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Principals' Perspectives of Trust and Vulnerability in Leadership: A Grounded Theory Study

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Abstract

Leadership is a challenging task and leading well requires interpersonal skills that inspire those they lead to follow them. The aim of this grounded theory study is to explore the experiences of educational leaders who thoughtfully engage in trust-building and express vulnerability in their leadership practices. This study explored how six principals at kindergarten through 12th grade schools experience trust and vulnerability as building leaders. Three research questions guided this study: how do leaders experience trust, how do leaders generate trust, and how do leaders experience vulnerability.

In this study, we begin by understanding the background to the problem and introduce the literature that provided a framework for this study. This study begins with an in-depth analysis of the history of trust research followed by how researchers have defined trust. Following the trust definitions, the literature explores the implications of trust in education and concludes with an overview of data on vulnerability in leadership and vulnerability in education.

This grounded theory study was designed to explore vulnerability as means of improving trust is a topic that has not been extensively explored in education. While researchers understand the value of generating trust, not much is understood about the experience of vulnerability in education. Grounded theory provides an opportunity to explore novice topics to explore unknown theories. Grounded theory also provides the researcher with an opportunity to follow the research and explore what unfolds in data collection. By following the data as it emerges the researcher is able to further investigate themes that may be left behind in a traditional qualitative or quantitative study.

Following the methods, data is presented from this study and concludes with implications and areas that require future research. The findings for this dissertation include trust as a significant influencer of Relational Trust theory and empathic leadership practices. I also present data that demonstrates the significance of expressing vulnerability as an educational leader. Much research has been conducted on the topic of trust, but little is known about how leaders experience trust, leaders looking to facilitate trust in their practice may benefit from understanding how other leaders experience trust and vulnerability in their role as leaders.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Expressing vulnerability becomes a leadership tool,
when it opens the door to connecting with others."
(Bunker, 1997 p. 134)

Background to the Problem

In these days of high-stakes testing and the ever-increasing demand for higher levels of student achievement, there is no question that teachers and principals experience tension in their buildings. Schools are pit against neighboring schools for the "best scores" and the expectation to maintain or improve levels of academic achievement. These demands for greater levels of accountability increase stress and competition between schools. We can even find situations within schools where communities no longer trust their local schools, and teachers don't trust parents, administrators, or the district. As the tension increases, school leaders may begin to experience higher levels of impatience and anxiety (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). This rise in impatience and anxiety can spread like wildfire through the school, and quickly the school culture begins to burn. If this fire is not swiftly extinguished, the consequences to the school can be significant. At the time of writing this dissertation schools across the country were facing the challenge of educating students in the middle of the covid-19 pandemic. More than ever schools have undergone unprecedented changes and disruptions to their school

culture. What is the cost of poor school culture? Unfortunately, it is suggested by Bryk & Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a, 2015b) that the consequences of an anxious school culture ultimately have the greatest negative impact on students and student learning.

What we do know is that the stakes are high, every day students walk through the doors of our schools expecting teachers and administrators to engage them in learning, and with each passing year, we hope that our students leave meeting the standards that we have taught them. But "education is complex" (Tschannen-Moran, 2015 p. 67), and while we may not realize the impact of the anxiety that ripples through our buildings, leaders can see the impact in the results of standardized scores. When scores are lower than the previous year or fail to, yet again, meet the benchmarks, we look for an easy fix that will improve our test scores. Unfortunately, improving student achievement "cannot be reduced to an easy formula" (p.67), and leaders must take a deeper look at the root source of the scores. The answer to poor student achievement or declining scores may, in fact, be related to school culture.

When the stress of high-stakes testing and tension in the school climate has taken its toll on the school's culture, it becomes the leader's responsibility to pause and reflect on how to change school culture. At this point, it is important to pause and reflect on the trust that is present in the school community. As worries are amplified within a school, people begin to guard themselves against potential risks and withdraw from engaging in relational trust (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). When we withdraw from each other

and resort to self-protective measures, individuals stop communicating and collaborating and the cycle of mistrust continues to spread from administrators to teachers, to students and parents. Thus, instead of a positive culture of learning and collaboration, we replace this culture with mistrust and self-protection.

When a culture of mistrust and self-protection has spread throughout the community, how should school principals respond? What are the responsibilities of a principal to change school culture? Are principals even aware that there is a culture of mistrust within the community? Do leaders understand the consequences of low trust within schools? What happens when a new principal inherits a school with a low culture of trust? These questions and more have run through my head as I have considered trust, vulnerability, and leadership.

I did not begin this dissertation looking at school culture or even trust. I was most interested in studying vulnerability in principal leadership. I have long been a student of Brené Brown's work, beginning with *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010) which led me to her Ted Talk *The Power of Vulnerability* (2010). This concept that we are whole with our imperfections and that we may actually be more authentic individuals when we accept and embrace our own vulnerability (Brown, 2010) was a novel idea to me, and I slowly began to adopt this idea into my personal and eventually my professional life. What I found was a deeper level of satisfaction at work as well as improved relationships with my friends, family, colleagues, and students. When Brown released *Dare to Lead* in 2018, I was thrilled that her work had formally stepped into the leadership realm. Little did I know that part one of *Dare to Lead* would be based on vulnerability. Brown's work

in *Dare to Lead* ultimately inspired my interest in investigating vulnerability in leadership, but through this journey of vulnerability, I have come to discover that trust and vulnerability are intimately connected, and that trust is at the root of school culture; therefore, they must be discussed and considered together throughout this dissertation.

The role of leaders is never an easy job. The demands placed upon leaders do not allow for missteps and uncertainty, and the pressure can lead to the misconception that leaders should be resilient to errors. Fairholm & Fairholm (2000) suggest this can influence the perceptions that leaders live beyond the skills of a typical person, and this idea can make them difficult to relate to. Meyer, Lefevre, & Robinson (2017) also suggest that leaders can be "seen as in control, infallible and invulnerable" (p.222). This pattern can result in leaders withdrawing from the teachers in their building, and this lack of connection can damage trust between teachers and their principal. So, while leaders may believe that they should present as stoic, strong leaders, it may be better to break down barriers with teachers by embracing their own vulnerability to establish trust amongst the school community (Meyer, LeFevre, & Robinson, 2017). Leaders should embrace their vulnerability and understand that leadership is not an individual process but rather a relational one and that the power of influencing culture can be found through collaboration with others (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000).

When leaders are able to accept their own fallibility and communicate with their staff that they would like to work collectively alongside their colleagues, this has the potential to shift the culture of the school. By establishing a culture of shared decision-making with staff, leaders can take a step towards generating trust within the community.

In Chapter 2, I will further explain the benefit of trust within a school community, and the impact trust can have on student learning. What is important is that educational leaders understand how school culture is influenced by building leaders. Fairholm & Fairholm (2000) stress that individuals can only accept leadership from another as far as the culture is in harmony. This concept stresses the importance of leaders understanding how school culture influences change within a school community and stresses the importance of leaders cultivating a community of trust to foster collaboration.

It is suggested by Fairholm & Fairholm (2000) that culture may be at the root of structural change. Often the culture of the school can be interconnected with student achievement. When a leader is tasked with improving student achievement, it is crucial to analyze the culture of the school to determine the effectiveness of potential change. A leader may find that if the culture in the school is disharmonious, change initiatives within the school may be unsurmountable. If a school community suffers from poor culture and low trust, principals ought to reflect within themselves as leaders. Researchers posit that leaders need to focus on generating trust within the community to improve culture and ultimately influence change within the school community and that when leaders focus on developing trust, they can influence further connections for student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bunker, 1997; Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000; Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015; Louis, 2007; Meyer, Le Fevre, & Robinson, 2017; Nienaber, Hofeditz, & Romeike, 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a; 2015b). Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) state that "trust is defined as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on

the confidence that the other person is benevolent, honest, reliable, and competent" (p. 257) therefore leaders need to model the action of being vulnerable to establish trust with their colleagues. Vulnerability can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but Brown suggests in *Daring Greatly* (2015) that "vulnerability means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you are feeling. To have the hard conversations" (p.4). Principals can model this behavior for their teachers by engaging in honest conversations about school performance and school culture. Throughout this dissertation, I focus on how leaders experience trust and vulnerability to understand how those practices influence school culture and improve opportunities for greater levels of student learning.

Problem Statement

Often, leaders are expected to fix issues within schools but do not understand the context of the real issue, and they must seek this out on their own. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) propose that four components influence community trust.

1. Rising expectations
2. Greater levels of accountability
3. Accommodating greater diversity
4. How news is communicated

Combined, these four components could lead to the perfect storm, where damage occurs to a school community. Leaders do not often have much influence on the components listed above, and in the present educational environment, the first three components are facing schools across the country. One of the problems then becomes

how leaders combat these challenges when sometimes, they have little control over the components above.

The greater problem lies in what happens if leaders choose to ignore the issues at hand and allow the school's culture to deteriorate. The consequence of ignoring the shift in culture may result in lower student achievement in the current climate of demanding higher expectations (Bryk & Schneider 2002, Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This could result in a dangerous cycle if leaders do not take care to observe the culture within the school. Leaders need to consider that "it is unlikely that a school with a principal whom the faculty do not trust will be successful in its core mission of fostering student learning" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p.84). Ultimately principals are responsible for the education that takes place in their school; therefore, they need to consider the factors that influence the educational opportunities, including the school culture and trust in their community.

Tschannen-Moran & Gareis indicated that "when teachers and principals do not trust one another, each seeks to minimize their vulnerability" (2015 p. 258); what has not been researched enough is the implications of individuals when they seek to minimize their vulnerability. Currently, there is very little research in the field of vulnerability. If everyone is busy guarding themselves or protecting their vulnerabilities, how does this impact the leaders, teachers, and the community at large? Nienaber, Hofeditz &Romeike (2015) were the first researchers to conduct a literature review on vulnerability; however, none of their research discussed references to vulnerability in education or educational leadership. If each individual seeks to minimize their vulnerabilities, no one is open to

asking for help, which minimizes the opportunities for collaboration. This isolation leaves no room for growth and improvement, and each person is left to navigate challenges alone.

In schools, it is often necessary to engage in difficult conversations, and leaders who embrace their own vulnerability reduce defensiveness in difficult conversations (Meyer, LeFevre, Robinson, 2017). Schools with low levels of trust require leaders who are willing to reflect on the culture of the building, and this reflection requires vulnerability. Often, leaders are asked to reduce their own vulnerability to present as strong and resilient leaders to their schools, but this façade can result in a lack of trust between leaders and their colleagues. When individuals do not trust one another, they tend to disengage from the education process. When people do not trust one another, they will seek to protect themselves by building barriers; this self-seclusion makes it challenging to seek help and learn from others. This ultimately harms opportunities for student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The challenge then becomes, how do leaders generate trust and engage in difficult conversations if they are unwilling to lean into their own vulnerability? The cost of not engaging in trust development and vulnerability could ultimately lead to a loss of learning opportunities for students.

Purpose Statement

Culture, more than structure, may be one way to overcome issues in education, but how do we improve school culture without trust? Fairholm & Fairholm (2000) suggest that we must establish trust by demonstrating our vulnerability as leaders. My dissertation aims to investigate how leaders experience trust and vulnerability, including

the potential barriers to trust and vulnerability in their role. In order to establish a shift in school culture, leaders must be able to extend trust and embrace their vulnerability. I desire to explore vulnerability, including misconceptions, and specifically investigate vulnerability in educational leadership. Brecher (2017) states that "vulnerability is not sharing every emotion…it is being open to ideas other than your own…and recognizing your limitations" (p.23). Leaders need to be realistic about their limitations and recognize where they may need support. From there, leaders can collaborate with the teachers in their building in order to improve the quality of education for each student. Vulnerability should be seen as a strength because it demonstrates a person's desire to reflect, investigate and advocate. Principals should strive to create a trusting culture in which everyone reflects, investigates, and advocates for student learning within their teaching because the children in their classrooms need each person in the school to do the best they can (Meyer, Le Fevre, & Robinson, 2017).

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to explore the experiences of trust leaders, specifically principals at kindergarten through 12th-grade schools in an urban city in the Rocky Mountain West region (Creswell, 2014). Considering the limited amount of research in the field of vulnerability, specifically in education sciences, researchers must begin to investigate how leaders experience their own vulnerability. This research will be conducted using grounded theory methodology. The purpose of grounded theory research is to create a new theory (Glasser, 2011; Charmaz, 1996). I am interested in investigating how vulnerable leadership and trust might be related in education, and I feel

that grounded theory will allow me to analyze new data about the experiences of principals with regard to trust and vulnerability.

Research Questions

As I considered the research questions for this dissertation, I was interested in how leaders experience trust and vulnerability. If it were easy for people to build trust, most people would engage in trusting behaviors, but this is not the case. Leaders often struggle with trust in their work. Vulnerability and trust become challenges for leaders, and I am curious about leaders' challenges when considering their own trust and vulnerability. This became the antecedent for my research questions. Without assuming the experiences of leaders, I am interested in understanding the experiences of leaders regarding vulnerability and leadership. This led me to the following research questions:

1. How do principals experience trust in relationships?
2. How do trust leaders generate trust relationships with those they lead
3. If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at schools?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this dissertation began with my interest in studying vulnerability in leadership. After reading Brown's work (2014, 2015, 2018), I grew interested in understanding research around vulnerability in education. In my research, I found it difficult to find research studies on vulnerability in leadership and even less research on vulnerability in education. Therefore, I built my conceptual framework from the end to the beginning. I began my conceptual framework with Brown's research on

vulnerability and research on vulnerability in leadership conducted by Nienaber, Hofeditz & Romeike (2015) and Bunker (1997). Based on the research conducted by Brown, I discovered that trust and vulnerability are equally important. This led me to conduct further research into trust in education.

When I began my research on trust in education, I found that Bryk & Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran (2001, 2014, 2015, 2017) are the seminal researchers on trust in education. Most of the research about the implications of trust in education and the theory behind trust in education has been studied by Tschannen-Moran and Bryk & Schneider. From there, I was led to research written by Louis (2007) and Chughtai & Buckley (2009); both articles reference the work of Tschannen-Moran and Bryk & Schneider in their literature. Both Bryk & Schneider and Tschannen-Moran studied how leader trust impacts school communities and ultimately student achievement.

While conducting research on trust in education, I wanted to understand how researchers defined trust as well as the history of research on trust. This interest led me to what became the first two components of my conceptual framework—the history of trust and definitions of trust. Baier (1986) is considered the seminal researcher on trust; her work uncovered the significant lack of research that has been conducted on trust, despite being referenced by philosophers for many centuries. Baier also addresses the different types of trust and where we see the different types in our world. After studying Baier, I was led to Faulkner & Simpson's philosophy of trust (2011, 2017). Faulkner & Simpson continued to investigate trust, including different types of trust, and explored the empowering theory of trust. In order to have a deeper level of understanding of trust, I

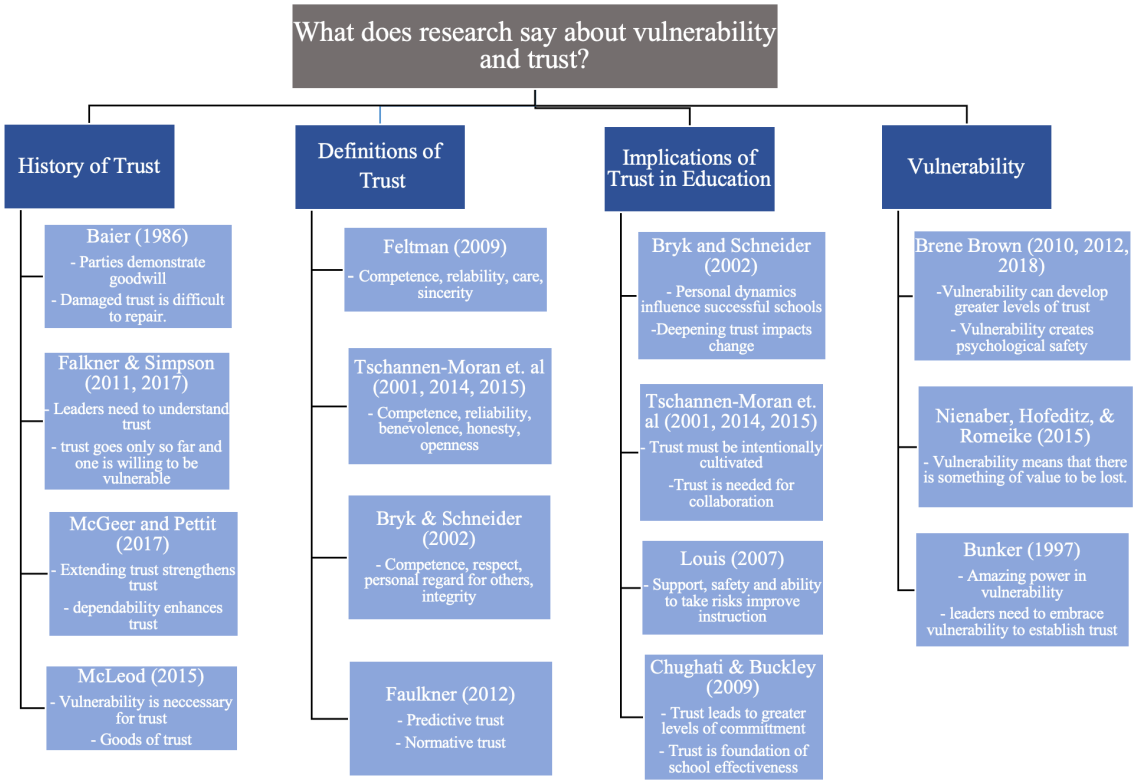
began my literature review with the history of research on trust and then studied how researchers define trust.

It is important to understand how researchers define trust to understand how we perceive trust and how leaders can strive to generate trust. In the definitions of trust section of this conceptual framework, I used the definitions of Feltman (2009), Bryk & Schneider (2002), and Tschannen-Moran (2014). Feltman and Bryk & Schneider have four components that make up trust, while Tschannen-Moran has five components. There are many similarities between all three definitions of trust, and I will detail the definitions in Chapter 2.

The conceptual framework of trust research for this dissertation was designed to provide a strong background of vulnerability and trust in principal leadership in order to conduct further research on vulnerability in principal leadership. An image of my conceptual framework can be found in figure 1.1 below. The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how principals experience trust and vulnerability in their roles as building leaders. Research has been conducted about the impacts of trust in schools, but not enough research has been conducted on how principals generate and experience trust and their own vulnerability. The components of my conceptual framework will enhance my research as I conduct this grounded theory dissertation.

Figure 1.1

Literature Map



Significance of the Study

Leadership is a complex and challenging process, and there has been little research conducted in the area of vulnerability in leadership. Even less research has been conducted in on the topic of vulnerable leadership in education. Nienaber, Hofeditz, and Romeike (2015) stated that they were the first to conduct a complete literature review on vulnerability. These researchers cite that "vulnerability is essential for trust but needs further attention by scholars" (p. 568). I hope to expand on the limited research of vulnerability and trust, specifically in education. Little is known about how leaders and their followers experience vulnerability. My research identifies

how trust and vulnerability in educational leadership are experienced by leaders and teachers and ultimately how these experiences influence educational outcomes for their students. Brown's (2018) research states that vulnerability can improve trust between individuals and deepen learning. If educational leaders accept and share their own vulnerability, they will be able to develop greater trust with their colleagues and improve teachers' learning outcomes. If teachers feel it is safe to experience their own vulnerability, their learning could positively impact the learning of their students.

This grounded theory study contributes meaningful research that promotes the idea that trust and vulnerability are paramount to leadership. By embracing vulnerability in their work, leaders can improve their interpersonal relationships and generate trust with their colleagues. Thus, supporting the evidence of Bryk & Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) that improved trust in communities can improve educational outcomes for students. Feltman (2009) states that "Trust allows us to disagree, debate, and test each other's thinking as work together to find ideas and solutions" (p. 11). When schools have high levels of trust within their community, they become better equipped to handle the challenges they will face through collaboration, debate, and problem-solving. Part of establishing a high trust community is the ability for each member to share their own vulnerability. Leaders must be the first to model vulnerability to generate trust and build a safe environment for others to share their own vulnerability. Vulnerability enhances interpersonal trust and thus improves learning outcomes. When teachers feel safe asking for help and collaborating with others, they can open up opportunities to enhance their teaching and ultimately improve learning

opportunities for students. I hope to educate leaders about the benefits of vulnerability and trust in their schools as it is fundamental to the success of schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Limitations

This dissertation is not designed to produce generalizable findings. This study has a small sample size, which will limit the generalizability. Instead, this study is focused on studying how the leader experiences vulnerability, as a means to strengthen trust, in their role as well as the impacts they perceive of sharing their vulnerability, both positively and negatively. This grounded theory research design offers a personal and in-depth investigation into the experiences of educational leaders. This study is not intended to provide a universal perspective for all educational leaders; it is designed to focus on the experiences of individuals.

This dissertation not only focuses on the individual stories of leaders but specifically, this study will look at the experiences of leaders who are principals as they are responsible for the culture of the school. This does limit the study as it does not acknowledge the leadership experiences of other leaders within a building, including but not limited to deans, teachers on special assignment, instructional coaches, district leaders, etc. The purpose of defining this limitation is to understand how one group experiences vulnerability as leaders of a building. These leaders may be the most susceptible to consequences from the staff in their buildings for not demonstrating trustworthy leadership qualities. Additionally, as there is no research in the field of vulnerability in educational leadership, it is important to address how leaders of schools

experience vulnerability. Future studies should examine how leaders in other roles experience vulnerability within their jobs.

Another limitation of this study is how teachers perceive vulnerability of their principals. Although it is crucial to understand the experience of teachers regarding their leaders' vulnerability, it is equally important to acknowledge the sensitivity of discussing one's vulnerability. For that purpose, the interviews and observations conducted in this study will focus on principals to establish trust between myself and my participants to facilitate deep and thoughtful conversations about their vulnerability in a leadership role.

Delimitations

The first delimitation for this dissertation is that I have intentionally selected to focus on trust and vulnerability. While there are many qualities of educational leaders, I feel that the experiences of leaders in navigating trust and their own vulnerability are important to understanding school culture and, ultimately, student achievement. As I researched trust, there were other topics that I could have chosen to include, but I specifically chose to focus on vulnerability based on my own personal interest as well as the lack of research that is present on vulnerability.

The conceptual framework for this dissertation is a delimitation in itself; there are many theories that can be connected to trust. When I focused my literature review, I found that I wanted to focus on relational trust and vulnerability, and I intentionally excluded topics that did not address both relational trust and vulnerability. Additionally, as this is a grounded theory research study, I found that additional

research on the relational leadership theory was warranted after conducting data collection and analysis. Understanding relational leadership theory allowed me to understand the data on a deeper level.

"Trust can no longer be taken for granted in schools. It must be conscientiously cultivated and sustained" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 13). In order to fully engage in deep and meaningful conversations with leaders. I needed to establish trust with the leaders that I am interviewing. By limiting my sample size, I ensured that I was able to spend the time necessary to generate trust and gain insight into the experiences of these leaders. In addition, I returned to the same participants, using theoretical sampling, to collect further information. If I had a larger sample size, I wouldn't be able to validate my findings with the same individual, which may take away from my ability to understand the experiences of these participants.

By limiting my research to principals, leaders who are most responsible for the school climate, I was able to understand the challenges of this group of individuals and further understand their experiences with trust and vulnerability. Additionally, much research about principals and trust has been conducted at the elementary school level; by opening up my participants to all levels, I was able to determine if there are similarities or differences between leaders at different levels.

Conclusion

As an educator, I have observed different leaders and leadership styles; I have also had to learn and adapt within my own personal leadership. I have observed that the relationships I have with my supervisors and the relationships I have with my

colleagues influence many aspects of my job, including; job satisfaction, job performance, and overall feelings of happiness and peace. My own interest in understanding how relationships at work influence me personally prompted me to seek reference in Brené Brown's book *Dare to Lead* (2018). As I started to embrace my own vulnerability and extend trust to others, I found that the quality of my relationships improved. This interest in vulnerability inspired my concentration on this research topic. Brown (2018) did not begin with studying vulnerability, but she did find that "it just happens to be the big barrier to almost everything we want in our lives" (p. 7). I was interested in furthering the vulnerability research, specifically as it pertains to school principals.

In the following chapters, you will find the literature review, where I analyze research based on my conceptual framework, including the history of trust, definitions of trust, implications of trust in education, and vulnerability in leadership roles. In Chapter 3, I detail the methods I utilized to conduct this grounded theory dissertation. In Chapter 4, I describe the findings of my grounded theory study, and finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my research findings.

Definition of Key Terminology

Trust: For the purpose of this study trust will be defined as "the willingness to be vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something you care about will not be harmed." (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015. P. 259)

Leadership: For the purpose of this study, I will refer to leadership in the realm of education. Specifically, I will define leaders in this context as principals.

Vulnerability: In this study vulnerability will be defined as a person's humility, self-awareness, and courage to acknowledge imperfections.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Trust may not be the seed of student achievement,
but it may well be the rich soil in which the seeds
of effective teaching and learning can take root and grow."
(Tschannen-Moran, 2015, p.268)

Trust in education has only recently been investigated, primarily by researchers, Tschannen-Moran (2011) and Bryk & Schneider (2002). Nevertheless, it is important to understand the history of trust research, how researchers define trust, and how trust has been studied in education, including the implications of trust in schools. Additionally, this literature review includes information about vulnerability, specifically as leaders and educators experience it. The purpose of including vulnerability within this literature review is to expand on the research that suggests that individuals who extend trust must experience some level of vulnerability to the person they are trusting. This literature review investigates current research on trust and vulnerability to help explain the leader perspective to address a need for greater levels of trust in education.

When I began to gather the research for this literature review, I was primarily interested in reading about vulnerability in leadership. When I conducted my initial search, there were very few articles that were included in my initial search criteria; therefore, I needed to expand my research to include research on trust. I chose to include

trust in my literature review because Brown's (2018) work states that trust is necessary for one to be vulnerable with another. In this literature review, I define the research topic that I focused on for this dissertation, what I intentionally left out, and I detail how I conducted my research. I then provide an in-depth analysis of the literature included in this review.

As mentioned previously, I began my research for this dissertation by examining vulnerability research. But it became apparent that I needed to broaden my research to include more background as there is little research on vulnerability. As I created my conceptual framework, I worked backward, from what I was most interested in, vulnerability, to trust in education which ultimately led me to understand the history of trust.

Unfortunately, there is not a theory that currently describes or explains vulnerability. This dissertation strives to explore vulnerability further to contribute to research about vulnerability, specifically regarding education. Baier (1986) is the first person to document research on trust. While many philosophers have discussed the importance of trust, it wasn't until the 20th century that trust was studied. Research on trust has only been developed in the last 35 years. Trust in education began with Tschannen-Moran's work in the late 1990s and Bryk and Schneider in the early 2000s. These researchers found that there are strengths and challenges to developing trust, including how an individual's willingness to be vulnerable influences trust relationships.

In the last 25 years, research has started to explain why trust is important in education. Most of the research on trust explores the perspectives of teachers and

community members in schools but leaves out the perspectives of building leaders. This research is crucial to understanding how trust influences school culture and ultimately understanding how trust influences student academic achievement. What we do not understand is what leaders experience in the trust phenomenon. We do not understand what leaders perceive as the strengths and challenges to building trust, extending trust, and experiencing vulnerability in their roles. This dissertation will explore leaders' experiences, including trust and vulnerability, to fill the current gap in the literature around principal leadership.

When I began my search for vulnerable leadership, I did not want to include topics that targeted vulnerable populations as this does not describe the experience of vulnerability but rather shines a light on systemically vulnerable populations. This excluded many current research articles, so I decided to broaden my research to include trust in leadership. I chose to include trust because Brown's research on vulnerability stresses the importance of trust in vulnerable situations (2018). I was also interested in current research of trust for leaders of all levels, which allowed me to include a variety of different leadership styles. As I continued to explore the literature, I included the history of trust to understand the foundation behind trust in literature.

My literature search began by using Compass, the University of Denver's research database, where I searched titles that include the words vulnerable and education. There is limited research on vulnerability that referenced education, was peer-reviewed, and published within the last ten years. I found that much of the literature included vulnerable populations and opportunities that made schools vulnerable to

challenges. Both of these topics were excluded as they did not speak to the personal experiences of principals. I then included research that included trust and education. Again, I limited my research to peer-reviewed articles published within the last ten years. As I uncovered research, I also opened my research to include seminal research outside of the past ten years, including Baier (1986) and Bryk & Schneider (2002). As Brown (2018) was the impetus for this research topic, I chose to include Brown's work. The book that inspired this research was *Dare to lead* (Brown, 2018); this book on vulnerability in leadership was founded on the base of Brown's research on shame-resilience theory (2007). The work of Brown has inspired my professional growth through vulnerability, and I am curious about the trust and vulnerable experiences of other leaders.

While I continued my research for this literature review, I used the following questions to guide my research:

1. Is there literature on vulnerability in education?
2. What is the current research on trust in education?
3. What is missing from the research?

Through the research process, I realized that further research about the history of trust would be beneficial. While reading, I found quantitative and qualitative studies about the impact of trust on schools and individuals, but I could not identify research that examined trust from the leaders' perspective. The research was collected using both forward and backward searching. I started by looking into research about vulnerability, which led me to initial findings on trust. After researching trust, I used backward research

to look at trust in education and the history of trust. This allowed me to gather a more comprehensive look at trust.

