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Exploring the Interdependence of Trust and Communication in the Teacher-Principal Relationship

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EXPLORING THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION IN THE TEACHER-PRINCIPAL RELATIONSHIP

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The College of Human Sciences and Education

by

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December 2018
To Sarah, Iris, and Harper.
Thank you for your unconditional love and support.
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Abstract

This research explored teacher and principal perceptions of trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationship. Through in-depth interviews, research participants provided perceived characteristics needed for effective teachers, principals, and teacher-principal relationships, and pointed out characteristics detrimental to the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship. The research utilized past research in organizational communication, trust, and trust and communication within the teacher-principal relationship and other important components of effective teacher-principal relationships to provide a literary foundation for the study. The research identified perceptions of teachers and principals with respect to communication and trust in the teacher-principal relationship, and identified what priorities successful first-year principals need to cultivate for effective relationships with their faculty.

Participants were comprised of teachers and principals from two elementary schools in southern Louisiana. Participants articulated their perspectives and shared experiences working with effective and ineffective principals. The experiences and perspectives of the research participants demonstrated the paralysis of functionality in the teacher-principal relationship caused by distrustful and non-communicative relationships. The research findings provide concrete evidence for the importance of establishing an effective teacher-principal relationship built on trust and communication. The eight participants shared the view that communication was a necessity for an effective teacher-principal relationship. Most of the participants also thought that trust needs to be present for successful teacher-principal relationships. The research findings revealed the participants had similar views of an effective teacher-principal relationship and the necessary characteristics of an effective principal and teacher.
Chapter 1. Introduction

Leaders, and decisions made by leaders, fascinate me. I see myself in my leaders and want to replicate the effectiveness of my leaders and also right the wrongs they do. I currently am the assistant principal of a large elementary school in southern Louisiana and am in my ninth year in the education system. Throughout my educational career, I have worked with some effective and some ineffective leaders. Two polarizing examples from my experience working with leaders occurred during my teaching career at Morton Primary School, an elementary school in southern Louisiana, where I taught for four years. The first three years I was there, I worked under Principal Rhonda Richardson who struggled to be effective during her tenure at this school. Ms. Richardson lacked basic skills in communication and relationship building that strengthen relationships with school faculty members and stakeholders. Eventually the school system transferred Ms. Richardson and, during my fourth and final year at Morton Primary, I witnessed a change in leadership; for the first time in my career, I experienced the benefits of working for an effective leader.

During Ms. Richardson’s tenure, I questioned her leadership capabilities and I second-guessed her decisions; I thought that I could be a better leader than she was. I saw the mistakes she made, her lack of genuineness, the absence of compassion in her daily work, and, above all, the absence of the communication skills needed to build relationships with her faculty. She often treated people as if they were unequal to her and talked down to them. She also did not trust her faculty, did not have confidence in the people with whom she worked, and did not seek out thoughts and ideas from her faculty. She was disconnected from her faculty and was not respectful to her faculty, which, in turn, did not command the faculty’s respect; her faculty lost confidence in her and distrusted her.
Ms. Richardson acted as if she had never been in our position and we were merely her disciples. She used a pejorative tone of voice when speaking to us, and her body language often aligned with her tone. If she thought she was not the best dressed or thought that someone else was better dressed than she, she went home to change to keep the perception of her being better than everyone else. She made sure that everyone knew that she drove an expensive Mercedes Benz SUV and often arrogantly spoke of material things such as her clothes and her automobile. Ms. Richardson clearly taught me what not to do as a leader. During her tenure, a deepening dissention grew among the faculty and stakeholders, which eventually led to her ouster as principal.

Each of the effective leaders for whom I have worked empowered me in some way. While working with Ms. Richardson, my desire to become a school leader amplified as I wanted to become an administrator to prove to myself that I could do better than she did. I often thought to myself, “If she could be the principal of this school, as ineffective as she is, then I could be the superintendent of the school system!”

Ms. Kathleen Ellison, the new principal of Morton Primary, was the polar opposite from Ms. Richardson. Ms. Ellison saved us; she was truly a savior and an inspiration. She embodied all the characteristics that I wanted to embody as a leader and that I yearned for while working under Ms. Richardson. Ms. Ellison empowered me; she made me be a leader and made me want to be the best leader I could be. She showed me that turnarounds are possible and how important supporting and communicating with her faculty was. She showed me how to listen and how to lead.

My experiences working under Ms. Richardson and then Ms. Ellison led me to pursue my PhD. I always wanted to be an administrator but after these experiences, I wanted to be trained
to be the best administrator I could be. Ms. Richardson and Ms. Ellison drove me to be the best I could be and led me to know what I truly wanted in my career.

My biggest issues teaching under Ms. Richardson for three years centered on poor communication and distrust. From the beginning of her tenure, communication was ineffective and there was distrust. I tried to have a relationship with her, to find out who she really was, to connect with her, but she never let her guard down and was consistently superficial. Communication was broken on many levels and it negatively affected her organizational skills. She also did not protect us or look out for us and our interests were not synonymous with hers; she was self-serving and did not support us. Ms. Ellison was the opposite as she protected us, listened to us, and supported us.

These experiences not only directed me to the path of pursuing my PhD, they also helped create the framework for my research. Through these experiences, I became curious about teacher-principal relationships and the characteristics needed for an effective teacher-principal relationship. During my time working at Morton I frequently asked myself, “Why it was so difficult for Ms. Richardson to develop that relationship? Why couldn’t she just be real, talk to us, trust us, allow us to trust her?” I also asked myself, “How was it so easy for Ms. Ellison to communicate effectively and establish trust quickly when she came to Morton Primary?” The disconnect between the two principals intrigued me and I wondered how something that seemed to be so easy could be so difficult. In a matter of days, Ms. Ellison established more trust with her faculty and in her faculty than Ms. Richardson had during the four years she was principal. From day one communication and accessibility were evident.

My research sought answers to what makes the teacher-principal relationship successful in the eyes of teachers and principals. I wanted to know what my colleagues thought about their
experiences during their time with Ms. Richardson and Ms. Ellison. I also wanted to look at a similar situation in the school at which I currently work at as an assistant principal.

After Ms. Ellison’s first year at Morton Primary, I earned a promotion to assistant principal at Davidson Elementary School, located in the same school system as Morton Primary. This promotion gave me the opportunity to serve on an administrative team that was experiencing a transition similar to the transition I experienced as a teacher at Morton Primary, but I viewed this transition from the perspective of a school administrator. The transition in leadership at Davidson was similar to the transition in leadership at Morton Primary from Ms. Richardson to Ms. Ellison.

The participants in this research were teachers and administrators from both Morton Primary and Davidson Elementary Schools. To some degree, they all shared an experience similar to the one that I had at both schools. Research participants perceived it was inherently in the best interest of principals to focus on cultivating positive and constructive relationships with their faculty, relationships rooted in trust and communication. The forging of a trusting and communicative teacher-principal relationship, along with any follower-leader relationship, is a basic need for an organization to be successful, and thus this research was warranted. Covey (2013) explained that high levels of trust and communication within organizations produce effectiveness within the organizations (p. 282). I show that, in any situation, the principal and the teacher have the ability to work together for the common purpose of education and to communicate effectively. Katz and Kahn (1978) wrote a brief and compelling explanation of the importance of communication in any organization: “Communication is the very essence of a social system or organization” (p. 428). Katz and Kahn believed the foresight that communication is a critical component for any organization to be successful; without
communication, there is no direction. Edwards and Fredriksson (2017) point out the growing
difficulty of establishing consistent communication across the organization due to increasing
complexity of the organizational environment and the various member groups of the
environment (p. 468). I experienced a lack of direction working under Ms. Richardson at
Morton Primary, and the participants in this research corroborated this experience of ineffective
leadership while working under her. Communication, trust, and their perception within a leader
are critical components to the success of an organization, and are illustrated in this literature
review and research findings. Trust and honesty are integral parts, but the research findings
clarify that the teacher-principal relationship starts with communication.

**Statement of the Problem**

The experiences and perspectives of my research participants combined with my
experiences pointed to the importance of trusting and communicative relationships between
teachers and principals. Arneson (2015) asserted that “teachers and administrators who have a
trusting working relationship will find that communication is easier and more productive,”
illustrating the connectivity and interdependence of a trusting relationship with productive
communication” (p. 36). The problem Morton Primary and Davidson Elementary School faced
prior to new leadership was the absence of a trusting and communicative relationship between
teachers and their principals. The driving question of this research asked, “What are teachers’
perceptions of the need for the interdependence of trust and communication in an effective
teacher-principal relationship?”

My qualitative research utilized in-depth interviews of teachers and principals and
detailed the impact of the participants’ perspectives on their perceptions and realities of their
relationships with their respective principals. The participants were aware of the scope and
purpose of the research, which set the expectation that the key themes revolved around trusting and communicative teacher-principal relationships.

The experiences of the research participants demonstrated the paralysis caused to the teacher-principal relationship by distrustful and non-communicative relationships. Analyzing the results of this research and formulating a plan to achieve and maintain a trusting and communicative teacher-principal relationship may correct a distrustful and non-communicative teacher-principal relationship. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’ (2015) quantitative study explored the interaction of faculty trust in the principal, the leader’s behavior, school climate, and student achievement, and suggested, “it is necessary for principals to evidence both interpersonal and task-oriented behaviors in order to be trusted by teachers” (p. 66); their research showed the value and necessity of trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationship. The problem is multilayered in that it influences not only teachers’ self-worth, but it also influences their perceptions of school climate and student achievement. Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015) highlighted the need for more research in this area by stating, “with a lack of research examining the relationship between a school leader’s traits, school climate, and student achievement and the belief that there is a disparity between the research on school climate and actual school practice, there is a definitive need for more research in this area in order to constructively impact student outcomes” (p. 3). Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015) provided traction for further research into the effects of the teacher-principal relationship and requested more exposure to the impacts of this relationship.

**Purpose of this Study**

Through narrative interviews this research documented educators’ perceptions, both positive and negative, regarding the relationship between trust and communication in the
teacher-principal relationship. The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of effective teacher-principal relationships through the experiences and perceptions of teacher and principal participants, and to provide information on the establishment of a healthy and effective teacher-principal relationship.

Allen (2015) believed administrators have a more positive impact on the school when they choose to build trusting and cooperative relationships with their staff and to recognize their faculty’s needs and desires (p. 16). Teacher perceptions of their leaders are improved when their leaders exhibit care in their needs and encourage teachers to collaborate and communicate with them (p. 16-17). The needed codependence and reciprocation of the teacher-principal relationship was further explained by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) as, “The strength of the relationships [teacher-principal relationships] suggests that schools will not be successful in fostering student learning without trustworthy school leaders who are skillful in cultivating academic press, teacher professionalism, and community engagement in their schools” (p. 66). Expanding strength in the relationship, Hulsbos, Evers, & Kessels (2015) say that communication between the teacher and the principal improves conversational skills and involves teachers in the decision-making process (2015, p. 36). The elements of trust and communication influence teacher and principal behavior, which aids in the development of positive and sustainable relationships.

My research explored teacher and principal perceptions of trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationship. Research participants provided characteristics they perceived as necessary for effective teachers, principals, and teacher-principal relationships as well as characteristics that they perceived to be detrimental to the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship. The foundation for the study utilized past research in the areas of organizational
leadership, teacher-principal relationships, communication and trust within that relationship, and other key elements of a successful follower-leader relationship.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the perceptions of teachers and principals with respect to communication and trust in the teacher-principal relationship?

2. What are the priorities of a first-year principal in cultivating relationships with faculty and what roles do trust and communication play in this cultivation?

**Theoretical Framework**

I used a phenomenological approach in my research to examine the phenomena of the teacher-principal relationship and what makes it effective. The examination of this phenomenon relies on the perspectives of the research participants and how their experiences produce their perspectives. Phenomenological research describes participant experiences, perceptions, and commonalities relevant to a specific phenomenon and then compiles them to develop a description of the essence of the experience of all individuals (Smith, 2015, p. 53). I framed this research through a constructivist worldview under the basic assumptions that research is a product of values through which an objective reality cannot be attained; the goal, however, is to understand multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge through the experiences of my participants (Mertens, 2014, p. 18).

I drew upon Katz’s (2009) leadership approach that suggested that leadership is based on three skills: technical, human, and conceptual (Katz, 2009, p. 4-6). My lens for this research was Katz’s human skills model. Human skills are people skills that propel a leader to work effectively with colleagues to accomplish organizational success (Northouse, 2018, p. 45).
Leaders possessing human skills create an atmosphere of trust and provide comfort to employees. A general concept of the human skills approach is found in table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Human Skills Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Inventory Question</th>
<th>Human Skill Inventory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>As a rule, adapting ideas to people’s needs is easy for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Being able to understand others is the most important part of my work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>My main concern is to have a supportive communication climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Understanding the social fabric of the organization is important to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>Getting all parties to work together is a challenge I enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17</td>
<td>I am concerned with how my decisions affect the lives of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Northouse, 2018, p. 69)

These statements are a part of a larger skills inventory that focused on three concepts: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills; the complete skills inventory is listed in the Appendices section of this research under Appendix D. My research focused on the human skills portion of Katz’s (2009) inventory that is primarily concerned with the leader’s capability of working with people (p. 3). Table 1.1 illustrates that a effective leader establishes a supportive climate of communication. As viewed through Katz’s (2009) lens, this main idea of an effective leader was the basis of this research, and proved to be the overarching perceived theme of an effective teacher-principal relationship.
Chapter 2. Review of Literature

Introduction

The review of literature focuses on the central themes of communication and trust in an effective teacher-principal relationship as identified by the participants of this research. The review first focuses on communication, which the research participants perceived to be the overarching characteristic of an effective teacher-principal relationship. I present foundational literature of organizational communication and move the focus to communication within the teacher-principal relationship. The next section of the literature review focuses on trust and its general importance in functional relationships and continues with a focus on trust within the teacher-principal relationship. The conclusion focuses on the importance of functional teacher-principal relationships containing trust and communication and connecting this literature to the experiences of my research participants, who had been members of effective and ineffective teacher-principal relationships.

Communication

Communication is the most important skill in life (Covey, 2013, p. 249). “For any effective work to occur there must be a certain amount of consensus on basic values and on a medium of communication. For any group to be effective, it must have within it the resources to fulfill the task it is given” (Natemeyer & McMahon, 2001, p. 195-196). My research findings provide perspectives that the absence of common values and goals discourage the establishment of communication that creates fundamental flaws in intergroup relationships. Schein (2011) agreed with the fundamental need for communication in a group for it to be effective; he emphasized, “The fundamental cultural principle is communication between two parties and is a reciprocal process that must be, or at least must seem to be, fair and equitable” (p. 11). The
reciprocal process of communication is important because we must all practice the rules of social economics in that reciprocation, the giving back, completes the communication and makes that interaction equitable and fair (Schein, 2011, p. 11). Northouse (2013) brought more specificity to reciprocal communication and equated it to the dynamic relationship of the leader and the follower. He insisted, “Listening and communication between leaders and followers is an interactive process that includes sending and receiving messages. Listening allows leaders to acknowledge the viewpoint of the follower and validate their perspectives” (p. 221). The sending and receiving of messages, or the talking and listening, are reciprocation that create a foundation for successful communication. The emphasis on listening is important because it is one of the four types of communication; the other three are reading, writing, and speaking (Covey, 2013, p. 249). Covey confirmed Northouse’s (2013) emphasis on the reciprocity of listening contending that listening is often forgotten in communication and is possibly the most important component of communication (p. 249). Bryk & Schneider (2003) suggested that exchanges between communicators should be respectful and are successful under the assumption that each person is genuinely listening to what the other is saying. Without the respect of interpersonal exchanges the communication and relationship may cease to exist (p. 3). A study on the roles of school leaders’ trust and communication by Lawson et al. (2017) connects reciprocal communication to the principal and the teacher. The study participants consist of nine principals and seventy-nine teachers representing nine elementary schools. This study isolated six overachieving schools which each contained evidence of reciprocal trust and communication between the principals and the teachers (Lawson et al., 2017, p. 46). The other three schools teacher participants primarily expressed a top down style of leadership which did not contain any evidence of reciprocal communication (Lawson et al., 2017, p. 46).
The next section in this review of literature focuses on trust and its role in the success of relationships. It shows that similarities exist between trust and communication and those components need to be present in sustainable relationships.

**Trust**

Trust is derived from two components of social economics. First, trusting another means believing that the interaction with a person will be understood and accepted by that person and neither person will take advantage of the other or reveal any information creating a disadvantage in either person (Schein, 2011, p. 21). Trust is lost and the relationship ends if either party takes advantage of the other and the level of communication reverts back to being superficial (Schein, 2011, p. 18). Schein (2011) and Bryk and Schneider (2003) posited two different reasons why relationships are not sustainable. Schein (2011) argued that a relationship becomes superficial when trust is nonexistent within that relationship. Indeed, it is highly likely that Schein (2011) was correct, however, it is equally likely that Bryk & Schneider’s (2003) view was also correct in stating that relationships are nonexistent when communication is absent. My research findings present perspectives supporting both viewpoints and underline the accuracy of each.

Reinforcing Schein’s (2011) two values of trust is a leader’s genuine care for followers. Successful leaders show care for those in their organizations, which promotes follower trust in their leader (Covey, 2006, p. 79); Covey further supported the implication that care is an antecedent to trust. Covey (2006) declared leaders embodying genuine care about the members of their organization motivate trust and the leader can attain this by having a general care for people, caring about shared goals, caring about the quality of work the organization produces, and caring about the organization as a whole (p. 78). While Covey (2006) focuses on the
organization as a whole and the role care plays in that organization Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) emphasize the importance of personal relationships built on trust, care, and respect (p. 401).

In addition to genuine care, the level of integrity a leader possesses underpins trust. Bennis (2009) insisted that integrity is the basis of trust and must be not only acquired, it must be earned (p. 35). This aligns Katz’s (2009) skills approach that allowed an avenue for leaders to develop skills necessary leadership skills such as integrity.

