no information will be taken without participant consent, and transcribed interviews will be checked by participants for accuracy before they are added to the study.
• Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and any personally identifying information will be stripped from the interview transcript.
• All names and e-mails gathered during recruitment will be recorded and linked to a uniquely assigned pseudonym within a master list.
• The master list will be kept securely and separately from the study data and accessible only to the principal investigator.
• The interview will be conducted in a private setting to ensure others cannot hear your conversation.
• Participants are given the option to turn off their camera during Zoom interview.
• Once member checking of the transcribed interview is complete the recorded Zoom interview will be destroyed. Once all transcripts have been verified by the participants, the master list of personal information will be destroyed.
• All other study data will be retained on record for 3 years after the completion of the project and then destroyed. The study data may be accessed upon request by representatives of the University (e.g., faculty advisors, Office of Research Integrity, etc.) when necessary.
• All data collected will be stored on a password protected personal laptop computer accessible only by the principal investigator.

WHAT IF YOU WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to choose not to participate, or to withdraw your participation at any time until the Master List is destroyed without penalty or loss of benefits. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in this project.

If you request to withdraw from this project, the data collected about you will be deleted when the master list is in existence, but the researcher may not be able to do so after the master list is destroyed.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at irb@une.edu.