Throughout the remainder of this literature review, I will examine what current research states about the history of trust, trust in education, the implications of trust, and finally, current research on vulnerability in leadership. There is no question that school leadership is a challenging job with many demands. Yet the needs of these leaders are often neglected, and rarely do researchers explore the challenges from the leaders' perspective. Literature states that trust in schools is essential to school culture and, ultimately, student achievement—the challenges of being a leader coupled with the challenges of generating trust amongst colleagues warrants further investigation.

This literature review begins with an overview of the literature that explores the history of trust. I will then detail how trust has been studied in education, followed by the implications of trust in education. Finally, I will examine current literature on vulnerability.

History of Trust

In this first topic, the history of trust, I examine how trust has been studied in research. The research details how trust is demonstrated by one person extending trust towards another, how trust has been perceived by philosophers, and the challenges and benefits of trust. Baier (1986), McGeer and Pettit (2015), and McLeod (2015) each research trust to gain a deeper understanding of trust. Baier (1986) describes trust and antitrust, specifically discussing trust and relationships and how trust can help and harm relationships. Faulkner (2011) researches different types of trust, including trust actions

and trust attitudes, and trust that is predictive versus trust that is normative. McGeer and Pettit (2015) investigate degrees of trust and the capacity of trust within relationships. Finally, McLeod discusses the "goods of trust" or the products that arise when trust is present.

"Trust and Antitrust," written by Annette Baier (1986), is considered the seminal research about moral trust. Baier begins by investigating trust as moral philosophers described it. Baier addresses the significant lack of investigation on trust, citing that while moral philosophers have always been intricacies of trust or trustworthiness. So, while trust is a phenomenon that every individual relies upon, we have very little information about how it forms and what it means. We show trust with friends, partners, strangers, and even our enemies when we trust that they will not cause us harm, and yet, as Baier suggests, the only experts at distinguishing different types of trust are actually criminals.

Baier (1986) investigates trust and what is necessary for trust to exist. Trust requires that both parties demonstrate goodwill, and when one extends trust to another, they rely on that person not taking advantage of them. Specifically, the one extending trust must be vulnerable to the person they are extending their trust to. Baier's definition of vulnerability is primarily limited to the extension of one's goodwill towards another. She does not extend discussion towards vulnerability regarding an individual's feelings and insecurities.

After discussing what is entailed with trust, the author moved on to discuss infant trust and power in trust relationships. Baier (1986) describes trust as the trust an infant

has for their parents. What we know is that babies are not born knowing how to trust or understand trust, but infants are the most susceptible to harm; they must rely on the care of others for their basic needs. Therefore, some trust is not "won" but is already present until it is damaged by the trusted. Baier states that "trust is much easier to maintain than it is to get started and is never hard to destroy" (1986, p.242). When we think about trust regarding education, there is a certain level of trust between students, staff, parents, and administrators. Parents trust that their students will be safe and educated, teachers trust that their principal will support them, and principals trust that teachers will teach. And yet, most people take the trust bestowed upon them for granted, and when trust is damaged, it is difficult to rebuild. What is not discussed in Baier's article is the "network of trust" (p.258). Baier acknowledges that her research focuses on how trust is developed and measured between two individuals. While, in education, the members involved in trust vary greatly in that the members of education include and are not limited to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and support staff. To balance the needs of these members, a network of trust must be present. In the next section, I will explore how trust is present in education when multiple individuals are present in creating a network of trust.

The Empowering Theory of Trust is an excerpt from the book "The Philosophy of Trust" by Paul Faulkner and Thomas Simpson (2017). In this excerpt, McGeer and Pettit suggest that "by manifestly relying on you – by exercising trust – I may not only cause you to exercise your existing capacity for trust-responsiveness; I may also cause you to develop capacity, achieving a higher degree of dependability and durability" (McGeer

and Pettit, 2017, p.5) When leaders extend trust to their trustees, they need to understand how trust is developed, including how extending trust improves the dependability and durability of trust, thereby increasing the opportunity for a trust interaction to be successful. Nevertheless, leaders should also be aware that there is risk in extending trust. While trust can be improved by extending trust to a trustee, it also requires the trustor to be vulnerable in that by extending trust; the trustee may let the trustor down. Therefore, a limitation to the empowering theory of trust is the trustor's ability to rely on the trustee reaches only as far as the trustor is willing to show their own vulnerability (McGeer and Pettit, 2017). This makes me wonder how closely linked trust and vulnerability are in working relationships; while trust can improve by granting trust to a trustee, it can only go to the extent that the trustor is willing to experience vulnerability with the trustor.

"Trust is an ambiguous notion" (McGeer and Pettit, 2017, p. 7). The authors propose that there are two primary factors to trust. The first, responsiveness to trust, suggests that some people may have trust responsiveness as a part of their psychology. While the degree of trust varies based on relationship and scenario, it may be that we are inherently wired to be trust responsive. The other factor is that trust can be developed when another individual places their trust in another individual. This indicates that trust can be both internally motivating and externally motiving. When leaders engage in trust with their colleagues, they should consider not only the ambiguity of trust but also how trust-responsive behaviors can be both internal and externally motivated.

McGeer and Pettit also theorize that there are two theses of trust (2017). The first theory is the situational enhancement of dependability, meaning that when a trustor

communicates their trust in a trustee, that increases the likelihood that the trustee will follow through. When the follow-through occurs, the trustor then holds the trustee in higher regard, thus increasing the possibility of extending trust to the trustee again in the future, thus continuing the cycle of trust. The first claim supporting the first theses of situational enchantment is the encouragement argument, which states that if the trustor communicates their belief in the trustee's trustworthiness, this is likely to increase the trustee's ability to be trustworthy. The second claim is the request-based argument. This claim expresses that by asking the trustee's permission, this action can also increase the likelihood that the trustee will demonstrate trustworthiness, as the trustee is under no obligation to be trustworthy. Finally, the last claim is the esteem-based argument which postulates that if the trustor believes the trustee is trustworthy, then this good opinion will give the trustee an additional motive to act trustworthy. Pettit (1995) calls this the "cunning of trust." As individuals, we rely on the situational enhancement of dependability without much forethought. Leaders, who are working to generate trust, should understand how trust between individuals is developed and how extending trust to their colleagues can, in fact, increase their trustworthiness.

The second thesis referenced by McGeer and Pettit (2017) is the situational reinforcement of durability. This thesis claims that an individual's trust can be enhanced by their trustworthiness and the trustor's reliance on their dependability. What is more important is that situational influences will make trustworthiness more dependable and have more durability. It is crucial that leaders understand how situational reinforcement can influence trust. Leaders would benefit from striving for positive relationships with

their colleagues to support the situational influences of trust between colleagues and themselves.

Overall, the empowering theory of trust states that trust is more complex than just your own trustworthiness as a person, and leaders should be aware of the factors that influence trust. Leaders need to understand the trustor and trustee's dependability, including the situational durability of the trust scenario. Trust and trustworthiness are a work in progress. Trust is influenced by both the trustors and the trustees and is a continuous struggle that requires care and attention.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy released literature written by McLeod titled "Trust" in 2015. In this work, McLeod (2015) details the importance of trust and the risks of trust and further investigates the philosophy of trust in relationships. McLeod identified the following philosophical issues around trust, plausibility (conditions for trust must be present for trust to exist), well-grounded, and justified.

McLeod (2015) begins by investigating the nature of trust and trustworthiness, specifically understanding the nature of trust that is required for trust to be warranted. Trust requires that the trustor: is vulnerable to the trustee, thinks well of others, and is optimistic and competent. McLeod states that vulnerability is necessary for a trustor to fully engage in trusting behaviors, but this leads to a potential for betrayal. Additionally, she states that "people who rely on one another in a way that makes betrayal impossible, do not trust one another" (McLeod, 2015, p.5). This provides an interesting dichotomy as an individual must be willing to experience vulnerability but may not be willing to risk betrayal. I am curious how this challenge might emerge in leadership positions. McLeod

also states that we cannot trust people that we are suspicious of; therefore, to have trust, we must be able to think well of others. Finally, to trust another individual, the trustor must be optimistic that the other party will follow through and has the competence to follow through. McLeod addresses that in some instances, trustors may not be optimistic about the trustee and call this "therapeutic trust." This type of trust can be seen in situations where parents extend trust to their teens when driving a car; for the purpose of this paper, though, we will assume that the trustor is optimistic of the trustee.

In the next section of this text, McLeod (2015) explores the epistemology of trust. It must be stated that philosophers believe that trust and rational reflection are at odds. Since trust requires risk, it is counter-intuitive to reflect and protect yourself from risk. Additionally, there seem to be three arguments for philosophers between trust and rational reflection. The first is that people engage in trust every day, and therefore individuals cannot rationally reflect on every trust situation. The second group suggests that trust cannot be avoided, for example, when we rely on doctors in emergency rooms. Finally, as mentioned previously, the philosophy of therapeutic trust states that while we may not trust another person, we must extend trust to provide them the opportunity to learn. It is important to note that most philosophers believe that trust needs to be understood differently than the doubting descriptions above.

After exploring the epistemology of trust, McLeod (2015) poses the question, what is the value of trust? McLeod identifies six "goods of trust" these goods or benefits of trust are cooperative activity, meaningful relationships, knowledge, autonomy, self-respect, and moral maturity. Philosophers have said little about the benefits of trust, but

McLeod states that these "goods of trust" could impact trustors, trustees, and society. By generating trust, we make cooperation possible and develop relationships between trustors and trustees. Trust is also necessary to improve knowledge; in writing this research, I trust that researchers have trustworthy knowledge, and therefore my readers can trust that I have trustworthy knowledge. When trust is present, we also see an improvement in self-respect and autonomy. Finally, the act of trust and the attitude of trustworthiness (Faulkner, 2012) improve the morality of individuals. These "goods of trust" have the potential to impact school communities when trust is present in the culture of the school.

Definitions of Trust

In this next section, I will guide the reader through a brief description of how researchers define trust. I selected researchers who study leadership and or education and discovered common traits amongst their definitions of trust and a few nuances. Interestingly, each researcher defined trust in four or five different components. Even more intriguing was that each researcher identified competence as one of the trust components. The other trust components discussed below are nuances between the different researchers' trust components; however, similarities can be drawn between the different components.

The Thin Book of Trust, written by Feltman (2009), provides a brief yet thorough overview of trust, trust in the work environment, the components of trust, and what to do when trust is broken. Feltman (2009) states that trust is imperative to successful companies and that trust is necessary and that leaders need to be intentional about

generating and maintaining trust. It is important to note that many people understand the value of trust in and out of the workplace, but most people cannot identify how to build or maintain trust. This text unpacks the components of trust, and within each component, we discover strategies for how to develop trust. What happens when trust is neglected? When trust is overlooked, the workplace becomes a breeding ground for distrust. People develop protective strategies to defend themselves, which inevitably gets in the way of effective work and working relationships.

In order to understand trust, we must understand the language of trust. Trust has many benefits to relationships; it allows individuals to work together through disagreement, and it allows teams to come to new understandings. Feltman (2009) and Bryk & Schneider (2002) reason that there are four components of trust, while Tschannen-Moran (2014) asserts that there are five components. Feltman (2009) established four components: sincerity, reliability, competence, and care. Through these four components, we develop a language of trust. When all parties meet the four components, then we come to a shared agreement for which people can work together.

But how does an individual and, equally important, a leader develop trust? Feltman (2009) suggests developing trust in each of the four components, sincerity, reliability, competence, and care. Sincerity is when an individual is intentional about what they say and how they behave. Feltman suggests that leaders need to be intentional about their expectations, ideas, beliefs, and goals. Additionally, leaders need to check with their colleagues to ensure that their intentions match with the leader's expectations; if they are not in line, the leader needs to engage in a conversation to discover the

differences and collaborate with their colleagues to come to a resolution. If leaders find that they must adjust their expectations, they must remember to be open with their team about why the expectations may be inconsistent with the original expectations. Finally, Feltman suggests that leaders open themselves to feedback, clarify what they heard and be vulnerable to hearing feedback the leader may not want to hear.

Reliability is the most precarious of the four components because reliability can be interpreted in a variety of different ways, and we are not always in control of whether or not we can follow through on the expectation. Feltman advocates that we make commitments in one of two ways. The first is when another asks us to do something, and the second is when we make an offer to do something for another individual. Whether we are asked or offered, we may still fail to prove ourselves reliable. The greatest challenge to following through on our commitments is a lack of clarity (Feltman, 2009). Clarity is difficult because there can be confusion about what constitutes follow-through. This confusion may lead to a lack of reliability since one or both individuals may have their own interpretation of follow through and be disappointed when the task has not been completed as expected. This could ultimately lead to one or both parties feeling that there is a lack of reliability when the real issue is a lack of clarity. Indirect requests will often result in poor follow-through. Feltman (2009) recommends that leaders provide direct requests that define the action, the conditions of satisfaction, and the time frame. By defining these terms, the person performing the request can respond with questions for clarification, and this allows the trustee to provide a counteroffer if they feel they cannot follow through on all factors of the request. Overall, it is suggested that leaders must

ensure they can follow through to establish stronger reliability. Before they commit, they must ask for clarification, be clear about what they can and cannot fulfill, and listen to people to determine what type of conversation they are having. Is the other party actually requesting that you do something, or perhaps they are problem-solving themselves? All these strategies should be employed by principals to develop their own reliability and the reliability of others.

Merriam-Webster defines competence as "the quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect)" (2020). Not only should leaders have the capacity to fulfill the role, but the people you work with should also believe you have the capacity to do what you say you will do. To establish competence, Feltman (2009) suggests that it is important to take an inventory of your skills to be realistic about what you can and can't do. Second, define what your standards of competence are; when you are unsure of something, say so, don't hesitate to ask for what you need, and finally, ask for feedback on your performance. Being open to feedback establishes further trust and improves your competence. In the next section, researchers explore how understanding competence and the leader's understanding of their competence can influence the levels of trust within a school.

The last component that Feltman says is necessary for trust is care, "when people believe you hold their interest in mind, they will extend you their trust more broadly" (Feltman, 2009, p.39). Care seems so simple. Still, every theorist and researcher who has studied trust addresses the issue of care and discusses its importance. Leaders can

demonstrate care for their colleagues and consequently develop trust. People will have greater trust for you if you have shared something important to you, be it values, hopes, dreams, or concerns. This vulnerability humanizes people and makes it easier for individuals to connect. Another way to build care is to listen to what others are saying and what they are trying to say. As an individual may not always say it outright, so your job is to listen free from judgment to what they are saying. Feltman suggests that before speaking or acting, ask yourself two questions, will this serve the people I work with? And why do I believe it will serve them? Spend time getting to know the people you work with find out their interests and concerns. Leaders should clearly define what they expect from those they lead and what they can expect from their leader. Finally, when you must make a decision acknowledge how this decision affects the people you work with, regardless of whether the decision has a positive or negative impact.

Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) and Mishra (1996) provide a slightly different definition of trust. They define trust in five facets, specifically as "one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (p. 20). I explore how the five facets of trust listed above influence trusting relationships and how leaders should be aware of these five facets in their leadership and within their schools. What is interesting is that vulnerability is stated in the definition of trust; it reveals how open someone is to being vulnerable with another. Yet vulnerability is rarely researched regarding trust, and I could not find research from Tschannen-Moran et al. that explored vulnerability. This is a gap in research that warrants further investigation.

Benevolence is the most important facet of trust; as mentioned previously, care must be at the core for individuals to trust one another. If a trustor does not believe the trustee will act with good intentions, trust will never be placed on a trustee (McGeer and Pettit, 2015). For school leaders, benevolence is equally important. Teachers must believe that their principal will act with good intentions to feel safe, be vulnerable, and trust the principal. Leaders can demonstrate benevolence by being sensitive to the needs of their employees, expressing appreciation for hard work, and demonstrating kindness. When teachers know their principal acts with care and benevolence, they rebound more quickly when given feedback.

The next facet of trust is honesty. Honesty includes a person's "character, integrity, and authenticity" (McGeer and Pettit, 2015, p.25). While care is the most important facet of trust, dishonesty does the most damage to trust. Leaders need to be honest with their employees while still maintaining boundaries of confidentially that are necessary for leadership. It is important to note that honesty can be interpreted in different ways. While the role of a leader may come with privileged information, too much privacy or secrecy is often confused with dishonesty. It can lead teachers to be suspicious of what their principal is hiding. Additionally, leaders may have the intention, to be honest, but then external factors may result in a change in what a leader had previously stated. In this instance, it is important to explain why the previous statement has changed and how this new information impacts those involved. Honesty is a precarious and powerful component that leaders should be aware of as they strive to generate trust amongst their colleagues.

Openness is how individuals make themselves vulnerable to others. When leaders are open, they are sharing information and control. Leaders need to remember that they must maintain confidentiality, but they should strive to be open about information that can be shared. When leaders are open about their ideas and open to feedback from teachers, they build trust while working to improve the educational outcome for students. Openness includes candor that may include criticism; yet, when this candor comes from honesty and benevolence, trust is fostered. Tschannen-Moran (2015) says, "through openness, a cycle of trust can be initiated, leading to increasing levels of trust in the organization" (p.32).

Reliability is the facet of trust that is built over time. When a trustor knows they can depend on the trustee to be consistent in following through on the tasks they have been asked to do, this builds more trust. But, when leaders overcommit themselves, are distracted, or do not manage time well, this damages reliability amongst colleagues, and they will lose trust in their leader. Reliability also means that staff can predict the behavior of their leader. When teachers know what to expect from their principal, they will have more trust. When leaders do not behave reliably, trust will be damaged, and teachers will reflect what is modeled. In return, teachers will not be open or honest, thus generating a culture of mistrust.

Finally, the last facet of trust is competence. Competence, defined above, is "the quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect)" (2020). Failure to demonstrate competence harms trust because if the trustee demonstrates that they do not have the skill to follow

through on their expected task, others will be hesitant to seek knowledge, judgment, or skill. Ultimately, they may lose their ability to support that individual. School leaders need to have the support of the teachers, but if the staff does not trust the competence of their principal, the principal will quickly lose the backing of their staff. So how do leaders demonstrate their competence? According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), competence for school leaders includes buffering distractions, managing difficult situations, setting high standards, working hard, setting a positive example, problem-solving, flexibility, and ability to manage conflict. These are high demands for any principal, but teachers rely on their principal to support them so that they can continue the difficult and important task of teaching children. By learning from Feltman (2009), leaders can take an inventory of their skills and be realistic about what they can and cannot do. Additionally, principals should seek feedback from their staff and share their feedback with staff to reflect on their current level of performance.

In the definition of trust, we must include how power influences levels of trust. Leaders need to be aware of how trust varies based on the power structure. For example, principals tend to hold more weight in competence and reliability, while teachers hold more weight in benevolence, honesty, and openness. Teachers are more concerned with mistreatment and rely on a caring and open leader to lead the school. Leaders need to know how teachers view trust and what builds and damages trust the most.

Similar to Feltman (2009), Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest four components necessary for developing trust. These components include competence, respect, personal regard for others, and integrity. There are many overlaps between Bryk and Schneider

and other trust researchers, and perhaps the only differences are the words they choose to use. Below I detail how Bryk and Schneider (2002) describe each component and how it relates to establishing trust in education.

Competence has been discussed in every definition of trust; a difference in this definition, compared with others, defines competence for a principal. Competence may look different based on the individual's role. Teachers may view trust differently than parents, students, and principal supervisors. Teachers may view competence as an inability to control student behavior, while parents may call into question a principal's competence if the building is not orderly. While there may be variances in how people define competence, what is clear is that gross incompetence or incompetence in all areas is damaging to trust. If the leader is viewed as incompetent, it will stifle opportunities for growth and improvement.

A common thread through all trust research is that respect is paramount to establishing trust, and Bryk and Schneider's (2002) research is no exception. Respect, meaning genuinely listening to one another, is crucial for establishing trust. Teachers need to feel that their concerns are heard and valued and that their principal will consider their concerns when making changes. Principals need to respect their teachers, parents, and students and listen to their needs and wants, not just put their own agenda first and foremost. It is also imperative that leaders respect the teachers, parents, and students in return. This mutual respect has the power to deepen a culture of trust within the school.

Personal regard for others is explained by Bryk & Schneider (2002) and is described as knowing and caring for the individuals around us. I see a parallel between

personal regard for others and Feltman's (2009) and Tschannen-Moran's (2015) definitions of care and benevolence. At its heart, personal regard is when principals care for their teachers, parents, and students and that these people know that they are cared for. Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that one of the roles of a principal is understanding the vulnerabilities of the teachers and parents. When leaders take the time to listen and hear the people's uncertainties, this builds trust as it is "an expression of benevolent intentions" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p.25). When principals take the time to build relationships and care for the members of their community, "they experience a social affiliation of personal meaning and value. Such actions invite reciprocation from others and thereby intensify the relations ties between them" (p.25). The last component of trust is integrity, the belief that someone will do what they say they will do. Teachers and parents both expect their principal to follow through on what they say with what they do, and leaders need to acknowledge this expectation. When leaders cannot fulfill expectations for factors outside their control, leaders must be forthcoming and work to rebuild trust.

Relational trust is imperative to making change, and significant change requires more profound levels of relational trust. Overall, relational trust can impact school reform in four different ways. First, principals who lead change in their communities need to listen to the feelings of uncertainty and moderate them as much as possible. Second, principals need to believe that the teachers and parents in their community have good intentions and community members need to believe that the principal also has good intentions. Third, high levels of relational trust mean that both parties understand what is

expected of them, increasing productivity and better implementation of new initiatives. Finally, high relational trust leads to a shared understanding of what is best for children. Placed together, these pieces lead to greater levels of change and improve learning outcomes for children.

In Faulkner's (2012) article on trust and the realities of trust, he explores how the act of trusting and being trustworthy requires a commitment from the parties involved and the realities that we cannot always follow through on our commitments. Faulkner begins by stating that "trusting can describe both an attitude and an action" (2012, p.1975). The action of trust is when an individual "acts" to do something. For example, the action of trust might be committing to showing up to an event and following through by showing up at that event. The attitude of trust is how one responds to the commitment that the individual has made. Faulkner states that "these two aspects are constitutively connected: one cannot identify acts of trusting independently of the attitude of trust" (p.1975). When leaders think about generating trust amongst their colleagues, it is pertinent to consider how the act and the action of trust are indistinguishably linked. Suppose school leaders are intentional about generating trust within their school community. In that case, it can be anticipated that not only will there be more acts of trust, but there will also be an improved attitude of trust within the school community.

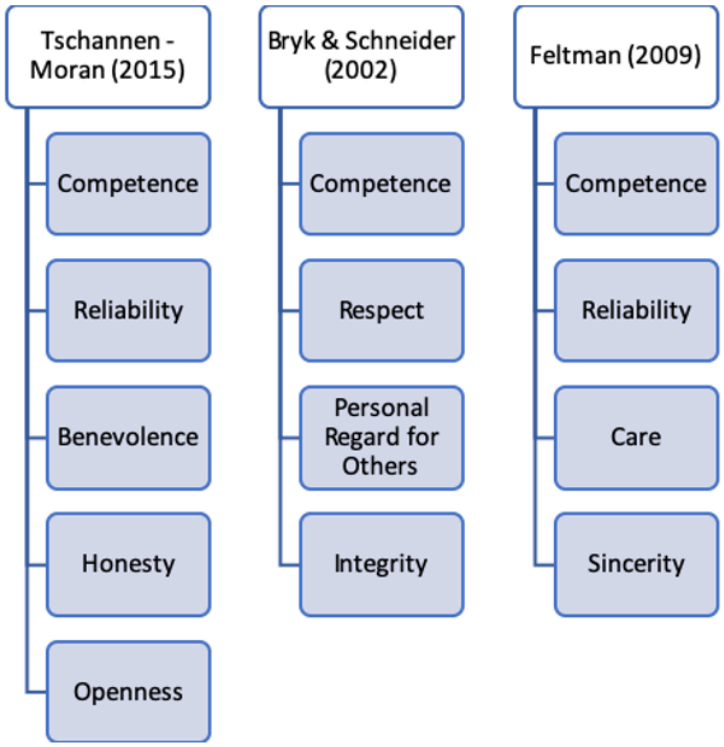
Another claim that Faulkner (2012) makes is that trust can be predictive and normative. Predictive trust is the belief that someone will follow through on a commitment, while normative trust is the expectation that someone has consistently followed through on commitments. Therefore, the trusting party can rely on the trustee to

follow through. School leaders practice both predictive and normative trust within their jobs but rarely do leaders have the opportunity to pause and examine the differences and the challenges. Faulkner provides an in-depth description of how predictive and normative trust are explained, but not enough research about how these types of trust impact leaders, who must trust others to lead a team.

It is important to understand how different researchers define trust and consider how these different definitions are similar and different. An illustration below in Figure 2.1 details the studied researcher's trust components. I attempted to organize the components by common terms or definitions to draw parallels between the different researchers. It is important to note that each of the researchers stressed the importance of competence as crucial to trust. One theme that was referenced by each of the researchers is that for trust to be present, we must be able to experience our own vulnerability. So, while there are components that are important to trust, each of these requires a certain amount of vulnerability that allows us to open ourselves up to trust one another.

Figure 2.1

Components of Trust



Implications of Trust in Education

In this section on trust in education, I explore how trust has been studied in the education field. Most of the research available has been conducted quantitatively through surveys (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a, 2015b). Louis (2007) was the first to study trust in education from the qualitative lens. Regardless of the research perspective, we realize that trust is important to school culture and, ultimately, student achievement.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) claim that in order to improve schools, "we must transform the intellectual dynamics of the classroom" (p.5). Specifically, Bryk and

Schneider (2002) sought to investigate the personal dynamics that influence every school. The relationships that occur within schools are the foundation of whether schools are successful, and trust is at the root of these relationships. Trust determines the basis of a school's functions, and leaders need to have a strong understanding of trust before they embark on change.

In order to understand trust in education, Bryk and Schneider (2002) sought to understand relational trust; they cite Robert Putnam's (1995a; 1995b; 1993) work on organizational trust which stated that "the quality of interpersonal ties" determines the "effectiveness of democratic institutions" (p.13). It is equally important to understand the social dynamics of the individuals in schools where schools are concerned. The quality of social relationships in the building will contribute to higher productivity levels than just systems and procedures alone. As the leaders of schools, principals need to pay attention to the social dynamics and be aware of what makes their teachers, students, and parents feel vulnerable. When leaders understand what makes the people they work with feel vulnerable, leaders should make a concerted effort to relieve these feelings of uncertainty. Bryk and Schneider (2002) believe that by addressing the uncertainties, leaders "can create a very intense, meaningful social bond between parties" (p.20). By addressing these doubts, leaders establish themselves as high-trust individuals and build trust between themselves and the individuals they serve. By deepening trust in school communities, leaders open the doors for truly impactful change for students and schools.

So why does trust matter? According to Tschannen-Moran (2014) trust is fundamental to successful schools. We cannot take trust for granted "it must be

conscientiously cultivated and sustained" (p.13). Leaders are not always trained to understand how trust is cultivated or the implications of not having trust in schools. Ultimately "trust matters because we cannot single-handedly create or sustain many of the things we care about most" (2014, p.17). At some point, we must have the support of others, which that inherently requires vulnerability and trust. We must accept that trust is fundamental in schools and understand how trust influences our collegial relationships.

When leaders consider how they will foster trust amongst their teachers, they need to be aware of how trust can ebb and flow. Trust relies on how vulnerable a person is willing to be. This willingness to be vulnerable can increase or decrease as expectations are met or not met. For leaders to develop and maintain trust amongst their staff, they should first understand the nuances of trust. This understanding can help leaders to anticipate shifts in trust and respond appropriately.

Trust can be fostered in school communities through both formal and informal structures. High trust schools have formal structures such as policies, rules, and other regulations that help to support trust. At the same time, low-trust schools may lack these policies and regulations or even have policies that harm trust. Both high-trust and low-trust schools have informal structures that help or harm trust. These informal structures include site norms, the school's values, and the school's culture all play into the level of trust within a school. Leaders need to be aware of the informal structures or cultural norms that may influence the school's culture.

A challenge to trust that leaders need to be aware of is trust in situations where people are from diverse groups. Tschannen-Moran (2014) specified that trust is more

easily developed with homogeneous groups, and when diverse populations come together, trust becomes more challenging due to differences in cultural norms or values. As schools become more diverse, leaders need to be aware of the challenges of establishing trust across diverse groups and spend time intentionally developing trust with all groups within a school. When trust is developed across diverse groups, the collaboration and learning that take place are deep and meaningful to the school community and the students.

Leaders who hope to develop trust amongst their colleagues should strive for authentic trust. Authentic trust is when others can be vulnerable with each other without anxiety. When leaders and school teams have authentic trust, that trust can defy disappointment, disagreement, and differences in values. If the parties involved can all commit to the trust relationship, then authentic trust can withstand disappointments. Researchers in coming sections will further detail the value of trust in improving learning outcomes for students.