**Teacher-Principal Relationship**

Educators and researchers have a general idea of the definition of school climate and that a positive school climate is necessary for a school to be effective. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral (2009) identified four main areas needed to promote school effectiveness: physical safety, relationships between individuals within the school environment who belong to the school community, teaching and learning methods, and the physical environment of the school and its surroundings (p. 184). Relationships and communication are necessities in an organization’s success and the leader is the architect behind this feat. Lewallan, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles (2015) argue that relationships not only impact the school or organization they impact the entire community (p. 736). Effective principals are respected by their school communities because they are transparent in their values and actions and ensure fairness when dealing with all members of the community. The principal’s transparency and fairness produce a reciprocation of respect and trust between the community and the principal and reduces the likelihood of communities challenging the principal (Gurr, 2015, p. 137). Kirby (2017) interviewed principals in a study focusing on principal behaviors and how those behaviors establish relationships within their school. Principals identified the importance of building positive relationships and its positive impact on school climate (Kirby, 2017, p. 73).
The principals continue stating that trust increases when positive relationships are established (Kirby, 2017, p. 73). Hallam and Hausman (2009) wrote of teacher and principal impact on reform and change that directly correlates to the establishment of a positive and trusting relationship (p. 406). Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee (2014) further add that when a leader creates a positive environment in a school it creates diversity, innovation, and fosters communication (Day et. al, 2014, p. 69). Day et. al (2014) continue and say that interpersonal and intrapersonal group communication improves when the principal establishes a positive environment at school (Day et. al, 2014, p. 69). Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2014) add that principals can provide teachers with a sense of trust and security in an environment that is supportive, collaborative, and fair (p. 101). Effective intrapersonal and interpersonal group communication creates a platform for all stakeholders to communicate with each other. If a school suffers from a dysfunctional teacher-principal relationship, it is imperative that change and reform occur to repair that relationship so communication can be fostered.

The schools represented in my research were in need of change and reform in their respective leadership positions because of deteriorated teacher-principal relationships that lacked trust and communication. Hallam and Hausman (2009) confirmed the factors that interplay with the teacher-principal relationship: “The ability to build a culture of trust is a characteristic of effective principal leadership” (p. 413). They provided an example of the effects trust could have on this relationship adding, “Principals and teachers need to embrace accountability initiatives that can serve as a catalyst to begin reform initiatives and serve to focus discussions in school-based professional learning communities” (p. 413). This example provides reason for trust and its relationship to collaboration. Modoono (2017) agreed with Hallam and Hausman adding, “Trust is the foundation for collaboration, and collaboration is what makes organizations
excel” (p. 20). Similar to Hallam and Hausman (2009) and Modoono (2017), my research revealed the importance of the administration modeling positive and effective ways to participate in a relationship with colleagues by establishing trust within that relationship. The overwhelming message is that trust is needed in all facets of the school building and is interconnected among stakeholders. To attain school goals, the interconnectivity of trust must be fully realized. Once trust is established, it can be built upon with increased trust-filled behaviors and actions; the same can be said for distrust.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s 2015 study focused on the exploration of the relationships of faculty trust in the principal, the principal’s leadership styles and behaviors, the school climate, and student achievement. Their findings identified the elemental importance of faculty trust in the principal for a successful organization. The two most influential variables affecting teachers and success in the organization were principal behaviors and school climate (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 82). The behavior of principals tended to directly relate to their ability to establish and sustain relationships with their teachers and other organizational stakeholders, and thus the results of the study were rooted in the key concept of trust.

Conversely, Tate (2003) supported the emphasis on communication before trust within relationships, arguing that listening builds trusting relationships. She identified the level of trust between the teacher and the principal as an indicator that a listening relationship has been established (p. 8). The findings of my research emphasized communication as the most important factor for an effective teacher-principal relationship. Tate (2003) shared my research participants’ points of view that communication comes before trust and an effective relationship cannot exist without it. While Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015), along with other researchers in my study, stress the importance trust has on an effective teacher-principal relationship
Sammons, Davis, Day, & Gu support Tate (2003) arguing that effective leadership increasingly relies on close and collaborative relationships. The relationships must be communication-focused and consist of elements of shared leadership and empowerment (Sammons et al., 2014, p. 572-574). Sammons et al. (2014) does not mention trust as an attribute to an effective teacher principal relationship but it is plausible that trust is implied and may need to exist in the teacher principal relationship for it to be successful. Although my research findings point to the necessity of communication in a teacher-principal relationship for it to be successful each participant reported the presence of trust in the teacher-principal relationship is also important and makes for a more effective relationship.

Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) found, “Thus, principals must be prepared to engage collegially with teachers in ways that are consistently honest, open, and benevolent, while also dependably demonstrating sound knowledge and competent decision making associated with administering academic programs” (p. 66). The culmination of their study provided value laden direction on areas of need for future research. Specifically, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) stated, “While our study provides new insights and implications, a number of new questions and compelling directions for future research also emerge. First, having evidence that faculty trust in the principal is so strongly related to the climate of the school, we need greater understanding of the dynamics that foster faculty trust in the principal” (p. 86). Holmes and Parker (2018) studied behaviors and motivations of teachers and principals through quantitative surveys and some of their results support my research as well as Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015). Their results from the principal surveys collected indicate the importance of the principal being trustworthy, honest, consistent, and communicative with their faculty in order to establish effective relationships (Holmes & Parker, 2018, p. 9). The dynamics of a trusting teacher-principal
relationship directly related to my research by highlighting the importance of a trusting and communicative teacher-principal relationship. My research sought to discover, through purposeful and in-depth interviews, the factors of the teacher-principal relationship and how its success or failure hinges on the interdependence of trust and communication within that relationship. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) indicated, “An understanding of the conditions and processes that enable teachers and administrators to learn to trust each other and cooperate together is critical as schools are increasingly faced with the volatility of changing expectations. We need to know more about the mechanisms for building initial trust” (p. 86).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s (2015) study also looked at the adverse effects of distrustful relationships. A principal’s ineffective communication is one factor that contributes to the lack of trust in a relationship. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) purported that “Teachers see principals as trustworthy when their communication is both accurate and forthcoming.” (p. 261). Corroborating the need for principal trust Balyer (2017) studied teachers opinions of trust in their principals which provides similar conclusions as Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) in respect to the importance of trust in the teacher-principal relationship. Balyer’s (2017) study consisted of thirty teacher interviews whom the majority were working in schools with new administrators with little to no experience. The vast majority of the teachers reported that they did not have trust in their principal due to inexperience and they also do not trust the district leaders who placed this principal here because of the lack of expertise the principal has (Balyer, 2017, p. 321). Balyer’s research provides an example of ineffective new administrators which is contrary to what my research consists of.

School climate and morale are closely related to school environment, which is impacted by the establishment of the teacher-principal relationship. Sarikaya and Erdogan (2016)
emphasized and highlighted the principal’s responsibility for school climate and morale by maintaining that it is the principal’s job to “construct an appropriate environment for education, contribute to students’ learning, meet the desires of staff and promote their integration with the school, and to positively affect their morale and performance to accomplish these tasks” (p. 73). Although Sarikaya and Erdogan (2016) expected principals to set the tone for the educational environment and meet the desires of the staff, the staff must also conform and contribute to the school environment and assimilate to the principal’s goals. Sarikaya and Erdogan (2016) argued that it is the principal’s responsibility to establish “an environment in which everybody works with pleasure within an atmosphere of mutual trust and solidarity” (p. 73).

Building on the importance of trust and a sense of the value of the shared vision of trust, Nappi (2014) discussed about the positive impact shared and distributed leadership can have on a school. Regarding the need for principals to be effective, Nappi suggested, “Principals set the tone for the building, work to develop and carry out school goals, guide instruction, develop the budget, and lead the charge for student success” (p. 1). Nappi continued, “However, one need not look far to realize that this concept in its purest form has not come to fruition. School principals and other administrators are often expected to fix all the problems schools face, yet one might pose the question as to the feasibility of this notion” (p. 1). It is impossible for principals to do it all, to have all the answers, and to make all the right decisions. As relationships develop and power is shared, a strong school community is formed, the school community is empowered and readily reciprocates the trust in their leader. While trust in a leader propels the development of a strong community, distrust or an absence of trust can
deconstruct a community, which was evident in the interview responses from the participants in this study.

Boyd, Harris, and Murray (2005) emphasized the importance of new teachers having the ability to create successful relationships with their leadership and with other adults within the school community. They concluded that the importance of a community-connected teacher cannot be overlooked and extends the professional life of a teacher (p. 6). These relationships form a solid network for the teacher and add longevity to the careers of teachers. Edge, Descours, and Frayman (2016) studied leaders under 40 years old and how they fostered relationships with their staff. While Boyd, Harris, and Murray (2005) write about extending teacher careers Edge, Descours, and Frayman (2016) further identify a need for the principal to model successful relationships with the staff and the community which not only extends the professional life of the teacher it extends the professional life of the principal (p. 5).

Adult employees within the school serve as the models by which the students behave and the same is true for the modeling of expected behavior by the school administration for the teachers. Students notice the way adults treat each other at a school. Balyer (2017) contends that teachers and administrators serve as role models and they should be honest, genuine, and consist in order to establish and sustain trust in relationships throughout the school (Balyer, 2017, p. 322). The teachers and other adults set the school environment, and if the teachers have an elevated morale coupled with a positive school climate, then the students are apt to possess those same attributes. If teachers’ morale is poor and coupled with a negative school climate, however, students possess the same attributes. Students are with teachers more than students are with their parents, which increases the opportunities to influence a child’s life. This puts the onus on the teachers and the principal to display a high moral and ethical character, which, in turn,
trickles down to the student population and, in effect, creates a more positive and sustainable school climate.

Teachers and other school personnel are and need to serve as positive role models. Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) argued the extreme importance of schools creating entire school environments which exemplified high moral and ethical character (p. 295-298). Their holistic approach to improving school climate suggested that instead of teaching only character-building lessons in the classroom, all adults in the school community need to be vigilant and serve as good examples for students within the school community. Teachers are likely to emulate their leaders similar to the students’ emulation of the teacher. If students have a functional model to emulate, their chances for success undoubtedly increase, which also increases the achievement for the entire school (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001, p.295-298). Roles of teachers and school leaders are more than curriculum deliverers and disciplinarians. Teachers and school leaders need to be positive role models, maintain a positive classroom environment, and establish a positive school environment which promotes the overall success of the school (Cosenza, 2015, p. 96).

Honesty and openness, according to the research participants in my research, create a positive culture throughout the faculty but honesty and openness can also be a detriment if interpreted incorrectly. Mishra (1996) commented that “Openness beyond a certain level may, however, serve to impair rather than enhance trust. For example, telling someone the complete truth, with elaborate detail, about his or her character flaws may decrease trust between two parties” (p. 267). Mishra (1996) detailed how this brutal honesty can have an adverse impact on the basic levels of trust rather than improving the levels of trust through honest and open communication (p. 267). Despite Mishra’s warning of brutal honesty, Gächter and Schulz
argue comprehensive and intrinsic honesty is crucial for the smooth functioning of organizations and societies (p. 496). The principal must have an understanding of how to balance openness and honesty without jeopardizing the teacher-principal relationship.

Additional research can provide emphasis on the necessity of stakeholders’ interaction and collaboration with the school’s leadership, faculty, staff, and students and the influence a trusting and communicative relationship has on school climate development and sustainability. Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe (2009) mentioned the principal’s daily climate impact a principal: “Through their approach to decision-making and their everyday interactions with teachers, principals can affect the level of trust and collegiality among teachers, the overall interpersonal climate of the school, and student achievement” (p. 712). According to Rhodes et al., trust plays an important and vital role in the development of an effective school climate and a semblance of student achievement. Throughout my research findings, the teacher participants’ echoed Rhodes et al.’s comments for consistency in decision-making and consistency in communication, which can positively or negatively affect the daily lives of teachers. Student achievement, and even somewhat effective teacher-principal relationships, however, can exist without trust.

Rhodes et al. (2009) focused on the importance of trust in the school building and its impact on school climate and student achievement, but this account shows there are possibilities that achievement can still be attained with the absence of a trusting teacher-principal relationship. School climate, and more specifically trust, cannot be accomplished overnight, with or without an effective principal. Rhodes et al. (2009) mentioned a principal’s “everyday interactions with teachers” (p. 712). The need for positive, transparent, and consistent interactions between the teacher and the principal must occur frequently to cultivate a trusting
and communicative teacher-principal relationship. Trust is a key contributor not only to school climate and student achievement but also to the development and sustainability of teachers’ levels of self-efficacy.

**Conclusion**

The perceptions of this study’s research participants indicated communication and trust have substantial positive effects on the teacher-principal relationship. Sarikaya and Erdogan (2016) wrote, “There is a need for instructional leaders who do not strictly adhere to bureaucracy and procedures, more support teacher development, have strong communications skills, inspire trust and attach great importance to inter-groups communication” (p. 80). Sarikaya and Erdogan (2016) illustrated the significance and need of trust and communication in the successful teacher-principal relationship by emphasizing the need for leaders to be supportive, communicative, and trusting to create successful communication with their staff. This review of literature points to trust and communication as central themes to an effective teacher-principal relationship which is supported by my research findings which identify trust and communication as the most important two factors in an effective teacher-principal relationship.

This literature analysis illustrated the importance and influence of the teacher-principal relationship and its interdependence on trust and communication. The literature specified the responsibility the principal has in establishing a trusting and communicative relationship with his or her teachers. Handford and Leithwood (2013) proclaimed that trust among teachers in schools relates significantly to student achievement, and trust in school leaders is an important influence in such trust. Trust is critical for leaders to understand and develop because it serves as a conduit for most interactions in their organizations, allowing less time spent on details, planning and attending to messages, and more time spent on actions that contribute to
organizational improvements (Handford & Leithwood, 2013, p. 197).
Chapter 3. Materials and Methods

Context

In this study I sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of teachers and principals relative to the role of trust and communication in their relationships. I drew upon in-depth interviews with my research participants to identify participants’ ideas about the qualities that potentially mark effective trust and communication. This qualitative research may be a useful avenue for educators by providing examples of how to build upon or improve the teacher-principal relationship.

I collected demographic information from my participants and general demographic information from the two schools represented in this research. The schools’ demographic information revealed dynamic differences between the two schools and the two towns in which the schools were located, however, the differences did not appear to impact the participant perceptions of an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Participants

My research sample consisted of six teachers and two principals of varying backgrounds, education, and experiences. The participants ranged in age from approximately 30 years old to 60 years old. The participants’ respective schools had equal representation in this research; the participants from Davidson Elementary School included pre-k teacher Sarah Pearson, fourth grade teacher Mary Potts, special education teacher Amber Easton, and Principal Cynthia Fields who had been at Davidson for one year but taught at Davidson for eight years prior.

The participants from Morton Primary School consisted of third grade teacher Beverly Smith, fourth grade teacher Julia Bass, physical education teacher and coach Joseph Clark, and
Principal Kathleen Ellison who had been the principal at Morton Primary for two years. Table 3.1 provides a review of the participants’ general background information.

Table 3.1. Research Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Educational Experience</th>
<th>Professional Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Pre-K Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mid 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>21 Years</td>
<td>3rd Grade Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>Physical Education Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 illustrates the heterogeneous representation of the research participants. Including diverse participants was important in the design of my research to provide a true demographical representation of the research setting. All of the teacher participants shared common perceptions of an effective teacher-principal relationship, as well as notable differences influenced by their ethnicities, where they grew up, their socio-economic status as a youth, their personal experiences in their childhood education, and their professional experiences. The research findings indicated that, similar to teacher participants, both principal participants shared commonalities in leadership styles and in their perceptions of what an effective teacher-principal
relationship looked like, but they also had notable differences. Specific themes and subthemes were present and are explained in the findings.

The three teachers from Davidson Elementary School included Ms. Sarah Pearson, a Pre-K teacher, a White woman in her late 50s who had five children of her own and began her teaching career later in life. Ms. Pearson had a positive experience in her own education as a child and had many excellent teachers who had high expectations for their students. She remembered specifically two teachers in the sixth grade who cared about all of the students in the classroom. Ms. Pearson remarked, “In sixth grade I had two teachers that were just fabulous in every way. They truly cared about all the students in the classroom and had really high expectations.” Mentioning childhood teachers was one of the first notable experiences shared by a majority of the participants. Five of the six teacher participants had positive experiences in elementary and middle school and had a love and appreciation for school.

Ms. Pearson attended and graduated from college with a degree in general studies. She worked in a family business and had five children, however, at age 50, she decided to go back to school and became a teacher; she had always wanted to be a teacher and had always loved children. Ms. Pearson stated, “Because I have five children of my own and I always wanted children, right, that was the one thing that I always knew about myself so I love children and that's really the reason that I chose this.” She earned her teaching certification in pre-K through third grade and she had taught pre-K for seven years. At the time of her interview, she had returned to school and was earning her special education certification in elementary education.

Also at Davidson was third grade teacher Mary Potts. Ms. Potts was a Black woman in her mid-30s and had four children of her own. Ms. Potts was from a small outlying town of Riverside City. She attended to college after high school and became a teacher after earning her
degree and certification in elementary education and had been teaching for 13 years. Ms. Potts had an indifferent perspective when asked about her educational experience as a child. She mentioned that she felt it was “okay” and assumed she had a positive experience. She said that she knew she had more of a positive experience in high school than in elementary school and mentioned she enjoyed her time in college. She noted, “You want to go to college and you're learning for you and I don’t have to go to school; like your elementary, you know, where you have more of the don’t wants. I know that I did.” Ms. Potts became a teacher mainly because she was patient and liked working with children. She said, “I really enjoy working with children; I’ve always been very patient, I guess I would say, with children and I think a lot of other people saw that in me, like my family.” She was part of a large family and had many cousins and young nieces and nephews, which gave her a love for children.

The third teacher participant from Davidson was Amber Easton. Ms. Easton was in her early 50s and had three children of her own. Similar to Ms. Pearson, she started working in education later in life. Ms. Easton had taught in special education for ten years and prior to teaching she was a stay at home mother. She initially earned her bachelor’s degree in child and family studies and then earned her certification in elementary special education. She spoke very fondly of her educational experience as a child; she absolutely loved school and loved the experience. She specifically recalled going to school in a little schoolhouse for Pre-k and had distinct and fond memories of it, stating, “For preschool I went to a little schoolhouse in my neighborhood and had an awesome experience. I have my most vivid memories from school from that young age. I even remember graduating from Pre-k and how great of an experience that was.” Ms. Easton recalled her teacher as, “I had a teacher that I just loved and we did a lot of hands-on, just a lot of different activities. I remember the graduation and I remember just a lot
of the things we did.” Her kindergarten experience was similar to her Pre-K experience and she recalled developing a true love for school during kindergarten. Her mother spent 36 years as a teacher and instilled her love of school in her. Additionally, she specifically mentioned a teacher she had in middle school who was captivating. She explained, “In middle school had a teacher that, uh, he was very much hands-on also and took us on a lot of field trips, as many as he could. He reminded me honestly of Robin Williams.” She confirmed that teaching was a calling for her: “I just felt that it was, it was just, I get the job or profession, it was more of a calling. I just really enjoy what I do.”

Each of the three teachers at Davidson had multiple children of their own and they each professed a love for children, a notable theme moving forward and relative to some of the characteristics each teacher thought should be a part of the teacher-principal relationship. The three teacher participants from Morton Primary all had children as did both principals who are a part of this research. This common thread was notable in that all participants worked with children each day and loved what they did, which gave a genuine feel to their profession because of this connection between their personal and professional life. The teacher participants identified many of the same characteristics of their teacher-child and parent-child relationships to be present in their teacher-principal relationships, thus revealing the importance they placed on effective relationships at all levels.

Table 3.2 provides a recap of the three teachers from Davidson Elementary and identifies their gender, their race, the grade level at which they taught, and the school at which they taught.

Beverly Smith was a third grade teacher at Morton Primary. Ms. Smith was a Black woman in her late 40s who grew up in a small town in a neighboring parish and had three
children of her own. Ms. Smith initially earned her administrative assistant certification at a two-year community college.

Table 3.2. Davidson Elementary Teacher Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Professional Position</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Pre-K Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After working in this field, she realized that she wanted something different so she went back to college and earned a degree in elementary education. She taught in that field for 21 years. After 17 years of teaching, she pursued and completed her master’s degree in educational leadership. She had aspirations of becoming a school-based administrator.

Ms. Smith recalled having a positive experience during her childhood education and mentioned how different schools were during her childhood. She explained, “I can remember that school was a lot more calm and I guess with all of the advances in technology maybe there's a lot of overload with the kids. There’s so much information coming in they’re on information overload and that played a part.” Ms. Smith continued, “I don't remember having a lot of cases of discipline issues and there was a lot less testing.” She lamented the memories of her schooling and that she wished her students could have experienced what she had experienced. She did not mention any specifics about her teachers but recalled a principal during her elementary years. She recalled, “I do remember going to school in elementary. I can remember the principal and he was a little bit more personable. I saw him more so I remember him. He
would come around to the classrooms. Middle and high school, I can't tell you who it was [middle and high school principal] but I remember him [elementary principal] being around and visible. He was a lot more visible.”

Ms. Smith had a love for children, which was why she chose to become a teacher. She mentioned how fond she was of children and how much she herself enjoyed learning. She explained, “I love learning, like always coming to teach you all day every day for the rest of my life. Kids are funny. I like being around them, they are so funny, they keep you laughing, uh, they just, they have this childless wonder about them, they, they make mistakes but you better them and they get right back up again; like we as adults could learn from that.”

Ms. Smith had connectivity and rapport with her students and expected from her principal. She aligned rapport with trust in her relationship with her students and with her principal. She also addressed the subtheme of visible principal in her interview. Visibility is a component of accessibility, a theme of my research; in my experience as a teacher and administrator, the two are interdependent as to be accessible one needs to be visible and vice versa. Under the guidance of Ms. Ellison as my principal, I was taught to not only leave your office door open, but also to leave your office. Ms. Ellison made herself present throughout the school campus and was at virtually every event, every recess, and every dismissal.

Also at Morton Primary was fourth grade teacher Julia Bass. Ms. Bass was a White woman in her early 30s with two children who had been teaching for ten years. Ms. Bass grew up in the city of Riverside, which is, as its namesake says, the parish seat of Riverside Parish. The city of Riverside was approximately 128,000 in population size and Riverside Parish’s population was approximately 240,000 (U.S. Census, 2017). Ms. Bass was quick and happy to mention her love of school. From early on in her childhood she recalled school fondly. She
said, “I mean, when I was a child I loved school, I thought it was fun, you know. It was a good place to be.” The subtle mention of school being a “good place to be” translated to her professional life as an educator. During her interview, she reflected on her time working for an ineffective principal at Morton Primary and alluded that coming to work was not a good place to be. She was quick to compare that negative experience to her situation under her current principal. She spoke of her current principal’s effectiveness and how her current principal made her love coming to work, how she made her work a “good place to be.” She mentioned that elementary school was her favorite level as a child and the main reason she loved school was the experience her teachers gave her, the same way that Ms. Pearson and Ms. Easton recalled their respective experiences. She distinctly remembered all of her teachers and how they created a great environment for her.

Ms. Bass became a teacher simply because she enjoyed kids. Similar to Ms. Smith, she thought kids were fun and enjoyed being around them. She said, “I've always just loved working with children, um, and as soon as I could I babysat. My only other job besides being a teacher was at a preschool. Um, I dunno, I guess I find it rewarding but then at the same time I just find it to be fun.” Ms. Bass was consistently positive about her profession.

Joseph Clark was the final teacher participant from Morton Primary and he taught physical education. Mr. Clark was a Black man in his early 40s with two children. Mr. Clark brought a unique perspective in that he was the only male participant in this study. He had taught for 15 years in physical education and held a bachelor’s degree in education with a certification in physical education. Mr. Clark is from Davidson and went to Davidson Elementary School and still lived in Davidson, but worked at Morton Primary the previous three years. Prior to that, he worked at another school in the Riverside School District.
Mr. Clark mentioned that early on he struggled academically, particularly in reading. He repeated first grade, which made him hate school even more, as he distinctly remembered repeating first grade and all his friends moved on to second grade without him. He hated school until he reached the third grade. His third grade teacher had the reputation of being mean and tough to get along with but for some reason she liked Mr. Clark and he became her right-hand man. He recalled, “She [his third grade teacher] took a liking to me and then I had her as my teacher the next year and everybody was just ‘Aw, man. I can’t be in her class man. She’s so mean.’ But I was basically her teacher’s pet. I never missed a day of school that year.” Mr. Clark continued, “Just being that pet that year, kinda changed my outlook on school you know; obviously I like waking up and going to school because I never missed a day because of you know just the atmosphere that it had, even though she was that mean ole cuss.” The attention she gave him changed what he thought about school, changed his entire educational experience, and gave him the confidence he needed to succeed and he still attributed his success to this teacher. I remarked to him that he probably would have never become a teacher, much less attended college or quite possibly even graduated high school if he did not have such a positive influence from his third grade teacher, and he agreed.

Mr. Clark continued to struggle academically in upper elementary and into middle school but he still liked going to school. Throughout middle and high school, he had teachers and coaches who supported him and wanted him to succeed. He took this momentum into college and earned his degree, despite his mother only having a fourth grade education and his father never having attended school. He alluded to the reason that he became a teacher was because of the quality teachers he had during his education and he wanted to be that same teacher for other students. He also thought that teaching was the most rewarding job in the world. He commented
further, “They [his teachers] impacted me a lot, impacted my life. And then my coaches in high school really were impactful. And in teaching me and I had phenomenal teachers. I think that's why I became a teacher, was to be able to touch other people's lives.” His comments affirmed the recurring theme of the teacher participants having had teachers who had a positive impact on their lives, which in turn solidified their love of teaching. They wanted to emulate their childhood teachers and provide the experience that they had to their own students. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the teacher participants who worked at Morton Primary.

Table 3.3. Morton Primary Teacher Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Professional Position</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3rd Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Physical Education Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both principal participants came from different backgrounds yet shared many of the same leadership qualities described by the six participants. Ms. Cynthia Fields, the principal of Davidson Elementary, was a Black woman in her late 40s who grew up in a poor neighborhood in a small town located in a neighboring parish of Riverside Parish. Ms. Fields began her college career when she was 24 years old, had been working in education for 16 years, and held a master’s degree in educational leadership. As a senior in high school, she had a child but she graduated high school and held down a job all while raising her baby girl. Ms. Fields grew up in an all Black neighborhood and had a large family of five brothers and sisters who were raised by a single mother. She mentioned that she did not spend any time with White people throughout her years growing up and the first time she spent any meaningful time with White people was
when she went to college; that experience opened her eyes to a whole new world to which she was happy to be exposed.

Ms. Fields began her schooling in the Head Start program and she had vivid memories of her school being a big, tall white building that looked like a barn. Her father’s cousin was her teacher there and she taught her how to read. She remembers her teacher telling her father, “Cynthia is going to be something someday” and “She is a quick and easy learner.” During her interview, Ms. Fields recalled a specific memory from her first grade teacher. Her first grade teacher wrote on her report card, “Please help Cynthia. She can’t read.” Ms. Fields still has this report card, over 40 years later. She mentioned that she ran into her first grade teacher and told her all about how she can read and about her success. That first grade experience gave Ms. Fields the desire and motivation to succeed academically. She wanted to prove to her teacher that she could read and used this motivation throughout her education. She fondly recalled her elementary years as a student and she had a positive experience in high school.

The most enjoyment for Ms. Fields came in college and her professional career. Similar to Ms. Potts’ response, her best educational experiences were her college years because she learned what she would put into practice in her careers. Going to college also allowed Ms. Fields to learn things outside her environment. Her college years opened her eyes to different cultures and she began to not see color. She recalled from her first year teaching that, “I had a classroom with all White children and I never realize that until the end of the year, which means you don't see color.” She credited her college experience for her ability to see people for who they truly are, not just by the color of their skin.

Ms. Fields became a teacher because people in her life believed that she could become a teacher; she did not have enough insight to see that in herself. Regardless of where she was
schooled or worked, people believed in her and thought that she could be more than she was. “They saw things in me that I did not see in myself.” One day, when she was 24 years old and working at Walmart, she woke up and knew that she had to go to college and become a teacher. She finally believed in herself, a far different experience from Ms. Ellison’s.

Ms. Ellison, the principal at Morton Primary School, was a white woman in her early 40s who grew up in a middle class family. Her parents raised her together along with her sister and brother. She earned her master’s degree in educational leadership and was in her twentieth year in education. As a child, she went to inner-city schools, which eventually would be the schools in which she taught. She recalled, “I walked to school, inner-city schools, so I was surrounded by diversity and this is important because I was around about diversity all the way down. Uh, I work better in those settings I feel.” Attending school in a diverse setting proved beneficial to her professional career as she was well prepared to teach in the inner-city high-risk schools. In contrast, Ms. Fields did not grow up or attend school in a diverse setting and was not exposed to diversity until college.

Ms. Ellison did well in school and had positive experiences through her eighth grade year where she finished third in her class. By her freshman year she flunked out of every single subject on purpose during the first quarter of the year and recalled, “I was very rebellious and then some things with my father changed and he addressed me and we had a conversation, whatever, but the next nine weeks I got straight B’s and what that experience did and I think that's why am effective in a high or middle school setting, is my decisions that freshman year did not define who I ended up being.” She referred to herself as simply a good kid who made some bad decisions. This experience gives her perspective when working with the kids and shows her there is always hope for any situation to improve.
Ms. Ellison initially went to college to be a physical therapist, but changed her major to education. She cannot recall why she became a teacher but did have a reason for becoming an administrator. She said, “Now an administrator, I can answer that one because we thought we knew more than what we saw and I'll tell you this, what I said to many people. I was tired of cleaning up other people’s ant piles. They would kick the ant pile and I would have to go and clean up their stuff. If I was gonna clean up and clean up it was gonna be when I kicked.”

At the onset of this research, I did not have an intentional focus on race or diversity, but as the research evolved, I realized how important diversity was to the validity of my research. Prior to interviewing Ms. Fields and Ms. Ellison, I would not have thought that Ms. Ellison, a White woman who grew up in a middle class family, would have more diversity experiences growing up than Ms. Fields, a Black woman who grew up in a poor all-Black neighborhood. My naivety and my ignorance did not allow me to see this as a possibility. I am a White man who grew up in a lower-middle class household with a single mother and I was the only child. I think growing up, and still to this day, I have viewed diversity incorrectly. Prior to this research, I would have viewed Ms. Fields’ upbringing as a diverse upbringing, simply because she grew up in a poor all-Black neighborhood. That neighborhood was not diverse; it was homogenous and my point-of-view was skewed. My point-of-view was fueled by ignorance; I grew up believing that a population of non-White people, such as where Ms. Fields grew up, was an example of racial diversity. This example is not racial diversity because the setting Ms. Fields described was all Black; within that setting there might be diversity of gender, socio-economic status, or other categories but when speaking of racial diversity, to which Ms. Fields referred and to which what I referred, the setting was homogenous. Although seemingly insignificant in the scope of this
research, this personal revelation had an impact on the research and provided further objectivity to the findings through my eyes.

The two principals in my research are both in their first years and both focused on communication and trust in their first year as administrators. They each feel a trustworthy relationship between a principal and a teacher is impossible to establish and maintain without the constructive use of communication. The principal should establish the line of communication through initial and continuous contact with his or her faculty. The principals in my study each had several years of experience working in administration which contrasts Balyer’s (2017) principal participants. The experience of my principal participants proves to be an important component of their success as principals and in establishing a positive environment where relationships thrive.

In reviewing responses from the two principals in this research, I identified themes and subthemes from the research findings. After I identified the responses from each principal, I provided a synthesis of the findings and identified the major themes, sub themes, correlations, and contrasts from the findings. As previously mentioned, each principal came from a different background yet had many of the same qualities of effective principals. Ms. Fields became an administrator because her principal believed in her and urged her to continue her schooling and move up in the ranks. Ms. Ellison was tired of seeing people above her make mistakes and expecting her to fix those mistakes. She compared the mistakes to a kicked ant pile and said, “I was tired of cleaning up other people’s ant piles. They would kick the ants you know, the ant pile, and I would have to go and clean up their stuff. If I was gonna clean up and up I was gonna be the one who kicked it.” This quote illustrated Ms. Ellison’s confidence and ability to take action when needed.
Table 3.4 represents participants from Davidson Elementary and participants from Morton Primary.

Table 3.4. Teacher Participants at Davidson Elementary and Morton Primary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Professional Position</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Pre-K Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Davidson Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3rd Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Physical Education Teacher</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Morton Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 provides a succinct participant summary and identifies where each participant worked and with whom each participant worked. The next section explains my positionality as a researcher and general experiences and perceptions I shared with the research participants.

**Researcher Positionality and Experiences**

I played the role of insider in the interview process of this research. I have had many of the same experiences and held many of the same perceptions as the research participants. I have worked or currently work with the eight research participants for between one and four years.
My shared experiences with the participants could have presented some bias in this research and I used those shared experiences to frame some of the research questions. An example of a potential bias is the disposition of the teachers with respect to their profession. Teachers may perform the same way in their classroom despite who their principal is. Another example of a potential bias is the personality of my research participants. Each participant has a unique personality and experience that caused them to answer the questions the way they did and also influences the type of relationship they have with their principal.

All participants were comfortable and forthcoming during the interview process and were eager to provide their perspectives; this outcome might have been different if I was an outsider and had not shared these experiences with them. I accounted for my relationships and closeness to the research during the interviews and coding of the findings, and provided some of my own accounts and perspectives to remind readers of my potential bias and my shared experiences with the research participants.

**Setting**

This research centered on two elementary schools in southern Louisiana. Each school had a previous principal who consistently demonstrated ineffective interpersonal relationship skills with the school’s faculty and did not establish or maintain trusting and communicative relationships with their faculty. My research findings provide documentation of the ineffectiveness from the teachers’ perspectives, and prove an adverse shift occurred in each school during the administration of each school’s previous principal. The problem increased exponentially over the respective terms of the principals’ tenure at the schools.

The schools represented in this research were Davidson Elementary School and Morton Primary School. Both schools were located on the outskirts of the city of Riverside, a city in
south Louisiana. Morton Primary’s school community held lofty expectations for the school and the principal because of its rich tradition and excellence. The school had only two leaders over a thirty-year span prior to Ms. Richardson becoming principal. Throughout the thirty years, the principals worked together in the relational capacity of principal and assistant principal. The assistant principal shared the principal’s vision and eventually succeeded the principal upon the principal’s retirement. Therefore, Morton Primary had a well-defined and indoctrinated culture and vision.

Both principals during the thirty-year span of service were White and the new principal, whose past leadership and faculty relationships were represented in the research findings, was Black. The transfer of power to the new principal was never seamless or accepting and, through my experiences and conversations with colleagues while working at this school, race surfaced as an underlying cause for this lack of acceptance. The school’s racial demographics consisted of 85% White students and 8% Black students (Louisiana Department of Education, 2017). Race may have had some impact on the objective acceptance of the new principal from not only the school’s faculty but also all stakeholders, because of the significant disparity of Black and White students. Davidson Elementary, however, had a more heterogeneous demographic makeup than Morton Primary.

In addition to differing demographics, each school had differing parent/guardian support systems and differing levels of community involvement. I worked at both schools, at Morton Primary as a teacher and at Davidson Elementary as an assistant principal, and I worked with a first year principal at each school; I was a teacher for one principal and I served as assistant principal to the other principal. This experience provided me with a closer look into the
relationship building of a new principal with her faculty and I saw this occur effectively at both schools.