Research on the importance of collaboration has been conducted for many years, but Tschannen-Moran (2015) wanted to understand why collaboration could be ineffective. She hypothesized that trust is needed to improve collaboration. Tschannen-Moran's study aimed to build upon empirical evidence linking collaboration and trust as it applies to schools. As described above, Tschannen-Moran hypothesizes five essential components of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. These five components must be present to establish trust, and when colleagues establish trust, collaboration is more effective. Tschannen-Moran (2001) posits, "In organizations with

high levels of trust, participants are more comfortable and are able to invest their energies into contributing to organizational goals rather than self-protection" (p. 313). In this study, Tschannen-Moran conducted surveys with principals and faculty at 45 elementary schools, with 898 participants. The results of the survey indicated that there was a correlation between collaboration and trust for each group, principals, faculty, and "clients" (students and parents). Tschannen-Moran found that there were also five benefits of having established trust within a school community:

1. If there are greater levels of trust in a school, the effectiveness of the faculty and staff improves.
2. Deeper levels of trust lead to improved communication throughout the community.
3. Trust is related to improved organizational citizenship.
4. Deeper levels of trust result in greater levels of student achievement.
5. If trust is present in the school community, there is a greater ability to create more genuine forms of collaboration between principals, teachers, and "clients."

While Tschannen-Moran established a correlation between collaboration and trust, she suggests that more information is needed about what trust looks like, how it is developed, what supports trust in relationships, and how trust can be repaired after it has been damaged.

In the article *Principals, Trust, and Cultivating Vibrant Schools,* Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) analyzes current literature surrounding principal leaders, trust,

and successful schools. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis define 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). The authors then discussed the importance of trust on student achievement and identified five different ways trust influenced student achievement. These variables included principals, colleagues, students, parents, and community trust in the school. Further, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis identified a "direct relationship between principal trustworthiness and student achievement" (2015, p.258). We suggest that when leaders are trustworthy, they establish a culture in the building that influences faculty, students, and the community. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis went on to describe how each characteristic supports trust. In order to establish trust, one must be vulnerable. The authors state that by extending trust to another person, they place themselves in a position of vulnerability. By trusting other individuals, we open ourselves up to betrayal or harm. It is the hope that the other person will not cause us harm. And it is when we take the risk to trust and the other party reciprocates, we have the potential for deeper trust, deeper learning, and greater potential for better relationships.

Further, the authors above identify benevolence as the "spirit of goodwill and a willingness to extend oneself in support of the well-being of another." (p. 259). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) postulate that when a person believes that another person has their best interest in mind that establishes trust, they believe that you will not cause them harm. Honesty was the next characteristic that builds and maintains trust. To have trust, we must believe that what someone says and does is true through both words

and actions. This seems to be both the most important and most complicated characteristics. As we do not always have control of the decisions or actions of others, this may influence whether our actions support what we say. The risk then could be to say little; conversely, if leaders are too quiet, they are perceived as not being trustworthy as they are most likely keeping something from people. Therefore, it is important to be honest but acknowledge mistakes and/or negative outcomes if necessary to rebuild or maintain trust. Openness is closely related to honesty. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis believe that openness includes being open with information, being open about organizational decision-making, and being open about professional discretion. Reliability is described as following through on decisions and promises. Teachers need to trust that their principal will be consistent and follow through with their commitments. When teachers do not trust their principal, this becomes a breeding ground for a hostile learning environment. Finally, competence is the belief that the principal has the ability to do the job as expected, at the standard of which they are expected to complete it. These characteristics combined make up the qualities people need to have trust in their leader. We do not currently know how principals navigate these characteristics of trust in their leadership roles.

In *Trust in Schools*, Bryk and Schneider (2002) conducted case studies at three elementary schools in Chicago; each case study explored relational trust between teachers and parents, teachers and principals, and teachers and teachers. The researchers found challenges, including unclear expectations and conflict avoidance, as problems that breed distrust. Conversely, they found that genuine respect and care were prominent in schools

that demonstrated high levels of trust. Along with respect and care, the researchers noted that clear expectations and addressing concerns in the building established greater levels of trust. When Bryk and Schneider broke down research into different groups, they found that avoiding conflict had the most significant impact on distrust. This information confirms Bryk and Schneider's results in describing the four components of trust: competence, personal regard, respect, and integrity.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) continued their research by analyzing academic growth at schools with high and low levels of relational trust. They began by conducting surveys about trust and found that teachers at schools with high levels of trust agreed or strongly agreed on nearly every probe on the trust survey. These teachers reported that their principal cared and respected them, while teachers in the lower quartile reported that they strongly disagreed that their principal cared for or respected them. They did find additional variables that influenced levels of trust, including; school size, stable student population, past achievement of the school, and the absence or presence of racial and ethnic tensions. This dissertation did not investigate the challenges to generating trust through different perspectives, but this should be studied in the future. Bryk and Schneider found that previous school achievement had a positive relationship with whether or not teachers trusted their principal. While racial conflict among teachers and schools with predominantly minority racial demographics had a negative impact on teacher and principal trust. The statistics about trust in schools with diverse racial demographics requires further investigation. Still, race is not included in the research of

this dissertation, as this is intended to be an exploration of the experiences of leaders regarding trust and vulnerability.

After exploring trust, and variables that influence trust, Bryk and Schneider (2002) investigated how relational trust is connected to improving and non-improving schools. The data was tracked in 1991, 1994, and 1997. Schools with a standard deviation greater than zero showed an improvement in reading and math, while schools with a standard deviation lower than zero saw a decline in academic achievement. Specifically, Bryk and Schneider found that schools with substantial levels of positive trust were three times more likely to demonstrate improved scores in both reading and math, while schools with poor trust had almost no change in improvement in reading and math.

Over the course of this research study, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that trust had a statistically significant impact on improving both math and reading scores in 1994. This research demonstrates that when schools spent time improving relational trust, they were able to be more productive. This increased productivity led to greater levels of academic achievement. What I must acknowledge about the research conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) is that….

> Relational trust does not directly affect student learning. Rather, trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological, that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities necessary to affect productivity improvements (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 116).

Bryk and Schneider suggest that establishing trust helps improve schools through four main means. The first is that by establishing trust, we decrease feelings of vulnerability

about new tasks associated with school reform. As trust becomes a stimulus for innovation and change, these changes can lead to greater levels of academic achievement. The second tool is that trust promotes greater levels of problem-solving amongst professionals. When teachers trust one another, they can engage in "genuine collective work" (p.116). The third tool is when school members trust each other, there is greater clarity around high standards and building norms, yet teachers still experience autonomy and support one another. Finally, trust creates a community that allows teachers and administrators to work together through the tough times and support each other to improve education for their students.

In *Trust and Improvement in Schools*, Louis (2007) expands upon the work of Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Bryk & Schneider (2002) by researching trust amongst leaders in high schools. Louis was interested in understanding how administrator-teacher relational trust affects the implementation of change. After conducting interviews and coding data, trust became one of the themes that emerged from the data. Interestingly there were two different groups of schools. The first group of two schools had positive attitudes about change, while the second group of three schools were more cautious and distrusted new initiatives. Research that emerged from the positive perspectives included supporting the vision of leadership, themes of "support, safety, and the ability to take risks try and improve instruction" (p. 9). Teachers perceived that they were engaged in decision-making. The other group of teachers did not trust their leaders, which ultimately led to feelings that initiatives were created in "back-rooms" and were irrelevant to improving education for children. Additionally, teachers at schools where trust was not

present reported feelings of fear, neglect, and limited opportunities for collaboration. Finally, teachers at schools with low levels of trust reported that they had no voice, and that all participation was forced. This study confirmed studies conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) and stressed the importance of relational trust in implementing change within schools.

Recently researchers have wondered how trust impacts school culture. Chughati & Buckley (2009) are no exception to this query. In the article, *Linking Trust in the Principal to School Outcomes,* the researchers were most interested in how trust is linked to the outcomes at schools. Chughati & Buckley investigated this topic by conducting a quantitative study to explore how teachers perceived trust in their principal and whether trust could be quantified. These researchers found that trust improves social capital, which ultimately leads to improved outcomes at work. Specifically, they state that trust improves social capital through improved levels of collaboration, improved pro-social behaviors, and principals no longer feel like they have to justify their actions to their teachers.

Additionally, the authors suggest that the most common definitions of trust include positive expectations about the behaviors of others and a "willingness to accept vulnerability" (p. 575). While the researchers address the need to accept vulnerability, there is no mention of vulnerability in their research. Cunningham and Gressso (1993), cited in Chughati & Buckley (2009) and Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (1998), stated that trust is the "foundation of school effectiveness" (p.576). While principal trust does not

directly impact student learning, it improves communication and collaboration, improving teaching practices and ultimately student learning.

Chughati & Buckley's research found that when teachers trust their principal, they have greater "organizational citizen behavior" (2009, p. 585). They also found that when principals exhibit "trustworthy behaviors, it makes the school environment more supportive" (p.585). This ultimately leads to teachers' improved dedication to the building and student learning. Additionally, the researchers posit that when teachers feel free to be vulnerable with their principal, they are more devoted to their work rather than placing their energy into protective strategies. This article provides a clear understanding of how trust improves student outcomes, the experience of the principal is still missing, and there is no understanding of principal vulnerability in this article. Further research on the subject of vulnerability should be conducted.

While many factors influence trust, this research describes the benefits and challenges of trust in schools. Based on the analysis of Feltman (2009), Tschannen-Moran (2014), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and others I have attempted to demonstrate the value of having trust in the work environment. Bryk and Schneider helped us to connect how trust impacts student achievement. Research has extensively covered trust for teachers, but not much is known about how principals experience trust in their schools. We have also seen that each researcher has referenced vulnerability as a key to establishing and supporting trust. Still, there is very little research about vulnerability and even less about vulnerability in principal leadership. In this next section, we will explore what current research says about vulnerability.

Vulnerability

I started this literature review with my interest in vulnerability, but research on this topic was limited. I discovered that trust was correlated to vulnerability through Brown's research on vulnerability. This research journey has ultimately brought me back to the current research on vulnerability. Brown (2006, 2012, 2017, 2018) is considered one of the seminal researchers on vulnerability and her work on how we view vulnerability in present society and how we should shift our view of vulnerability, particularly in leadership. Nienaber, Hofeditz, & Romeike (2015) conducted the first known literature review on vulnerability, and their article provides structure to the vague concept of vulnerability. I conclude this literature review with Bunker's, *The Power of Vulnerability in Contemporary Leadership* (1997). The research presented by Bunker addresses both the pros and cons of demonstrating vulnerability in leadership. Overall, this section explores what current research can teach us about vulnerability in leadership.

Brown's book *Dare to Lead* (2018) was the first text that I read that mentioned vulnerability in leadership. This work laid the foundation for exploring trust and vulnerability in principal leadership. Brown defines vulnerability as "the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" (Brown, 2018, p.19). Historically, society has viewed vulnerability as something that needed to be covered up or hidden; however, Brown's work studying shame and vulnerability strives to reframe the perspective of vulnerability to appreciate a natural experience and not one that creates winners or losers.

Brown (2018) stresses that vulnerability is never easy, yet it has the power to deepen our experiences and develop more profound levels of relational trust. Brown states that leaders cannot and should not be expected to "go it alone" (p.25) and that when leaders are isolated, they are cut off from authentic connection, and those leaders ultimately suffer. Through vulnerability, leaders can build connections and gain strength through working with others. Despite the benefits, a challenge to vulnerability is trust. Brown suggests that trust and vulnerability are equally important. At this point, Brown's research is divergent from other trust philosophers. Brown states that trust must come before vulnerability; however, Bryk & Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Feltman (2009) suggest that trust is rooted in vulnerability. There is currently not enough research exploring individual perspectives to understand how trust and vulnerability interact. What is certain is that both trust and vulnerability require a certain level of risk; this risk makes it challenging for people to open themselves up to vulnerability.

Brown (2018) found, via Project Aristotle at Google, that vulnerability was the most important dynamic for successful teams citing that psychological safety allows people to engage in difficult conversations. This safety allows people to believe that others will not embarrass them (p. 36). Leaders often feel the need to guard themselves against risk and vulnerability; however, research suggests that highly productive teams need vulnerability and psychological safety to be successful. Brown also found that certain attributes get in the way of psychological safety, including judgment, unsolicited advice, interrupting, and gossiping. While listening, genuine curiosity, honesty, and confidence are attributes that support psychological safety.

While vulnerability is important to leadership, vulnerability does not mean a lack of boundaries. Brown (2018) suggests that boundaries are necessary. Vulnerability does not mean open confession or manipulation but rather being open to risk and feelings of uncertainty. Finally, Brown suggests that we are not truly feeling our emotions without vulnerability. To feel emotion, we must be vulnerable; that vulnerability is the root of love, belonging, joy, creativity, and innovation. Schools are in need of these very attributes, and if school leaders are looking at ways to generate creativity, innovation, love, joy, and belonging, then perhaps they need to look internally at their own vulnerability.

Nienaber, Hofeditz, and Romeike's (2015) article on vulnerability and trust is the first literature review focused on vulnerability. Nienaber et al. conducted a systematic literature review which included 49 articles that included references to vulnerability in leader-follower relationships, and most of these articles included vulnerability definitions from either Mayer (1995) or Rousseau (1998), which states that vulnerability means "that there is something of importance to be lost" (p. 712). Their research aimed to provide a summary and critique of the current literature available on vulnerability. They specifically focused on the leader-follower relationships and the literature around vulnerability. The themes identified in this literature review include concepts of vulnerability across disciplines, determining the relationships between vulnerability and trust, and how vulnerability impacts the leader-follower relationship.

In *The Power of Vulnerability*, Bunker (1997) cites the background of her study as leaders being challenged by the differences between the value system of leaders being

strong and in control and neglecting the relationship piece of being leaders. She explains the challenges of working for large corporations that inevitably go through significant changes in program, leadership, etc., and how these changes impact both leaders and their employees. This study aimed to share the learning from facilitating workshops on vulnerability with leaders. Bunker offered a program to support leadership training for individuals about being vulnerable. Bunker found that "There is amazing power in vulnerability…. but personal vulnerability opens the door to helping others, but the truth is that most leaders wear protective masks that they don't remove easily or lightly" (p.128). Bunker found four consequences to wearing protective masks, these include:

- Leaders and followers get stuck in the grieving cycle after change or loss; leaders feel isolated.
- Leaders present an image of secrecy and a lack of authenticity,
- Employees observe this image, which then decreases trust and builds animosity amongst staff
- If leaders refuse to validate the feelings of their staff, this can lead to anger and ultimately dysfunction amongst the staff (p.128)

The struggle then must be to support leaders in removing the protective mask to embrace the power in vulnerability. Bruk, Scholl, and Bless (2018) found that others view vulnerability positively, and leaders who struggle to work with others must find the courage to remove their protective mask and embrace vulnerability to establish trust and support the people they are leading (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Bunker (1997) found that

demonstrating vulnerability to others becomes a tool that helps leaders connect with others.

Conclusion

Most of the research, currently available, is in the field of trust; however, there seems to be growing interest in the topic of vulnerability. Research on both trust and vulnerability has a relatively young history. The research on trust began with Baier in 1986, and vulnerability research is even more recent, beginning in 1997. Due to the limited amount of research in these fields there is still a great deal to explore. Trust in education has only been researched in the last two decades, so there are still many gaps that need to be filled. While most researchers identify the need to connect vulnerability and trust, there is currently not enough research connecting leadership, trust, and vulnerability.

Current research stresses the importance of trust, specifically relational trust, in working with other individuals. Bryk & Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran et al. (1999, 2001, 2014, 2015) have researched the benefits of trust in education, and it is clear that schools with high levels of trust lead to improved school culture and ultimately higher levels of student achievement. Additionally, there is consistency amongst researchers about the components of trust. While there are some differences amongst word choice, the themes tend to be similar amongst researchers.

Due to the lack of research available in vulnerability, there is a great need for further research and investigation about vulnerability in the broad sense and an even more vital need for more research on vulnerability in education. Most of the research

currently available on trust in education is quantitatively based. While this research provides a unique perspective to trust, there is a lack of research that understands the leadership perspective of trust. It is important to understand how trust and vulnerability influence each other in the role of leadership, specifically principal leadership.

This dissertation sought to explore the leaders' perspective of trust and vulnerability in leadership roles, including the challenges and benefits to trust and vulnerability. It is also important to understand the connection between trust and vulnerability from the leaders' perspective and how leaders generate trust. There are still many topics that can be explored about trust and vulnerability. One of the topics that emerged that should be studied further but is not included in this literature review is how diversity influences trust and vulnerability between leaders and those they lead. In general, how trust and vulnerability impact schools is an area of research that should continue to be studied. This dissertation hopes to be just one piece of literature to contribute to research on trust and vulnerability in education.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this grounded theory research study is to explore the experiences of principals who engage in trust and vulnerability in their leadership, specifically school principals at the kindergarten through 12th-grade schools in the Rocky Mountain West region. Current research defines trust "as the willingness of a party (trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (trustee) based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor and control the party" (Nienaber, A., Hofeditz, M., & Romeike, P. D., p.568). While researchers have studied trust theory, trust in education, and the implications of trust, researchers have not yet explored how trust is developed between school leaders and their staff, nor have they explored how building leaders experience trust. When I created this research project, I intended to explore leaders' experiences and determine if there is a theory that explains the experiences of leaders regarding trust and vulnerability.

Research Questions

After exploring research previously conducted in education around trust and vulnerability, it became apparent that there was a need to understand more about the leaders' perspectives of trust and vulnerability. Researchers who have studied trust in education have primarily focused on the perspectives of teachers and community

members, rather than studying the experiences of trust and vulnerability in leadership. Bryk & Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2001, 2014), Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a, 2015b), Brecher (2017), and Bunker (1997) all discuss the importance of having trust in working relationships, including in education. Still, establishing trust in positions of power is not as intuitive as we may believe. I was curious about how leaders at schools, with reportedly high levels of trust, engaged in practices of trust and vulnerability in their roles. As Tschannen-Moran (2014) defined, schools that demonstrate strong levels of trust begin with the leader and include traits such as having a solid vision, modeling trust with respect, feedback and reflection, and coaching. The leaders chosen for this dissertation have demonstrated the skills listed above as observed by local area leaders and principal supervisors.

Furthermore, research has been conducted qualitatively and quantitatively on how trust impacts schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis 2015a; 2015b). Expressly, researchers understand the value of generating trust in a community, as evidenced by increased student achievement due to improved productivity in learning communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). However, researchers have not closely studied how trust is cultivated by a leader and the impacts trust relationships have on a leader in a school. Ultimately my research questions led to a grounded theory study, and the questions below are designed to assist in generating theory about how leaders experience trust.

The research questions for this dissertation expand on the information in the literature review to specifically target the leaders' perspectives of trust and how they

perceive trust and vulnerability in their work. The first question guiding my research was: How do principals experience trust in relationships? This question is important to begin the grounded theory process of understanding the experiences of leaders related to trust, which has not been studied previously. The second question is: How do leaders generate trust with those they lead? The literature review demonstrated the value of having trust relationships in schools, which also relates to the first question. However, this research question will allow me to explore further how leaders generate trust within their leadership with others. The final research question is: If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at work? Current literature does not address leaders' vulnerability, but literature states that vulnerability is necessary for trust to be developed. Therefore, there is a gap in what has been described as crucial to developing trust and research on how leaders experience the feelings of vulnerability. The purpose of this grounded theory research study is to explore the experiences of principals who engage in trust and vulnerability in their leadership. For further details about how and why I created my research questions, please see the research matrix in Table 3.1.

Research Questions:

1. How do principals experience trust in relationships?
2. How do leaders generate trust with those they lead?
3. If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at schools?

Rationale for Research Methodology

Charmaz (2006) states, "Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them" (p.10). To understand how educational leaders experience trust and vulnerability, we must understand their world and experiences. Through a set of principles established by Glasser and Strauss (2010), grounded theorists create a new way of knowing and understanding. These principles include looking to discover, not verify, explain not describe, allowing themes to emerge, not forcing themes to emerge, and matrix operation, a process of connecting codes and providing validity to data in a coherent visual approach.

I was curious about how principals perceive trust in their role as leaders. To collect data on principals' experiences with trust, I needed to engage in qualitative inquiry to understand their perspectives of trust in their leadership roles.

Current research on trust explores trust between teachers and community members (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a; 2015b). However, very little research investigates the leaders' perspective of trust; I wanted to understand what each participant believed were the challenges, benefits, and emotional costs of trust. Researchers have stated that trust in schools is important to school culture, however it does not appear to be intuitive. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of leaders who do thoughtful cultivate trust and express vulnerability so that leaders can understand how to cultivate trust in their schools. Another gap in current research is that trust is primarily researched

in elementary schools, and this excludes the experiences of trust in secondary schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). There are many differences between elementary and secondary schools, including population size. Researchers have stated that high levels of trust are more prevalent in schools with a population of fewer than 300 students (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). I believe it is important to explore the perspectives of leaders at secondary schools to gather a more comprehensive understanding of trust and vulnerability in schools. When seeking participants for this dissertation, I included a variety of educational backgrounds, including school size and education level.

Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis state that grounded theory "is appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon" (2019, p.1). During my literature review, I found research on trust, but very little research on vulnerability and none explicitly looking at the research on vulnerability in education. Based on the limited research and understanding of vulnerability in educational leadership, grounded theory is the methodology that allows the researcher to "construct an explanatory theory" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2) that explains the experience of trust and vulnerability in educational leaders. I conducted a grounded theory study as a new way of understanding how leaders experience trust and vulnerability. Another purpose for selecting grounded theory is to allow the research to explore where the data leads without limits to sample size, qualitative study design, and other barriers (Charmaz, 2006; Glasser & Strauss, 2010). Grounded theory encourages researchers to validate their codes and data by engaging in further research after initial themes are discovered through constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling based on the data, and theoretical coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). In

the research design section of this chapter, I will explain constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and theoretical coding and justify why these methods were selected.

Vulnerability research is still in the early stages of development, but it is also known to be necessary for trust relationships (Brown, 2018; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Feltman, 2009; Louis, 2007; Meyer, Le Fevre, & Robinson, 2017; Nienaber, Hofeditz, & Romeike, 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; 2014). Therefore, I believed it was important to engage in research exploring principal leadership vulnerability. Nienaber, Hofeditz, Romeike (2015) conducted the first known literature review on vulnerability, and I found no literature that referenced vulnerability in education, let alone principal leadership and their experiences with vulnerability. I believed the best way to understand how leaders experience their vulnerability was to ask them to share their experiences. I hypothesize that there is a lot that we do not understand about how leaders experience their vulnerability in running schools. I suspected that there may be a theory present to help understand vulnerability in leadership. An understanding of vulnerability may help leaders to understand the value of vulnerability in their role and demonstrate vulnerability in their position.

Feltman (2009), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Tschannen-Moran (2014) all address vulnerability as necessary to trust; however, researchers do not explore vulnerability or how leaders experience vulnerability in developing trust. Nienaber, Hofeditz, and Romeike (2015) connect that vulnerability is the antecedent to trust, while Bunker (1997) states that there is great power in vulnerability, yet leaders often protect themselves from vulnerability. As I considered how to investigate this research project,

research supported a qualitative research design would be the most appropriate approach. I believe that understanding the experiences of trust and vulnerability needs to be explored in an open and theoretical manner. This is supported by Charmaz (2006) who states that grounded theory allows researchers to be open to what is being studied to learn about the participants' lives. To gain an in-depth experience of trust and vulnerability, grounded theory provides the framework and tools to explore the theories that will inevitably emerge during this investigation.

Table 3.1

Research Matrix for Trust and Vulnerability

Research Questions	**Why do I need to know this?**	**Data Collection** ***What kind of data will answer these questions***	**Sampling Decisions** ***Where will I find this data?***	**Analysis Plans**	**Validity Threats**	**Possible strategies for dealing with validity threats**	**Rationale for strategies.**
How do principals experience trust in relationships?	What are the challenges and risks to trust for principals?	Qualitative Open interviews.	Principals at public schools k-12.	~Open coding for the first round of interviews. ~Thematic Coding for the second round of interviews.	~Length of involvement ~Depth of data ~ Accuracy of data.	~2 rounds of extensive open-ended and semi-structured interviews. ~member checking ~Triangulation with surveys, memos and interview transcripts. ~ Constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling.	Charmaz (2006) and Teppo (2015) suggest that theoretical sampling, memoing and theoretical sampling can provide more validity to data. I am attempting to generate a theory that explains the principal's experiences with trust and vulnerability within their school. The best way to support this research is through in-depth interviews that explore the individual's experiences and allows me to investigate my findings further through theoretical sampling.
How do leaders generate trust with those they lead?	It is important to understand how leaders think about generating trust (if they do)	Qualitative Open interviews.	Principals at public schools k-12.	~Open coding for the first round of interviews. ~Thematic Coding for the second round of interviews.	~Length of Involvement ~Depth of data ~ Accuracy of Data.	~2 rounds of extensive open-ended and semi-structured interviews. ~member checking ~Triangulation with surveys, memos and interview transcripts. ~ Constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling.	
If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at schools?	Leadership is challenging and often requires resiliency, what are the challenges and benefits to being vulnerable as a leader.	Qualitative Open interviews.	Principals at public schools k-12.	~Open coding for the first round of interviews. ~Thematic Coding for the second round of interviews.	~Length of Involvement ~Depth of data ~ Accuracy of Data.	~2 rounds of extensive open-ended and semi-structured interviews. ~member checking ~Triangulation with surveys, memos and interview transcripts. ~ Constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling.	

I wanted to study principals' personal experiences of relational trust and personal vulnerability. This dissertation is focused on exploring relational trust with leaders. I intended to investigate whether leaders intentionally build trust with their colleagues, and

if so, how do they generate that trust, and how their vulnerability does or does not influence their trust relationships. Vulnerability currently has very little research that considers how vulnerability impacts leaders, especially related to trust development.

Charmaz (2006) states that grounded theory allows researchers to discover the themes that emerge from the data; by allowing for unstructured interviews, leaders were able to share what they felt was important about their experiences with trust and vulnerability in their leadership role. As mentioned in my literature review, much research has been conducted on the importance of trust in schools, as well as the positive impacts of high trust schools (Charmaz, 2006; Flick, 2019; Teppo Anne, 2015), but how trust is cultivated and how vulnerability is experienced remains to be researched.

Researcher Positionality

As an educator currently serving a classroom of diverse learners, I have come to value the trust I develop with my students as a crucial step towards furthering their learning. I believe that without trust, I can only engage my students to a certain extent, the extent to which they are taught to be compliant. This belief shapes my interest in this research study and impacts my positionality as I conduct this research. I am also interested in pursuing educational leadership in my future career, and I hope to apply my learning from this study to my future leadership experiences. Understanding my positionality and using member checking and memos are ways to ensure that I remain neutral in my research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

One of the struggles with research in grounded theory is that every researcher enters the research with preconceptions and personal biases. While Charmaz (2006),

Glaser (1978), and Fram (2013) all stress that researchers are participants in the research, that does not mean that researchers can make assumptions without data backing them up. To monitor my preconceptions, I used memos and member checking to support my research and help me monitor my reactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Teppo, 2015). These methods acted as an audit to check my assumptions and confirm that my data were valid.

Research Design

As I began organizing this research project, I referenced many researchers in the area of grounded theory, including Glasser & Strauss (1978), Charmaz (1996, 2006, 2008), Teppo (2015), Morse & Clark (2019), and Flick (2019). Charmaz's constructivist approach of grounded theory suggests that researchers "construct meaning in relation to the area of inquiry" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2). As I considered how I would construct this research, I used Charmaz's philosophy of constructing meaning to pull from the strengths of other grounded researchers such as Glasser, Strauss & Corbin, Charmaz, and Birks and Mills. Below I explain which researchers influenced different portions of my research design. Overall, Charmaz's constructivist philosophy guided the underlying research design for this dissertation.

These researchers guided me in the most appropriate method in selecting the tools I would use for data collection. Interviews and observations are the most common tools for data collection (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Flick, 2019; B. G. Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Teppo Anne, 2015). As this research project is based on principals' perspectives, interviews were the most appropriate fit to collect data about trust and vulnerability.

Additionally, I used a short survey, adapted from Tschannen-Moran (1999), to support the triangulation of the data that emerged from the interviews. This survey not only gave me an introductory view of leaders' self-reported perspectives, but I was also able to use this data to confirm data on trust. Each interview had the same five questions in the initial interview and the same questions in the secondary interviews—this ensured standardization amongst data collection.

Charmaz (2008) stresses the importance that grounded theory research is an emergent method. Therefore to be truly immersed in the research, the design must be open-ended as the data unfolds and an understanding of the problem improves (Birks & Mills, 2015). I created a formal research design to receive approval and finish this project. However, I attempted to keep to the validity of grounded theory by following the generated data while still maintaining structure. Strauss & Corbin (1998) stress that the importance of conducting grounded theory is that the development of a theory is not pre-determined before the research has been conducted. The researcher must use the data to explain the process and theory created because there is no research available about how leaders experience trust and vulnerability in their position. Grounded theory is an excellent methodology for this research because it allows the researcher to adapt research as necessary to gain a complete perspective of the leaders' experiences of trust and vulnerability.

After researching different grounded theory design theories, I selected Charmaz's (2006) constructivist theory as the primary method for designing this research. While I pulled pieces of research philosophies from Glasser, Strauss, and Corbin (Glaser, 1998;

Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I felt that the constructivist approach of Charmaz most aligned with my researcher positionality and the research questions I was hoping to answer. Charmaz's constructivist approach looks at how participants create meaning of the area of inquiry (2006). My research questions listed above asks leaders to explain their experiences, and the constructivist approach allows the researcher to create meaning alongside the participants. Additionally, the traditional positivist views of Glaser (1978) did not allow for the co-construction and participation that I was seeking as a researcher. The topic of trust and vulnerability should be approached with the researcher also engaging in trust and vulnerability. The positivist approach did not align with that flexibility in the same way the constructivist approach did.

I selected grounded theory methodology to provide an in depth understanding of the phenomena. It is recommended as a grounded theory practice to engage in purposive sampling after conducting a literature review to understand what researchers understand about the topic of inquiry. Purposive sampling is used in grounded theory to select participants with knowledge/ experience in the subject studied (Chun Tie et al., 2019). When I selected my participants, I sought participants who could answer the research question as stressed by Glasser & Strauss (2010) and Charmaz (2006). The next step after purposive sampling is to generate or collect the data. For my dissertation, I chose to include data generated from a survey (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). This is one of the positivist approaches I pulled from Glasser's research philosophy. Glaser states that 'all is data'(1998) and having data about self-reported perceptions of trust would support my research in addition to the interviews that I conducted as part of my data collection.

Following the data collection phase, grounded theory research design moves into initial coding. The purpose of initial coding is to analyze the data and look for similarities and differences to discover patterns in the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). During the initial coding stages of my research, I again used the constructivist approach to conduct initial coding by giving meaning to the data. Chun Tie et al. (2019) stress that initial coding helps the researcher know what data is needed to deepen the research and understand the research inquiry. I used Charmaz's theory of keeping codes simple to group them into broad categories. Charmaz (2006) suggests that axial coding or using coding families limits research by focusing coding into pre-determined groups by leaving codes in more broad categories. Charmaz suggests that the researcher can construct a theory rooted in the data. Following initial coding, grounded theorists engage in a cycle of focused coding using theoretical sampling and cycling back through initial coding. Focused coding takes the individual codes discovered during initial coding and groups them into abstract concepts that emerge. This leads to more data collection based on the questions that arose during coding and additional data analysis; at this point, theoretical sampling supports the process of understanding the data. In theoretical sampling, data can include additional information relevant to the research. Birks and Mills (2015) believe that theoretical sampling is the process of following the clues discovered through the coding process. I used theoretical sampling by returning to my research participants with additional interview questions; after analyzing the data from the first round of interviews, I discovered I needed more information to understand my participants' experiences further.

Grounded theorists stress the process of data collection, and stages of coding along with theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and memoing continue until data saturation is reached (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019; B. Glaser, 1998; B. G. Glaser & Strauss, 2010). Charmaz describes constant comparative analysis as "comparing data with data to find any similarities or differences" (2006, p. 54); this process occurs throughout the data analysis process to compare different types of data as well as different phases of data. For my research design, I conducted two rounds of data analysis. I conducted initial coding and focused coding with each round of data analysis. After the two rounds of data collection, I used advanced coding to move into developing the theory.

Throughout the entire research process, Grounded Theorists emphasize the importance of theoretical sensitivity as this encompasses the entire research process for grounded theory. I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) definition of theoretical sensitivity; they describe theoretical sensitivity as understanding what data is meaningful and understanding the significance of the data to generate a theory. While it is imperative to keep an open mind, theoretical sensitivity allows the researcher to understand what is essential to the theory. Constant comparative analysis is critical to theoretical sensitivity. It allows the researcher to reflect and compare data from each data collection phase and analysis to determine what is significant to the research. The two together lead to more resiliency in data and proving new theories.

Participants

For this dissertation, I selected educational leaders in the Rocky Mountain West region who held the title of principal. I specifically looked for leaders who came from a variety of settings and levels of education from elementary up through high school. I also attempted to include a diverse selection of leaders from different races, genders, school sizes, and experiences to capture their diverse perspectives. I wanted to study the experiences of leaders of schools, who are most responsible for building school culture; this means that I focused on recruiting principals.

As I began this research, it was the start of the school year during coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), I sent an initial email to the principals I had identified as leaders who demonstrated strong levels of trust in their community, based on the Teaching Leading Conditions survey (TLCC). The TLCC survey is administered to school staff bi-annually to investigate the conditions of learning present in the school. Question categories include professional development, student behavior, leadership, professional learning communities and others. I used the leadership category as well as the professional learning community category to determine schools where staff reported trust within their school. I identified leaders based on teacher responses to the TLCC survey; I identified questions on the survey that aligned with the trust components described by Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) that asked teachers to evaluate the competence, reliability, respect, integrity, and openness of their building leader. I then took leaders that scored high in the areas listed above and selected leaders, two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools, and emailed them asking

for them to participate. I heard back from two participants, one who eventually dropped out of the study and the second who participated. Due to the challenges of leading in an unknown and complicated time, it became difficult to find participants willing to give up their time during a stressful year.

Since I only had one participant, I reached outside of the data from the TLCC survey and used recommendations from local area leaders and principal supervisors who observed principals that demonstrated high levels of trust within their community. From there, I gathered four additional participants who were interested in engaging in this research. My sample size did not have as much diversity amongst grade levels as I had hoped at this time. None of my participants were high school leaders. One limitation in my literature review was that research on trust in schools was conducted in elementary schools; I was interested in discovering if I could speak to leaders who worked in secondary schools. I again reached out to local area leaders and principal supervisors seeking a participant at this level. Finally, I was able to find a principal at an alternative high school that agreed to participate in my research.

I was specifically looking for participants to answer my research questions about their experiences with trust and vulnerability. I was also looking for principals who thoughtfully engage in trust-building with those they lead. For the initial round of interviews, the purpose of purposive sampling was to recruit leaders from a variety of different locations, backgrounds, and philosophies about trust in educational leadership. For this dissertation, the definition of leader was restricted to the role of principals. While there is value in interviewing leaders of all levels, I was most interested in

engaging with leaders who are most responsible for the culture of the school. Additionally, I intentionally limited my participants to leaders at public schools because of the systems established by districts, states, and federal government that may impact trust in relationships.

When selecting my participants, I wanted to include leaders from different levels. This proved to be interesting and aligned with what emerged in the literature review in that it was more challenging to recruit secondary leaders, and that aligned with research that shows more elementary leaders engaged in thoughtful trust building. There are a greater number of elementary schools than secondary schools; it still appeared as though more elementary leaders engage in trust-based leadership than secondary leaders. While I did not seek a random sample, as this is not an experimental design, I was very interested in investigating perspectives from leaders who have different experiences.

I ended up with six principals as the participants for my research. Four of the leaders were elementary principals, one leader was at a middle school, and one leader was at a high school. The participants ranged in experience levels from five years up to 15 years of experience. There were four male participants and two female participants. I was also seeking leaders from diverse racial groups. I ended up with two leaders who identified as White, two leaders who identified as Black, and two leaders who identified as Latinx.

Each participant had very different levels of experience in their teaching background and leadership journey. While I would have liked more perspectives from the secondary level, I am satisfied that the participants had thoughtful and diverse

perspectives of leadership methods and views of trust-building within their school communities. Overall, the criterion for the sample was that leaders consented to participate in this research and were willing to engage in conversations about trust and explore their own experiences of trust in positions of leadership.

According to Morse and Clark (2019), there are three different philosophical frames behind sampling; following participants through an experience, sampling different participants at different milestones within an experience, or retrospective interviews to discuss their experience. For my dissertation, I focused on the third philosophy, conducting retroactive interviews. To fully grasp the phenomenon of how principals experience trust and vulnerability in principal leadership, I used the method of conducting retroactive interviews which allowed me to obtain an understanding of leader perspectives of their experiences. To understand the concept, I specifically recruited participants who were considered "trust-experts" by both teachers who work with them or principal supervisors within their school community (Morse & Clark, 2019). The purpose of grounded theory is to construct meaning based on experiences; using retrospective interviews and leaders who are trust experts allows me to focus on the participants' individual experiences during the data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During the second round of interviews, I was looking to identify different theoretical components to construct a theory (Morse & Clark, 2019). Therefore it was beneficial to use the same participants from the first round of interviews to identify patterns, confirm data discovered in the first round of data analysis, link concepts, reach saturation, and verify information (Morse & Clark, 2019). Charmaz (2006) stated that by

using theoretical sampling, researchers might make further connections among different categories. To gain a deeper level of understanding about how leaders experience trust, it was appropriate for me to further my research by conducting another round of interviews using theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling also aids in creating validity for my research (Charmaz, 2008). Additionally, Teppo (2015) suggests that conducting a second round of interviews further investigates research and expands on themes that emerge from the initial interviews.

For this research study, the setting was conducted entirely online. As this research was conducted during COVID-19, in-person interviews could not be conducted to protect the physical safety of myself and my participants. Additionally, since each participant was at a different school, the setting was variable. Each interview was conducted via the web conference, Zoom©; the leaders met me from their place of work at the time of the interview.

As this was a grounded theory study, I limited the participants to six different leaders to saturate myself in the experiences of school leaders without losing the co-constructive philosophy of grounded theory (Mruck & Mey, 2019). Grounded theorists suggest that participants should be diverse enough to gather enough data, including variability, but also state that having too many participants may take away from the research by not allowing enough elaboration and familiarity for the participants to engage in trusting conversations (Charmaz, 2006, Mruck & Mey, 2019).

Having six participants allowed me to have a variety of experiences to include variability and not have too many participants, which may have taken away from the

overall purpose of the research design. As mentioned above, my participants included a variety of educational backgrounds, leadership experiences, and personal experiences. Each principal is currently leading a school and has thoughtfully engaged in trust-based leadership practices.

The participants consented to two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews was an open-ended interview where I asked leaders to share their perspectives of trust as they experience it. In the second round of interviews, I was more targeted in my questions, asking leaders to elaborate on the categories and themes that emerged during the first round of data analysis. See appendices B and C for the questions used during data collection.

As this process is emergent and based on trust, I wanted to develop relationships and trust with my participants before delving into vulnerable and delicate conversations. Charmaz (2006), Teppo (2015), and Mruck & Mey (2019) all suggest that it is necessary to establish trust before engaging in grounded theory research. This topic was focused on trust and vulnerability, therefore, establishing trust between the participants and myself was imperative to ensure that my participants felt safe sharing their experiences with me. Since interviews needed to be conducted via web conference, developing trust was more difficult as there was a barrier between myself and the interviewee. The authenticity of having a personal conversation was slightly stunted because the computer screen was a physical boundary. I did not have the opportunity to generate authentic trust before beginning our interviews to the extent I would have liked. I combated this by taking time to get to know my participants, specifically asking about their past educational and

professional experiences. While there was still some formality, I feel this helped us develop a relationship that allowed for a more natural conversation about their experiences of trust and vulnerability in leadership.

Morse and Clark (2019) stressed the importance of acknowledging the potential for data insufficiency. Since discussing vulnerability and trust can bring up private and personal experiences, I was worried that some of my participants would not be willing to openly engage in conversations that may open them up to vulnerabilities and or judgment. I countered this challenge by letting my participants know that pseudonyms would be used and that I would be the only person engaging in data analysis. One of my participants mentioned multiple times that they did not want certain specifics mentioned during their interview. Still, the others seemed to communicate about their own experiences freely without compromising the identity of other individuals discussed in the interviews. To help my participants feel comfortable, I phrased my questions in ways that allowed them to engage in "hypothetical data" (Morse and Clark, 2019, p. 19), using hypothetical situations.

During the second round of interviews, I was looking to validate and expand on the information discovered in the initial round of interviews. A relationship between myself and the research participants had already been established, and the participants consented to a second interview before the initial interview. To set up the second round of interviews, I reached out to principals again via email and scheduled appointments for the second round of interviews. Interviews during this phase felt less formal than the first round of interviews, and I feel that part of this is due to the prior relationship and trust

established during the first interview. I also felt that giving the participants access to the questions before the interview allowed them to think about their responses, which made them feel more at ease during the second interview.

To collect thoughtful data, I used three different data sources to triangulate my research. I used a survey and two rounds of interviews for my data. The survey was adapted from Tschannen-Moran's (1999) original survey on principal trust, published on Tschannen-Moran's website with permission granted for scholarly purposes. The survey was adapted to include demographic information and excluded questions that were not relevant to this research study; this survey acted as an introductory tool for me to understand how each leader perceived trust in their schools. The benefit of using this survey was to understand each participants' views of their school before we spoke.

Additionally, as this piece of data was adapted from research that had previously been conducted, this added to the validity of my research and supported the triangulation of data. However, since this is a qualitative grounded theory study, the survey provides quantitative data not typically included in a constructivist grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2006). The second two pieces of data were both interviews. Allowing for interviews includes the perspectives of the leaders and allows me to expand on what was said in the first round of interviews by conducting follow-up interviews. These interviews would have been more open-ended in a true grounded theory study. Flick (2019) states that grounded theory is emergent, and while there is a plan for collecting data, the researcher should always seek to answer whatever questions arise. To conduct this grounded theory study promptly and receive IRB approval, I focused my interview

questions to allow emergent data to unfold. Still, I also wanted to have an endpoint for my data collection.

Data Collection Tools

To collect comprehensive data and answer my research question, I selected three different tools for data collection. First, I used a survey to act as an introduction to principal perceptions of trust within their schools. Then I used open-ended questions for the first round of interviews. This method was selected because grounded theory researchers (Charmaz, 2006, 2008), Glasser & Strauss (2010), and Mruck & Mey (2019) stress the importance of allowing data to emerge naturally. Having interview questions that are not open-ended does not allow data to emerge naturally. My final piece of data was a second round of interviews. This was conducted using semi-structured interviews. This method was selected to validate and expand on the data that emerged during the first round of interviews.

Survey

My first tool for data collection was a 20-question survey. Before conducting interviews, I asked each participant to complete a short survey. This survey was published on Tschannen-Moran's website and provided at no fee for scholarly purposes (1999). The validity of the principal trust survey was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin the Bartlett tests. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test measures sampling accuracy and exceeded expectations at 0.88. The Bartlett test demonstrated statistical significance "in supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix" (Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Additionally, factor analysis was used to investigate the variable relationships for socially

complex concepts. Based on the factor analysis the principal trust survey demonstrated a range between 0.644 and 0.809. The reliability of this measure found that the consistency coefficients were measured at 0.89, and the reliability coefficients were measured at 0.87. Based on this data this survey is determined to be both valid and reliable (Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

I adapted the survey to highlight the questions most pertinent to my research questions. The purpose of this survey was to understand each leaders' perceived levels of trust within their building. This survey helped me determine how each principal perceived the levels of trust in their community which adds to the validity of the data from the data analysis phase. Adding data from the survey is another way to demonstrate how principals perceive the trust in their communities, which reinforces that data from the interviews. Tschannen-Moran's survey was designed to clarify the perceived quality of relationships at the schools where my participants are leaders; please reference Appendix A for the questions included in the initial survey.

Initial Interview Data

I used open-ended, unstructured interviews to collect my data. Grounded theorists Charmaz (2006) and Glasser et al. (2010) strongly suggest using unstructured interviews for grounded theory research to ensure that individuals could share their stories. I began my first round of interviews with scheduled one-hour-long interview sessions with each participant. I had five open-ended questions to guide the conversation around trust for the open-ended interviews. See Appendix B for the interview questions selected for this first round of data collection. My intention for these questions was to begin the conversation

about trust and vulnerability and then allow for the participants to share any information that may be relevant. As I conducted the first round of interviews, I asked additional probing questions to understand each participant's experiences better.

During each interview, I used video and audio recording to capture the interviews; this allowed me to be free from distractions, such as copious note-taking, while I immersed myself in the participant's experiences. Since the interviews were conducted via Zoom©, an electronic informed consent form was emailed to each participant the day before the interview. The participant signed and returned the informed consent before beginning the interview. As each interview was conducted, I asked clarifying questions to deepen my understanding of their experience. By conducting unstructured interviews, I was able to ask authentic questions that emerged during data collection. The practice of engaging in follow-up questions is supported by grounded theorists Bryant & Charmaz (2010).

Secondary Interview Data

For my final piece of data, I used semi-structured interview questions based on the themes and categories that emerged during data analysis of the unstructured interviews. Please see Appendix C for a detailed list of questions from the second round of data collection. Using semi-structured interview questions for the second round of interviews was necessary to expand on the data that emerged during the first round of data collection. Charmaz (2006, 2008), Glaser et al. (2010), Glaser & Strauss (2010), and Mruck & Mey (2019) all stress the importance of returning to the data to expand and validate findings that emerged during the first round of data collection. This saturation

method is one of the essential methods of grounded theory research (Teppo, 2015). To reach saturation, I specifically asked questions that would give me a greater level of understanding about the leaders' experiences with trust and vulnerability.

Furthermore, theoretical sampling allowed me to reach saturation within my data (Charmaz, 2006; Teppo, 2015, Flick, 2019). The purpose of theoretical sampling has many different advantages. I used theoretical sampling for pattern identification, confirmation, linking concepts, and saturation (Morse & Clark, 2019). While some researchers may question the concept of saturation the value of saturation for this grounded theory study is to demonstrate a thorough collect of data and analysis. As I conducted the second round of interviews, I intentionally developed questions that helped me answer information that emerged during the first round of data analysis. Theoretical sampling and semi-structured interviews allowed me to discover if cross-categorical themes existed among different participants.

In a grounded theory design, the researcher is one of the data instruments used, and it is expected that the researcher is actively involved in the process (Charmaz, 2008; Mruck & Mey, 2019). The individual beliefs and values of the researcher play a significant role in the data collection and analysis. To maintain validity, the researcher must reflect on their decisions, positionality, and bias during each phase of data collection and analysis (Bryant, 2017). This method of reflection can be conducted through open analysis of data and conducting reflexive memos throughout data collection and analysis.

Procedures

Seeking IRB approval proved to be a problematic issue as not only did I have an ambiguous number of participants. I also had to rearrange how my interviews would be conducted to meet Covid-19 protocols. When I first submitted my IRB paperwork, I planned to conduct in-person interviews to build trust and have an authentic interview experience. I submitted my initial paperwork days before the first lockdown for Covid-19. I then had to revise my IRB paperwork and interview protocol to reflect the Covid-19 protocols to ensure the safety of my participants.

Furthermore, I received final IRB approval in the middle of summer, making initial recruitment difficult. Principals traditionally take time off in the middle of the summer, so I anticipated that it would take time for leaders to respond. I have also discussed the additional challenges leaders faced during this research project due to changing Covid-19 protocols, which made recruitment more difficult.

After compiling a list of school leaders, I reached out via email to each principal introducing myself and the purpose of my research on trust. After each participant consented to participate in the study, I sent them a link to a survey about their perceived levels of trust in their school. As discussed above this survey is a 20-question survey published and written by Tschannen-Moran in 1999; I adapted the survey to seek information that would provide me with information about how each leader perceives the trust relationships in their school. My adaptations included demographic information that would tell me more about the individuals' leadership experience and excluded questions

that did not pertain to the research questions; please reference Appendix A for a detailed list of the survey questions.

After each participant completed the survey, I scheduled an interview with them. Each participant consented to a virtual interview to ensure safety protocols were followed due to Covid-19. Each interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes, depending on the participant. Each interview was recorded via Zoom©, and a transcript was generated for coding purposes. After transcripts were made, I listened to each interview first to ensure that the audio matched the written transcript. One advantage of interviewing remotely was that I could use both visual and audio recordings. After completing each interview, the audio selection was uploaded and transcribed using the transcription service, TranscribeMe!©. The transcripts were then saved to a secure drive to maintain confidentiality for my participants.

Another piece of data used was memoing; after each interview was conducted and throughout data analysis, I spent time writing my reflections from the interviews and data analysis sessions in memos. Memoing allowed me to be vigilant to constant comparative analysis in the data analysis phase of my research (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz also states that memos enable the researcher to stop and reflect on their ideas, "memo-writing provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering" (2006, p.72). Memoing is crucial to conducting a grounded theory study as memos increase the researcher's awareness of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Teppo Anne, 2015).

For the second round of interviews, I followed the same procedure for recording and transcribing interviews as I did during the first round of interviews, including virtual conferences using audio and video recording via Zoom ©. Still, my questions and focus were specific to the themes that emerged during the first round of analysis. The questions used for the second round of interviews are listed in Appendix C.

For the second round of data collection, I sought information that would validate categories and themes that emerged in the first round of data analysis (Charmaz, 2008 Mruck & Mey, 2019; Teppo, 2015). I wanted to ensure that I conducted high-quality interviews in both rounds; something I learned from the first round was the importance of giving people time to process the questions before the interview. Therefore, for the second round of interviews, I sent the questions to each participant in advance of our interview to allow them time to construct thoughtful responses. This proved to be especially important as many of the questions used in the second round of interviews required participants to reflect on their own beliefs and perspectives. The semi-structured interview questions were more specific to certain experiences and warranted additional time for reflection. When I reached out to each participant with the questions, I also set up a time to meet with each participant virtually. The purpose for the virtual second interviews and having semi-structured interview questions allowed me the flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on their responses in the second interview.

Due to time constraints, I limited the research phase to two rounds of interviews; therefore, I acknowledge that this dissertation is acting merely as an introduction to the leaders' experience of trust and vulnerability and that I was unable to reach full saturation

in the time allotted. To ensure the greatest amount of saturation, I needed to ask questions that best fit the design of the study and allowed me an opportunity to immerse myself in the experiences of the participants.

After the second round of interviews, I again took some time to write memos to ensure validity through reflexive practices. Teppo (2015) states that "memos create an audit trail of the development of the analyst's thinking and direction of theoretical sampling. They provide transparency to the research process" (p.7). Memoing provided me with additional data for analysis, and it also allowed me to be reflexive and transparent about my research. Memoing also provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in the research and give me another opportunity to understand the data. (Mruck & Mey, 2019). Having specific details and reflections based on the interviews I had conducted helped me to recall information about my perceptions from the interviews when I conducted data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Flick, 2019; Teppo, 2015).

Memoing has many roles, and in this dissertation, I used memos after interviews and throughout data analysis to reflect on my observations. Charmaz (2006) suggests that there are a variety of different ways to write memos, and I felt I needed to utilize a variety of different memoing strategies to allow for authentic and reflexive memoing. This allowed me to be able to draw connections between the different categories, participants, and themes. As I drew connections between different data analysis fields (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2006), I wrote memos that helped me understand how trust and vulnerability were experienced by different leaders and what connections could be made between different participants. Charmaz states that

"memo-writing forms a space and place for exploration and discovery" (2006, p.82), this process of memoing allowed me to engage deeply and discover the foundations for a new theory. Since this dissertation is a grounded theory design it is imperative to engage in deeply immersive practices to engage in the act of discovery and exploration as I collected and analyzed the data.

The second round of data collection was the final stage of sample selection for this project. While there are benefits to expanding upon the themes of trust and vulnerability through further research and validation across individuals, this study is intended to be an introduction to how leaders experience trust and vulnerability. Additionally, to complete this dissertation within an appropriate amount of time, it was necessary to establish a final point of research, including limiting sample selection and the point of saturation.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis section of this dissertation, I detail the procedures I took to analyze the data after collecting the data from the survey, and the two rounds of interviews. When I began the data analysis for this research project, my primary method of data analysis was constant comparative analysis as suggested by grounded theory researchers (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Teppo Anne, 2015). Fram (2013, p.1) states that "constant comparative analysis (CCA) is a technique or method that appears to be synonymous with grounded theory". The very idea of constant comparative analysis is that the researchers can make connections and analyze data throughout the process of data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Within constant

comparative analysis, there are various methods that researchers can use to analyze data, but what seems to be consistent amongst researchers is the approach to using initial coding and then a second round of focused coding. For this research project, I followed this path and used initial coding, focused coding, and finally theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006).

After receiving the surveys from each participant, I used the secure web-based application, Qualtrics© to analyze the data. Qualtrics© was used to look at each survey individually to understand how each principal perceived the trust within their school—understanding the perceived levels of trust at each participant aided in the validation of the reported experiences of each leader. I also looked at common themes amongst the principals as a group; I was able to look at collective trends about the perceived levels of trust amongst teachers, students, and community members. The survey was intended to gather preliminary information about the leaders' perceptions of trust; it was also used to validate the information that the leaders shared in their interviews. By looking at trends in data, I used constant comparative analysis to compare the data from the interviews with the results from the survey to ensure consistency in reported experiences compared to their interview results.

The audio clips and transcriptions served as the foundation of the data I collected for this grounded theory study. This data was used to code and ultimately develop the theories around trust and vulnerability. I used the transcription service, Transcribeme!© to have the interviews transcribed, and then data was then uploaded to NVivo© for security and the coding process. I did an initial listen to ensure that the transcripts were

accurate to what was said during the interviews. I listened to the initial interview to confirm that the transcript matched before the initial coding began.

I used initial coding for the first round of data analysis to understand my participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Charmaz (2006) states that the purpose of initial coding is to stay open-minded and allow the data to emerge naturally, while focused coding focuses on specific categories that may lead to the development of a theory. "The openness of initial coding should spark your thinking and allow new ideas to emerge" (Charmaz, 2006, p.48). During initial coding, I utilized the strategies of question-by-question coding. According to Charmaz (2006), this coding method allows the researcher to identify ideas that may escape the researcher's attention when looking for themes throughout an entire interview. As I conducted question by question coding, I looked for new and different ideas that emerged in the interviews as I analyzed the data. After initial coding, I wrote reflexive memos, which helped me reflect on what I noticed and observed in the data (Mruck & Mey, 2019). As I analyzed each interview, I repeated the memoing process to wrap up my final thoughts for each data analysis phase.

Once initial coding was completed, I used comparative methods to compare the data from each interview. After each initial coding session, the memos I wrote helped me compare themes and data that emerged from session to session. I also compared individual data from each interview, followed by comparing thematic statements made amongst different participants. During this phase, Charmaz (2006) stresses the importance of including the ideas that emerge for the researchers, as this data may indicate gaps or themes that I, the researcher, have not yet seen. This is another reason

that memoing is vital to the grounded theory process. After identifying the initial codes, I moved into focused coding based on the data from the initial interviews.

One part of data analysis in grounded theory research is to check that the research questions are part of the emergent process (Belgrave & Seide, 2019; Dey, 2011; Mruck & Mey, 2019). My study has three different research questions; therefore, I needed to note which data point aligned with which research question. I did come across some data and observations that did not fit precisely into each of my data points, and I noted those data points separately. I created four different categories, one for each question and the last for data that did not align with my initial research questions. This allowed me to group my codes by research question to determine if categories overlapped or were entirely separate from others.

After conducting initial coding, I engaged in focused coding. Focused coding intends to be more direct, selective, and conceptual when compared to initial coding (Charmaz, 2006). Focused coding helps explain broader concepts that emerge through large chunks of data. It is important to stress that focused coding is also comparative. As I coded broad concepts, I was vigilant in comparing my initial codes with the focused coding; I also continued to reflect through the ongoing use of memos. As I conducted focused coding, I started to draft questions for secondary interviews based on themes and concepts that I noticed. The prepared questions were finalized and used for the semi-structured interviews in the second round of data collection.

Once the second round of data collection was conducted, I started the second phase of data analysis with initial coding using question by question coding, which

allowed me to identify additional themes or ideas that emerged or were confirmed through the semi-structured interviews. I then conducted focused coding exclusively, looking at the responses from the second round of interviews related to my initial research questions and the codes that emerged during the first round of data analysis. It was essential to compare the data from the first round of interviews with the data and memos discovered in the second round of interviews. This data turned into a final phase for theoretical coding.

Charmaz states that theoretical coding "is a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding" (2006, p.63). Theoretical coding is supposed to connect themes and categories uncovered during initial and focused coding. Glaser (1978) proposes 18 theoretical coding families; these codes act as analytic structures to transition the data from codes into a thematic story and ultimately a theory. Charmaz (2006) suggests that theoretical codes "may hone your work with a sharp analytic edge" (p. 63). It is important to note that Charmaz (2006) suggests that Glaser's list of 18 coding families is not all-inclusive. While some of my categories align with Glaser's families, I needed to be cognizant that codes can reach beyond Glaser's pre-determined coding families. I was attempting to understand the experiences of principals in their attempt to answer my research questions; the reminder that coding families are emergent helped conduct thematic coding. After completing thematic coding, my final step was to ensure that my theories aligned with my research questions, not to force an answer, but rather to ensure that I have remained thoughtful about my research questions throughout the data collection and data analysis process. This process was immersive

and ongoing; this proved to be an essential step in creating a theory around the principal trust and vulnerability experience.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Ensuring validity in grounded theory is one of the most significant challenges for researchers, as they must validate their findings without relying on the use of literature (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Corbin and Strauss (2008) stress the importance of checking validity as the process of grounded theory and coding is making meaning from raw data to explain an abstract concept. Therefore, I needed to ensure that great care was taken to validate my findings as I analyzed data. Teppo (2015) suggests that validation in grounded theory is cyclical, beginning with constant comparison of the initial data and then seeking out additional data to see what else emerges. As themes emerge, this cycle of collecting data, coding, and writing memos become its own validity test. To validate my findings, I used constant comparative analysis and ongoing memoing. These memos were used as an additional measure for validity as these memos served as the "audit trail" (Teppo, 2015 p. 7) for my thinking as a researcher. To validate my findings, I used secondary interviews with theoretical sampling as another measure to ensure validity. Charmaz (2006) states that the purpose of theoretical sampling is to seek additional relevant data to "elaborate and refine categories" (p. 96) that emerge from the data.