As I analyzed the research findings and participant interviews, I found examples of how each of the first year principals established effective relationships. The research findings drew comparisons of the previous principal of each teacher participant to the current principal, which showed significant contrast between the teacher participant experiences with each leader. The findings indicated each of the teacher participants had an ineffective relationship with their previous principal and also revealed that both principals built and dismantled effective relationships with their teachers through their characteristics and actions. The use of two schools and the comparison of both principals combined with the experiences of the six teacher participants identified the need for an effective teacher-principal relationship as well as a purpose for this research. The warrants of this research, furthermore, can be found in the voices of the participants; these eight voices exposed what works and what does not work in the teacher-principal relationships, and how to avoid ineffectiveness in the relationship. The participants’ experiences and perceptions provided cause for this research and traction for similar research beyond this study. The characteristics, themes, and experiences shared through this research provide motivation for current teachers and principals to work toward establishing communicative and trusting relationships with each other.

Background on the schools, the communities to which the schools belong, and general information about the current political and educational climate in Louisiana is necessary to situate this study. Louisiana is the only state in America whose political subdivisions are parishes rather than counties; the state is divided into 64 parishes. A parish is defined as a small administrative district typically having its own church and priest, which naturally grew out of
Louisiana's heavily Roman Catholic influenced past (Sousa, 2017). Louisiana has kept parishes among the several elements of the political and legal structure from that time.

Davidson Elementary School was a Pre-k through fifth grade school located in the small town of Davidson in Riverside Parish, a southern parish in Louisiana with a population of approximately 240,000 (U.S. Census, 2017). Davidson’s population was approximately 1,754 people according to a 2017 census report. The town of Davidson’s population had been stagnant for several years, which created a stagnant economy and resulted in widespread poverty and a significant drug problem. As a school based administrator at Davidson Elementary, I witnessed first hand from the local police department reports about students’ parents and guardians being arrested or jailed for drug possession.

The second school, Morton Primary School, was a Pre-k through eighth grade school located in the same school district as Davidson Elementary but in the town of Morton, a small outlying town of the city of Riverside. The two towns were opposite in many ways. First, Morton Township had a population of approximately 12,704 and its population had grown 50% in the previous six years, from approximately 8,105 (U.S. Census, 2017). The town of Morton was thriving economically and the large population growth in the past several years boosted its economy and created a significant growth in housing and commercial development. This was fully realized by the influx of student population I experienced while teaching at Morton Primary for four years during the population growth of Morton Township. The school size increased at Morton Primary whereas the school size at Davidson had dwindled. Each school performed differently academically as well, with Morton significantly outperforming Davidson Elementary.
Ethical Considerations

I followed the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board of Louisiana State University to avoid potential ethical ramifications that might surface during my research. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 65 years old and no participants reported psychological or neurological conditions. Subjects had the option to decline participation; if they chose to participate, they were given pseudonyms and remained anonymous. The findings of this study have the potential to be submitted for publication; in the event of publication, no names or identifying information will be included and the participants’ identities remain anonymous.

Each participant signed and was provided with a copy of a consent form and was given the contact information for the Louisiana State University’s Institutional Review Board if they needed further assistance.

Research Design

Through this research, I sought to gain insight and understanding from the experiences of the participants (Kim, 2015, p. 54). I compared and contrasted the participants’ data with respect to trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationship. I utilized open-ended questioning through in-depth interviews that focused on communication and trust within the teacher-principal relationship to identify themes and characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship. The research process was subjective in nature due to the various perspectives of participants as well as my perspective as a researcher who shared many experiences with the participants. The awareness and discussion of subjectivity enhanced the rigor and validity of this research (Bradbury-Jones, 2007, p. 290). Bradbury-Jones conversely believed “it may be impossible to judge the trustworthiness of qualitative studies in a meaningful way; that qualitative studies need to be judged against criteria that are specifically developed for
use within the qualitative paradigm” (p. 290-291). Exposing my subjectivity as a researcher as well as the subjectivity of the research itself presented a higher level of rigor and validity to my research. I do not agree, however, that trustworthiness in qualitative research is impossible because, if the researcher presents the true merits of the research and outlines the realities of the research, the research is trustworthy at face value, with its flaws.

Knowledge hinges upon one’s perspective, as explained by Smith (1998), and once we understand and accept that knowledge is always within one’s perception, we realize that there are no real truths, in the conventional meaning of the word (Smith, 1998, p 4). Similarly, Berger (2015), aligning with Smith (1998), says “Consequently, researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal” Berger (2015, p. 220). My research is built on perceptions and experiences of my participants and myself along with the biases our personal experiences create. All of the eight participants in this research provided their truths, their realities, and these truths and realities cannot be discounted or rejected for they are of the truest of truths of the participants; they are the perspectives of the participants’ experiences. Maxwell (1992) described our experiences as participants to be “As observers and interpreters of the world, we are inextricably part of it; we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience” (p. 283). Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015), adding to the impossibility of obtaining observer independence, argued that the researcher should embrace their role as an observer in order to maximize the potential of the research (p. 9). The participants’ accounts of this research, as well as my experience with each participant and my shared experiences with each of them, created the
research subjectivity and truth; the findings present the truths of our experiences and how our experiences led us to interpret the relationship with our principals.

Peshkin (1988) recognized the important connection between one’s perspective and one’s knowledge and wrote of the inevitable existence of subjectivity in research. Peshkin (1988) stated, "I feel at liberty to spin a particular story - the gift of my subjectivity - but not out of thin air; my story must be borne out by facts that are potentially available to any other researcher" (p. 278). Here, Peshkin drew attention to the researcher’s purposeful subjectivity which must be rooted in truth, the truth of experience of the participant or the researcher.

Data Collection Procedures

My research utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were transcribed and emergent themes of the teacher-principal relationship were revealed. As I identified themes associated with this relationship, I focused on trust and communication within that relationship, the foundation of this research, and accounted for emerging thematic elements of which I might have not thought prior to data analysis. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed for narrative development using open-ended questioning that provided access to unchoreographed material from participant responses. I used a small sample size in my research to garner in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the teacher-principal relationship and how it comes to be effective. My interviews were centered on inductive and emergent processes revealing the findings supporting the phenomena of the study (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319).

I chose participants at my current workplace and my previous workplace because of the dynamic teacher-principal relationship at Morton Primary during my time there and my shared experiences with those participants. The experiences warranted attention due to the wholesale changes in the leadership that was caused by ineffective leadership at the school. Additionally, I
focused on Davidson Elementary because Davidson went through a change similar to what Morton went through. These choices provided participant perspectives from two schools with different demographic representations.

Southern Louisiana was experiencing divisiveness, which was indicative of the climate of the state and the country. The two school communities in this research represented the divisiveness in both climates. Morton Primary was a school community with a large majority of White residents of the middle class. The increase in population of this community was indicative of the common tradition of White flight where middle class Whites leave the city and move to the suburbs. In the 1950s, social scientist Morton Grodzins (2017) said, “Once the proportion of non-whites exceeds the limits of the neighborhood’s tolerance for interracial living, whites move out” (p. 138). The literature referred to this “limit of tolerance” and, according to the literature, the racial composition of a neighborhood changes somewhat more quickly as the minority population increases (Haines, 2010, p. 20). I had experiences when working at Morton Primary where racial undertones were noticeable and Black children were typically targeted more as discipline problems. Principal Richardson was Black and I do not think that she was given a fair chance because of the color of her skin. I do not know if she would have been a more effective leader if given a better chance; I believe that she might have had more opportunity for success as a leader in the Davidson community, which consisted of a heterogeneous representation of ethnicities and was a more realistic representation of the general demographics of southern Louisiana, both economically and ethnically.

The data was collected through the form of in-depth interviews that provide detailed descriptions and understandings of each participant’s relationship with his or her current principal and past principals, and how those relationships interrelated with trust and
communication. The principal participants answered eighteen questions that were similar to the teacher participant questions but from the perspective of the principal. The question sets are found in the Appendices section of this research.

Six teachers and two principals were interviewed; the principals were current administrators of the teacher participants. The teachers represented various demographics and experience. All participants were provided with assurances of confidentiality and all research procedures conducted in this study were reviewed and approved by the IRB. I used pseudonyms for the eight participants as well as for any identifiable information, such as the name of the school at which they worked or the city in which the school was located. In support of the use of pseudonyms and to protect the participants’ identity, Kaiser (2009) stated:

> Researchers remove identifiers to create a clean data set. A clean data set does not contain information that identifies respondents, such as a name or address (such identifying information might be stored elsewhere, in separate, protected files). Some identifiers are easily recognized and dealt with. For example, the names of respondents can be replaced with pseudonyms” (p. 1635).

Throughout the research process, I took precautions to eliminate any chance of identifying information that could cause harm or discomfort to the participants while upholding the validity and central message of the research findings (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015, p. 617).

For the data collection, I recorded the interviews using an audio recording device. The in-depth interview process was semi-structured and was non-directive to foster the most natural and honest conversations with the participants. The semi-structured design allowed the participants time to think and formulate their answers to express their experiences; this also provided additional reaction time for the researcher to develop follow-up questions focusing on emerging ideas and unfolding events. I urged participants to provide complete descriptions of their experiences and asked follow-up questions seeking further clarification when
appropriate. Participants described their thoughts about when events occurred along with their sensations and feelings during these events, the setting of the events, the climate surrounding the events, and the overall impact the events had on their relationship with the principal.

**Analysis**

Through data analysis, I decoded the data from the interviews and identified similarities and differences among the interviews. My first step was to transcribe the interviews, assuring that I represented exactly what was said and how it was said. Once I completed the transcription process I utilized Tesch’s (1990) coding process. I read through the transcriptions to get a sense of the findings as a whole (Tesch, 1990). While Tesch (1990) focuses on transcriptions Saldaña (2015) puts additional emphasis on the importance of utilizing notes taken during the interview process to support the transcription. During this process I utilized my interview notes to implore a precise transcription of the interview including non-verbal cues and pauses that I recorded in my notes during the interview (p. 137). I read each interview again and wrote notes about the content of the interview, and the general experiences and ideas shared by each participant. I made a list of all the themes and topics I found in the transcriptions and deciphered which themes were shared by which participants and created a concept map of themes and characteristics shared by every participant. Next, I grouped related topics and combined some topics to reduce the total list of topics. Trust, honesty, and confidentiality, for example, were grouped together and became one cluster and eventually a major theme. The coding process allowed me to accurately identify themes and patterns from the participants’ experiences and perspectives relative to the teacher-principal relationship. Interview notes along with coding notes were compared and were used to support the analysis and render a findings-based narrative discussion. The focus of the research method was to gain a thorough understanding of the
descriptions of experiences provided by the participants and how the findings related to the trusting and communicative teacher-principal relationship.
Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion

My analysis uncovered several themes and subthemes associated with the teacher-principal relationship. The research also pointed to the important roles trust and communication play in that relationship. The unit of analysis in my research was the teacher-principal relationship with the teacher and the principal as the constructs of that unit. Communication and trust were the two main themes identified in the findings from the perceptions of the research participants. These major themes occurred throughout the research and were based more on the perceived effectiveness of the principal within the teacher-principal relationship; the participants put the onus on the principal, rather than on the teacher, to instill these characteristics and to use these characteristics to forge the teacher-principal relationship. Rieg and Marcoline (2008) reinforced this thought of the principal bearing the responsibility of establishing the relationship with their teachers: “Relationship building with teachers by principals helps to underscore the adage that ‘all business is personal’” (p. 5).

The research participants perceived a need for the teacher-principal relationship to have a personal component to be effective. An example of this need was found in the interview with Ms. Potts, the fourth grade teacher at Davidson Elementary. Ms. Potts did not want to have a personal relationship with the principal based on friendship or doing things outside of school. She wanted a personal relationship with the principal but on a professional level; she wanted her principal to be professional and sincerely care about her teachers.

The findings are organized and introduced relative to specific themes and subthemes identified from the interviews with the research participants. These themes support the conceptual framework of this study and add to the validity and practicality of the framework. Each theme and characteristic provides context and reason for studying the teacher-principal relationship.
relationship, the need for the relationship to be effective, and its dependence on communication and trust. I connected the participants through similar and differing themes with the intent of adding to the construct of the study.

**Positive Childhood Educational Experience**

The positive childhood educational experiences of the participants steered them to a career in education and positively impacted the participants as educators. Six of the eight participants expressed fond memories from their childhood education and had positive and memorable experiences as students in elementary school, which carried through high school and into college. Many of these childhood experiences led the participants to the field of education. Ms. Fields, Ms. Ellison, Ms. Pearson, Ms. Easton, Ms. Smith, and Ms. Bass had specific positive memories and experiences early in their childhoods. They also mentioned these experiences as influencing their becoming effective teachers; they wanted to have a positive impact on their students just as their teachers had a positive impact on them. Positive experiences in teachers’ personal education correlated to positive experiences that teacher participants provided to their students. Ms. Potts and Mr. Clark experienced more indifference and negativity in their elementary schooling than the other six participants did. Table 4.1 recognizes the similarities and differences of the educational experiences from the participants’ youth.

Ms. Potts, the fourth grade teacher at Davidson, was indifferent about her elementary, middle, and high school years. She did not recall much about her years as a student during that time. She did point out that she enjoyed college the most because it aligned with what she wanted to do.

Mr. Clark brought a different experience than the other participants as he immediately and unequivocally said he hated school during his elementary years. He never wanted to attend school and often ran away from school.
Table 4.1. Participant Educational Experiences in Lower-Elementary School as a Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Positive Experience</th>
<th>Indifference</th>
<th>Negative Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He recalled, “I hated school. Uh, I ran away from campus a couple times as a kindergartner cuz I could see my house from the school yard. Uh, fences weren’t locked back then. A custodian came off campus, [slight laugh] came, bring me back to school. Back then you know, you can grab a kid by the arm and drag ‘em.” He hated waking up to go to school and the only things he looked forward to at school were recess and playing with his friends. Later in elementary school, Mr. Clark found support from a third grade teacher, grew to love school, and eventually credited his teachers with inspiring him to pursue a career in education. “They [Mr. Clark’s teachers] impacted me a lot, impacted my life. And then my coaches in high school really were impactful. Some rewards I get from teaching I can’t get in any other profession.” Mr. Clark’s teachers helped mold him into the teacher he is today; he clearly voiced a love for teaching and credited the positive impacts from his personal teachers.

Other participants had similar memories of their childhood teachers and drew on those experiences as reasons for their success as teachers. Mr. Clark’s fond recollection of his teachers showed that a student’s negative experience in school can turn into a positive one if teachers genuinely care for the student. Several participants mentioned genuineness as a perceived characteristic of an effective principal and an effective teacher. It was clear that the childhood
schooling experiences of each participant had an impact on them as educators, which supports the importance of this subtheme and further illustrates the role a teacher has in shaping a student.

**Communication**

Participants in this research perceived communication, the first of two major themes in this research, as the overarching characteristic of an effective teacher-principal relationship. Each participant disclosed the necessity for communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship and provided experiences within their own teacher-principal relationships where communication was absent. Table 4.2 illustrates that all eight participants identified communication as a vital characteristic of an effective teacher-principal relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Top three characteristics of an effective Teacher-Principal Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Rapport (Communication) Trust Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Rapport (Communication) Compassion Personable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Communication Trust Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Communication Professionalism Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Open Communication Clear Expectations Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Open Communication Honesty Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>Communication Fairness Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>Communication Trust Accessibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the eight participants clearly identified communication as necessary for an effective teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Pearson and Ms. Potts identified rapport as necessary for a successful relationship, directly aligning with communication. As a first year principal, Ms. Fields emphasized communication. She asserted:
I think my, well, not I think, I know, my goal, especially from the previous administration, and I say this from experience you know, who [previous administrator] was not a very good communicator or did not communicate in a respectful way, that it was my goal to speak to the staff, regardless if it was a good or bad situation, to approach it in a positive and respectful manner. Um, I can't stand it when someone speaks to me disrespectfully or yells at me and I don't wanna do that to any other adult even if I'm furious I don't want to do that.

Ms. Fields identified the need for improved communication between her and her teachers due to the lack of communication between the previous principal and her teachers. Additionally, Ms. Fields indicated how important respect is to the success of the teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Fields used the working relationship she and I had as an example of fostering communication and emphasizing the importance of communication when she concluded, “Uh, and I do believe that it's [teacher-principal relationship] been fostered the way how you and I communicate with each other and the way that we communicate with them.” Ms. Fields’s words revealed that communication was her main concern in her new position as principal. Her emphasis on communication, as well as the other seven participants, proved the importance communication has on the participants’ perceptions of an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Participants not only shared experiences from communicative teacher-principal relationships but also shared negative experiences in those relationships where communication was absent. The participants’ perceptions of and experiences in the teacher-principal relationship were negative when there was a void of communication within the relationship. Table 4.3 indicates the absence of communication experienced by the teacher participants in relationships with their previous principals. Table 4.3 illustrates that six teacher participants experienced ineffective communication with their previous principals. The teacher participants had parallel experiences with their previous respective principals and their current respective principals although they were from two different schools and had two different first-year leaders.
Table 4.3. Teacher Participant Experiences with Levels of Communication with Previous Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Ineffective Communication with previous principal</th>
<th>Shared the same previous principal at Davidson Elementary</th>
<th>Shared the same previous principal at Morton Primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Smith was somewhat of an outlier in that she did not share the same previous principal as Ms. Bass and Mr. Clark at Morton Primary because she did not work at Morton prior to Ms. Ellison’s first year as principal. Ms. Smith still shared a similar experience with the participants, as her previous principal was an ineffective communicator. Furthermore, Ms. Bass and Ms. Easton had parallel experiences but shared them with different past principals.

Ms. Easton described her relationship with her previous principal as, “Distant [the relationship]. A level of insecurity on my part. I just didn't’ feel secure in the relationship and in approaching her.” The principal Ms. Easton referred to was the principal at Davidson Elementary prior to Ms. Fields. This quote illustrates how different the previous principal at Davidson was than Ms. Fields and the emphasis Ms. Fields put on communication at Davidson Elementary. Additionally, if a teacher perceives the principal as distant, is not comfortable in the relationship and is uncomfortable approaching the principal, communication does not exist in that relationship. Northouse (2013) assert successful leaders communicate by listening first. They understand that listening involves being receptive and hearing what others have to say (p. 221). Ms. Easton’s experience with her previous principal did not align with Northouse’s
assertion as it consisted of a non-receptive and uninvolved leader. In summary, the teacher participant perceptions indicated the need for communication for the teacher-principal relationship to be effective.