> By focusing on theoretical categories rather than on a single empirical topic, theoretical sampling leads you to sample across substantive areas. Thus, engaging in theoretical sampling can encourage you to raise your theory to a formal, more abstract level that cuts across different substantive areas. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 106)

This quote from Charmaz emphasizes how theoretical sampling can validate findings in data that emerges. This method can help narrow the focus of the emergent theory, qualify

and elaborate theories that emerge, and link categories previously discovered (Belgrave & Seide, 2019; Charmaz, 2008; Dey, 2011). I also confirmed the validity of my research by conducting member checking with each participant after both rounds of data analysis. The purpose of member checking in this process was to certify that the interviews accurately reflected what the participants intended to say during the interview. Finally, the survey that I used during the initial round of interviews was used as an additional method of validity and triangulation. As mentioned earlier, Glaser (1998) states that anything can be data in grounded theory, including quantitative data. Using constant comparative analysis, I used the survey data to compare the data that emerged from the interviews to validate and confirm what the individuals said about their experiences of trust.

Ethical Considerations

To gain a broad scope of research, I was seeking participants across a variety of different settings and experiences. I used a protected drive to upload all video/ audio files, written transcripts, and memos to protect my participant's identities. During the writing process, I used pseudo names to protect the identities of my participants. I was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July of 2020; this process helped ensure that I was appropriately protecting the privacy of my participants. One of the requirements of IRB was to keep a record of each participant's location, contact information, and consent form. I created a document that kept track of these records as well as what data I had collected for each participant. All of this was kept safe using a secure database. Although participants were recommended to me local leaders in the field

with direct experiences with school-level leaders who demonstrate trust, the recommenders were not informed about which participants agreed to be a part of the research and which did not. Ultimately, I kept my final participant list private to ensure anonymity. Establishing trust demonstrated my competence and reliability (Feltman, 2009, Tschannen-Moran, 2014). I was able to do this by ensuring their confidentiality and following the IRB protocols established by my university.

Limitations

This methodology did present some challenges and limitations. The limitations to my research included population size and variation, coding spread, and maintaining coding in context. To combat the limitations in data analysis, I referenced prominent researchers such as Charmaz (2006), Mruck & Mey (2019), Teppo (2015), and (Saldaña, 2016) to ensure that my research aligned with the methodology throughout the data collection and analysis of this research.

One area that I wanted to explore was gaining access to participants at large schools. Unfortunately, I could not secure any participants from large schools, which was interesting to me and should be researched more in the future. I did reach out to schools of various sizes; however, there were few schools with over 300 students that had high levels of reported trust according to the Teaching and Learning Conditions survey, and the of the few that did, I did not receive any response to my request for participation.

During data analysis, an additional challenge was ensuring that I coded and analyzed data that was neither too specific nor too broad in my codes and categories. One way I worked to challenge this threat to validity was to use constant comparative

analysis. Instead of analyzing data once and moving on, the process of constant comparison helped me to guarantee that I was providing an appropriate level of analysis.

A challenge that frequently arose for me was the issue of coding out of context. I was very interested in understanding more about the leaders' experiences; however, this research project was designed as an introduction to the leaders' perspectives of trust and vulnerability. I found myself coding and creating questions for secondary interviews that did not specifically focus on my research questions. Using memos and constant comparative analysis, I would remind myself to set those topics aside as they may become areas for future research.

Conclusion

This research project was designed to investigate school leaders' perspectives on trust and vulnerability. To gain a genuine understanding of the leaders' experiences and to address the gap in research around vulnerability and leader perspectives of trust, grounded theory was the methodology that best fit the research questions I sought to answer. The opportunity to immerse myself in the rich data while using constant comparative analysis allowed me the greatest opportunity to answer the questions for this dissertation and fill the gaps in current research. In the next chapter, the findings that emerged during data analysis are discussed as well as their impact on educators and future research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The previous chapter detailed the steps taken for data collection and conducting analysis. In this chapter, I will look at the data that emerged during the analysis phase of this research study. As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of principals who engage in trust and vulnerability in their leadership. I specifically sought leaders who thoughtfully developed trust and shared their vulnerability as school leaders. My conceptual framework was rooted in trust in education, trust in leadership, and vulnerability. There is currently a gap in research that does not address how leaders cultivate trust or address how leaders experience trust and vulnerability. Researchers including Bryk & Schneider (2002), Chughati & Buckley (2009), Louis (2007), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) all discuss the value of having trust in leadership and education. While Bunker (1997), Meyer, et al. (2017), and Nienaber et al. (2015) address the power of vulnerability in leadership, none of these authors address how leaders cultivate or experience trust and vulnerability. As stated in previous chapters, if trust and vulnerability are essential components to successful leadership, we must first understand leaders' experiences so that leaders looking to engage in trust-building and vulnerability can learn from leaders who already engage in this practice. This research study was conducted to understand the

experiences of leaders who intentionally nurture an environment of trust and vulnerability within their schools, as reported by local area leaders.

This chapter looks at the data that emerged from this grounded theory study; we begin by looking at how data was organized and present how data fills the gap in research by engaging in data analysis specific to the principals' perspectives. The data for the analysis section includes data collected and described in the methods chapter. The data used for this grounded theory study consists of a 20 question survey, adapted from Tschannen-Moran's 1999 principal trust survey, two rounds of interviews using theoretical sampling, and finally, memos written during interviews and data analysis contributed to the data.

Organization of Data Analysis

My research was designed to remedy the gaps of previous research through thoughtful engagement in conversations that explore the experiences of school leaders who engage in trust-building and vulnerability with those they lead. The data presented below has been organized to provide context about the data that emerged during data collection and how this data connects to each research question.

I begin with an introduction to the participants; I detail each principal's experience and personal views of education that have led them to cultivate trust in their schools. All relevant details that may compromise their privacy have been omitted and pseudonyms are used to safeguard their privacy in this process. It is essential to include details such as experience and leadership philosophy to ground the data and the

experiences of the individuals as unique and relevant to understanding the data that emerged.

Participant A (Andrew) has 15 years of principal experience. All his leadership experience has been at the same school. The school that he leads is a suburban elementary school that serves approximately 300 students. Andrew's philosophy is rooted in the relationships that he has cultivated in their school throughout many years. Andrew was a teacher at the school where he leads and notes that he has worked with the same people for many years. During his tenure in the school, knowing and working with the same colleagues has allowed him to understand and appreciate the strengths of the individuals on his staff.

Participant B (Brenda) has been a principal for 11 years and currently serves at an urban middle school for approximately 300 students. Brenda has experience leading at all school levels; she has served in elementary schools, high schools and is now working at a middle school. Brenda also has experience working at the district level but missed the interpersonal experience of working within a school and moved back into the school where she currently leads. Brenda states that her philosophy of education is rooted in truth, that if she and her team are willing to speak the truth, they can work through any challenge together.

Participant C (Chris) has been a principal for ten years. Chris also has experience leading at the district level but returned to lead at a school. Chris currently serves at an urban area kindergarten through eighth-grade school. The school serves approximately 500 students; this is the largest school sampled in this grounded theory design. Chris's

teaching and leadership experience are primarily in the elementary level; however, she served as an assistant principal in middle school and is currently leading at a school that serves students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Chris states that her leadership philosophy is rooted in her experiences, as she states, "my own life was filled and nourished with models of biliteracy, multiculturalism, collaboration, servant leadership, and inclusion, all assets that cultivated me into the leader I am today." She desires to serve students in a way that better meets them at their level while engaging them through their own identities and experiences.

Participant D (Daniel) has been a principal at the same school for three years. This is Daniel's first school where he has led as principal. The school is located in an urban area and is an elementary school that serves approximately 300 students. Daniel's leadership philosophy is rooted in his experiences growing up; Daniel states, "The behaviors that allowed me to be happy when I was a kid are the behaviors that I want to put in place with my communities." Daniel intentionally cultivates trust within his community to build a strong community within his school.

Participant E (Edward) has been a principal for four years, and he currently leads at an urban area elementary school that serves approximately 300 students. Edward's philosophy of leadership and education is deeply rooted in his experiences as a student in the district where he is now a principal. Edward's passion for equity in education radiates through every word of his interview and is part of the foundation that has led to him intentionally cultivating trust and vulnerability in his school.

Finally, Participant F (Fred) has led for the last seven years. Fred works at an alternative high school that serves less than 100 students in a rural community. Fred was looking to improve the educational opportunities for the students at his underperforming school, but he realized that the school would first need to change the culture of the school. Fred's passion for working with students in an alternative setting is based on his own experiences as a student. Fred states, "I was the problem child, and I think it took me until the tenth grade, and I was in all kinds of trouble…. my tenth grade English teacher called me out." When Fred became the leader of this alternative school, they had a significant dropout problem, and he quickly realized that nothing would change without a culture of achievement. Over time, Fred has worked with his staff to cultivate a learning culture at the school. He credits the shift in achievement and the attention they receive from the local community to the change in school culture developed during his tenure.

Each participant selected for this grounded theory study provides a unique leadership experience. Their experiences with trust and vulnerability provide thoughtful insights into the diverse and equally necessary opportunities to engage in trust and vulnerability in leadership.

Following the description of the participants, I remind the reader of the research questions used to ground this research. I then detail the data that emerged in the Analysis of Data section. I include data from the surveys, the interviews, and memos as organized by each research question. Finally, I summarize the major points of data before moving into the discussion chapter.

Research Questions

To understand the experiences of leaders who cultivate trust within their schools and thoughtfully engage in vulnerability, I designed three research questions; the following research questions were used to guide this research include:

1. How do principals experience trust in relationships?
2. How do leaders generate trust with those they lead?
3. If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at schools?

To answer these research questions, I used a grounded theory research design.

Analysis of Data

The data analysis was used using Charmaz's methodology of initial coding, focused coding, and finally theoretical coding (2006). Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of how coding was conducted from the end of the first round of interviews through theoretical coding (Urquhart, 2017). After conducting interviews, initial coding was used with the software NVivo©. As suggested by Charmaz, I coded data as actions; using this method of initial coding, I ensured that I did not make assumptions before finalizing all coding phases. I worked quickly and coded data that stood out. After conducting initial coding, I moved into a round of focused coding.

After conducting initial coding from the first interviews, focused coding, rooted in the initial interviews, allowed me to determine questions for the secondary interviews. Focused coding allowed me to understand what additional information I needed to seek. I then returned to my research participants using theoretical sampling to further

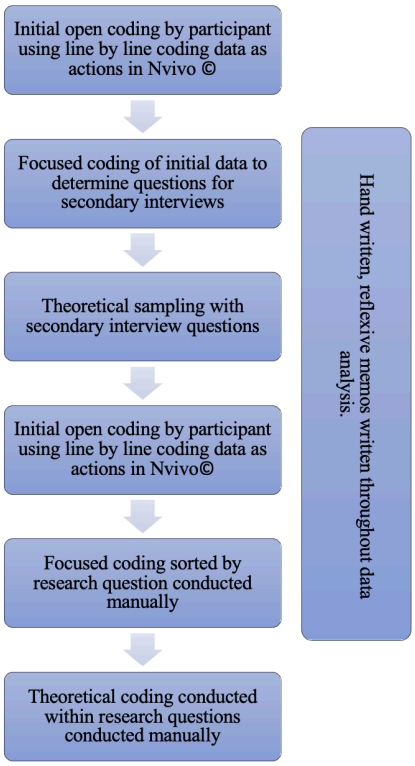
understand their experiences with trust and vulnerability. I repeated the process of conducting initial coding using data as actions to code data from the second round of interviews.

I decided to conduct focused coding manually from this point forward as I wanted to visually layout the initial codes as I conducted focused coding. As I conducted focused coding, I noticed similarities amongst the data; memos allowed me to take notes and come back to my observations using constant comparative analysis. Once focused coding was conducted by each research question, I continued focused coding within each research question. Charmaz recommends pausing and taking time to compare codes and data. Memoing provided me with this opportunity to organize my thoughts and observations as I conducted coding. Naturally, as I conducted focused coding, I discovered that I was stepping into theoretical coding. Specifically, I found how codes related to each other Again, memos allowed me to visually represent how different data interacted with other data. I have created samples of the memos and how they are connected to additional data within each research question.

The memos that I wrote provided me with opportunities to reflect on my reactions to participant interviews as well as process the data that emerged during data analysis. During memoing, I created visuals that allowed me to see how data was connected, and I processed data in narrative forms. I described my reactions as well connections from the data and my observations to synthesize the data.

Figure 4.1

Coding Process



Data analysis was also conducted using the results from the principal trust survey adapted from Tschannen-Moran's (Tschannen-Moran, 1999) principal trust survey. Please see Appendix A for the list of survey questions used. The data from the survey was used to look at similarities and differences between the participants and how the participants viewed the trust within their school compared to the data included within the interviews. The survey was administered using a six-point Likert scale with one represented as strongly disagree to six represented as strongly agree. A question about how long each participant had been in educational leadership was also included in the survey. Within each research question, I introduce the question, discuss how the analysis

was conducted, and then present the resulting data. Relevant data is shown in the following order: Survey results, interview data and codes, and visuals constructed during memoing are incorporated throughout each research question.

Research Question 1: How Do Principals Experience Trust in Relationships?

The first research question that guided my research and data collection was to gather information about the individual experiences of leaders who thoughtfully cultivate trust within their schools. The data were analyzed first by organizing the questions from the survey results. I found that some research questions could be categorized into different groups. I started by looking at questions specifically related to trust within the school staff. I identified survey questions that seem to be the staff's perceptions of the principal and another group of the principal's perceptions of the team. From there, I classified questions by research question. After analyzing the data from the survey, I moved into focused coding within each research question.

As I coded data within the first research question about how researchers experience trust in their relationships, certain codes surfaced frequently. These were coded into similar groups and described below. I include a visual from my memos in Figure 4.2 of how the codes were grouped and how I viewed the codes interacting based on the data within the first research question.

Survey Results

The principal trust survey provided insight into the principal's experiences and views of the staff in their building. The questions that most aligned with the research question can be viewed in Table 4.1, along with the results by each participant. As this

first research question asked principals to share their experiences with trust, it was essential to understand whether the principals trusted the teachers they work with. Overwhelmingly, every participant stated that they trusted the teachers at their school and four said they strongly agreed that they trusted the teachers at their school. While this was one of the last questions of the survey, I chose to present the data first here to present the data that most connected to the research question and how each participant viewed the trust within their building.

Table 4.1

Survey results: How do Principals Experience Trust?

	Question 20: I trust the teachers in this school	**Question 10: I question the competence of some of my teachers**	**Question 11: I am often suspicious of the teachers' motives in the school**	**Question 19: My teachers typically look out for me.**
Andrew	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Agree
Brenda	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree
Chris	Strongly agree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
Daniel	Strongly agree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
Edward	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Agree
Fred	Strongly agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree

Competence was a topic that came up both in the literature review and within the interviews, so the survey question about the principal's perception of competence aligns closely with the first research question. The question in the survey was stated as "I question the competence of some of my teachers" four of the participants indicated that

they disagreed; they do not question the competence of the teachers in the building. Two participants said that they somewhat agreed.

The third question that was categorized as answering how principals experience trust is how leaders perceive the teachers' motives within the school. The question is phrased as follows "I am often suspicious of the teachers' motives in the school." Five of the participants stated that they disagree, meaning they are not suspicious of the teachers' motives in the school. One participant said they somewhat agreed that they are somewhat suspicious of the teachers' motives in the school.

The last question that aligned with the first research question asks leaders if they believe the teachers in the building lookout for them. Two of the participants stated that they strongly agreed with this question, while the other four participants indicated that they agreed. After completing data analysis from the survey results, I conducted focused coding to discover categories from the codes presented in the data.

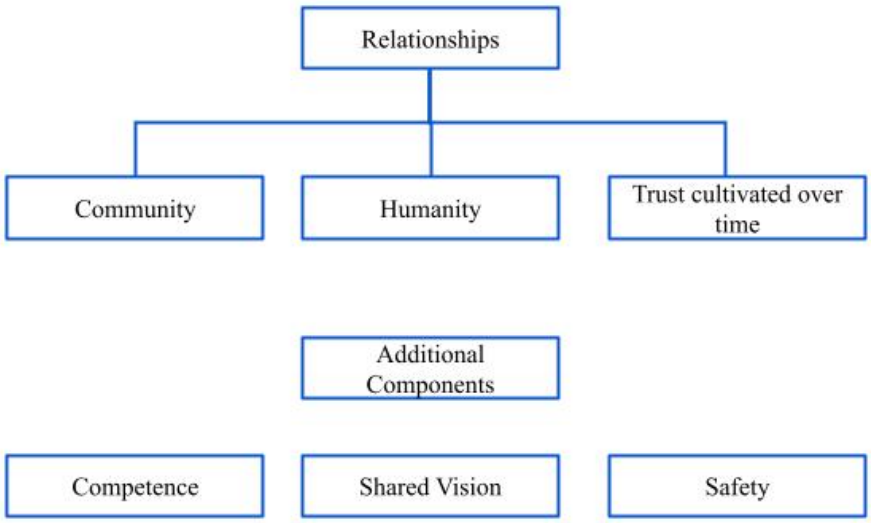
Codes Related to How Principals Experience Trust

During focused coding, some categories emerged. Figure 4.2 presents a visual from my memos that represents the relationships between the codes that emerged during focused coding. Below, I detail each category generated and include detailed evidence from the interviews that explain the experiences that support the codes and categories. The first category that emerged in this research question was the value of cultivating relationships within the school staff. Within those relationships, leaders expressed that a sense of community was necessary. Additionally, relationships require the leader to value the humanity of the individual and that trust must be cultivated over time, and that

it is not inherent. Furthermore, leaders discussed how competence, safety, and a shared vision contribute to how a leader experiences trust with those they lead.

Figure 4.2

Codes in Principals Experiences of Trust



Relationships as a Part of Principal Trust

Relationships were a code that quickly became the main category that explained how principals experience trust in their schools. Every participant referenced their relationships with the teachers they worked with many times during the interviews. I did discover that there were subcategories that fall under relationships. These subcategories include having a community of belonging, respecting the individual's humanity, and having time to cultivate trusting relationships. The subcategories are presented below, following the presentation of data for the relationships category.

As mentioned above, relationships were a code that repeatedly appeared throughout initial coding and focused coding. This concept of relationships was seen as very important to the trust experience. Five of the participants expressed the importance of relationships in their work as leaders, specifically regarding how they experienced trust. Fred says the following about education and the importance of understanding that leaders work with individuals.

> "Education is an art, but it's a human art. We're dealing with people. And as long as we're dealing with people, we have to practice good interpersonal skills, caring and compassion, kindness, and empathy, and all those things. And if we do that, I think staff is willing to walk through fire for you whenever they know that you have their back." (Interview)

This quote from Fred's interview demonstrated his need to see his teachers as individuals who need to experience caring, compassion, and empathy, without which there is no trust. So, he intentionally cultivates trust by demonstrating qualities of caring and empathy. In Fred's survey, he stated that he agreed that his staff looks out for him; his comment "staff is willing to walk through fire for you" (Interview) demonstrates that his practice of building relationships supports the trust that he experiences with his staff. They are a team that will support each other because they care for each other.

Brenda has been a principal at multiple schools, and her time as a leader has taught her the value of having relationships with her staff. In our first interview, Brenda stated, "Relationship building is a big component of trust, if you don't have a relationship with someone, they're not going to be apt to tell you anything…" (Interview). As a

leader, Brenda has many experiences with students and staff. One of the things she spoke about was the inevitability of staff members seeking help. Brenda says there will be no trust without relationships, and staff will avoid reaching out when they need help. This self-protective nature was referenced in Feltman's (Feltman, 2009b) research that without trust, individuals will engage in self-protective strategies to defend themselves.

Andrew spoke extensively about building relationships and acknowledges his time working with the same individuals contributes to the relationships he has cultivated but also stresses that "Building relationships with teachers is essential and building relationships goes back to communication and connecting with people like they equal intelligent individuals" (Interview). Andrew's experience with trust incorporates Bryk & Schneider's (2002) research that respect is a vital component of trust. Andrew discussed the importance of knowing and having relationships with his teachers to understand and respect them.

Edward discussed a lesson he learned during his time as an assistant principal. Edward explained his school was struggling with student discipline issues; he states that "the school was crying out for technical support" (Interview), so he implemented rules within the school, but at the end of the year, he reflected on the school year and realized he had suspended over 70 students. This time of reflection made him realize that not only were his students rebelling, but his staff was as well. When Edward reflected on this time, he said that leaders need to have an "understanding that rules without relationships, equals rebellion" (Interview). Since learning the value of relationships in his role as leader, he now takes time to know and appreciate his staff intentionally.

Edward's survey results reinforce this; Edward stated that he agreed that his teachers' lookout for him. The relationships he has fostered as a leader lead to his staff supporting him as a leader.

Daniel's experience with trust went deeper than just professional trust; Daniel says that for trust to be present in schools, we must have "trust not just on a professional level, but on a personal level." (Interview) Daniel's interview suggested that we can have trust at a professional level, such as trusting that someone will follow through on their assigned tasks, but that there is value in cultivating trust at a personal level. Daniel shared his experience that personal trust means that teachers will "have your back" when you need it. For Daniel, personal trust means that people care for you and are invested in seeing your success, so they will be there for you if you need help in your classroom, but they will also be there when you need something in your personal life.

There were many examples of principals cultivating relationships in their schools. Participants stated how important relationships were to a trusting relationship at work, but it is essential to address the challenges present in fostering relationships. Edward said it best when he said, "It's hard to live on paper, like do this, and you'll be successful building authentic relationships with this group of people." (Interview) I appreciated this comment that while principals can acknowledge how meaningful relationships are to trust and education, there is no prescription for generating relationships with people.

While there is no right way to foster relationships with staff, some characteristics emerged as I conducted focused coding. I consider these subcategories of relationships. These subcategories include community, humanity, and time.

Community in the Principal Trust Experience

The subcategory of community emerged during initial coding and then again during focused coding. I observed that principals talked about their individual relationships with teachers and the collective sense of community present in the schools. Phrases that were coded often included family, a sense of belonging, and of course, community. The principals in this research study talked about cultivating that sense of community from the very first day and continuing to cultivate that community throughout the years.

An example of cultivating that sense of community was brought up by Fred, who stated

> "The first day new teachers come in, we don't do anything school-related. We all go out to breakfast, and all my alumni teachers go out to breakfast with the new teacher. And we just spend time building connections. We do things like go on hikes together…." (Interview)

By building personal connections among his staff at the beginning of the year, he communicates his values to the new person. This place cares about you, and they want you to be a part of this community.

Edward also spoke about the community connection. "We welcome them in as a family, and we want that investment to continue" (Interview). Edward shares his personal experiences and actively spends time getting to know new staff and treating them as one of the family. Edward commits to know his team personally, and he makes sure they know him personally because he says that community and relationships go both ways.

Brenda says that she builds a sense of community within her school by knowing something personal about them. That way, “every day when I walk through the hall and say good morning, I am able to connect to them [on a personal level]” (Interview). In line with Brenda, Chris says that she also takes time to know her staff because she wants “students and staff [to] have that sense of belonging” (Interview). Chris also says that because the people in her school are a community that “there isn’t anybody in this building who wouldn’t step up for somebody else.” (Interview). Chris says that by creating a community, the teachers in her building are more apt to support one another when someone is in need.

Humanity in the Principal Trust Experience

The following subcategory that appeared within the codes was about seeing the humanity in the teachers these leaders work with. At least three of the participants stressed the importance of seeing their teachers not just as teachers but as whole individuals who have families and needs outside of the building. Fred shared an incident where one of his teachers had a family emergency, and he felt that he had a choice about how to respond to his teacher. Fred shares the following, “There’s a difference between ‘well did you put it in the system’ versus ‘oh my gosh, are you ok, do you need anything?’ (Interview). Fred advises that systems are in place for a reason. Still, if leaders only look at systems rather than understanding the human behind the teacher, that damages any trust that has been cultivated.

Additionally, Daniel speaks to the experiences of his teachers, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Daniel says that during the covid-19 pandemic, he decided to

put the human first and the professional after seeing the human. Fred spoke of times when his teachers had sick family members and that by extending grace to his teachers during this challenging time, the school came together to support each other and the community. This allowed them to stay open when other schools were forced to close because the school community stepped in and helped each other out.

Trust over Time

The final subcategory under relationships developed when multiple people referenced their trust relationships with people they have worked alongside for many years. Understanding that it is necessary to cultivate trust in relationships demonstrates the value of trust and that it is not inherent and must be intentionally nurtured.

Andrew discusses the sense of community in his school, and he states, "Most of the teachers that I've worked with have been at the school as long as I have…. The rest of the teachers have worked at the school with me for 14 to 20 years." Andrew credits his long tenure with the same individuals for the sense of community in his school. He talked about the shared vision present at his school and how they make decisions as a team because they have been together for so long that they trust one another.

Daniel also spoke about the power of time in cultivating trust. While Daniel has less time leading when compared to Andrew, he talked of the levels of trust that have been established between himself and the teachers who have been with him since the beginning of his tenure. Daniel says, "the longer the teacher has been here, the stronger the trust" (Interview). Daniel attributes this to his effort at presenting the same person in

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public and private. He says, “My staff know who I am, I don’t present two different people” (Interview)

Additional components were discovered during focused coding that explained how principals experience trust. These components include competence, having a shared vision in the school, and physical and psychological safety within the school community. Below, I detail the evidence supporting each of the codes discovered in data analysis

Competence in the Principal Trust Experience

Competence was one of the codes that emerged during data analysis that did not fit with the relationships category but still presented itself as important to the leaders’ experience with trust. As mentioned in the literature review, many researchers have already shown competence as essential to trust. Bryk and Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Feltman (2009) all included competence in their components of trust, and this research would be insufficient if I did not include the data that supported research from the literature review. As a reminder, competence was also a question presented in the trust survey, and four of the six participants reported that they did not question the competence of their teachers. The interviews suggested that competence is more profound than a leader’s view of teacher competence, but most participants discussed their own experiences with competence. Half of the participants stated that a challenge to experiencing trust was questioning their competence when cultivating trust in relationships. Daniel commented that when he does not have an answer for his staff, he feels that he must prove his competence and worries that his teachers may not trust him if he does not have the correct information they need. At the same time, Edward

shared his concern that his passion for education and passion for equity might get in the way of how his teachers might view his competence. Finally, Fred discussed his concern that his teachers may question his ability to lead by being honest about not having all the answers. Interestingly only one of the participants who expressed doubts about their competency reported that they somewhat questioned the competency of their teachers. What is clear is that competence is a significant influencer for how leaders experience trust.

Shared Vision in the Principal Trust Experience

Another code discovered during focused coding spoke to the experiences of principals who cultivate trust by creating a shared vision in the school. Three participants shared experiences with having a shared vision in their school and how that impacted their experiences with trust in their community.

Andrew spoke to his experiences with having a shared vision in his school. Andrew shared his passion for shared decision-making with his staff; in research question two, I will include more information about how he generates trust through shared decision-making. Andrew discussed the importance of having a shared vision in the school, that "shared leadership based on shared goals is a very important piece" (Interview) of how he knows he can trust his staff. By cultivating a shared vision amongst his team, he can trust that everyone is working towards the same goal.

Daniel also stressed the importance of having a shared vision. Daniel says that he wants to include his staff when he attempts to implement a new system or implement a new program. "I never want to put them aside when I'm developing a vision. So I start

with them" (Interview). Daniel believes that the best way to get his teachers invested in the school's vision is to include them in the process.

This aligns closely with Fred's experiences with creating a shared vision in his school. Fred says, "if you ask for staff feedback and you ignore it, you may as well just make the decision." (Interview). Fred spoke to the value of having a shared vision because he says if not everyone is on the same page, then "you are going to have a problem" (Interview). The participants emphasized that it is essential that staff are included and invested in the school's vision.

Safety in the Principal Trust Experience

Finally, the last code that emerged during data analysis was the concept of safety, which included both physical and emotional safety. Most of the data that appeared on this topic was related to covid-19 safety protocols, but each participant spoke to how the covid-19 pandemic challenged the trust within their school. Brenda stressed the importance of having "safety and security all the way up." (Interview), stating that the entire community must be committed to the same safety and security goals. Chris shared her experience with staff who chose to stay home during the school year for health reasons and expressed that ensuring a safe environment was essential to maintaining the trust of both her team and the families who sent their students to the school.

On the day of our interview, Daniel had an experience with a student and another staff member; throughout the interview, he mentioned multiple times how important it was to make sure that your staff feels safe physically and psychologically. To protect the privacy of the student, I will not include the details of the interaction. Still, the staff

member involved was deeply troubled by what he had witnessed, and Daniel appeared distracted throughout our interview. It was evident that Daniel was concerned about his staff members' mental health; this speaks to his experience with trust and ensuring that his teachers feel both physically and psychologically safe. The following section will present data that emerged during focused coding for the second research question.

Research Question 2: How do leaders generate trust relationships?

Research question two looked more specifically at leaders' steps to generate trust with those they lead. The resulting data will again be presented first with the data from the survey. Then the codes and categories that emerged during focused coding will be discussed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data that presented itself during the data analysis phases.

Survey Results of How Leaders Generate Trust

The questions from the survey did not directly ask questions about how leaders generate trust; upon coding, four questions indicated that leaders who had developed trust with their staff would hold certain beliefs about their team. I used these questions to guide the data analysis of research question two. See Table 4.2 for more information about the research questions and the participants' answers.

Table 4.2

Survey Results: How do Leaders Generate Trust?