Ms. Fields and Ms. Ellison, principals at Davidson and Morton respectively, agreed that communication was one of the top three characteristics of an effective principal and an effective teacher-principal relationship. They not only believed it but they practiced it. Ms. Bass, a fourth grade teacher at Morton Primary remarked, “I love the way that she [Ms. Ellison] sets the expectations and they’re given and it’s to everyone and it's the same, you know.” This quote indicated the additional need for consistency and communicating expectations as characteristics in an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Ms. Potts had a similar description of the need for communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship and how it existed in her relationship with Principal Fields. Ms. Potts described Ms. Fields as having an open door policy and promoting a positive relationship with her. She said that she had not had to speak to her many times during Ms. Fields’s first year as principal but when she did speak to her, she felt as if she was open to ideas and allowed her to make instructional decisions in her classroom. Ms. Potts described Ms. Fields:

This relationship is a lot better than the past principal with trust and communication and I didn't feel like I could communicate on some things with my past principal because I don't, I don't know what to expect, and if sometimes if I don't know what to expect I don't like, I’m not a confrontational person, like I really don't and so if I feel like it would you know some type of conflict I just wouldn't talk about it at all. So, I just do my thing and so I feel like it's more of a good communication with this principal in the last principal. I feel like I can talk to her and, um, and come up with ideas or just, uh, anything that I need to talk about.

This quote demonstrates the difference between Ms. Potts’s relationship with her previous principal and her current principal and how communication, and the lack there of, was central to the different relationships. She stated her previous principal was not predictable, not welcoming,
and she did not feel like she could knock on her door. The relationship was not positive, the expectations were always different, and she never knew what to expect. Her previous principal also was not supportive and was not open-minded, which made an effective relationship with her impossible. Ms. Potts provided this research with additional evidence about the value of communication in a teacher-principal relationship and provided insight into a teacher-principal relationship that is void of communication.

Ms. Ellison stated how important communication was in her relationship with her faculty, and particularly the importance that her faculty to have a voice. She provided them with a voice and let them express their opinions and her staff was thankful for that voice; her three teachers interviewed for this research mentioned how important this voice was to their relationship with Ms. Ellison. She reported that she was happy with how she communicated with her faculty and mentioned how her accessibility was so important to a successful relationship with her faculty.

Accessibility was a recurring theme of this research and proved to be an integral part in the foundation of an effective teacher-principal relationship through the eyes of the participants. Ms. Ellison spoke about fostering communication between her faculty and her, and reported that she liked the way they communicated and that accessibility was a big part of the success of her communication. Ms. Ellison insisted, “A part of that [fostering communication] is accessibility, as far as communication goes but also having a sacred calendar that is predictable and creating things that are predictable so when you create things that are very predictable you can help communication a lot.” Predictability, clear expectations and knowing what you are getting, thus, connected to the major research theme of communication. Participant perceptions of communication in the teacher-principal relationships were evident throughout the research and were perceived to have much value in an effective teacher-principal relationship. Subthemes
connecting to the theme of communication include rapport, leadership, compassion, genuine investment, principal accessibility, principal consistency and visibility, and comfort. The subthemes are illustrated later in this chapter.

**Trust**

The second major theme identified in this research was trust. Characteristics of trust, along with honesty and confidentiality, were evident in each interview. Teacher participants perceived trust as significant in the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship; some participants believed that an effective relationship was not possible without trust. Table 4.4 illustrates the emphasis research participants put on the characteristic of trust in the teacher-principal relationship.

Table 4.4. Necessity of Trust and Communication in an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Does an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship Need Trust and Communication?</th>
<th>Does an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship Need Trust?</th>
<th>Is the Teacher-Principal Relationship Better with Trust than without it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 indicates half of the participants thought that an effective teacher-principal relationship must include trust to be effective. Although half of the participants did not think the teacher-principal relationship needed to include trust, all eight participants thought that trust made the
teacher-principal relationship more effective. Ms. Easton said the teacher-principal relationship cannot be effective without trust and communication. She declared, “If there is not trust, the communication remains surface level.” Surface level communication indicates communication occurs at a minimal level and only on an as-needed basis. Handford and Leithwood (2013) corroborated the need for more than surface level communication, writing, “The principal must be genuine and exude consistency, competence, honesty, and openness; all affecting the trust the faculty places in the principal” (p. 205-206). The genuineness of the principal eliminates the potential for surface level communication and provides a path for faculty trust in the principal. Ms. Smith said that an effective teacher-principal relationship must contain both trust and communication, contending, “How are you going to trust someone you don't communicate with? If you don't communicate then you don't know the person, don't know the values, expectations, etc.” Ms. Bass agreed:

I think they [trust and communication] both have to be there for it [teacher-principal relationship] to be an effective relationship. I mean obviously you can still communicate without trust but I don't think it's true communication. I think it's kind of some of the stuff I said earlier where you know yea you are talking to the person but, it's not, I'm not going to be 100% honest with you because I'm afraid of where the conversation’s going to go so if you want me to be honest then, yeah, I have to feel the trust part of it.”

Ms. Bass revealed that although communication takes place in the absence of trust, she did not think the communication was in its true form. Therefore, her perception was that communication was useless if trust was not present alongside it.

Ms. Easton expanded on the perceived importance of trust in the teacher-principal relationship and the dynamic difference of trust between her relationships with Ms. Fields and her relationship with her previous principal. Ms. Easton described her relationship with her current principal, Ms. Fields, as a good relationship that was respectful and compassionate. She also noted that her current principal was always present at school, a quality her previous
Ms. Easton explained, “The relationship was distant and I also felt insecure in the relationship and intimidated when I tried to approach her [previous principal]. On a personal level, she was very nice but professionally she was the opposite.” Ms. Easton illustrated how a lack of trust created a distance between the teacher and the principal and inhibited communication. It also showed the difference in approachability and accessibility between Ms. Fields’ and Ms. Easton’s previous principal. Participants perceived the principal’s presence adds to their approachability and improved communication and trust.

Ms. Ellison wanted her teachers to trust her, trust what she said, and trust her decisions. In speaking about her current faculty she confirmed, “They trust that my advice is coming from a place of non-judgment and that it's going to be a thoughtful advice I guess, so it’s trusting. So it’s [trust] a huge factor.” Ms. Ellison alluded to the importance of the perception of objective trust her faculty had in her and how that perception was important in her relationship with her faculty. Furthermore, she thought her faculty must trust her for the relationship to be a success; in contrast, Ms. Fields and Ms. Pearson did not put trust as a necessity to an effective teacher-principal relationship.

The participant perceptions of the importance of trust were evident but the development of trust did not happen automatically. Ms. Pearson did not think that the relationship with her principal was where it could be eventually because she had a difficult time trusting people, which was no fault of the principal. Schein (2011) recognized Ms. Pearson’s struggle with trust and how it would take time for her to establish trust. Schein confirmed Ms. Pearson’s notion saying that intimacy, in any relationship, will reflect the amount each party trusts each other and
intimacy is established as time goes on and as each party reveals more about themselves to the other (p. 18). Ms. Pearson was satisfied with the level of trust she had with her current principal and pointed out that trusting someone can be difficult and can take some time.

Ms. Fields had a similar perspective to Ms. Pearson. Ms. Fields postulated, “Alright, let me say this. I have a very, very difficult time trusting people. You truly, truly, truly have to earn my trust. I don't take it lightly.” She talked about the level of trust with her faculty adding, “Um...I've only known this faculty for the past year. There's only two people on this staff that I can say that I trust and that’s you [interviewer] and our secretary. Uh...I think... I trust my faculty enough to know that I have to inspect what I expect.” She continued, “I like the level [of trust] where it is. I think in time it will, I will expect it to get better but I'm fine with the way that it is now.” Ms. Fields did not value trust in the teacher-principal relationship as the other participants did. The value she put on trust in her relationship with her teachers was surprising, especially when compared with Ms. Ellison, the other principal participant. Both principals were successful in their first years as principals and both put a significant emphasis on communication, but they differed in their emphasis on trust. Despite this difference, success was still attained at each school setting. This could be an example of communication fostering trust.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) shared this view that leaders foster trust through their actions and words, which validate follower expectations. Validation and consistency of meeting expectations creates trust. Ms. Fields was fine with the current level of trust and assumed it would improve over time, but did not seem to be concerned about it improving. Conversely, concerning communication and trust in the teacher-principal relationship, Ms. Fields claimed:

I think communication is even more important than trust to be honest with you. I'd rather know exactly how you feel instead of trying to determine how you feel. I just, I just like people just come out and be honest with me and be up front. Let me deal with the true
issue. Um, if I had to pick one over the other I would say it’s communication because I can take it for what it is.”

Ms. Fields put a greater emphasis on communication and not as much emphasis on trust as she did mention honesty, which is similar to trust. Although Ms. Fields focused on communication, there was a component of trust involved in her relationship with her teachers.

In conclusion, Ms. Pearson and Ms. Fields shared the perspective that trust between the teachers and the principal evolves over time, and it was not vital to the teacher-principal relationship. Their perceptions of trust were different from the other six participants in that they did not believe it was a necessary component of an effective teacher-principal relationship but they both valued trust. After my interviews with Ms. Pearson and Ms. Fields, I recognized the value they put on trust and, contrary to what they reported, I perceived that they actually both valued trust far more than communication. They placed high value on trust but they did not believe that it was attainable in a short period of time, and may never be attainable for them in their respective relationships with the principal and the teacher. Subthemes associated with the theme of trust found in this research are professionalism, respect, leadership, honesty and confidentiality, genuine investment, support, principal accessibility, principal consistency and visibility, and comfort. These associations can be found later in this chapter where the participants connect these themes to the major themes of trust and communication through their perceptions and experiences with their respective principals.

**Professionalism**

Research participants perceived that principals must maintain professionalism with teachers to promote effective teacher-principal relationships. Ms. Pearson worked with her previous principal for six years and from the start, her principal’s professionalism was inconsistent. She recalled:
It started off in a bad way over another employee. She cornered me because she and this other employee had gotten, had had words and I… I don't even know what had happened so then she came to me to find out whether or not this employee was coming back which is unethical, yes. So I come in to say hello I was in the middle of the summer and she, when I told her I didn't know whether the employee was coming back or not, she got in my face and became a monster, a bully, and then when I tried to move away she got in my face again and she followed me in that lounge and I won't ever forget it. I left and I was hysterical… hysterical trying to talk to my mom and thinking about quitting because I thought how could you work how can you work for her.”

This disagreement had a lasting negative effect on her and her previous principal's relationship and she never again had faith in her principal’s professional abilities. Ms. Pearson stayed away from the principal and kept her distance from her for a long time. However, even though she kept her distance professionally she found a personal common ground with her. Both of their daughters were addicts and going through a rough time so they had a common experience and talked about that. When Ms. Pearson mentioned she developed this personal relationship with the previous principal I thought, “How could she ever talk to this woman again?” I told Ms. Pearson I thought she was a forgiving person and she answered, “I have been forgiven, yeah, lots of times. And I think, you know, I’m gonna be judged one day and I do believe that, I really believe it.” This was on a personal level, not a professional level; she never forgot the way she was belittled in years past and could never get back to a working and effective professional relationship with her previous principal.

Ms. Potts claimed an effective principal needs to be a good listener, needs to maintain a professional relationship, needs to possess leadership skills, needs to be direct and precise, and has clear expectations. Ms. Potts stated she did not want a principal who tried to be friends with the teachers in a personal manner; she wanted the principal to have a professional relationship with the teachers. She said, “Not trying to be friends with the staff I think is a really good. A professional relationship with the staff.” Ms. Potts valued her profession and her professional
workplace and wanted it to stay professional. She did not go to work to make friends or to socialize and she wanted the principal to exhibit those same behaviors. I agree to the importance of a principal maintaining a level of professionalism not only with their staff but with all stakeholders. My perception, along with other participants in this research, is that the consistency of professionalism creates predictability which fosters trust between the principal and the teacher.

**Respect**

Participants perceived respect as an important characteristic in the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Easton listed respect as one of the three most important characteristics the teacher-principal relationship must have to be successful. Ms. Pearson illustrated her respect for her current principal, Ms. Fields, by saying, “I really respect her, um, I like what I've seen when I wasn't even supposed to probably be there. There’s something refreshing about seeing an African-American woman walking down the hallway. I'm sure her life was not a bed of roses and look where she is. I admire that, I admire it. I can’t help but admire that.” She liked what she saw in her and looked forward to getting to know her better; this was an example of the need for mutual respect in the teacher-principal relationship. Day and Leithwood (2007) wrote, “Effective principals prioritize genuine care for all in the community and the building and sustaining of professional trust and mutual respect” (p. 185). The research participants who worked under Ms. Fields believed that she exemplified the establishment of mutual respect. Although Ms. Pearson and the other teacher participants from Davidson Elementary had only worked with Ms. Fields for one year, each of the Davidson teachers described a level of respect and comfort for Ms. Fields that had developed in one academic
school year, roughly 182 working days. Ms. Fields built relationships with her teachers in a short period of time.

Ms. Ellison faced a challenging first three years as an assistant principal. Ms. Ellison stated the following regarding to her first principal: “The first one showed no value in me, no respect. I do not feel like I was valued for what I brought to the table.” Ms. Ellison felt a lack of respect and value from that principal and it this made for a difficult relationship. Conversely, Ms. Ellison spoke of how the second principal valued her and how she said to her, “I can't do this without you.” She mentioned that, as a principal, she valued her assistant principal and assured she is in an environment conducive to success.

Another example of a positive quality her second principal had was to admit not knowing something. Ms. Ellison stated, “It’s so important to be able to say that this is not my area of expertise and I know it’s not, but I need to rally the people that it is and use them to that potential; there’s your stronger leaders.” She emphasized the importance of this trait and being able to admit when you do not know something or need help by saying, “The principals that won't admit it, or say it, I think that that is a huge barrier to them being successful.” This indicates a high level of self-respect and also shows a level of vulnerability that is an important aspect for the principal to establish trust. Schein (2013) contended that the key element of trust is to be vulnerable and be your genuine self (p. 80). Participant experiences and perspectives pointed to the need of vulnerability and its relationship with the establishment of trust, which made principals more effective in their eyes.

**Rapport**

Participants pointed to rapport building and relationship building as necessary for developing a successful teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Potts mentioned establishing and
maintaining a good rapport with students. She stated that it was as important for teachers to build rapport with students as it was for principals to build rapport with teachers. She had great rapport with her current students but she said it can be struggle to establish that each year, but said the struggle is worth it because rapport builds strong relationships.

Ms. Smith was also a proponent of building relationships and rapport with the students. She said, “I think one of the characteristics of an effective teacher is, for me, building a relationship with the student because I feel that when you build a relationship with the student all other things will follow. You can get them to do the academics. You could get them to behave if you have that relationship with them.” The value Ms. Potts and Ms. Smith put on building a rapport with students was a value they also expected from their relationship with their principal. Ms. Potts talked about a principal from the start of her teaching career. This principal worked for over 30 years at her previous school and Ms. Potts believed that she embodied all characteristics of an effective principal. She recounted:

That was the best principal relationship I think that I had. She was older, she was very wise, she, um, I guess because she was principal for so long she just kind of knew what she was doing, but I mean after doing so much for so long you just had this rapport and I stepped into the school just seeing this great relationship that she had with others, like all the teachers they just loved her.

Ms. Potts referred to this principal several times throughout her interview and compared her to her current principal, Ms. Fields, as both principals focused on establishing rapport with their teachers. She said this was one of the reasons she focused on rapport in the classroom. This was an example of how leadership can model behavior for their faculty. The teachers, in turn, modeled this behavior to the students, which established a culture of rapport building.

Relationship development starts with rapport building (Lassater, 2016, p. 20). Furthermore, Ms. Smith’s current principal, Ms. Ellison, put an emphasis on building rapport
with her faculty. Ms. Smith mentioned that Ms. Ellison took the time to get to know her and other staff members in the school. The principal valued her opinions and she spoke professionally to her teachers, not down to them. The value Ms. Ellison placed on her faculty connected to her first position assistant principal experience. Her former principal did not value her and she was miserable in her position. Ms. Ellison spoke about that experience and then spoke about how her next principal was the opposite and highly valued her. The connection with Ms. Ellison’s past experiences as an assistant principal and her current experience as a principal was evident as she purposefully showed value in her faculty; she did not want her faculty to go through the experiences that she endured during her first position as an assistant principal.

Ms. Smith said, “She [Ms. Ellison] has excellent listening skills as well as organizational skills.” Ms. Smith believed that the principal is truly there to help her educate the students and she feels like she has an open door policy and could go to her with anything. Ms. Smith stated that building rapport with the teacher was as an integral part of the relationship as was knowing the teacher's effectiveness. She wanted the principal to come into the classroom to see what was occurring. She also wanted the principal to communicate expectations, not just through email, but other ways including conversation. She further stated:

Conversation, just regular conversation, one on one. Building a rapport means coming to the teacher and really talking to them on a one on one level. You know talking to about what they expect of their students talking to them about what you expect of them. Following up with that conversation throughout the year not just when it’s time for observations but just following up and then make sure and checking in with the teacher you know every now and then even if it's just in the hallway how are you? How’s it going? Do you need anything?”

This quote revealed the importance Ms. Smith placed on rapport building and the significance rapport building had in her relationship with her principal. Furthermore, rapport building needs
to remain consistent throughout the relationship and will help establish communication through conversation, according to Ms. Smith.

**Leadership**

Ms. Smith, a third grade teacher at Morton primary, was a proponent of effective teachers using the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Children. Covey (2004) created these habits and they aligned with his original work of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (p. 60). Ms. Smith thought that effective teachers should utilize these habits on a daily basis and she instilled them into their students. Covey’s (2004) 7 Habits of Highly Effective Children are:

- Habit 1 - Be Proactive
- Habit 2 - Begin with the End in Mind
- Habit 3 - Put First Things First
- Habit 4 - Think Win-Win
- Habit 5 - Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood
- Habit 6 - Synergize
- Habit 7 - Sharpen The Saw (p. 60).

The Seven Habits is a program with the premise that everyone can be a leader (Covey, 2004, p. 60). Ms. Smith expected her students to practice these habits and expected them to become better leaders and, more importantly, she expected her principal to lead with these habits in mind. Both Morton Primary and Davidson Elementary were Leader In Me schools; the essence of The Leaders In Me is leadership, a characteristic that the participants frequently mentioned. They also incorporated the tenants of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in their respective missions; Riverside school system promoted the 7 Habits and expected its teachers and school
leaders to put these habits into practice. Both Morton Primary and Davidson Elementary had comprehensive plans and curriculum associated with this program.

Ms. Fields’ leadership skills were learned from her previous leaders. She listed three principals under whom she worked as an assistant principal. The first principal taught her the importance of organization; he was organized and had a plan for everything. Ms. Fields laughingly said of him, “He was so organized. He left no stone unturned and whatever task we had there was a plan for everything and he didn’t deviate away from it at all.” Her laughter implied to me that she thought he might have over-planned at times or was not very flexible. Ms. Fields indicated that organization is an important characteristic of an effective leader.

Ms. Fields spoke highly of her second principal. She said she never let anyone forget who was the leader of the school. She stated, “My second principal, whom I love and admire so much, was one of those principals who you mean what you say and you say what you mean.” Her experience with her second principal highlighted the importance of consistency and communication in a leader.

Ms. Field’s third principal also instilled important qualities in her. This principal reaffirmed the concepts of never forgetting who is the leader of the school and never forgetting what you need to do as a leader. Regarding her third principal, Ms. Fields said, “I learned from her to remember that you have to always listen and give everyone an opportunity to voice and speak their concerns but the ultimate decision lies with you.” This showed Ms. Fields’ sense of responsibility for herself as a principal. Ms. Fields took her experiences from these three principals and put them into action during her first year as principal. The teacher participants in this research who were teaching under Ms. Fields’ leadership mentioned the leadership
characteristics that Ms. Fields mentioned, and each alluded to Ms. Fields’ embodying these characteristics.

Ms. Bass expanded on the importance of the presence of leadership in the teacher-principal relationship. She believed that an effective principal needs to be a leader and said, “I think of it as the person [the leader] who is really going to call the shots, make the decisions. I’ve been with other principals in the past where I feel like they kind of push it onto somebody else when it was something difficult that they didn't want to make the call on so for just a person I’m the principal so I’m going to make the call on that.” Both principal participants in this research prioritized decision-making and both understood that they were the leaders of the school and they needed strong leadership skills each day to make decisions that impacted hundreds of stakeholders. Ms. Smith and Ms. Fields each give examples of effective leadership and connect the effectiveness to communication by highlighting the importance of listening. Ms. Bass adds the connection of trust to leadership discussing how important it is for the leader to make decisions and take ownership of those decisions which promotes trust in the principal as a decision maker.

Honesty and Confidentiality

Participants highlighted honesty and confidentiality as important characteristics of the teacher-principal relationship and connected these two characteristics to trust. Ms. Ellison revisited the importance of trust in her relationship with her faculty and also the process of earning trust. She said, “Let me tell you how I feel the way that you gain trust is to always be honest. That everything you tell them [faculty], it's from a place that it is honest. That there is no bullshit and I have to bullshit sometimes. Don't get me wrong, cuz you don’t want… your goal is not to make people cry at work and be so bluntly honest.” Ms. Ellison continued:
That's that predictability; I know what you're going to say before you say it. I want to be perceived very predictable, I think that's it; deliberately predictable. So what that means is that you intentionally make decisions and you say to yourself I’m making this decision because I want to appear predictable and when you gonna start talking to yourself that way and making those decisions how can I look predictable how can I be predictable then all your decisions will look that way.

Northouse (2013) extended Ms. Ellison’s thoughts on predictability contending that an effective leader must be predictable and reliable even during circumstances of uncertainty. Ms. Ellison’s predictability created an avenue for trust in the teacher-principal relationship and the teacher participants who worked with her reported that she was consistently predictable and reliable.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Bass were passionate about the necessity for honesty and confidentiality in the teacher-principal relationship. Similar to Ms. Ellison, Ms. Bass thought that her current principal was professional and confidential. Ms. Bass said trust played a huge role in their relationship and she was satisfied with the level of trust explaining, “It's [trust] one of the main things if you don't have it then yeah that's kind of what I was saying earlier how you don't feel safe coming here or comfortable coming here. You know I feel like that is the kind of stuff that builds up until you quit or leave or you know transfer or whatever it maybe and you lose a lot of good people in that sense.” She mentions that the reputation of her school used to be that it was a destination for teachers and that they wanted to teach there but, with her previous principal, the opposite occurred. The current principal changed that. By instilling the characteristics of these research findings, the school became a sought after destination for teachers across Riverside Parish. Conversely, in my three years under the previous administration, I witnessed an exodus of teachers each year due to the leadership and its ineffectiveness.
Compassion

Participants identified compassion as another characteristic in an effective teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Pearson, Pre-K teacher at Davidson Elementary, listed compassion as one of her top three characteristics of a teacher and a principal. Ms. Easton talked about compassion and creativity as two important characteristics of an effective teacher. She recalled how this compassion aligned with teachers she had in elementary and middle school and the lasting impact those teachers had on her. Ms. Easton stated, “As far as compassion, on that, in order for someone to be in this profession that they have to have a certain amount of compassion for the children and work already in place.” Ms. Easton thought all members of the education profession should have some level of compassion to be truly successful at what they do.

Ms. Bass, a fourth grade teacher at Morton Primary, listed nurturing as an important characteristic of a teacher and a principal. Nurturing is closely related to compassion and Ms. Bass recalled her teachers in grade school as being nurturing:

I guess I wanted to work for you [her teacher] I think it just makes you feel important you know as a small kid you're coming here, it's kind of scary because I’m thinking more along... I'm thinking more so it's a big deal to come to school and it's a big change in your life and then, you know, to have that nurturing person you feel like they care about you. So then you want to come back the next day and if you feel the opposite as in ‘I'm just another person in here’. I feel like that completely changes.

This illustrates the impact her teachers had on her and her desire to have the same positive, nurturing impact on her current students. I look back at teachers I had during my education and the ones that stand out all had compassion and all cared about the outcomes of their students. This compassion made it possible for me to trust my teachers and I feel the same way now when the teachers I work with are compassionate; compassion has always eliminated barriers of trust for me.
Genuine and Invested

Participants pointed out the need for genuine, invested teachers and principals, and how the level of genuineness and investments in their profession impact the teacher-principal relationship. Mr. Clark identified genuine concern for the children, someone who cares for them, as an important quality for an effective teacher and remarked, “Genuinely concerned for the kids that they teach. So uh... just real care you know.” Mr. Clark viewed his profession as more than a profession; he seriously viewed the influence he had on the students. Mr. Clark held effective principals to the same standard that he held effective teachers. He thought the principal must have a genuine concern for the students and faculty and must have the best interests of the students in mind. He also saw preparation as part of the principal’s responsibility: “Preparing them for testing and preparing them for life situations in discipline, you know, not condemning them but just making that a learning experience for them.” Mr. Clark included preparation as part of the principal’s investment in the success of a school, which is an example of genuine concern for the students and faculty.

Ms. Fields also expected her teachers to have the same genuine concern for their students as she did for her teachers. She believed it was important for a teacher to see things for the way they are, not the way they expect the children to be. A priority for her was that teachers realize that parents send the best that they have and do the best that they can do. She explained: “

I mean, seeing things for the way that they are not the way that they expect the children to be and I would say that would be the number one for me and I know you want the top three because there is so many times that our parents send us the best that they have and the best they can do and the best they could do was all that we have to accept. We can take it, we can mold it, we can shape it, we can make it better, or we could hold it against them and make it worse. You know, and I use myself as an example, you know, my mom did the best that she could, you know, with me with my siblings and sometimes my brother would cause trouble and I never got in trouble because I was good person but that was the best that she could do with him because that's all she knew how to do. And I think that sometimes, and I do hate when I hear if the mama would do this and the mama
would do that, there's so many things are kids have to deal with that we never had to do with his children and we can't even imagine what happened to them the night before, even the morning of, just being realistic and try to put themselves in a child's place that's all and be patient and understanding. Those would be the top three.

Ms. Fields listed some of the same characteristics for an effective principal as she did for an effective teacher: fairness, consistency, integrity, patience, understanding were five characteristics a principal must have to be effective. She also mentioned that principals should never forget what it is like being a teacher and never forget their integrity. She also thought that principals should make things as reasonable as possible for the teachers. Ms. Fields had expectations for herself in genuine engagement and understanding of her faculty and expected her faculty to genuinely have an understanding of their students and to genuinely be invested in their students. This is an example of the leader modeling expectations for their followers.

Similarities surfaced between the teachers’ current principal and previous principal at Morton Primary and Davidson Elementary. The teacher participants from Morton Primary had worked with Ms. Ellison, their current principal, for two years and the teacher participants from Davidson Elementary had worked with their current principal for one year. These similarities provided markers for characteristics of effective teacher-principal relationships and also provided markers to avoid when establishing to an effective relationship. Ms. Smith concurred that Ms. Ellison’s investment in her school was a main reason why her relationship with Ms. Ellison was effective. Ms. Ellison also mentioned the importance of an invested teacher and how that investment directly related to their effectiveness and the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship. Ms. Smith also relayed how Ms. Ellison had a common purpose with her faculty and knew everything that went on in the school. Ms. Smith mentioned Ms. Ellison’s involvement in educating the youth and how passionate she was about everything she does. These characteristics added to the effective teacher-principal relationship Ms. Smith had with
Ms. Ellison. In contrast to Ms. Smith’s experience with Ms. Ellison, Ms. Bass recounted her experience with the principal prior to Ms. Ellison.

Ms. Bass described her relationship with her previous principal as different from that of Ms. Ellison; this general disparity between the current and previous principals of the teacher participants was a recurring theme throughout this research. Ms. Bass stated that her previous principal was superficial. She recalled, “She was friendly and we said hello but that was it.” Her previous principal did not conduct any engaging conversations. Ms. Bass recalled, “I feel like, um... I wanna say she was cold, I wanna say she was cold, I don’t know how to describe it but I just, there, it was just a feeling, I don’t know what... let’s say that she didn't give that nurturing feeling.” Ms. Bass’ previous principal appeared to lack genuineness, a disconnect related to a lack of investment; several participants indicated genuineness as a needed characteristic of an effective principal.

Ms. Ellison expounded on the importance of the teacher and the principal being invested in their professions. She suggested:

I feel that a teacher who is effective, and I've had some poor teachers that I've had to work really hard with, and I've had some great teachers that you don't have to invest too much in, but that word invest…even those poor teachers who were invested in their school invested in the…they're doing well. But that's the first factor in my opinion that lays the groundwork for an effective teacher.

This investment in the education profession connected Mr. Clark’s list of important characteristics of a teacher and a principal.

Similar to her characteristics for an effective teacher, Ms. Ellison thought an effective principal should be invested and be an effective communicator. She also mentioned that effective principals need to make timely decisions and understand all that goes into that decision.
She said:

A principal should be invested, definitely communicate definitely invested in the job that they have a, um, I think an effective principal and I don't know how else to explain it but I've said this a couple of times is there's a decision, we make 200, 300, 400 decisions every day but every single decision it's in front I have to be able to look at it like this and see the domino that it's gonna cost and then make a decision pretty quickly.

Ms. Ellison linked the principal’s investment to communication and to the successful fulfillment of the principal’s daily duties and responsibilities. In addition to Ms. Ellison’s need for an invested teachers and principals, she listed the importance of appearing genuine, similar to Mr. Clark’s perception of the need for teachers and principals to be genuine. She stated, “I mean I think that people can smell fake people from a mile away so you have to appear genuine or you have to be genuine in, um, what you're doing.” She believed that without being genuine the teacher and the principal would not be taken seriously, respected, or trusted. Covey (2006) connected genuineness to trust and made that case that “The motive that inspires the greatest trust is genuine caring- caring about people, caring about purposes, caring about the quality of what you do, caring about society as a whole” (p. 78). I feel that educators who have a genuine care for society and for the students they teach equates to effectiveness in the profession. Ms. Fields talks about genuine engagement with her faculty and calls for the need for genuine engagement between her faculty and their students which equates to genuine communication. Ms. Ellison, in addition to connecting genuineness to communication, links it to trustworthiness and alludes to the fact that an ingenuous person cannot pretend to be genuine.

**Support**

Support was a characteristic that the research participants experienced with their current principal but had differing experiences with the levels of support they received from previous
principals. Table 4.5 illustrates the level of support the research participants received from their previous principals when they faced adversity.

Table 4.5. Research Participants Experiences of Supportive Principals during Times of Adversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>High Level of Support from Previous Principal during adversity</th>
<th>Indifferent Level of Support from Previous Principal during adversity</th>
<th>No support from previous principal during adversity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
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<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
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<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
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<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
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<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>

Table 4.5 shows the absence or indifference of support in six of the eight participant experiences of adversity. Ms. Potts and Mr. Clark recalled having high levels of support from their principals during their times of adversity in their first year of teaching. Ms. Potts’s first year was at a high needs Kindergarten through sixth grade school in a neighboring parish where she taught sixth grade. She struggled to establish a rapport with her students, a challenging environment for a first year teacher. Her classroom management skills were not effective and added to her struggles. Her administration was supportive and she mentioned, “The principal talked to the kids one on one, kinda like you [Interviewer] and Ms. Fields do.” The principal encouraged her and provided her with support throughout the year. She left the school, not because of lack of support from the principal, but because she wanted a new start.
Mr. Clark’s recounted an example of diversity that involved two students who fought in his P.E. class. The students told the administration that they fought because Mr. Clark told them they could do so. Mr. Clark told the students to, “Fight and see what happens”, with the intent of warning the students; he did not think they would actually fight. They fought and one of the students received a concussion because of the fight. Because the students said that Mr. Clark let them fight he could have been held liable for this incident. Mr. Clark’s administration was supportive throughout the ordeal and all worked out, however, he thought he was going to lose his job; he recounted how much the support of his administrator meant to him. The need for support in an effective teacher-principal relationship was a recurring theme throughout this research and the participants perceived it as an integral part of the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship.

Ms. Pearson and Ms. Easton did not have the same supportive experience as Mr. Clark and Ms. Potts. Ms. Pearson taught in Pre-K and Ms. Easton taught in special education and both worked with at least one paraprofessional during the day as part of their job description. Ms. Pearson and Ms. Easton had difficulties with their paraprofessionals adhering to the school rules and expectations but neither received support from their principal because their respective principals were close friends with each of their paraprofessionals. This issue occurred at two different schools under two different principals and was an indication that lack of support was not a singular occurrence from the experiences of the research participants.

The principal participants also share times in their profession when they faced adversity and did not believe that they were truly supported by their principal. Ms. Fields mentioned that she faced adversity with a student and his father when she was a teacher about ten years before she became principal at Davidson. The student and his father were White and were racist and
Ms. Fields was a Black woman. The father never allowed his son to have a Black teacher; Ms. Fields was the only fifth grade teacher and the child had no other option for a teacher; she had to teach him due to the size of the fifth grade section at Davidson Elementary. The father complained as did the son but Ms. Fields did not take the problem to her principal because she did not feel supported by the principal, and did not want to draw attention to the situation and possibly make it worse. Ms. Fields faced this situation head on; instead of relying on her principal for support, she relied on her partner teacher, whom she said was still her best friend today. If there was a discipline issue, her partner teacher handled it because she was White and there would never be a racial reason for the boy’s father to question her. By the end of the year, the student loved Ms. Fields as a teacher as his racism had subsided.

Ms. Ellison faced adversity during her first three years as an assistant principal. Her first assistant principal position was at a new school. She worked with a principal who did not choose her to be her assistant principal and instead had wanted her counselor to become her assistant principal. Their relationship started off poorly and Ms. Ellison’s time at this school was especially challenging. Ms. Ellison’s sole job was to handle discipline. She had more abilities in the area of curriculum that would have allowed her to help the principal as well as the school to become more successful, but she did not have that opportunity and moved to another school at the request of the superintendent. The experiences of adversity shared by the participants showed that the participants did not trust their principal with their issue because the principal was not supportive or would not have been supportive.

**Accessibility**

Ms. Ellison identified accessibility as an important part of an effective principal and playing a role in establishing an effective teacher-principal relationship. She remarked, “I had
to build a trusting relationship with people which means I kept my door open as much as possible and every person that came in my room I tried to stop what I was doing to give them attention, which was exhausting. Also making myself extremely accessible.” The teacher participants from Morton Primary identified Ms. Ellison as being accessible and attributed this to her success as a principal and their success in their relationships with her. Ms. Ellison and the Morton teachers valued accessibility and thought the teacher-principal relationship would not be as successful without it.

Ms. Easton recalled a time in her career when the principal was not accessible. The principal prior to Ms. Fields at Davidson Elementary did not practice open communication and did not have the ability to help settle problems and everyday issues. Ms. Easton mentioned that she was not comfortable in speaking with her previous principal as she was not approachable, not open, and not supportive. Ms. Easton was comfortable speaking with her current principal, Ms. Fields, and she stated that she was open and approachable.