	Question 3: Teachers in the school are candid with me	Question 6: I have faith in the integrity of my teachers	Question 8: I believe in my teachers.	Question 14: When teachers in this school tell you something you can believe it.
Andrew	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Brenda	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Chris	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
Daniel	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
Edward	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Somewhat agree
Fred	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

The first survey question that aligned with research question two was, "teachers in the school are candid with me." This survey question aligned as it demonstrates that leaders who have generated trust with their staff can receive candid feedback from their staff. All six participants indicated that the teachers they work with would engage in honest and open dialogue with their leader. Tschannen-Moran (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b) listed honesty and openness as two of her five components of trust. If leaders did not cultivate trust with their staff, they would engage in self-protective strategies, and openness and honesty would not be present in the school.

The next question that aligned with the second research question was about a leader's faith in the integrity of their teachers. Four of the participants stated that they strongly agreed, and two of the participants indicated that they agreed with the question. This question was included as an indicator of how leaders viewed the professionalism of the teachers that they lead. This question was included based on the research conducted

by Bryk & Schneider (Bryk & Schneider, 2002b). Bryk and Schneider identified four components of trust; integrity was one of the components included. Leaders who extend trust to their teachers need to have faith in the integrity of their teachers to foster trust with those they lead. This question was included to understand how leaders perceived the teachers they work with as a basal to understanding how leaders generated trust.

The next question included in the analysis for research question two asked leaders to reflect on whether the participants believed in the teachers they lead. All six participants stated that they strongly agreed with the question; this indicates that these leaders are invested in generating trust with their teachers and will make a conscious effort to cultivate further trust.

Finally, the last question included for research question two asked leaders to reflect on the information they receive from their teachers. Specifically, they were asked when teachers in this school tell you something you can believe it. Three of the participants stated that they strongly agreed, two participants said they agreed, and one participant said they somewhat agreed. This question also helps establish leaders' perceptions of their staff before engaging in data analysis that explains how leaders generate trust with their staff.

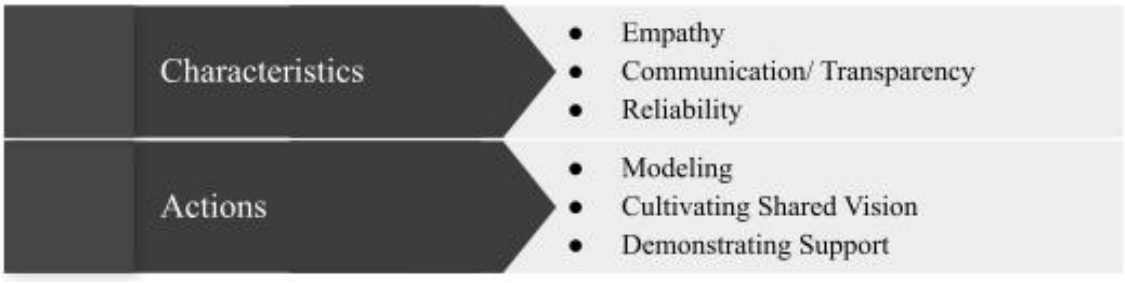
Understanding the survey results provides additional data to validate what leaders shared in their interviews about how they generate trust in their schools. These survey questions help explain how leaders view the trust they have with their staff, and the upcoming codes will provide further evidence that describes how leaders generate trust with their staff.

Codes Related of How Leaders Generate Trust

One of the quotes that stood out from the data collection is an excellent metaphor for why trust is essential. Chris shared this feedback early in our first interview, stating that "you've got to put the trust coins in before you start withdrawing them. And so, I made sure that the bank account is really solid, to the best of my ability" (Interview). This metaphor comparing trust to a bank account demonstrates the value of establishing trust before you need to have difficult conversations, just as a bank would require you to have money in your account before you can spend that money. This quote introduces why trust is so important, however in the following paragraphs, I will detail what was discovered in the data about how leaders generate trust with those they lead. I present the data in two different categories, first are the characteristics that leaders demonstrate that aid in developing trust with those they lead. The second category details the actions leaders take to generate trust. Please reference Figure 4.3 for a graphic from my memos of how I coded the data and present the findings in this section.

Figure 4.3

Codes in Generating Trust



Empathy in Generating Trust

The first characteristic that presented itself in focused coding was empathy. There were many different examples of teachers demonstrating empathy with the principal and principals showing empathy with their teachers throughout the interviews. However, a few pieces of data stood out and created a specific category of leaders demonstrating empathy with those they lead.

During our interview, Edward shared his experience with empathy when generating trust with his teachers. Edward shared that he uses both his own experience and his knowledge of his staff to lean into empathy. Edward shared how he uses empathy to understand experiences and decide what is best for his students. "I tap into those past experiences to really build deep empathy and strategic thought about planning what is best for students" (Interview). Edward says that he generates trust through empathy by making sure that his staff knows that he "ha[s] your best interests at heart…. I'm coming from a place of love and connectivity" (Interview).

In the last research question, I shared Fred's story about seeing the individual's humanity and setting aside systems to meet the needs of the individual. In this experience, Fred shared that the son of one of his teachers had been injured, not only did he take time to see the urgency of the situation and help his teacher get what he needed. He also shared the importance of making sure that person was alright. In this experience, Fred shared empathy with his teacher who was worried about his child. For Fred empathy means doing what is best for the people around you and making sure they have what they

need to show up and if that means checking in or covering a class so they can take care of their family, then that's what he does.

Reliability in Generating Trust

Reliability was a category that emerged during focused coding. Reliability came up during the literature review as one of the components of trust. Both Tschannen-Moran (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b) and Feltman (2009) assert that reliability is necessary for trust. Tschannen-Moran described reliability as following through on decisions and promises; while Feltman cautions that reliability is important, it can be precarious as different people interpret reliability in different ways depending on their interpretation. What was clear from the data that emerged was that all the participants discussed reliability to lead their school and generate trust.

Chris provided a few examples of demonstrating reliability within her school community. Chris shared experiences where she shows up and steps in to help where help is needed. She generates trust through reliability; for example, Chris described a system in place at their school where staff opens the car doors at school in the morning to greet the students. While there is a teacher rotation, she welcomes students and families every morning. Chris described this example as one way she shows up to support the students and their families and her teachers, who are also greeting families every morning.

Another example Chris described was stepping in to serve food to the families during their annual Thanksgiving celebration. Chris reported that this small act had a significant impact on her staff; after the Thanksgiving celebration, she noticed that more of her team volunteered to step up and help for other events. Finally, she also described

the culture of being present in classrooms. Chris reports that she tries to make it into every classroom at least once a week. She noted that teachers seemed concerned about why she was coming in at first, but after many years, Chris's effort to visit classrooms has built trust with teachers. She reported that teachers know that they can seek feedback about student behavior because she has been present in the classroom to observe these behaviors. While each of these actions may seem small, Chris believes that by showing up and doing small things consistently, she is cultivating an environment within her school where teachers know what to expect from their leader.

Brenda discussed her experience moving from one school to another as an example of how reliability helped cultivate trust. Brenda reports that when she moved from her district position to the school she now works at, the leaders she worked with placed her at her current school because of the reliability she had demonstrated over the years. She also reported that colleagues from her new school had consulted staff from her former schools seeking information. While she did not have trust with her new team, her reputation for reliability followed her into her new school and laid the framework for developing trust in a new place.

Reliability for these participants also included following through on accountability. Fred shared the following about the value of holding people accountable "no one wants to work with a weak teammate…. The staff trusts you to hold people accountable" (Interview). Fred described having difficult conversations with one of his teachers about that teacher's poor performance. While he acknowledges that having conversations about accountability is challenging, he realizes that it is his job to follow

through on keeping the team on the same page as the leader. By engaging in conversations about teacher performance, he cultivated more trust with the other teachers on his staff.

Chris also shared her perspective of holding teachers accountable. Chris shared a story where she had to have many difficult conversations with a teacher who disagreed with the school's vision, the vision the rest of the staff had committed to. Eventually, Chris had to have the conversation about placement, and while she was worried about how this would impact the trust in her building, what she reported was that "weeding out folks that weren't necessarily there for the right reason, built a lot of consensus with the rest of the staff" (Interview). What Chris discovered was that her staff wanted her to be reliable when holding people accountable to the school's shared vision. For leaders, reliability includes both small examples of showing up every day and following through on difficult conversations that keep the school or an individual from being a part of the school's vision.

Communication in Generating Trust

Another characteristic that emerged during focused coding about how leaders generate trust was leaders who engage in communication. What I discovered in this code is that communication is both a characteristic and an action. Leaders who thoughtfully engage in generating trust with their teachers want to be clear with their teachers, but they must also model and engage in the practice of communication as well.

Brenda shared that for her, communication includes speaking her truth. One of the ways she tries to be reliable and make sure that her communication is clear and

transparent is by speaking her truth. By creating an expectation for her staff that she will always be truthful, her staff knows what to expect and knows that she will be as transparent with her communication as she can. Brenda shares, "I'm a person who believes in telling the truth. I tell people, just tell me whatever it is, and we'll get through it." (Interview) If people don't feel that they can speak freely and trust that their leader is truthful, they are more likely to engage in self-protective factors. Speaking truth leads to improved communication within the school community.

Another example of how important truth is to building trust was discussed in Chris's interview. Chris shared a story about a time at her school when building morale was very low. She knew something was bothering the staff, so she asked them to write their fears down. After completing this activity, Chris shared that she discovered that "letting people speak their truth really builds trust" (Interview). She reports that in the weeks following their truth-telling activity, multiple teachers came to her and expressed that they were glad they had the opportunity to speak their truth. By opening the door to let the truth come out, the school community could move forward, and Chris reported that they have more open conversations now.

Another piece of evidence that Chris shared was acknowledging when communication may not be clear. Chris says one of the things she is very candid about is that she's not always clear with her communication. Acknowledging that clear communication is an area of growth has helped her build trust with her colleagues. Chris states that she wants to be clear but realizes that it's not a strength. To make sure her communication is clear, she asks people to hold her accountable for clear communication

"if something doesn't make sense, tell me" (Interview). Chris understands the damage that can be done to trust if communication breaks down; therefore she addresses an area of growth and asks her staff to help hold her accountable to ensure clear communication.

Daniel also talked about communication as means to generate trust with his staff. Daniel uses communication to help clarify why he is implementing systems and structures. Daniel reports that he is very intentional when he explains new systems; this transparency opens a conversation and provides an opportunity for his staff to ask questions. This attempt to provide clear communication helps create transparency and generates trust with his staff. Additionally, when Daniel is responding to feedback he has received from teachers, he reports that he tries to be very clear about interpreting the feedback. Still, if he cannot meet their expectations, he shares that he tries "to be transparent. I tell them "Hey guys, this time I couldn't make it exactly the way you thought I should, but this is what I tried." (Interview) Daniel shared that he wants his staff to understand that he is trying to be open to their feedback but that sometimes he cannot meet their expectations. He can communicate his intentions by demonstrating humility and honesty, thus building trust with his staff.

Edward presented a different side of communication. While leaders can make sure they are clear, one thing that can easily be forgotten is the importance of listening. Edward believes that "one thing that's universal is active listening" (Interview), communication is both given and received, and Edward believes that actively listening to his teachers generates as much trust as ensuring that his communication is clear. Taking the time to listen to those he leads helped him gain a deeper level of understanding for

who the individual is and build their relationship; when his teachers feel that they have been heard, they are more likely to trust their leader in the future.

Other categories that developed during coding could be described as a leaders' specific actions to generate trust with their teachers. These actions include modeling expectations, developing shared leadership, and providing support to teachers who need it. In the following paragraphs, I will present the findings that emerged during coding that demonstrated these categories.

Modeling to Generate Trust

Modeling was a category that emerged; what was discovered was that those leaders who generate trust with their staff model trusting behaviors with their staff. Each leader approached modeling in their own way; however, what was evident was that if they expected staff to engage in trust, they had to model those behaviors to staff from the leadership role. Edward's experience with modeling trust was demonstrated in how he approaches conversations around equity in his school. Edward shared his experiences with integrating equity groups within his school. He reported that "There [was] some hesitation with everyone ... but eventually, I think through modeling and encouragement we have smaller equity groups within our culture work that really fosters and takes on the identity and values of the school" (Interview). Edward shared that he had to call out his discomfort and identity when engaging in difficult conversations. Over the last few years, he has observed that more teachers are willing to engage in uncomfortable conversations. Edward reports that leaning into tough conversations is now a norm at his school.

Daniel's experience described another example of modeling. Daniel reported that his school implemented a social-emotional curriculum that helped students respond to challenging situations. One of the prompts the curriculum recommended was the statement "Can I problem-solve with you" Daniel shared that he started using this phrase with his students and staff. He knew this was impacting his team one day when staff members began coming to him using the prompt "Can I problem-solve with you?" to discuss concerns within the school. Daniel observed the shift in culture as adults started engaging in the practice of asking for help; by modeling the behavior he wanted to see in his students, his staff developed the same behaviors and were able to ask for support when they needed it from their principal.

Fred also shared how a system that the staff implemented at their school impacted the trust held within his team. Fred reported that teachers begin their days with "connection circles," a place to connect and develop trust with their students. Fred said that he wanted to create a connection circle for his staff. He reported that "this stuff is really good for teachers too" (Interview). Now that they have implemented a connection circle for the team, he notes that "we talk a lot, openly." (Interview). Having a defined place to speak candidly with one another has created a place of trust with staff and students. Another example of how Fred models for his staff is when he apologizes. Fred says, "Always apologize, you're going to make mistakes own it. Own it." (Interview). Fred says that apologizing is essential to honesty and communication, but modeling the apology teaches those he leads that it is okay to make mistakes. When they can speak about their mistakes openly, they create a deeper level of trust.

Shared Vision to Generate Trust

Cultivating a strong shared vision is another one of the categories that developed throughout data analysis; within this category, some of the codes that were noted included the use of distributive leadership, empowering teachers, and leaning into teacher strengths. These codes contributed to how leaders cultivate a shared vision within their school, but having a shared vision generates deeper levels of trust at schools.

Fred shared that his reason for creating a shared vision is to ensure that everyone is working toward the same goal. Fred reports that they take five days every year to define the school's culture and explain why they intentionally create the culture they have established over the years. He explains, "a huge piece to building your school's capacity for trust is, if everybody's not on the same page, you are going to have a problem" (Interview). Fred wants his staff to know and understand the school's culture to ensure he takes the time necessary to create an understanding of the school vision. He trusts that he has hired qualified and competent educators, so he spends less time on the logistics of teaching at the beginning of the year and invests more of their staff development time in cultivating a clear vision and strong school culture. Fred acknowledged that he works with a small staff, and he can meet with teachers with more frequency, but that does not discount the effort leaders make to create a shared vision within their school; in the next few paragraphs, I present data that explains how leaders who have larger teams create a shared vision at their schools.

Leaders who work at larger schools employ strategies that emerged as codes, including distributive leadership, empowering teachers, and leaning into teacher

strengths. Andrew and Daniel both spoke about the importance of using distributive leadership to cultivate a shared vision within their school. Distributed leadership is described as a team of leaders representing the larger community acting as an instructional leadership team. The purpose of using distributed leadership is to build the capacity of teachers and create collective responsibility. Distributed leadership is not designed to "lighten the load" of the principal. Rather, when done intentionally, distributive leadership utilizes the expertise of other people in the building to improve educational outcomes for students.

Daniel reports that he works closely with his instructional leadership team to discuss how they will provide "the same support no matter who the leader is." (Interview). By using distributed leadership, he can provide individualized support for all the teachers in his building. As an instructional leadership team, they work to guarantee that the needs of the staff are being met and that they are in line with the school's vision. Daniel's comment that his team will receive the same support helps create a shared vision and builds more transparency as staff knows what to expect, and ultimately this builds deeper levels of trust.

Andrew also employs distributive leadership in his school. As mentioned previously, Andrew has worked with the same staff for many years and has found that "shared decision making and shared leadership is definitely an important piece of building staff trust" (Interview). Andrew specifically spoke to shared decision-making as a means to generate trust with his teachers. Andrew reported that he learned a long time ago that the best way to get teachers invested in the school's vision is to ask them for

their feedback. While he acknowledges that not every decision can be made with shared decision making, having teacher input has significantly impacted how the staff works collaboratively to provide a better education for their students and has resulted in deep levels of trust among the staff.

Another topic discovered during analysis was identifying teacher strengths and utilizing those strengths to improve the school community. Distributed leadership identifies teachers with specific skill sets and uses those skills to benefit the school community. Andrew shared his views of using the strengths of his teachers to generate trust and improve the school community.

> "I think that if you really identify the strengths in people, and then you try very hard to give them ways to grow in those strengths and bring those strengths to the organization, then that translates into trust because you learn to trust those strengths and you learn to trust the different attributes people have that they can bring to the organization" (Interview).

Andrew references examples where he has empowered teachers to utilize their strengths. One example was inviting a staff member to facilitate their staff meetings. The teacher has been facilitating staff meetings for a long time and other teachers trust that when she is the facilitator, they know they are going to get something constructive out of their time. Another example he provided was having two teachers who demonstrated strengths in creating schedules. These two individuals work together to seek his feedback, as the leader, but also the feedback of the other teachers, and create schedules that best meet the needs of the school. Andrew says that by empowering teachers to use their strengths he

has not only developed trust with them, but they have developed trust with other colleagues in their building.

Fred also has his experience with supporting teachers by encouraging them to utilize their strengths. Fred's experience leading an alternative school taught him that he needed to engage with his students differently, so as he started to think about how he would engage his diverse learners he realized that he already had staff with unique skill sets. Fred decided that he would work with teachers to help them figure out how to teach to their passion and engage students by using their strengths and areas of interest. By encouraging his staff to teach to their strengths and passions, the staff found that students were more engaged in the course work, they started showing up more consistently and the teachers reported deeper relationships with their students. This in turn had an impact on the staff, as they felt that they had the autonomy to engage students in diverse ways, and Fred reports that now when teachers have an idea, they feel comfortable approaching him.

Providing Support to Generate Trust

Leaders also expressed support for their teachers as a method of generating trust. Providing support for teachers has multiple benefits including improved teaching practices, leading to improved learning outcomes, developing relationships and trust with staff, and more. How leaders demonstrated their support looked different at every school, it also looked different with the individuals these principals were leading. What did emerge in data analysis was the value of providing support that was individualized to the needs of the teachers.

One of the topics discussed by multiple participants was the idea of coaching. Multiple schools engaged in thoughtful coaching to support teachers. Some schools used an in-school coaching model using distributive leadership while other schools used coaches from outside the building and one school used both in-school coaches and reached out to district or private support depending on the level of support that was warranted.

Daniel reported that his reason for using coaching to support his teachers is that he acknowledges he cannot be an expert at everything, however, he "want[s] to be useful, I want to be an instrument, that gets them what they need" (Interview). Daniel uses coaches to support his teachers because he cannot provide them with everything that they need. Daniel's school relies on the distributive model to empower teachers. Daniel reports "we have leaders in place to coach and develop their skills." And reports that "our staff trusts the process" (Interview). Daniel also reports that he tries to support his teachers with whatever they need help with. Examples that Daniel listed included help with lesson planning, data analysis, making parent phone calls, and even home visits. After returning to full in-person teaching, after the covid-19 lockdown, Daniel said that his teachers reported an interest in wanting to reach out to families and meet them in their homes. In response to the request by his teachers, he has arranged to make one home visit a week with any teacher who asks him. He reports that this has had a significant impact on the relationships he has cultivated with families, and it has fostered deeper levels of trust with his teachers. Daniel reports that he looks forward to the time he gets speaking with his teacher and supporting their role as a teacher with the families.

Edward spoke about how he used support from outside the building to meet his teachers' needs. Edward wanted to provide support specifically focused on engaging in equitable teaching practices. He reached out to a local university and worked with them to support his teachers. He provided teachers with the opportunity to receive one-on-one coaching; through modeling around how to set up equitable classroom routines and individual coaching on reflecting on their equity philosophy and teaching practices. Edward reported that "We started seeing a decline in negative interactions, we really started seeing people taking professional learning and implementing it the next day" (Interview). Teachers implemented new practices, but they were also more willing to engage in equity work within the school. By collaborating with a local institution, Edward was able to provide support for his teachers on a delicate subject that he knew he needed help with. Rather than trying to forge ahead alone, he accessed resources around him, and his school has responded by engaging more thoughtfully in the equity conversations and planning within his building.

Brenda shared an example of how she supports her staff on a very personal level. During covid-19, one of her teachers reached out to her and expressed that she was struggling to manage the increase in stress and managing her familial expectations. Brenda was concerned for this teacher but recognized that she did not have the skills necessary to help her teacher. Wanting to protect the teacher's privacy, she reached out to district individuals for support and resources. Brenda reports that she goes out of her way to help her teachers, whether it's personal or professional because she wants "to make sure that you're supported and that you're going to be successful" (Interview)

What also was clear is that providing coaching and resources to teachers is only one part of supporting teachers. Both Chris and Edward shared the value of supporting teachers in their professional growth. Chris said that she believes in helping teachers grow and part of her responsibility is to empower them. While Edward shared that "you have to hype up your teachers, you have to be their biggest fan" (Interview). Edward shared that he learned the value of this while he was still teaching and was nervous about moving into a leadership role. He reported that his principal was why he ultimately decided to move into educational leadership. His principal's unwavering support gave him the confidence to apply. He also notes that he still has a very close relationship with that former principal and wants to support the teachers he leads in the same way.

The last code that I present emerged as leaders reported why they took the time to cultivate solid trust-based relationships with their staff. Important implications emerged around what leaders observed within their school community and the staff, specifically when they made a conscious effort to cultivate an environment of trust. Daniel reported lower levels of anxiety due to his efforts to develop trust in his school. Specifically, Daniel said that when he and his instructional leadership team walk into classrooms or engage in coaching conversations, they have observed lower anxiety levels. Rather than teachers feeling nervous, they are open to feedback which he reports is ultimately best for supporting student learning.

Chris reported that one of the benefits she has observed within her school is that when new staff members are brought into the community, they feel more welcome, and the rest of the community "quickly bring new people on board" (Interview). Chris reports

a culture of acceptance and trust within her school community, and those new teachers learn that being open is a part of the school's culture.

Finally, Fred discussed the importance of school culture on overall achievement in a school. Fred began his principal role at a low-performing school, and he stresses the importance of school culture. He states, "Culture eats instruction for breakfast. Your culture in the community of a school and trust and ability to express vulnerability trumps everything" (Interview). Fred reports that you cannot expect students to be academically successful without having a positive school culture. By intentionally cultivating trust within his school community, he was able to turn his school around from low performing to high performing in a matter of a few years.

What is evident from the data and the codes discussed in the second research question is that there are many different approaches to generating trust. Different leaders lean into various strategies, and different teachers will receive methods differently. The data presented in this research question provide a comprehensive examination of how different leaders generate trust in their communities. Chapter five will provide an in-depth discussion on trust development in leadership.

Research Question 3: If Vulnerability is at the Root of Trust, as Researchers Suggest, How do Leaders Experience Vulnerability in Trust Relationships at Schools?

The third and final research question was designed to explore how leaders experience vulnerability in their role as principals. The resulting data will be presented first with the data from the survey. Then the codes and categories that emerged during

focused coding will be discussed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data that presented itself during the analysis phases. The data presented below is best categorized as a process to understand how leaders experience trust. As I coded the data, I found that while these participants share vulnerability with those they lead, there are challenges to sharing that vulnerability. After exploring the data that emerged specific to the challenges of sharing vulnerability, I present data from leaders about how they combat the challenges and lean into vulnerable situations. The final code that emerged was the impact vulnerability had on them as individuals and how they perceived the impact on their school community. Please reference Figure 4.4 for a visual representation of how the data is presented for this research question.

Survey Results for Vulnerability Experience

As this research question was designed to explore the leaders' experience with vulnerability, I did not expect that the principal trust survey would have questions specific to vulnerability. This explains why only one survey question is included in the survey part of the data analysis for this research question. Brown defines vulnerability as "the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" (2018, p.19). I used this definition to determine which survey questions aligned with this definition.

Table 4.3

Survey results: How do Leaders Experience Vulnerability?

	Question 15: Even in difficult situations, I can depend on my teachers.
Andrew	Agree
Brenda	Strongly Agree
Chris	Strongly Agree
Daniel	Strongly Agree
Edward	Agree
Fred	Strongly Agree

The question that addressed this definition the most was, "Even in difficult situations, I can depend on my teachers." Difficult situations are fraught with uncertainty and emotional exposure. How leaders answered this question provides more data about how leaders experience vulnerability with their staff. All six participants reported that they could depend on their teachers in a difficult situation. Four of the participants said that they strongly agreed with this question. Table 4.3 has a detailed breakdown of how each participant answered this question. Understanding how leaders perceive their teachers under challenging situations is imperative to understanding how leaders experience vulnerability in their schools. If leaders disagreed with this question, it would be difficult to validate their experiences with vulnerability as they would most likely engage in protective measures if they did not believe they could depend on their teachers in difficult situations. This survey question provides a foundation for whether leaders are

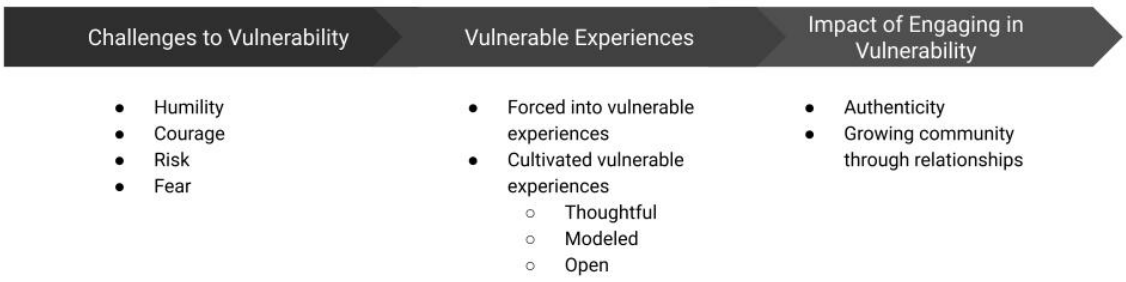
willing to engage in sharing their vulnerability. In the next section, I explore the codes that emerged that answered this research question.

Codes Related to Vulnerability Data

As mentioned at the beginning of this research question, I discovered during focused coding that three codes explained how leaders experience vulnerability in their schools. The first code describes the challenges leaders face when they decided to share their vulnerability with their staff. Once leaders have engaged in sharing their vulnerability, the category that emerged explores the data that explains how leaders experience their vulnerability with their team. Finally, the last category is how sharing their vulnerability with their staff has impacted their staff as a collective and as individuals. Figure 4.4 shows how the data is presented in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Figure 4.4

Codes for Experiencing Vulnerability



Brenda shared the first piece of data that stood out during focused coding. Brenda stated that "All good leaders need to be vulnerable and need to really understand the strength in building relationships and trust." (Interview). During the literature review, researchers spoke about the importance of engaging in vulnerability. Brown states that

leaders can build connections and strengthen teams that engage in vulnerability (2018). Bruck, Scholl, and Bless (2018) reported that in their research, vulnerability is viewed positively by others and that leaders should strive to find the courage to be vulnerable in front of others. Finally, Bunker (1997) found that there is great power in vulnerability as it opens the door to connecting with others. Brenda's statement about understanding the strength in vulnerability is supported by the researchers who have studied vulnerability. However, what was apparent during the data analysis is that being vulnerable is not easy and requires courage.

Challenges to Vulnerability

Most of my participants shared challenges expressing vulnerability with their staff. These participants cited various reasons that they found sharing vulnerability challenging. More than one participant referenced that sharing vulnerability requires humility, a skill that requires leaders to remove their protective barriers and open themselves up to judgment. Chris states that "being vulnerable takes courage" (Interview) that taking the risk to open yourself up to criticism requires one to be courageous. In the following paragraphs, I explore the data that emerged about why sharing vulnerability is so challenging.

Edward shares that he struggles with vulnerability because "we don't live in a world that fosters dynamic vulnerability." (Interview) Mcleod (2015) suggests in her research that one of the challenges to demonstrating vulnerability is that to truly be vulnerable with another, we open ourselves up to the risk of betrayal. This potential risk makes people closely evaluate whether to share their vulnerability with others; if

individuals decide that it is not worth the risk, they lose an opportunity to develop trust with others.

Chris also struggles to share her vulnerability in front of her staff because she is worried about how her staff will perceive her. Chris shared that she worries that her teachers are "going to think "oh she's such a wimp" (Interview) but then reported that when she did share her feelings during a difficult time, she said that they found it more of a strength. This authentic expression of why she hesitates to share her vulnerability is one example of her fears. As the building leader, she wants people to look to her for strength and worries that her team may view her as weak if she shares her emotions.

Daniel shared his challenges to express his vulnerability. Daniel spoke about the challenges he encountered leading during the covid-19 pandemic. He admitted that he had felt internal pressure to be the infallible leader that he believes his teachers want him to be. He reported that the pressure came from within himself, that he didn't want to let his teachers down. Eventually, he expressed his feelings to his teachers and told them, "I'm not sure if this is the best way" (Interview). Daniel was worried about how his teachers would view him if he admitted that he didn't know the best way to handle this difficult time.

Edward also shared that from his experience, sharing vulnerability is complicated based on past experiences. Edward shared that "some people are really scared of diving into that vulnerable work because of their past experiences." (Interview) This connects to Baier's (1986) research that rebuilding trust is difficult. Past experiences where an individual shared their vulnerability and the receiver caused them harm will make that

person less likely to share their vulnerability with others in the future. It is important to understand the context as to why vulnerability is so challenging so that in the following category, we can appreciate how leaders overcome their hesitation and lean into vulnerability.