In addition to accessibility, the principal must be approachable. Mr. Clark said he wanted his principal to be approachable and he reiterated the importance of listening skills and respect. Ms. Bass’ had similar expectations and they both believed that their opinions mattered and they expected to be treated like a professional. Mr. Clark also did not want a micromanager; he wanted a principal who trusted in the teacher, cared, and communicated. When Ms. Ellison, his current principal, first started he was reluctant to go along with everyone in thinking that she was the best principal they have ever had. He said, “Everybody was just you know, it was the best thing since sliced bread and I'm not going to jump on that boat right away. I’m not going to jump on right away.” Mr. Clark continued:

So when she got to, you know, she came in and spoke a little bit and showed me some real person, some real Ms. Ellison, is when I was comfortable exchanging. When she
started she had, uh, in-house meetings and talked about our concerns and what our
concerns was and gave us a voice so to speak. Now I can tell you this, you know, she
may not have agreed with everything I said or didn't and I may not of agreed with
everything she said, but for the most part we were people of our words.

Mr. Clark was not quick to pass judgment and simply wanted a principal who respected him and
communicated with him. Participants draw conclusions that principal accessibility aligns with
trust and communication. Ms. Ellison used accessibility establish trust with her faculty by
making herself accessible at all times, she felt this was a non-negotiable when it came to
establishing trust. Ms. Easton adds the connection of accessibility to communication recalling
experiences with a previous principal who was not approachable and was not accessible.

**Consistency and Visibility**

Ms. Ellison talked about her most important role as the principal and equated that role to
consistency and visibility. She compared her role as principal to the teachers’ role in the
classroom. Her time on campus is her “instructional time.” She said:

> So when they pull us to central office four times a month you're messing with my
> instructional time and then instructional time to me looks like I want to keep the campus
> safe. [Staff] Watch me do things to keep you busy and going to check doors; I'm gonna
> be here, I'm going to be visible. I'm gonna go on duty and walk around duty. It's like a
> modeling of what you should do and if you pull me away I'm not here to go to model
> those things.

She described her role: “So I guess that's been my role. It’d be just like a teacher. It is the
teacher of the teachers of what that should look like.”

Mr. Clark was comfortable speaking with his current principal, Ms. Ellison, and he
believed that they had a mutual respect. He mentioned one conversation that stood out to him
and rubbed him the wrong way. Ms. Ellison inquired of him about his punishing students for
missing practice; she did not want him punishing any students who missed practice because they
were attending a school-sponsored meeting, such as a Beta Meeting. He was surprised she did
not have more faith in him and her approach surprised him as well. She addressed him in front of other teachers rather than take him into her office as she had done on previous occasions. Mr. Clark did not think this experience with Ms. Ellison was appropriate and was inconsistent with her usual way of doing business. This one-minute conversation between Mr. Clark and Ms. Ellison had a lasting impact on the effectiveness of their relationship. At the time, her question surprised him but he came to understand why she asked it. He believed that they both spoke what was on their minds and respected each other’s opinions.

Ms. Easton was happy with the communication and relationship between her and her current principal. Consistency played a role in the success of her relationship with her principal. She expounded:

It's, um...this might be a hard way to describe it but by consistency, meaning I'm able to approach this principal really at any time something that I need to discuss or ask and, um, just that, just that open door policy and I don't want to make too much out of that but um there are times that I know our administration needs their door closed they’re busy, they have stuff to get done. But just it’s been fostered overtime. Consistency over time and also just watching the model that our Administration shows for their compassion with our students, their focus on our school. That consistency just speaks volumes.

Northhouse (2013) affirmed Ms. Easton’s views of the importance of consistency of a good leader. He recognized that behaviors such as being involved and being consistent add to successful leadership (p. 8). While Ms. Fields understood the need to be a consistent leader she also put a priority on being fair to her staff. She believed that being fair was one of the more important characteristics she embodied: “I want to be fair to the teachers and I'm wanting to be fair to the students.” Her mention of students shows the value that the treatment of students brings to the teacher-principal relationship. She modeled this for her teachers and expected all of her teachers to value the students and their colleagues. My experience working with Ms. Fields
to model this expectation created a capacity of trust between the school administration, the teachers, and the students.

**Comfort**

Teacher participants listed their level of comfort with their principal as a factor in the effectiveness their relationship. Additionally, both teacher and principal participants listed their communication comfort level when describing their respective relationships. Ms. Pearson mentioned it was hard for her to be comfortable with the principal as she had trouble trusting people. She said, “I'm not real comfortable but it's not her [Ms. Fields] it's, um... when I tried to trust my last principal she let me know right off; I mean I found out later I can't trust you at all so I kinda never have gotten beyond that.” Ms. Pearson loved Ms. Fields although she did not feel comfortable in talking with her at the time of the interview. She said, “I know I can trust her [Ms. Fields], that kinda thing. And I do love my principal, I just, I'm shy I am not going to be someone to just, you know, if I’ve got something to say I’m going to say it but it may take me a while.” Ms. Pearson presented an anomaly because, even though she stated, “I know I can trust her [Ms. Fields]”, she still did not trust her and had trouble communicating with her. Ms. Potts and Ms. Easton confidently stated that they were comfortable with Ms. Fields in all aspects of their relationship with her. They both agreed that feeling comfortable within the teacher-principal relationship was important. They shared the same experience as Ms. Pearson with their previous principal, recalling they were never as willing to speak to her because they never knew what type of reaction they would receive.

Ms. Bass wanted a principal that made her feel comfortable coming to school every day and she wanted some autonomy and a say in her profession. She said, “I would hope my principal would have it to where you felt comfortable coming to school every day and having a
say so. She [Ms. Ellison] makes you feel like you are an equal even though you might be the teacher and she's the principal.”

Ms. Smith was comfortable speaking to her current principal, Ms. Ellison. She said she was open to conversation, accessible and always responded to texts or emails within 24 hours. She listened to any type of problem or concerns and offered great advice. She was always genuine and thought that Ms. Ellison always heard her voice. Ms. Ellison valued her opinion and asked for her opinion. Ms. Smith’s previous principal made her feel uncomfortable in speaking to her and she often avoided the principal. She did not feel like an equal, felt less than, and as if she was beneath her. She did not think that her opinion was valued and thought the principal always told her what to do and could not provide feedback or her opinion.

In recounting her three experiences as an assistant principal, Ms. Fields mentioned that, at first, she was only comfortable with speaking to the faculty about discipline, mainly because that was all she did at her first school. She said, “In my first job it was strictly discipline; sun up sundown; that's basically all I was there for. I didn’t do any observations.” In her second position, she felt more comfort in speaking about curriculum. I asked why her comfort level increased and she responded, “Because I was also dealing with discipline but I was also able to start moving into learning instruction.” This was the first time she was able to focus more on curriculum whereas her first job as an assistant principal was solely dealing with discipline. In her third and final position as an assistant principal, she was more comfortable talking with her faculty about curriculum and district policies. Ms. Fields stated her third position as assistant principal was the most comfortable because she had developed extensive background knowledge of discipline, policies, and curriculum during her first two positions as assistant principal. This
confidence and knowledge directly related to the comfort level and success of her relationship with her faculty at her third and final assistant principal position.

Principal Fields described her relationship with her current faculty. As this was her first year as principal, her relationship with her teachers was in the infancy stage. Ms. Fields described it as, “It is on the rise if you will; because it's my first year here and my staff is still getting to know me as I am them.” She talked about her expectations, an important theme among the teacher participant responses from both schools. The lack of expectations from their respective previous principals left them jaded and in need of clear expectations from their current respective principals, who provided clear expectations. Ms. Fields said, “I'm laying out my expectations which are somewhat different from previous administration and some people do take longer to adapt to change.” She also added that the relationship with her faculty was positive but addressed the imperfection of her relationship with her faculty. She said, “Um... I wouldn't say it's perfect. I never want to be perfect. If it's perfect and that means that I'm not doing my job.” I asked her what she meant, and she responded, “If it's a perfect relationship then... I'm not holding everyone accountable because I do expect there to be some resistance. If everything is fine and everything is good then that means I'm allowing certain people to do some things that I really don't want them to do but to keep the peace I'm gonna let them do it. Everybody is not going to always agree, I know that, I expect that.” This comment aligned with Ms. Potts’s views on professional relationships. Ms. Potts did not want a principal who sought to be her friend or to have a perfect relationship; she wanted a professional leader. Ms. Fields’ comments proclaimed that she wanted nothing but a professional relationship with her faculty but expected that relationship to contain imperfections.
Ms. Fields also described her relationship with her faculty at her previous school. “I do believe I was there for three years and I developed, I can honestly say, I had a relationship with every single person on that staff and it was a staff of 115. We were truly, truly a family.” Ms. Fields lamented about her previous faculty, remarking:

I do miss them a lot but we all grow and we all move on and I do… (sigh) this may sound harsh... but besides you [interviewer] I do not want a family relationship here. Because there, I was the assistant principal, it was okay pretty much to do that. But being a true leader of the school I can't have that because then I feel that some people may take advantage of the relationship.

Her comment surprised me because when I was teaching, my experiences with effective administrators were always coupled with friendly relationships with those administrators, both professional and personal.

According to Ms. Fields, followers need to respect the leader and the leader needs to always keep a personal distance from their followers. Ms. Fields provided further explanation and says, “Let me explain to you. I feel… I want to always be respected as the principal.” She emphasized always and held herself to that standard every day. Several participants mentioned the need for respect and that respect goes both ways. If Ms. Fields respected her teachers, they would reciprocate. She continued:

I don't want it to be that, ‘Oh, I like her so much she's so cool and I really don't have to follow the rules because we have such a great relationship’ or ‘There's a deadline but that's OK, she's, we get along so well I'll turn it in next week.’ There's a fine line and I want everyone to know that I have expectations; regardless of who you are I expect you to meet them. I don't want to be more lenient towards one and not the other. This year I was, next year I won't. Because it was all about them learning what I want and what I expect. I just feel sometimes when you let people into much taken advantage of especially when you're in leadership positions.

Ms. Fields’ statement about expectations also correlated with participant’s responses. She said, “I want everyone to know my expectations; regardless of who you are I expect you to meet them.” Multiple participants aligned with Ms. Fields’ statement as they listed the need for
their principal to have clear expectations. Ms. Potts emphasized the importance of Ms. Fields’ teacher expectations and noted, “I trust her as a leader of this school. I trust her decision making, I trust her honesty, and I think that's because she's been so open with communicating her expectations.” Ms. Potts specifically related the trust she had in her leader to the expectations her leader had of her. The expectations were a part of the communication strand of the conceptual framework of this research and Ms. Potts connected trust and communication, thus supporting my claim of the need for interdependence of trust and communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship. Additionally, Ms. Pearson mentioned the importance of her leader communicating expectations to her, as did Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith’s comments closely aligned with Ms. Potts; she believed that to trust your principal you must communicate with them and know their expectations. Ms. Smith said, “How are you going to trust someone that you don't communicate with, it's hard to trust them because you don't know them or you don't know their values and their, what they’re expecting.” This comment aligned with Ms. Potts’ views and again made a case for the interdependence of trust and communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Mr. Clark’s experience with his past principal was different from his experience with Ms. Ellison. He was comfortable speaking with her but he said he also put her in her place. He gave an example of how she questioned some tryouts and questioned why her son was not playing in the soccer game. He recalled:

He doesn't get in the first half and she comes to me during the game and asks why. I said, ‘I'm not going to discuss plans are with you during a game; if you want to call, if you want to call me in your office tomorrow we can discuss it. I said that I'm not gonna do this right now.’ She said ‘I just wanted to know if he was sick.’ I said ‘No, he's not sick so we'll talk about that tomorrow.’ And you know she said, ‘Okay.’”
He surprised me when he mentioned that in the Black culture, a Black man who talks to a light-skinned Black woman, who the principal was, comes off as being flirtatious. He said:

She [previous principal] is a light skin African-American female who most of the time always perceive that if an African American male tries to engage in conversation with them they think they’re trying to get with them. So I never approached her often, I never joked or cut up with her a whole lot because of that. I didn’t want to come off as flirting or you know what I’m saying where is with Ms. Ellison, you know, I talked with her a little bit more freely because only because she opened up and came more freely.”

Mr. Clark only said what was necessary to the former principal; he did not go out of his way to form a relationship with her. He thought that he had to choose his words wisely and was not comfortable expressing how he felt, whereas with Ms. Ellison he was comfortable, in part because she was white. Participants make it clear that comfort in their relationship with the principal facilitates trust and communication within that relationship by providing examples of relationships in which comfortability was evident as well as relationships in which comfortability was absent.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Chapter four followed the process of the discovery of themes throughout the research. I reviewed the responses to each question holistically and highlighted notable comparisons and contrasts of the eight participants.

Questions 1 and 2 addressed participants’ backgrounds and their educational experiences. Question 3 overwhelmingly established that the participants became teachers because they of their love for children.

Question 4 looked at the participants’ teaching careers and focused on facing adversity in the work place. Question 4 asked, “When is a specific time in your teaching or administrative career where you have faced adversity?” Can you explain this adversity?” “What was your principal’s role in that adversity? Did your principal contribute to it? Did your principal provide
 supports during the time of adversity? If so, how?” Each participant had a specific time in their professional careers when they faced adversity. Two participants thought they received overwhelming support from their principals during this time of diversity and the other six participants did not believe that they received the support needed from their principal. Five of the six participants alluded that the principal was the cause of the adversity. Five of the participants who identified their principal as playing a role in this adversity also said they did not trust the principal, a connection to the major theme of trust. Adversity with an absence of trust was a common theme in question four.

Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 focused on the key characteristics of an effective teacher, an effective principal, characteristics that helped principals form relationships with the participants, and the top characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Each of our participants provided their top three characteristics of effective teachers and principals. They placed emphasis on the two major themes of communication and trust and used those themes to identify characteristics of effective teachers and effective principals. Through conversations about the participants’ experiences, I uncovered these themes and identified which themes they viewed as paramount to an effective teacher-principal relationship and how the absence of these themes was detrimental to the effectiveness of their relationship with their principal.

Question 9 focused on the comfort level the teacher participants had with speaking to their principals and the comfort level each principal participant had with speaking to their faculty. Five of the six teacher participants identified a high level of comfort in speaking with their current principal and identified their current principal as accessible. Some participants used the actual word accessible and others use words synonymous with accessibility. For instance,
Ms. Potts remarked, “She [Ms. Fields] has an open door policy and has a positive relationship.” Ms. Easton mentioned, “She [Ms. Fields] has open communication and is approachable.” The lone participant who did not feel comfortable talking to her current principal was Ms. Pearson. Ms. Pearson took responsibility for this discomfort and mentioned that she knows she can trust Ms. Fields and that she can go to her if she necessary.

Both principal participants mentioned how important it was for them to be accessible and have open communication with their faculty; both were comfortable speaking to their current faculty and had always had a comfort level with speaking to their faculties as administrators. The responses to this question pointed to the overarching need for the principal to be accessible in an effective teacher-principal relationship. Each of the six teacher participants described their relationships with the current principals as highly effective; accessibility was one of the main reasons why they felt that way.

Question 11 asked for a comparison of the teacher participants’ current principal and previous principal, which was also a part of this thematic explanation. Each teacher participant stated that their previous principal was not accessible and their relationship with their previous principal was ineffective. They also mentioned an absence of trust and open communication in that relationship. The relationships the teacher participants had with their respective previous principals and their respective current principals contrasted. The disparity indicated the need for communication and trust in the teacher-principal relationship for it to be successful. These three themes were the primary characteristics present in the effective teacher-principal relationship described by the research participants and were the primary characteristics absent in the ineffective teacher-principal relationships described by the teacher participants.
Question 12 centered on the expectations the teacher participants had for any principal with whom they worked, and asked the principal participants what expectations they had for any teacher with whom they worked. The teacher participants repeated characteristics mentioned in questions 6 and 8, which focused on the characteristics of an effective principal and the characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship. Participants’ expectations for principals included rapport with their principal, comfort, communication, respectfulness, professionalism, clear expectations, no surprises, compassion, and leadership. According to the six participants, Ms. Fields and Ms. Ellison embodied those participant expectations. The principal participants’ expectations for the teachers with whom they worked were similar to the teacher participants’ list and the overall themes of the research. Characteristics listed by the principal participants included patience, understanding, and an investment in their profession.

The final questions of the participant interviews focused on communication and trust in the teacher-principal relationship. This portion of the interview findings provided revelations to this researcher. I anticipated each research participant to identify, unequivocally, that trust was a necessary characteristic of an effective teacher-principal relationship; that was my opinion and I thought that communication was the second most important characteristic. My view of the necessary components of the teacher-principal relationship changed with this research and I realized that without communication, the relationship could not exist.

Tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 review major trends of the findings. I focused on are the top three characteristics of an effective principal and the top three characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship. Table 4.6 identifies the three most important characteristics of an effective principal as indicated by the research participants.
Table 4.6. Participant Perceptions of the Top Three Characteristics of an Effective Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Top 3 Characteristics of an Effective Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Good Listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Genuine Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>Fairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>Invested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication overwhelmingly was the characteristic most identified by the participants. A majority or 75% of the participants believed that communication was the overarching need in an effective principal. Table 4.7 further affirms the need for communication.

Table 4.7. Participant Perceptions of the Top Three Characteristics of an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Top 3 Characteristics of an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>Rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>Open Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 shows the emerging characteristics of communication and trust in an effective teacher-principal relationship. Research participants thought that trust was an important characteristic of the teacher-principal relationship at a rate of 62.5% and 62.5% of participants thought that communication was an important factor in an effective teacher-principal relationship.
Table 4.8 illustrates that 100% of participants thought that communication was a necessary characteristic in an effective teacher-principal relationship.