Leaders' Experiences with Vulnerability

One of the categories that emerged in research question three was how leaders engage in vulnerability. There seemed to be two different ways leaders approached vulnerability in their schools. Some instances resulted from leaders being thrust into situations that forced them to engage with their vulnerability. In contrast, other situations allowed leaders to cultivate and model vulnerability in their schools intentionally. Regardless of the method, both ways taught these individuals vital lessons about the value of sharing vulnerability in their school to further strengthen the relationships and trust with those they lead.

Three participants shared their experiences where vulnerability was brought upon them through a challenging event. In the following paragraphs, I will share the experiences of the three leaders and their reflections following their experience sharing vulnerability.

Fred shared a challenging time where a situation outside of his control forced him to show his vulnerability with his staff.

> "A student at our school came home …. and he found his dad dead, and he had no other person to—he had no other person to call. He called me. He had no family whatsoever. And the only family he did had had just passed away. And so, I had

to show up on-site, and I had to act as the parent of that child in that situation and help the child deal with the death of his only family member. And wondering where this kid was going to sleep that night and where—I mean, it was terrible… And I struggled with that personally for a while after that. And I just remember my staff helping me through that struggle. So yeah, we've got a great community of people who care about each other, and I mean, that's what you do." (Interview)

This experience forced Fred into a difficult situation that resulted in him sharing his vulnerability and relying on support from his staff. Through this tragedy, Fred had a choice to make. Fred could have put distance between his feelings and presented a mask for his team (Bunker, 1997), or he could choose to remove that protective mask and show his authentic feelings and risk rejection from his staff. Fred reported that upon reflection, for him and his school, "hardship [did] a lot of really great things" (Interview). Through this experience, his team was brought closer together and cultivated deeper levels of trust through shared vulnerability.

Chris also found herself in a vulnerable experience where her vulnerability was presented to the staff when she was trying to demonstrate her strength as a leader.

"When all of the school shootings began, it was tough. I mean, it is still tough each time it happens. For us, school shootings hit very close to home because we are just a few miles from [a school where a shooting took place], and one of my staff members was a student when the shooting happened and was stuck in the school waiting to be evacuated.

> When a school in close proximity had a shooting, I called the staff together to share their concerns and so that I could share all of the safety procedures we had in place. However, my sadness seeped through, and I could not hide it any longer. This sadness I ended up sharing was met with empathy and kindness. I had set out to try and make people feel safe, and it turned out to be them supporting me during a very stressful time." (Interview)

Chris reported that her experience sharing a vulnerable moment also brought her staff closer together. As she mentioned, her team responded to her vulnerability with empathy and kindness. Tschannen-Moran (2014) found in her research on trust that teachers hold more weight in benevolence, honesty, and openness. When Chris allowed herself to be vulnerable and share her grief with her staff, they responded with kindness because they observed their leader being open about her feelings. Ultimately this led to deeper levels of trust and connectivity within their school, even in a time of great challenge.

Daniel also shared a time when he was thrust into a vulnerable situation; his experience was different as it resulted from the actions of a member of his staff. Daniel was placed in an uncomfortable position that resulted in a vulnerable conversation with his leadership team and ultimately led to a stronger relationship.

> "A staff member who was … part of my leadership team. She was not in alignment with what we wanted to do for our … children. … She was not contributing much either. She was more stuck on being stubborn on, "I don't think this is the best way." ….. I walked in, and she was talking about me to the team, and I walked in….

> And I was paying attention to my emotions because I was very disappointed and very upset. …And then, after a week, I sent her an invite, and we sat down and talked, and she was very apologetic. …
>
> She decided to leave…that was a good learning experience for the whole leadership team because I wanted to make it clear that it is important to disagree … And it's pretty cool because the rest of my leadership team has been with me since I started, so it made our relationship better." (Interview)

Daniel's reflection of this situation was that serious situations cultivate vulnerable conversations. Daniel says that he could have chosen to ignore this embarrassing experience. Instead, he faced it head-on with his leadership team and reported that sharing his experience resulted in better relationships with his leadership team.

Each of these experiences had a significant impact on the leaders and the teams they lead. It is important to note that vulnerability research supports facing challenging situations with vulnerability as there is a cost to guarding oneself against showing vulnerability. Bunker's research suggested that the cost of not sharing vulnerability could result in the following ways: the individual could get stuck in the grief cycle, leaders may present to others as having no authenticity, which results in lower levels of trust and ultimately leads to anger and dysfunction on the staff (1997). Rather Tschannen-Moran (2014) and Bunker (1997) suggest that vulnerability is viewed positively by others. When leaders demonstrate vulnerability, this becomes a tool that helps leaders connect with those they lead.

While some situations will force leaders into vulnerable situations, most leaders prefer to cultivate and model vulnerability with their teachers intentionally. Rather than waiting until an event occurs, that places the leader in a position to decide to lean into vulnerability. Most leaders preferred to engage in vulnerability intentionally as they understood the value of building connections with others. In her research, Brown (2018) found that vulnerability is the root of love, belonging, joy, creativity, and innovation; leaders who want to foster this in their schools should engage in vulnerability.

Edward believes that a culture of vulnerability is necessary before schools engage in difficult conversations. He shares that "I started this work when I first got to [school] a little too soon before building that culture of vulnerability. And people started grabbing onto times in the past where it didn't work" (Interview). So, he stepped back and started focusing on the culture within the school, explicitly modeling vulnerability with his staff so that when they began engaging in conversations, it resulted in very open and honest conversations. Edward reported that he started calling out times when he was being vulnerable with his staff, particularly when he was engaging in conversations about race and equity in school. Over time he reported that his team engaged in vulnerable conversations with him. When staff started engaging in more vulnerable conversations, he also noted that his teachers were modeling vulnerability with their students. This cycle of modeling vulnerability connects to Brown's research about creating a space of love, belonging, joy, creativity, and innovation (2018).

Fred shared when he modeled vulnerability for both his students and his staff. He shared this story about how he modeled vulnerability to help shift the culture of his school.

> "I needed their help to help fix some of the things in our school that culturally weren't going well when we first started. I remember finding drugs in our school over and over again from students, and it brought me to tears. It was like, we are trying so hard to fix this place. And I remember being in tears in front of the students saying, "Is this who we want to be?" And everybody was like, "Wow, that was powerful and sincere." And I think people changed as a result of it." (Interview)

Fred shared that he felt as though he needed to show how much he cared at that time. He also reported that since his school was struggling with culture at the time, he had to place deep trust in both his students and staff that they wouldn't reject his demonstration of vulnerability, and when he did share his vulnerability, both his staff and students responded positively which helped contribute to the shift in culture in his school. Fred leaned into the connections he had with both his staff and students when he shared this vulnerable moment, and he was met with deeper connections as a result. Fred acknowledges that vulnerability is key, but he believes that there "has to be a connection before we turn to vulnerability." (Interview)

Daniel intentionally shared a personal experience with his staff that helped his team understand what was going on in his life and pulling his attention away.

> "I shared with my staff that my mom is close to dying of cancer…. When I shared that with my staff, they saw me very vulnerable. I was a mess; I was a wreck. I was crying… And they helped me with a fundraiser …I was able to fundraise a significant amount of money … So, my staff was right there with me, and they're asking me continuously about how she is doing" (Interview).

In Daniel's experience, he had already spent time cultivating solid relationships and trust with his staff. Still, when he chose to share the information about his mother, he felt a responsibility to help them understand him, and as he noted, his staff was supportive and helped him out by raising money for her care.

In this category, leaders shared how they experienced vulnerability with their staff. In some instances, vulnerability was thoughtfully and intentionally shared, and in other situations, vulnerability was thrust upon them due to circumstances out of their control. Leaders shared that sharing their vulnerability was met positively by their students and or staff in either situation. In the following category, I will share how leaders perceive the impact of vulnerability on themselves and within their school community.

Impact of Vulnerability on Principals

In this section of the findings, I explain the data that resulted in the final category that emerged during focused coding. This category materialized as leaders described the impact vulnerability has had on them and their school community. In the following paragraphs, I present the findings that explain how vulnerability has impacted the leaders and their schools.

Many of the participants shared the importance of being their true selves. Chris, Edward, and Daniel all shared the impact of vulnerability, allowing them to be themselves as authentic individuals who lead a school. Edward said it best when he said, "We cannot mask our identity to assimilate." (Interview). Edward shares his experience of applying for a principal position that he ultimately did not acquire; he reported that the community did not see him as someone who could lead their school. Upon reflection, Edward recounted that he was protecting his authentic self, to present an image he believed they wanted to see. From that experience, Edward learned that he needed to embrace his vulnerability and allow his teachers, students, and the school community to see the authentic person he is. Edward reports that this experience has helped him be a better, more authentic leader who teaches his staff and students to embrace their authentic selves.

Another example of the impact of vulnerability on his school is Edward's reflection about growing together as a community through vulnerability. As mentioned in Edward's background information, his passion for leadership is rooted in his experiences as a student in the district; he uses that experience to cultivate a shared vision for equity in his school. Edward made the following statement about the value of sharing vulnerability at his school "How can we deal with our past experiences that are reflecting within our own biases, and halting us from doing this work and how can we push forward?" (Interview). Edward shares that engaging in vulnerable conversations is how you reflect on your biases and move forward. Without this, individuals are halted, and the necessary growth for student success is also halted. For Edward, the impact of not

engaging in vulnerability means “continuing to force students to assimilate” (Interview) and denying them the right to be their authentic selves.

Chris also shared that the impact of being vulnerable has allowed her to connect with many different individuals on her staff. By embracing her authentic self and sharing her past experiences, she reports that she “was able to really connect with so many different individuals, like the custodial staff, the kitchen, the paraprofessionals, and the teachers.” Before being a teacher, Chris was a paraprofessional; she also grew up speaking Spanish, so by sharing her identity with her staff, not only was she being authentic she was also able to build strong connections within her school culture. Chris says that leaders need to “value students for their essence, their culture, their languages, and their families (Garcia &Guerra, 2004; Freire, 2015, Moll et al., 1992)” (Interview). For Chris sharing her vulnerability has allowed her to be herself and appreciate the individual values of her students and staff.

Daniel articulates that sharing vulnerability with his staff impacted his relationships with those he works with. In the last category, I shared his story about his mother, who was dying from cancer. As Daniel reflected on this experience, he shared how much of his personal history he has shared with his staff and that sharing these experiences have helped his team to understand how and why he leads the way he does and allowed him to lean on their support during this challenging stage of his life.

Fred shared that the impact of vulnerability for him was “started with one person who saw me for who I was and what I could be” (Interview). When sharing a personal experience with a colleague early in his professional career, he expressed that he felt

seen. For Fred, the impact of vulnerability allowed him to grow as an individual. As mentioned in Fred's narrative at the beginning of this chapter, Fred's journey being the "problem child" has led him to lead at an alternative school, he sees the potential in the children he works with, and he hopes that by modeling vulnerability he can help his students see their potential and grow to their most tremendous capacity as he was given the same opportunity.

Research question three looked at how school leaders experience vulnerability. What was discovered was that school leaders find vulnerability challenging because of concern about how they will be perceived and the challenge of confronting their fear that they will be rejected for sharing their fallibility. However, these participants engaged with their vulnerability in both forced and intentional ways despite the challenges. Leaders shared that regardless of the approach to sharing their vulnerability, they expressed advantages to sharing their vulnerability with their schools.

Summary

This chapter presented detailed data and explanations of the three research questions that guided this study, I also presented data from the survey and the interview data and codes that emerged during data analysis. Data was discussed that demonstrated how leaders experience trust and generate trust with those they lead, and finally, data was presented about leaders' experience with vulnerability. Within each of these research questions, I presented data and codes that appeared, including the value of relationships, the characteristics, and actions that lead to developing trust, and explored why leaders struggle to share their vulnerability as well as the impact of vulnerability on the

individual and the community when leaders engage in vulnerability. In the final chapter, I discuss the data and the conclusions for this research on trust and vulnerability in principal leadership.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

"This is inside out work.
We cannot lead where we won't go."
(Brown, 2018)

In this final chapter, I review this grounded theory research study and present a final discussion of what has been learned from this study. I review the findings from the research and conclude with the implications and suggest areas for future research. I begin this chapter with a review of the previous chapters as a reminder of the background to the problem, the research conducted in the literature review, and the research design before discussing the findings and implications.

Review of Literature

In the first chapter, I introduced the audience to the problem that grounded this research and the research questions. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) reminds us that the cost to low school culture is the potential for impatience and anxiety to spread throughout the community. The impact of poor school culture could ultimately negatively impact students and student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). In an effort to understand what impacts school culture, I looked to research to understand what impacts school cultures. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) theorize that trust has the most significant impact on school culture, citing four components that influence

school culture: rising expectations, greater levels of accountability, accommodating greater diversity, and communication of news.

The problem then is how do leaders cultivate trust in their schools. Meyer, Lefevre, & Robins (2017) suggest that leaders can develop more significant levels of trust by embracing their vulnerability to engage in difficult conversations. There is currently not enough research that explores vulnerability, especially vulnerability in leadership. As a reminder, this grounded theory study aims to examine the experiences of leaders who thoughtfully engage in relational trust and vulnerability, specifically looking at principals who serve in kindergarten through 12th-grade schools in an urban city in the Rocky Mountain West region.

In the literature review, I explored current research on the history of trust research, definitions of trust, implications of trust in education, and current research on vulnerability. My initial interest was in vulnerability; however, upon preliminary examination, I discovered that there is limited research on vulnerability. Vulnerability researchers Brecher (2017), Brown (2018), and Bunker (1997) all stressed that trust must be present for one to be willing to share vulnerability with another. Considering the lack of vulnerability research, I decided to include trust in my literature review. The history of trust then became the foundation of my research. In the following paragraphs, I summarize the key findings from each research topic before reviewing the methodology of this study.

The history of trust was the first topic I discussed in the literature review. Baier (1986) is the first researcher to conduct a formal study on trust. While philosophers

discussed trust as far back as Plato, how it was generated or what is required for trust to be present was not studied until Baier in the 1980s. Baier states in her research that for trust to be present, both parties must demonstrate goodwill towards the other. McGeer and Pettit (2017) postulate that the best way to improve the durability of trust is to extend trust to others, but that the degree of trust present is dependent on the relationship between both parties. Additionally, McGeer and Pettit assert that when individuals generate trust, cooperation is possible and develops relationships between the two parties.

The second area of focus of the literature examined how different researchers defined trust. I reviewed the trust components of Bryk & Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Feltman (2009). Bryk and Schneider theorize that there are four components of trust. These components include competence, respect, personal regard for others, and integrity. At the same time, Tschannen-Moran (2014) suggested five components necessary for trust to be present. Her components of trust include competence, reliability, benevolence, honesty, and openness. Finally, Feltman (2009) also cites four components of trust. Feltman's components include competence, reliability, care, and sincerity. The one-word present in each of the different definitions of trust was competence. I also saw similarities between benevolence, personal regard for others, and care. Together these researchers provided me with information that helped me understand what was necessary for trust to be present while understanding that there may be differences in what creates a foundation for trust as presented by the differences from each researcher.

The third topic discussed in the literature review was focused on the implications of trust in education. Bryk and Schneider (2002) remind us that the relationships present in schools ultimately define the success of schools and that trust is at the root of those relationships. Tschannen-Moran (2014) posits that if trust is at the heart of relationships, then it "must be conscientiously cultivated and sustained" (p.13). Therefore, leaders need to strive for authentic trust because it leads to greater levels of collaboration. These more profound levels of cooperation result from more robust communication between individuals, which results in a more effective team. The result of greater communication and collaboration ultimately results in improved student achievement. After presenting the research on the impact of trust in education, I discuss the research on vulnerability in leadership.

Finally, I reviewed the limited research available on vulnerability in research. Brown (2018) shares that historically, society has viewed vulnerability as something that should be hidden from public view. However, Brown argues that sharing one's vulnerability with another has the power to strengthen relationships. Bunker (1997) agrees and states that there is great power in vulnerability. That as leaders sharing vulnerability with another can lead to greater levels of trust.

My literature review explored the vulnerability research and found that there is not enough research on vulnerability in leadership, nor is there enough research on vulnerability in education. It was evident that not enough research has been conducted on vulnerability in educational leadership. In the following section, I present the summary

of the study, and I include a brief over of the research methodology and the methods used for his research.

Summary of Study

This dissertation was conducted as a grounded theory study. Charmaz (2006) reminds us that "grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them." (p.10). Much research has been conducted on the importance of trust in schools, but most of the research has been driven from the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents. There is limited research about the experiences of principals who engage in thoughtfully cultivating trust within their community. Additionally, researchers Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019) state that grounded theory research is best conducted when little is known about a phenomenon. The limited research available on vulnerability, specifically in educational leadership, provides an opportunity to understand the experiences of principals who thoughtfully engage in trust and vulnerability in their role as leaders.

Research Design

The research design for this grounded theory study was modeled after the constructivist philosophy of Charmaz (2006). I also included pieces from Glasser (1978)'s positivist philosophy through the incorporation of survey data. Surveys are not traditionally included in grounded theory research. Still, Glaser suggests that "all is data" (1978). The survey adapted from Tschannen-Moran's principal trust survey (1999) provided relevant data about the principal's trust perspective within their community. The

data included for this study included survey questions, two rounds of interviews, and memos written throughout the interview and data analysis phases.

For this study, I utilized two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews began with five open-ended questions to understand the participants' experience with trust and vulnerability. After conducting initial coding and focused coding from the first round of interviews, I developed twelve follow-up research questions rooted in the data from the initial interviews. I then conducted theoretical sampling (Morse & Clark, 2019) and returned to interview the same participants. The purpose of using theoretical sampling was to expand upon the participants' experiences to further the depth of understanding around trust and vulnerability in their roles as principals.

After conducting the second round of interviews, I conducted initial coding again. Following this process of initial codes, I then proceeded to perform focused coding and then theoretical coding. As I conducted coding, I utilized constant comparative analysis to compare data with other data, including interviews within and among participants, survey results compared to participant statements and data with the memos I wrote throughout data collection and analysis. Charmaz (2006) declares that constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to be reflexive in the data analysis and look for similarities and differences within the data. During focused coding, I created categories within each research question. Finally, I utilized theoretical coding to connect themes that emerged during focused coding.

Research Questions

The three research questions guiding this grounded theory study; these research questions were as follows:

1. How do principals experience trust in relationships?
2. How do leaders generate trust with those they lead?
3. If vulnerability is at the root of trust, as researchers suggest, how do leaders experience vulnerability in trust relationships at schools?

Participants

The participants for this study included six principals. While there is merit to including leaders' perspectives at all levels, I intentionally limited my research to principals as I wanted to understand the experiences of those individuals most responsible for the culture of a school. I also limited this research to six participants to include variability in experiences and data.

Most of the participants in the research from the literature review were limited to elementary schools with a student population of less than 300. I was interested in understanding more about the different experiences of leaders. Therefore, I included data from participants from diverse backgrounds, including school size, gender, race, school level, and experience levels. Except for school size, the participants in this research provided many different perspectives that provided me with a thorough understanding of the principals' experience when studying trust and vulnerability.

My participants included three elementary principals, one principal from a kindergarten through eighth-grade school, one middle school principal, and one high

school principal at an alternative school. Of my six participants, four were male, and two were female; their experience as principals ranged from four years to fifteen years. Additionally, my participants came from diverse racial backgrounds; two were black, two were Latinx, and two were white. I include the racial demographics as Tschannen-Moran (2014) noted that more diversity within a school makes trust more difficult to cultivate. One of the areas I was interested in studying for this research was trust at schools with population sizes greater than 300. Unfortunately, the largest school size in this study is less than 500 students. I see a need to understand the experiences of principals at schools with a student population greater than 500 in future research studies. Despite this limitation, my participants provide diverse perspectives about trust and vulnerability in their schools.

Data Collection Tools

The tools I used for data collection included a survey, two rounds of interviews, and memos written throughout the data collection and analysis process. The survey was the first data collection tool that I used. The survey was adapted from Tschannen-Moran's principal trust survey (1999). I used this survey to introduce the participants' perceptions of trust in their schools. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of the questions asked in the survey. This data source was then used to demonstrate validity to the participants' interview responses during data analysis.

After completing the survey, an initial interview was scheduled with each participant. In the first interview, I asked each participant five open-ended questions. These questions were to begin the conversations about their experiences with trust and

vulnerability. Questions from the initial interview can be found in Appendix B of this study. As the participants shared their experiences with trust and vulnerability, I asked probing questions to gain a more in-depth understanding. These interviews were conducted via Zoom©, and I uploaded the transcripts to Transcribeme!©. These transcripts became one piece of data used for data analysis.

Following the first round of initial and focused coding, I returned to the same six participants with twelve semi-structured questions. The questions used for the second round of interviews can be found in Appendix C. The purpose of conducting a second round of interviews was to expand on the topics and themes that emerged during the initial round of interviews. The use of theoretical sampling for this second round of interviews allowed me to distinguish any patterns present, confirm data presented in the initial interviews, link concepts, and it enabled me to reach saturation of data.

The final piece of data that I used for this dissertation was memos. Grounded theory researchers stress the importance of using memos as one piece of data in data collection and analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2006). Using memos in grounded theory allows the researcher to engage in reflexive practices. This includes the purpose of checking assumptions and biases and drawing connections as data develops. Memoing is a crucial part of any grounded theory research study and provided me with important reflections that helped me see themes and categories throughout the data collection and analysis phase.

Data Analysis

One of the most critical pieces to data analysis in a grounded theory study is constant comparative analysis. Charmaz (2006) cites that constant comparative analysis is the process of researchers making connections and analyzing data throughout. Constant comparative analysis with memos were the two pieces of data analysis that were conducted throughout the data collection and analysis phase.

Throughout data analysis, I conducted three rounds of coding. After the first round of interviews, I conducted initial and focused coding. Following this data analysis phase and returning for the second round of interviews, I ran initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Additionally, the survey results were studied to determine themes, validate findings from the interviews, and determine collective trends among the participants.

Charmaz (2006) states that initial coding aims to notice the initial ideas. I used Charmaz's coding strategy of coding words as actions during this process. Charmaz says that coding data as actions keeps the researcher from making assumptions about the data and grounds the researcher in the present data. After conducting initial coding from the first and second interviews, I ran comparative methods and compared data from each interview. Using comparative methods and memos allowed me to see gaps and themes in my research. These gaps allowed me to create follow-up interview questions better to understand the principal perspectives of trust and vulnerability.

During focused coding, I used the data from initial coding to create a sense of the presented data. Charmaz (2006) says that focused coding is more selective and

conceptual than initial coding. During the second round of data analysis, I conducted focused coding manually. I aligned the data from initial coding into the different research questions with one category that caught data that did not align with the research question. I found that focused coding by hand allowed me to create visuals of corresponding data. During this phase, memos proved an asset as I started constructing meaning from the codes. I wrote memos and drew visuals to help me see the connections within the data. As I coded, I went back to the initial data and compared the initial codes with the focused codes and my memos.

Finally, I moved into theoretical coding. Theoretical coding emerged naturally from focused coding. The more codes started to connect, the more I found that themes and categories emerged. Again, memos played a significant role in creating visual representations of theoretical coding as I compared data and checked my assumptions. Chapter four included visuals of the theoretical codes as they presented themselves from the data. In the next section, I review the findings that emerged from this study.

Findings

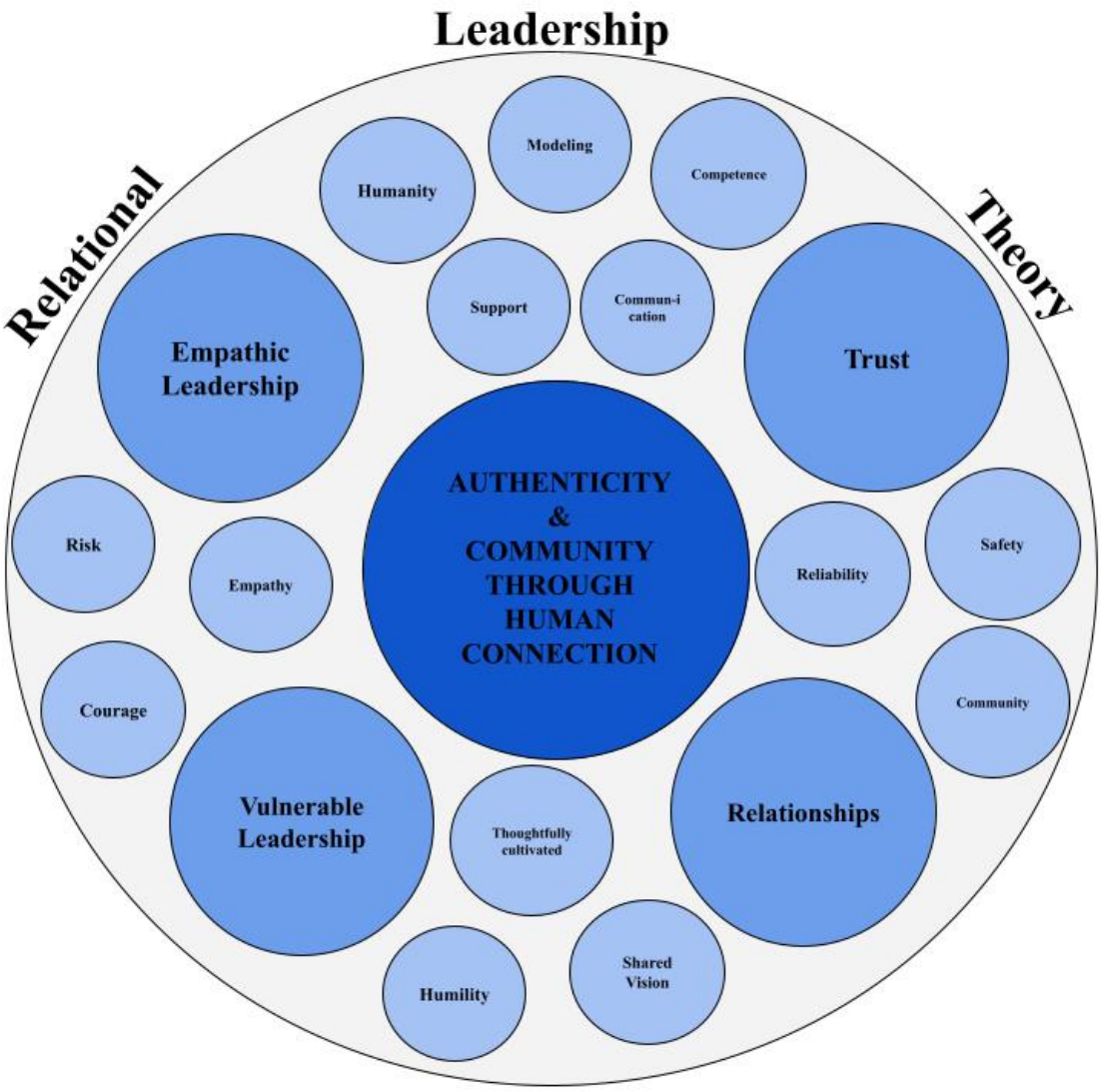
In the findings section of this chapter, I review the findings discovered in the previous chapter. This research aimed to understand the experiences of leaders who engage in trust and vulnerability in their leadership roles. Researchers note that trust is an essential piece of a school community and student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002b; Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014b; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). In the following section, I present the theories that emerged in the findings alongside a discussion of the connections from the findings presented in the data.

Figure 5.1 presents a visual representation of the connections between the data and the findings discussed in the previous chapter. I conclude this dissertation with the implications this research has for educational leaders and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Figure 5.1 presents the findings that emerged based on coding and data analysis. The outside of the circle is represented by the overarching theory that was discovered during data analysis. Within the large circle, there are four main categories that emerged from the data; relational leadership theory, trust, empathic leadership, and vulnerable leadership, these circles present the most significant components of the research. The small circles are subcategories that express the main categories. Finally, at the center of the circle, I present the impact of the findings as described by the participants in this grounded theory design.

Figure 5.1

Trust and Vulnerability in Relational Leadership Theory



This first research question aimed to understand how educational leaders experience trust with those they lead. The data shows that relationships are the most significant influencer for how leaders experience trust. There were subcategories within relationships; these included community, humanity, and the acknowledgment that trust is

cultivated over time. The findings of relationships and the subcategories within the relationship category were in harmony with relational leadership theory.

Relational Leadership Theory

The findings of this research study concluded that the theory that explains trust and vulnerability in educational leadership can be described as relational leadership theory. Hollander originally discovered relational leadership in 1958. Relational leadership theory is rooted in the relational process of people working together toward change (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Researchers Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) state that relational leadership theory has authentic leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership components. This theory includes features of trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The thematic category of relationships and the subcategories of community, humanity, and trust, cultivated over time, harmonize with relational leadership theory. Uhl- Bien (2006) stated that leadership involves interactions between humans. To have a highly successful organization, attention must be paid to the interpersonal relationships between the leader and those they lead. The leaders in this study stressed the value of relationships with those they lead as a means to experiencing trust. In effect, leaders who cultivate trust are engaging in the practices of relational leadership theory. Leaders interested in improving their organization's productivity need to pay more attention to the relationships with those they lead. Relational leadership Theory provides an encompassing theory that explains the experiences of the educational leaders in this study. The findings in this grounded theory reinforce the value of relationships in leadership and explore vulnerability and trust as

significant components of improving relationships. Uhl- Bien (2006) states that relational leadership places an emphasis on interpersonal relationships, the research in this grounded theory study explores how leaders experience trust and vulnerability in their roles. What emerged was the confirmed not only by the value of interpersonal relationships and but also through these relationships individuals connect with one another and are free to be their authentic selves.

Within relational leadership theory in this study, four different main categories emerged as detailed in Figure 5.1. These main categories are significant influencers on how leaders experience trust and vulnerability within relational leadership theory. Relationships, trust, empathic leadership, and vulnerable leadership are the four major influencers to relational leadership theory. I discuss each of these components and present supporting data to further explain their significance.

Relationships

The leaders in this study all addressed the value of having relationships with those they lead in their schools. The research from the literature review also supported the findings of relationships from this research study. Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that if high-quality social relationships are present, higher productivity levels are present. More than systems or curricula, the research from Bryk and Schneider suggests that relationships improve the productivity of a school. This was well supported by the data from the participants in this study. Leaders shared their perspectives of relationships in their experiences with trust. Fred stated the value of relationships in their community with the following quote.

> "Education is an art, but it's a human art. We're dealing with people. And as long as we're dealing with people, we have to practice good interpersonal skills, caring and compassion, kindness, empathy, and all those things. And if we do that, I think staff is willing to walk through fire for you whenever they know that you have their back." (Interview)

Fred shared that by cultivating relationships through good interpersonal skills, staff will support their leader, resulting in higher productivity levels, as Bryk and Schneider (2002) mentioned.

Bryk & Schneider (2002) also referenced that leaders who cultivate relationships "experience a social affiliation of personal meaning and value. Such actions invite reciprocation from others and thereby intensify the relational ties between them" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p.25). The leaders in this study shared how the relationships they have cultivated with their teachers have impacted how they experience trust and vulnerability in their roles, additionally, the value of relationships is stressed as one of the major influencing factors within relational leadership theory. Promoting relationships with those they lead invites a shared dedication to the relationship and improves loyalty to the trust relationship.

Trust

Trust was not only discussed in the description of relational leadership theory but was also a foundation for the literature review. Data in research and within the data from this grounded theory stress the connection between trust, vulnerability, and relational leadership theory. Cunliffe & Eriksen (2011) state in their research that trust is necessary

for relationships, they also stress that trust is necessary for people to feel that they can share themselves with their leader. Brenda stressed in her interview the value of having trust-based relationships when she said, "Relationship building is a big component of trust, if you don't have a relationship with someone, they're not going to be apt to tell you anything…". In this example, Brenda demonstrated her understanding of trust and relationships as crucial to leading. Brenda's quote provides perspective of why trust in relationships are important. It is important in schools, where unforeseen events can occur at any time, that staff feel they can communicate with their leader.

Chughati & Buckley (2009) stated that teachers who worry about the trustworthiness of their principal will engage in protective factors, and if teachers don't feel they can share information this impacts the quality of teaching and opportunities for growth for both the teacher and ultimately the students. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also stressed that trust cannot be taken for granted because "we cannot single-handedly create or sustain many of the things we care about most" (p.17). The participants in this study demonstrated the need to trust their teachers and intentionally cultivate their trust in return because they understood the significance of relying on one another to serve their school community. In chapter four, leaders shared how the different ways they tried to intentionally cultivate trust with those they lead, these categories will be discussed further below.

Empathic Leadership

Empathy was one of the first characteristics that emerged from the data in this research study. When I discovered relational leadership theory and the value it has to

how leaders experience trust, I found that the practice of empathic leadership is a component of relational leadership theory (Jian, 2021). Jian (2021) states in their research that "empathy is an essential ingredient to positive leadership outcomes" (p.1). The participants in this study showed empathy to those they lead. Edward stresses the importance of connecting with his teachers, while Daniel also stressed the value of empathy in his role as a leader. Fred also spoke about the importance of demonstrating empathy for his teachers when he spoke about how he prioritized the individual before making enforcing policies. These examples demonstrate how leaders lean into empathic leadership practices to cultivate trust within their community.

Leaders who want to cultivate trust with their teachers need to engage in empathy in their leadership practices. These findings are consistent with claims made by previous research. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) support the use of empathy because teachers who trust one another engage in "genuine collective work" (p.116). The leaders in this grounded theory study explicitly named that empathy is a part of their leadership strategies; empathic leadership practice calls out the need for empathy to be intentional and reciprocal (Jian, 2021). Researchers also state empathy must be reciprocal as it creates a 'mutual shaping of context" (Jian, 2021, p. 6); for leaders to cultivate relationships and generate trust, they must co-construct their relationships through empathy with those they lead. This was evidenced by the shared vulnerability these participants spoke about in their interviews. While leaders expressed the challenges to sharing their vulnerability, empathic leadership practices suggest that sharing this vulnerability develops mutual empathy with teachers.

Vulnerable Leadership

Vulnerable Leadership Theory is the final significant influencer within relational leadership theory in this study. The research presented in this study described the experiences of leaders who had engaged in expressing vulnerability with their teachers. Three of the participants shared experiences where they shared their vulnerability based on experiences that were out of their control. Participants also shared experiences where they intentionally shared their vulnerability in an effort to engage with those they lead in addressing a sensitive topic. Bunker (1997) states that when leaders demonstrate their vulnerability, it becomes a tool that helps leaders connect with others. The participants' experiences with demonstrating their vulnerability are in agreement with Bunker's research, as each participant stated that they felt a deeper level of connection with their staff when they expressed their vulnerability. While they all expressed that it required courage, the result was positive and cultivated greater levels of connectivity with the staff. Based on the experiences of these participants coupled with the research on vulnerability, relational leadership theory, and empathic leadership practices, I assert that sharing vulnerability with others creates reciprocal empathy, which improves relationships. This leads me to argue that vulnerable leadership is a component within relational leadership theory. How leaders choose to express their vulnerability cannot be defined in any "right way"; Edward reminds us that leaders must be willing to navigate the uncertainty and embrace the discomfort. Through this vulnerability, educational leaders and teachers develop stronger relationships. Vulnerable leadership provides a substantive theory in this study, in that similarities amongst participants were discovered

that demonstrates the significance of vulnerability in leadership (Mills et al., 2012). Participants also shared that the value of shared vulnerability results in more profound relationships.

The smallest circles of the visual in Figure 5.1 include the subcategories that emerged in the findings. These subcategories include the specific components that leaders shared that were analyzed as both traits and actions leaders demonstrated in their experiences generating trust and engaging in vulnerability. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the interactions between the subcategories from the findings and the connections these subcategories make to trust, relationships, empathic leadership, vulnerable leadership, and relational leadership theory.

Community

Community was one of the subcategories that emerged in the findings. The participants in this study stressed the importance of taking time to cultivate a community in their school. Fred shared how he intentionally sets aside time to cultivate a community with his new teachers at the beginning of the year, while Brenda stressed that the benefit of having a strong sense of community in her school has resulted in teachers being willing to step in and help each other out. Community is built on the foundation of relationships and trust and empathy. The participants in this study strive to build a community within their school to improve the relationships and trust so that they can collaborate and grow together.

Humanity

Humanity also emerged in the findings as a significant influencer to trust and relationships. Humanity is very closely related to empathy and empathic leadership practices as well. The participants in this study stressed the importance of seeing the human before the systems or the job description. Daniel spoke about his experiences of prioritizing the individuals he works with ahead of the systems during the strict covid-19 protocols, while Fred spoke about his experience prioritizing the individual's emotional needs over the protocols of the building. Jian (2021) discussed the need to address emotional needs as a significant component of empathetic leadership practices. By taking time to address those emotional needs we are demonstrating care which cultivates trust a significant influencer of relational leadership theory. While systems and procedures are important, leaders must heed the emotional needs of those they lead in order to cultivate a relationship that will result in greater opportunities for self-reflection and growth.

Safety and Support

The results of this dissertation also stressed the importance of safety and support when leaders generate trust within their communities. Providing a safe work environment both physically and psychologically was a code that emerged in data analysis for the first research question on how leaders experience trust. Teachers who do not feel safe in their work environment are not able to engage in reflective practices which means they cannot reflect on their teaching practices; this will have an impact on student learning. Chris shared the importance of ensuring the safety of her staff during

covid-19 and how ensuring the safety has maintained the trust within her building. Meanwhile, Daniel experienced the need to prioritize the psychological safety of one of his staff during our interview. By ensuring the safety of their staff, these leaders are demonstrating empathy and cultivating relationships.

Additionally, support was mentioned by several participants as a way they generate trust within their community. Support was different based on the leaders' skills, and the support necessary within the building. Support was also different based on the needs of the individual, but what was evident was that leaders took care in understanding the needs and providing support that matched what their staff required. Some participants talked about providing support within the building, while others sought resources outside of the building. Some leaders provided coaching for the entire staff, while Brenda addressed a situation that was specific to one teacher. What was evident was that the leaders in this study were attentive to the needs of their staff. As a result, teachers were more willing to ask for support, they were more willing to receive feedback, and they developed stronger relationships as a result of the different supports provided. The trust and relationships strengthened by providing support connect to the major theme of relational leadership theory.

Competence

Competence was another subcategory that emerged; most of the participants in this research study spoke about competence in their interviews. Interestingly, while researchers also addressed competence as a major component to trust, most participants were primarily concerned with their competence rather than that of their teachers. As

noted in the literature review, Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that teachers perceive competence from their leaders as leaders who buffer distractions, manage difficult situations, set high standards, work hard, set a positive example, problem-solving flexibility, and an ability to manage conflict. Daniel shared his concerns about leading during covid-19, sharing that he wasn't sure how to lead during this challenging time. Daniel's experience aligns with the research of Tschannen-Moran (2014) as he expressed concerns about managing during a difficult situation. Daniel also shared that he struggled with district-level leaders' expectations and felt it was his responsibility to buffer the distractions from the district. Leaders' experiences and their struggles with competence provide important information about how principals experience trust in their schools.

Feltman (2009) suggests that leaders can combat the uncertainties of competency by taking inventory of your skills as a leader be realistic about what you can and can't do. Second, define what your standards of competence are; when you are unsure of something, say so, don't hesitate to ask for what you need, and finally, ask for feedback on your performance. Daniel demonstrated this by sharing a vulnerable moment where he told his staff he wasn't sure how to navigate leading during the covid-19 pandemic with all the challenges that came with it. Fred echoed this sentiment of telling his team that he didn't have the correct answer for leading under challenging situations. Ultimately Daniel and Fred both shared that acknowledging that they were unsure further developed the trust within their school.

Overall, research agreed with the experiences of leaders who intentionally cultivate trust in their schools. Relationships and specifically relational leadership theory

demonstrate the value of cultivating relationships with the staff a principal leads to improve the overall climate, trust, and productivity in the building. Additionally, Feltman (2009), and Tschannen-Moran (2014), support the experiences of building leaders who reflect on their competence and engage with staff accordingly. This study discovered the value of competence when leaders had to acknowledge when they didn't have the correct answer for leading, through this leaders' shared vulnerability with their teams.

Modeling, Communication, and Reliability

The subcategory of modeling was also discussed extensively in the participants' interviews. Many participants shared that they model the behaviors they expect from their teachers. This showed up in Edward's experience engaging in conversations about equity within his school. Edward shared that his staff was hesitant to engage in these conversations at first. Still, he stated that through modeling and support, he started to observe his teachers leaning into the challenging equity conversations. It is important to note that Tschannen-Moran's (2014) research found that schools with more diversity report challenges to establishing trust and that leaders need to spend time intentionally developing trust. Edward's experience with equity conversations reflects this challenge, but he responded by taking time to intentionally model vulnerability in engaging in these conversations. Edward shared that his teachers are more open to these conversations and trust each other through their shared experiences. Tschannen-Moran's research reinforced Edward's experience by stating that when trust is developed across diverse groups, the benefit is that learning is more meaningful to the school community and the

students. Modeling became one of the tools leaders used to demonstrate vulnerability and empathy. Leaders hoped that by modeling vulnerability and empathy they would create a community where these characteristics were part of the school climate. Leaders who modeled empathy, trust, and vulnerability observed that their staff reciprocated, and they reported that these components were present in their school community.

Communication was discovered as a subcategory of how leaders generated trust, and one of the benefits to greater levels of trust is stronger relationships within the community. Leaders in this study also referenced the importance of communication in generating trust with those they lead. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) addressed the risk of not communicating with staff when they reported that leaders who say too little or are too quiet result in teams who view them as untrustworthy as they are most likely hiding something. Brenda shared in her interview that she always tries to speak the truth. She also expects the same in return from her staff, stating, "just tell me whatever it is, and we'll get through it." (Interview). Brenda demonstrates her trustworthiness and models her expectations that her team is honest with her in return by being forthcoming with her staff. The participants also shared that communication is necessary to clearly express their intentions by being transparent with feedback. Daniel says that he demonstrates his trustworthiness to cultivate trust with his staff. By being forthcoming, individuals generate trust by sharing their intentions and what they believe; without this, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) state that the lack of communication results in damaged trust within the community.

Another subcategory that emerged in the findings was the topic of reliability. Reliability can be observed in how teachers perceive trust, but it also improves relationships, when people can predict how their leader will respond, they will be more likely to lower their protective mask, and this leads to teachers being more willing to express their vulnerability. Tschannen-Moran (2014) stresses that reliability means that staff can predict their leader's behavior. Chris demonstrates her reliability by participating in the school's system of greeting families in the morning, stepping in where help is needed, and visiting classes regularly. Rather than holding expectations of teachers that she doesn't hold for herself, she steps in and demonstrates through her actions the value of greeting the community members every morning. While this may seem like a small demonstration of reliability, the trust this has cultivated in her school has led to better collegial relationships within the building.

Additionally, Chris and Fred shared that staff view reliability as the person who holds teachers accountable to the school's vision. Chris said that holding staff accountable has built consensus with her team. Teachers rely on their leaders to hold everyone to the shared school vision, and one-way leaders conveyed that they were reliable was by making sure everyone in the building was held to the same standards. Feltman's (2009) research on trust also demonstrated the need to follow through on expectations because the risk of not following through may result in a lack of follow-through. Feltman (2009) suggests that the best way to ensure reliability is to clarify the expectations; this can be done by communicating a clear vision for the school. If the expectations are unclear, how one person interprets an expectation may be different from

another, and teachers may perceive a lack of reliability in their leader if they believe the expectations are not reinforced by their leader. This could result in teachers losing faith in the leader's reliability and damaging their trust. Therefore, it is necessary to follow through on holding individuals accountable it is equally important to establish clear expectations to ensure that all parties understand the expectations.

Shared Vision

The final subcategory that emerged from the data was the importance of engaging in shared decision-making to generate trust with teachers. Researchers present decision-making as a significant factor that leads to schools with high or low levels of reported trust. Bryk and Schneider (2002) discovered that teachers with reported low levels of trust reported that they had no voice and that participation was forced upon them. While schools that reported higher levels of trust reported that they were engaged in decision making and that they felt they supported the vision of leaders (Louis, 2007). Teachers who were included in shared decision-making also reported that they thought they could take risks to improve instruction, an experience not shared by teachers at schools with low levels of trust. The data in this study reinforced the value of shared decision-making in generating trust with their staff. Andrew reports that he has found that the best way to get staff on board with new initiatives is to engage in shared decision-making. In a different approach, Daniel says that before he starts a new program or system, he seeks the feedback of his teachers. He reports that he wants his teachers to understand why he wants to move in this direction, but he also says it is essential to listen to the feedback from his teachers. Schools that experience higher levels of trust have been reported as

being schools that engage in shared decision making and a shared vision. This creates a community vision and a staff committed to engaging in the shared vision together.

Overall, leaders should be thoughtful about how they generate trust with their team because Jian (2021) says that having positive interactions with one another and believing in their good gives us access to their emotions. For leaders who want to cultivate trust thoughtfully, the benefit is stronger relationships that lead to improved productivity and ultimately improved student learning outcomes.

The final research question asked leaders to share their experiences with vulnerability in their role as leaders. To answer this research question, I present a conceptualization of vulnerable leadership as a component of relational leadership theory. I present research from the participants' experiences combined with the research from vulnerability to describe how vulnerability in leadership results in greater levels of reflection and improved collaboration and trust in schools.

Challenges to Vulnerability

The participants in this grounded theory research expressed challenges to sharing their vulnerability with staff, reporting that sharing their vulnerability required them to tap into their courage, demonstrate humility and open themselves up to risk. Brown (2018) states in her research that vulnerability is never easy but has the power to deepen our experiences and develop more profound levels of relational trust. Mcleod (2015) reminds us that when we engage in vulnerability, we open ourselves up to the risk of betrayal and courage is necessary to share vulnerability with others. Still, by guarding our vulnerability, leaders miss out on the opportunity to develop more profound levels of

trust. Chris shared that she worried how her staff would betray her, explicitly stating, "oh, they'll think I'm such a wimp" (Interview). Chris shares here that a challenge for her was the risk that by expressing her vulnerability she was opening herself up to be seen as a "weak leader." As a leader, it may be uncomfortable to open oneself up to that risk of exposure; nevertheless, Brown's (2018) research found that highly productive teams need vulnerability and psychological safety to be truly successful. In my study, I found that the leaders who shared their vulnerability with their staff reported favorable outcomes with staff.

Based on the research of relational trust, with the findings of empathic leadership practices and the research on vulnerability resulting in greater productivity levels, I wonder what leaders who do not share their vulnerability may be missing within our schools. Leaders who choose to protect themselves from vulnerable experiences miss out on opportunities to connect with their teachers and engage in reflective conversations about student achievement. While vulnerability requires courage and can be challenging it is necessary to embrace that challenge and engage in discussions despite the potential risk of betrayal, I leave the reader with this question about the consequences of protecting oneself from vulnerable conversations. Can schools whose leaders do not engage in vulnerable conversations ever honestly engage in conversations about teaching practices and student learning?

Impact of Vulnerability

In this final category identified in the research questions, I explain the impact of vulnerability on educational leaders; I also connect the research that helps explain how leaders experience the effects of their vulnerability. Edward shared in his interview that sharing his vulnerability has allowed him to be his most authentic self with his teachers. Brown's (2018) research supports this idea by stating that we are stifling our emotions without vulnerability. Brown also notes that vulnerability is the root of love, belonging, joy, creativity, and innovation. Leaders looking to lead a school that encourages innovation and creativity ought to consider relational leadership theory and vulnerable leadership theory to inspire deep relationships that inspire love, belonging, joy, creativity, and innovation.

In Chris's experiences with vulnerability, she shared that by sharing her vulnerability with her staff, she learned to "value students for their essence, their culture, their languages, and their families (Garcia &Guerra, 2004; Freire, 2015, Moll et al., 1992)" (Interview). In his research, Feltman (2009) shares that sharing vulnerability humanizes people and allows people to see a person's values, hopes, dreams, or concerns. This connects to Chris's experiences. By sharing her vulnerability, she was able to model the values she held that led to teachers seeing the authentic and diverse person leading their school and the authentic and diverse students in their school. Bunker (1997) reminds us that "there is amazing power in vulnerability…. personal vulnerability opens the door to helping others" (p. 28). When leaders share their vulnerability, they are creating

opportunities for their teachers and students to share themselves and make room for schools to celebrate everyone's values, hopes, and dreams.

In answering the research questions of this study, I have presented data from the participants and research from experts on trust, vulnerability, and relationships that explain educational leaders' experiences who intentionally generate trust and share vulnerability with those they lead. In this chapter, I presented data that describes principals' experience with trust within relational leadership theory. The second research question explained how leaders generate trust, and I present research that connects how leaders generate trust with the empathic leadership a category of relational leadership theory. Finally, in the last research question, I connect that vulnerable leadership theory is its own component of relational leadership theory. I presented data and previous research that claims trust, empathy, and vulnerability create opportunities for leaders to connect with those they lead as it evokes opportunities to reflect on practices that create opportunities for students and staff to reach higher levels of productivity and creates spaces for individuals to be their authentic and diverse selves. At the center of Figure 5.1 is the circle named authenticity and community through human connection. Through this research, I discovered that the impact of trust, relationships, empathy, and vulnerability results in leaders and teachers creating a community that values everyone's authenticity and creates a strong foundation for human connection.

Conclusions

The aim of this grounded theory study was to understand the experiences of educational leaders who intentionally cultivate trust and vulnerability with those they

lead. What was discovered in the literature review is that trust is necessary for school culture and a positive school culture creates opportunities for more significant levels of learning. The research from this study confirmed the importance of trust in school communities. It also explored the different ways leaders cultivate trust with those they lead. Finally, this study closely examined the experiences of leaders who expressed their vulnerability to those they lead. While there are challenges to sharing this vulnerability evidence suggested that the outcomes of sharing vulnerability had a positive impact on the relationships between leaders and their teachers, but it also had an impact on the culture of the school. Researchers have presented data that connects student achievement to the culture of the school, and school culture is influenced by the staff and lead by the building principal (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In this research study, leaders who cultivated trust and shared their vulnerability expressed that they were able to be authentic as leaders and that it created a stronger community. When school leaders take time to cultivate strong relationships within their buildings the result is a community based on human connection which creates opportunities for growth as individuals do not feel the need to engage in self-protective factors that prevent learning from taking place.

Implications

Teaching is a human-driven business; when leaders attempt to run a school without considering the teachers and students within the community, they may find teachers resist changes and the culture of the school community declines. Researchers have not paid much attention to the role of vulnerability and empathy within schools.

Still, this dissertation adds to a growing body of research that stresses the importance of trust and relationships in leadership. Researchers have stated that schools with greater levels of trust will experience improved levels of effectiveness as the faculty and staff improve their practices. Leaders will also observe that schools will demonstrate improved communication and organizational leadership through greater levels of trust. Leaders looking to improve student achievement and collaboration should look to their school's culture and the relational trust between leaders and teachers, teachers and teachers, and teachers and students. By establishing relationships based on empathy and vulnerability, leaders can work to shift the school's culture and create a community rooted in authentic trust. Leaders may also find that trust may defy disappointment, disagreement, and differences in values when authentic trust is present. Creating a school that acknowledges and values the unique individuals that make up a school creates greater levels of learning and growth.

When leaders first consider how they will engage in relational trust and vulnerability, it is important to understand what research states as the values of trust from the teachers' perspective. Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that principals value competence and reliability while teachers value benevolence, honesty, and openness. Leaders should start here and reflect on what builds and breaks down trust. Relational leadership theory prioritizes the relationships between leaders and those they lead; vulnerable leadership creates a meaningful way for leaders to connect with their teachers that will deepen the reflective practices that ultimately lead to greater levels of student achievement. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) remind us of the value of trust,

stating that there is a "direct relationship between principal trustworthiness and student achievement" (p.258).

Future Research

Throughout this dissertation, trust has been discussed and investigated by previous researchers. Trust was also validated by the findings in this study. This grounded theory study has stressed that vulnerability in research has not been extensively studied. There has also not been enough research on vulnerability in education. Below I present areas that require further research that were not included in this study.

To begin with, Brown (2018) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) both addressed challenges to cultivating trust and vulnerability in diverse groups. Yet researchers also suggest that authentic trust and vulnerability allow individuals to be their authentic selves. Further research should investigate how leaders lean into vulnerability to avoid defensiveness. This research was also validated in the experiences of the leaders in this research study. The challenge of cultivating trust amongst diverse groups coupled with the power of vulnerability in inviting people to demonstrate their authenticity creates an interesting dichotomy. Future research should further investigate the experiences of trust and vulnerability in groups with diverse populations. Researchers should seek to understand the challenges of leading diverse groups and how leaders overcome these challenges are topics.

This grounded theory study was intentionally focused on in the principal's experience with trust and vulnerability. Research has been conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2014), and Louis (2007) that explored teachers'

perspectives of trust. Still, since vulnerability has not yet been explored, it would be interesting to explore teachers' perceptions of vulnerability, both vulnerability from their leader and within teacher groups. In addition to research of vulnerability with teachers, it would be interesting to investigate the experiences of students and community stakeholders' perceptions of vulnerability. Vulnerability plays a significant role in the relationships within a school. Understanding how vulnerability is perceived and experienced by all community members could influence relationships and perceptions of how leaders view vulnerability.

The research in the literature review that studied the impact of trust in education was limited to schools with less than 300 students in their population. However, many schools have student populations with much higher populations. I believe that there may be a reason that most research is limited to schools with smaller populations, but research has not been conducted to understand the challenges or experiences of trust in schools that serve more than 300 students. I suggest that future research investigates the differences in reported trust based on school size. This understanding may help educational leaders gain a further understanding of how trust is experienced in school communities.

Finally, as this is a grounded theory study that introduces the potential for a substantive theory of vulnerable leadership, future research should look to confirm and expand on the findings in this study (Mills et al., 2012). This study specifically explored the experiences of principals who intentionally generate trust and express their vulnerability with those they lead. The participants provided data that explained the

value of sharing vulnerability in their role as leaders which resulted in more significant levels of trust, and deeper levels of human connection and allowed leaders to be their authentic selves. These categories elucidate the value of vulnerability in leadership. However, not enough attention has been paid to the power of vulnerability in educational systems. While this dissertation investigated leaders' experiences, much more research needs to be done to understand the impact of vulnerability on education further.

Summary

To conclude this grounded theory research study, I remind the reader that the purpose of this was to examine the experiences of leaders who thoughtfully engage in relational trust and vulnerability, specifically principals at the kindergarten through 12th-grade schools in an urban city in the Rocky Mountain West region. Within this dissertation, my goal was to understand how leaders generate and experience trust and how they experience vulnerability within their leadership roles.

In this study, I discovered that relationships were at the root of trust as reported by the leaders. Within relationships, I found that schools with a sense of empathy, an appreciation for humanity, and trust cultivated over time reinforce the relationships within a school. Additionally, leaders expressed that competence, safety, and a shared vision for the school contribute to the principals' trust experience. The findings from this dissertation connected to the research of relational leadership theory and trust, which further validated existing research and the value of relationships and trust within a school community.

This research study was designed to understand the experiences of leaders who share their vulnerability with those they lead. Research participants shared the challenges they face when choosing to share their vulnerability with their staff; they also shared experiences where they have shared their vulnerability and their perceived impacts of sharing this vulnerability. Other researchers have validated the benefits of sharing vulnerability, and I introduced vulnerable leadership, as a component of relational leadership theory.

School leaders have taxing jobs, and their attention is demanded from the district as well as the local community. The pressure of high-stakes testing and the challenges of leading schools during tumultuous times, including the covid-19 pandemic result in high stress levels in building leaders. Some leaders may manage these demands by retreating inward; however, this dissertation and the research on vulnerability and trust argues that leaders should extend look to the community and develop relationships rooted in trust and shared vulnerability to engage in authentic relational trust because research has stated that within communities with high levels of trust we find that the quality of relationships is a significant factor in fostering student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

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APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL TRUST SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following survey questions were sent to principals prior to the initial interview. The intent of this survey is to gather information about each participant's perceptions of trust in their school before the initial interview.

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL TRUST SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your name
2. How many years have you been working as a principal (at this school or others)?
3. Teachers in this school are candid with me
4. I can count on parents to support the vision of the school.
5. I have faith in the integrity of my teachers
6. Students in this school respect the adults.
7. I believe in my teachers.
8. Most students in the school are honest.
9. I question the competence of some of my teachers.
10. I am often suspicious of teachers' motives in this school.
11. The students in this building care for one another.
12. I trust the students in this school.
13. When teachers in this school tell you something, you can believe it.
14. Even in difficult situations, I can depend on my teachers.
15. Parents in this school have integrity.
16. Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments
17. Most teachers openly share information in the school.
18. My teachers typically look out for me.
19. I trust the teachers in this school.
20. Students in this school are reliable.

APPENDIX B: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following interview questions were asked of research participants in the first round of interviews. The intent of these questions was to gather information about each participant's experiences with trust and vulnerability in their role as leaders.

APPENDIX B: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience with trust, how do you feel trust influences your work?
2. How do you generate trust with the teachers in your building?
3. What does trust look like? or How do you define trust?
4. Tell me about your perspectives of vulnerability in leadership?
5. How does trust influence your role as a leader?

APPENDIX C: SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following interview questions were asked of research participants in the second round of interviews. The intent of these questions was to further explore the participants experiences of trust and vulnerability after initial data analysis.

APPENDIX C: SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What challenges do you experience that make it difficult for you to share your vulnerability as a leader?
2. How do you demonstrate support and build trust with new/ novice teachers? What are the challenges and or benefits to bringing a new person into your staff?
3. Can you share an experience where shared leadership has impacted trust or vulnerability with your staff?? Specifically what changes do you observe in behavior, interpersonal relationships?
4. What changes, if any, have you observed regarding the culture of your school that can be attributed to trust and/or vulnerability.
5. In your own words, describe how trust and vulnerability interact with one another as a leader. Can one exist without the other? Why or why not?
6. How has your personal identity and experiences influenced your philosophy of leadership?
7. Have you ever shared a particularly vulnerable moment with your staff? How was that received?
8. Do you intentionally develop trust with your supervisors? If so, does this require a different approach?
9. Has being open and forth coming with information ever lead to damaged trust with a teacher? Can you explain a scenario and how you were able to or not able to regain a relationship with that person?

10. What behaviors do you observe specific to trust and/ or vulnerability amongst diverse groups in your staff?
    a. Are there certain situations that make this more or less challenging?
11. How do you observe your staff responding to vulnerability, (their own, other staff, or student)?
    a. Do some shy away from it? What are your reflections as a leader?
    b. Do you find some staff/ situations flourish and what are the characteristics of that situation?
12. If/When a staff member breaks trust with you, how do you respond?