Table 4.8. Relationship Effectiveness Contingent upon Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Is an Effective Teacher-Principal Relationship Contingent on Communication?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Pearson (T1)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts (T2)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Easton (T3)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith (T4)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bass (T5)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Clark (T6)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Fields (P1)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ellison (P2)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, table 4.8 reaffirms communication was the overarching characteristic of an effective teacher-principal relationship. Research confirmed the importance of communication and trust in effective relationships, in particular in effective teacher-principal relationships. Organizations must share goals and experiences to allow the development of communication and trust within the organization (Natemeyer & McMahon, 2001, p. 196). Once this development occurs it is clear if the communication is evident and sustaining. Covey (2006) estimated that sustainable organizations have high levels of trust fueling their communication. If these high trust levels are present, communication is easier. If the trust level is low, communication becomes suspect (Covey, 2006, p. 6). Natemeyer & McMahon (2001) and Covey (2006) advanced the importance of trust and communication in relationships, which aligned with the participant perceptions in my research. Adding to the basis of trust in the follower leader relationship, Bennis (2009) maintained that leaders who trust their followers are, in turn, trusted by them and that this trust is the foundation of any effective relationship (p. 133). Day et al.
(2014) adds to Bennis’s call for a basis of trust in a functional relationship asserting that high quality relationships between leaders and followers are established by a culture of communication and rooted in a positive learning environment (Day et al., 2014, p. 65). My research participants identified trust and communication as essential themes in an effective teacher-principal relationship along with several subthemes as outlined in this chapter. The central themes and subthemes connect to the theoretical perspective of Katz (2009) Leadership Skills Approach as well as to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). The leadership model of Katz (2009) and the PSEL standards (Murphy, Louis, & Smiley, 2017) include many of the themes and characteristics purported by my research participants as essential to an effective principal and an effective teacher-principal relationship. Table 4.9 identifies the connections between the themes identified by my research participants and the skills and qualities of effective leaders identified by Katz (2009) and the PSEL standards (Murphy, Louis, & Smiley, 2017).

Table 4.9. Theme Connection to Human Skills Approach and PSEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Themes</th>
<th>Katz Human Skills Leadership Approach</th>
<th>Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine and Invested</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The connections above provide traction and strength to my research findings by connecting the perceptions and experiences of my research participants to practical standards and a theoretical leadership model whose purposes are to anchor effective leaders and provide them with a foundation to sustain their effectiveness. The research supports existing research which outlines the importance of trust and communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship. The research findings provide a bridge between the abstraction of leadership development and the real experiences of teachers and principals with regard to effective leadership and effective relationships.
Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions

Conclusion

The teacher participants in this study identified two major themes for an effective teacher-principal relationship: communication and trust. Additionally, the findings showed the negative experiences the teacher participants encountered because of lacks of communication and trust with ineffective principals, and their respective relationships with those ineffective principals. The characteristics of the positive teacher-principal relationship and the negative teacher-principal relationship illustrated by my research participants provided practical indicators for establishing an effective teacher-principal relationship. The research findings put the burden of establishing an effective teacher-principal relationship squarely on the shoulders of the principal.

The study focused on the interdependence of trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationships in two southern Louisiana elementary schools. All of the teacher participants interviewed had similar and shared experiences with their previous respective principals and their current respective principals. I brought a unique perspective to this research because I worked with all eight participants and had shared experiences with them. Also unique to this study was that the six teacher participants and I worked with each respective principal her first year as principal. We witnessed the development of effective teacher-principal relationships and the fostering of communication and trust within the teacher-principal relationship. Compared to the research of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), my research, in part, focused on the teacher-principal relationship and its effectiveness. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found that trust was the mitigating factor in creating an effective teacher-principal relationship. The
findings of my research are contrary to this because all of my participants put more value on communication than trust in their respective relationships with their principals.

I provided two contrasting examples of my experiences as a teacher to introduce this study. The first experience portrayed a Principal Richardson, an ineffective communicator and disingenuous leader. She did not embody the characteristics required to be an effective principal and established an effective teacher-principal relationship, confirmed by the eight participants of this research. The second experience pointed to the possibilities of being part of an effective teacher-principal relationship and how the principal’s role in that relationship represented many of the essential characteristics my research participants identified as necessities for a teacher-principal relationship to be effective. The experiences and four years of research of this process allowed me perspective on the importance of relationships, which sounds simple and something that I often take for granted. My experiences during this process have affirmed relationships are the keys to any successful commitment, whether they are friendships, a marriage, or the relationship between a teacher and a principal. I worked under an ineffective principal at Morton Primary for three years. The next year I worked under Ms. Ellison, an effective principal and from whom I learned much about leadership and communication, and then I transitioned into administration and became an assistant principal under Ms. Fields at Davidson Elementary School. The two years spent working with these two principals instilled qualities in me that guide me to become an effective leader. I cultivate communication, rapport, and communicating clear and reasonable expectations.

I was promoted and I am in my second year as an assistant principal at a larger school within Riverside Parish. I often reflect on my experiences, starting under Ms. Richardson, moving to Ms. Ellison, and then to Ms. Fields. I find myself in some of the same situations my
three previous principals were in and I think about how they would perform in the situation, what they would say or do. I add to them each day at my new school as I work under another effective principal, marking the third consecutive year of doing so. This principal is in her first year, which makes this the third year in a row that I am working with an effective first-year principal. These experiences have provided me with a clear path to success. When I become principal, it is my hope that, for the fourth year in a row, I will be at a school with an effective first-year principal.

**Implications**

The central themes illustrated throughout the literature and throughout my research findings align with the current professional standards of educational leadership. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration created an updated set of professional standards for school principals in 2015 with a general focus on training, certification, hiring, evaluation, and supervision at the school level (Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2017, p. 1). The updated standards replace the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The ISLLC standards, prior to being replaced, were used as learning outcomes for school leadership training programs as well as school leader licensure testing and accountability (Kelly, 2016, p. 2). The new professional standards, better known as “Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)” (Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2017, p. 1), call for a need of sustained communication and trust for effective principals. Aspiring school leaders learn these professional standards which create a foundation for their futures as leaders. Table 5.1 illustrates the professional standards for educational leaders. These standards provide ten attributes for an effective principal and, while there is no explicit connection to trust, communication, and the principal, there is underlying evidence that suggests the importance of trust and communication.
Table 5.1. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms</th>
<th>Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students</th>
<th>Standard 10. School Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015)

These two qualities are evident throughout my study and are also aligned with the theoretical lens used to investigate the teacher-principal relationship. Table 5.2 reviews the six facets of human skills Katz uses to identify an effective leader.
Table 5.2. Human Skills Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Inventory Question</th>
<th>Human Skill Inventory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>As a rule, adapting ideas to people’s needs is easy for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Being able to understand others is the most important part of my work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>My main concern is to have a supportive communication climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Understanding the social fabric of the organization is important to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>Getting all parties to work together is a challenge I enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17</td>
<td>I am concerned with how my decisions affect the lives of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Northouse, 2018, p. 69)

The skills inventory illustrates the importance of leaders building relationships with their followers and establishing a climate of communication with their followers. The focus on the personal skills and how important they are to the foundation of an effective leader and how that leader connects with his colleagues is what connects the Human Skills theory to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. The skills approach and the PSEL standards provide skills and traits for a leader to become effective but the leader must maintain these relevant traits and skills and continually connect them to leadership development (Meuser et al., 2016, p. 1392).

The review of literature and my research findings specifically cite the value and importance of communication and trust and how they are precursors for a principal to be effective. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders improved the focus on trust and communication in cultivating effective principals with two significant improvements. First, the PSEL calls for leaders to model ethical behaviors focusing on trust and collaboration. Effective leaders, furthermore, are expected to provide moral direction for the faculty while placing academic success of students the number one goal of the school (PSEL: A Crosswalk, 2016, p. 6).

Secondly, PSEL puts more emphasis on relationship building. PSEL calls for principals to have the ability to build productive relationships which foster student learning by maintaining
reciprocal communication with the stakeholders (PSEL: A Crosswalk, 2016, p. 12). While the crosswalk connects two areas of improvement within the PSEL Rowland (2017) supports the new standards saying the PSEL standards suggest that effective principals should focus on factors including: equity, inclusiveness, teacher support and empowerment, shared leadership, and inclusion of all stakeholders (Rowland, 2017, p. 12). Rowland (2017), along with the two areas of improvements outlined by the PSEL Crosswalk (2016) align with the tenor of my research. The first improvement area focuses on trust and communication while the second area focuses on relationship building which is the foundation of my research. The PSEL standards associated with these two improvements are PSEL 2 and PSEL 8 which can be found in table 5.1. These standards reinforce the validity of my research by standardizing the two main themes my research participants identify as non-negotiable components of an effective teacher-principal relationship; communication and trust.

The findings made me question my relationships with my current faculty. After interviewing Ms. Fields, for instance, I felt compelled as an administrator to refrain from developing personal relationships with my current faculty and keeping them strictly professional. This would be a difficult task because I seek out friendships and want to get to know the people with whom I work. I would not have a guard up to my personal life or not inquire about faculty personal lives, but rather it means that I will do so in a professional manner and not seek out anyone to be friends.

**Realities and Directions for Future Research**

The research findings provide concrete evidence of the importance of establishing an effective teacher-principal relationship. Some of the participants did not think that trust was a necessity in an effective teacher-principal relationship. All eight participants shared the view
that communication was an absolute necessity, aligning with my belief at the onset of this research. Although from various backgrounds and various schools, the research findings revealed the participants had similar views of an effective teacher-principal relationship and the necessary characteristics of an effective principal and teacher.

I intend to explore further the perceptions of principals who maintain effective relationships with their teachers and to talk to principals who do not have effective relationships with their teachers. I will pose the questions of “What led your relationship with your faculty to become ineffective?”, “What corrective actions have been taken to improve the relationship?”, and, “What blame do you put on yourself and on your faculty for the ineffectiveness of your teacher-principal relationship?” These questions provide extensions to my current research. As a researcher asking these sensitive questions, I will need to have a strong rapport with potential principal participants because of the potential personal, reflective nature of these questions. An absence of rapport might influence the validity of the findings because of the unknown levels of participant honesty when answering these questions.

An extension of the current research could also include a larger sample size of principals, which would provide more opportunity for a true comparison to the teacher participants in this research and in future research. Additional ideas for extending the study are to interview more teacher participants who work for the two principals used in this study. The increase in teacher participants would provide a broader range of findings, which would give more validity to these findings. It also would be beneficial to interview principals who have held longer tenures as principals than the two principals in this study. Longer tenured principals would bring different perspectives and more experiences to this research.
The sample size of this study consisted of eight participants who, for the purposes of this specific study, were sufficient and provided a breadth of themes and characteristics of effective teacher-principal relationships. The study could be expanded to include additional participants representing the same schools, similar schools, or different schools that would add to the findings but would not change the current findings. Replication of this study in other areas of the country with the same sample size or even a larger sample size would provide added experiences and perspectives centered on the effectiveness of the teacher-principal relationship. These findings represent two schools within one school system in a culturally specific area of Louisiana. The findings could contain different characteristics and themes if the research was conducted in a different setting in Louisiana or another area in the United States.

**Opportunities Based on What Was Learned and What I Would Do Differently**

This research exposed several underlying themes that are evident in similar research as indicated in the review of literature section of this research. Current literature supports the themes indicated the research participants. Armed with my knowledge after completing the research, I would replicate this research and focus on themes that are not as evident in the current literature. I would also interview mid-level leadership at the school level such as instructional strategists, assistant principals, and data analysts. Interviewing participants would provide additional insight into the teacher-principal relationship and point to the mid-level leadership’s role in the teacher-principal relationship. The literature is rich with studies and reviews purporting trust as the underlying factor in an effective teacher-principal relationship. The participants in my research put a high value on trust but hold an even higher, non-negotiable value on communication in an effective teacher-principal relationship. The emphasis the participants placed on communication provides evidence that similar future studies should focus
more attention to communication and thematic elements related to communication when conducting interviews and seeking characteristics of effective teacher-principal relationships.
Appendix A. Consent Form

Consent Form for Non-Clinical Study - Louisiana State University

1. **Study Title**: Exploring the Interdependence of Trust and Communication in the Teacher-Principal Relationship.


3. **Investigators**: The following investigators are available for questions about this study: M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Jon Downs, 337-200-1500. Dr. Kenny Fasching-Varner, 225-578-2918.

4. **Purpose of the Study**: This research study will identify teachers’ perceptions of the need for an interdependence of trust and communication in the teacher-principal relationship in order for the relationship to be effective.

5. **Subject Inclusion**: Individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 who do not report psychological or neurological conditions. To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

6. **Number of subjects**: 8

7. **Study Procedures**: The respondent is participating in an in-depth interview. The respondent is asked a series of questions related to the teacher-principal relationship. Guiding questions were developed prior to the interview and the respondent will have a copy of those questions. Additional questions are asked as needed to provide further information on this topic. The study will be audio-recorded. Respondents will remain anonymous.

8. **Benefits**: Data from the interviews will add to the existing research narrative of the interdependence of trust and communication within the teacher-principal relationship.

9. **Risks**: There are no known risks associated with this study. There is no potential for psychological harm or social harm. The respondents will remain anonymous.

10. **Right to Refuse**: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time and all anonymity will remain intact.

11. **Privacy**: Results of the study have publication potential but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Respondent identity will remain anonymous.

12. **Signatures**: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: ________________________________ Date: ____________________
Appendix B. Teacher Participant Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please share your educational background including degrees, certifications, and teaching experience.
2. Please tell me about your general experience in education. Beginning with your first years as a student, through your student career and into your professional career.
3. Why did you become a teacher?
4. When is a specific time in your career that you have faced adversity? What was your principal’s role in that adversity? Did your principal contribute to the adversity? Did your principal provide supports during the time of adversity? If so, how?
5. What are some key characteristics of an effective teacher? What are the three most important characteristics of an effective teacher?
6. What are some key characteristics of an effective principal? What are the three most important characteristics of an effective principal?
7. In your career how many principals have you worked for? Thinking back, what are some qualities and characteristics from those principals that helped form your relationship with them?
8. Describe the three most important characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship.
9. How comfortable are you with speaking with your current principal? Do you feel you can speak openly to your principal about your school? Describe your current relationship with your principal. How long have you worked for your current principal?
10. Describe your relationship with your most recent previous principal. How comfortable were you in speaking with your past principal? Did you feel you could speak openly to your past principal about your school? How long did you work with the previous principal?
11. Compare your relationship with your previous principal and your current principal. How is the relationship similar? How is it different?
12. What expectations do you have for any principal you work with?
13. Are you happy with the way you and your principal communicate? How has that communication been fostered?
14. Does trust play a role in the fostering of your relationship with your principal?
15. Are you satisfied with the level of trust in the relationship you have with your current principal?
16. How interdependent are trust and communication within your relationship with your principal? Can the relationship be effective with one but not the other?
17. What are the three most important characteristics of your current principal? Compare those characteristics to your past principal.
18. What is your overall perception of your relationship with your current principal? When you think about this relationship how do the words trust and communication make you feel with regard to the relationship? How did the words trust and communication make you feel with regard to your relationship with your previous principal?
Appendix C. Principal Participant Interview Questions

Principal Interview Questions

1. Please share your educational background including degrees, certifications, teaching experience, and administrative experience.
2. Please tell me about your general experience in education. Beginning with your first years as a student, through your student career and into your professional career.
3. Why did you initially become a teacher and then an administrator?
4. When is a specific time in your teaching or administrative career where you have faced adversity? Can you explain this adversity? What was your principal’s role in that adversity? Did your principal contribute to it? Did your principal provide supports during the time of adversity? If so, how? Also, what would your role be as a current principal if one of your teachers went through this type of adversity?
5. What are some key characteristics of a successful teacher? What are the three most important characteristics of an effective teacher?
6. What are some key characteristics of an effective principal? What are the three most important characteristics of an effective principal?
7. In your career how many principals have you worked for? Thinking back, what are some positive qualities and characteristics from those principals that helped form your relationship with them?
8. Describe the three most important characteristics of an effective teacher-principal relationship.
9. How comfortable are you with speaking with your current faculty? Do you feel you can speak openly with your faculty about your school? Describe your current relationship with your current faculty. How long have you worked at your current school?
10. Describe your relationship with your previous faculty? How comfortable were you in speaking with your past faculty?
11. Compare your relationship with your previous faculty and your current faculty. How is the relationship similar? How is it different? Is it different at all now that you are a principal?
12. What expectations do you have for any teacher you work with?
13. Are you happy with the way you and your faculty communicate? How has that communication been fostered? What have you done specifically to foster this communication?
14. Does trust play in the fostering of your relationship with your faculty? If so, how?
15. Are you happy with the current level of trust that exists in your relationships with your current teachers? What could you do to increase the current level of trust?
16. How interdependent are trust and communication within your relationship with your teachers? Can the relationship be effective with one but not the other?
17. What are the three most important characteristics of a principal that you feel are necessary to foster an effective teacher-principal relationship? What is your most important role in the teacher-principal relationship?
18. What is your overall perception of your relationship with your current teachers? When you think about this relationship how do the words trust and communication make you feel with regard to the relationship? Did you feel the same way with your previous faculty?
Appendix D. Skills Inventory

*Instruction:* Read each item carefully and decide whether the item describes you as a person. Indicate your response to each item by circling one of the five numbers to the right of each item.

**Key:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = Not</th>
<th>2 = Seldom</th>
<th>3 = Occasionally</th>
<th>4 = Somewhat</th>
<th>5 = Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| 1. I enjoy getting into the details of how things work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. As a rule, adapting ideas to people’s needs is easy for me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I enjoy working with abstract ideas. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Technical things fascinate me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Being able to understand others is the most important part of my work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Seeing the big picture comes easy for me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. One of my skills is being good at making things work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. My main concern is to have a supportive communication climate. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I am intrigued by complex organizational problems. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Following directions and filling out forms comes easily for me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. Understanding the social fabric of the organization is important. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I would enjoy working out strategies for my organization’s growth. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I am good at completing the things I’ve been assigned to do. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. Getting all parties to work together is a challenge I enjoy. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. Creating a mission statement is rewarding work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I understand how to do the basic things required of me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I am concerned with how my decisions affect the lives of others. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. Thinking about organizational values and philosophy appeals to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

(Northouse, 2018, p. 69)
References


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Vita

Jon Downs, a native of Lafayette, Louisiana, earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Jon has taught for seven years and is in his second year as an assistant principal. He was accepted into the LSU School of Human Sciences and Education in pursuit of a PhD in P–12 Educational Leadership. During that pursuit, he graduated with an Educational Specialist degree from LSU. Jon is a lifelong learner and intends to continue his studies in the area of teacher-principal relations.