A Dissertation

entitled

Teacher Perceptions of Trust with their Principal

by

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the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Administration and Supervision

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The primary purpose of this study was to seek teacher perceptions of trust with their principal. The research questions focused on three areas including how do teachers perceive issues of trust between themselves and their principal, how do teachers perceive trust as it relates to open and honest communication with their principal, and how do teachers perceive trust as it relates to the power dynamics and working relationship with their principal? The target population consisted of 10 regular education elementary teachers who volunteered to talk openly about their perceptions of trust, communication, and their working relationship with their building principal. A two-part interview protocol was used to guide the conversations and discussions, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. A thorough and extensive analysis of the data revealed patterns and themes related to the various components of trust.

The research participants provided useful data regarding perceptions of trust between themselves and their principal. The majority of teacher/participants felt a lack of total trust in their administrator and this negatively impacted their ability to communicate
effectively with their principal. Most of the teacher/participants felt that they could provide accurate and honest information to their principal, but they also felt that the communication they received from the principal was not mutually accurate or honest. The majority of teacher/participants also felt that their diminished perception of trust impeded their overall working relationship with their principal. Furthermore, the teacher/participants indicated that the higher their perception of trust with their principal, the more open and honest their working relationship was with their principal. Conversely, the lower their perception of trust, the less open and honest their working relationship was with their principal.

Related components which surfaced through discussions of trust included aspects of communication, leadership characteristics, and general characteristics necessary to build avenues of trust between two individuals. Recommendations include suggestions for further research in the area of trust and its impact on education.
To my parents, Dr. Robert Francis Scarr, Ph.D. and Jean Lowry Scarr, who for their entire lives, have fostered the spirit of education and the quest for knowledge and self-improvement in their own lives as well as those of their three children and eight grandchildren. They have kindled my passion for learning, and have inspired my journey through this doctoral program, my professional life, and my personal endeavors. To my sister, Lynn Elizabeth Blakemore, and my brother, James Lowry Scarr, who have given me the encouragement to realize my dreams and full potential as an educator. And finally, to my three children, Holly Diane Schade, Laurie Ellen Schade, and Stephen Paul Schade, who have offered me their unlimited love, their understanding, and their belief in me. Thank you, my dear family, for all your unending love, support, and dedication. I could not have done this without you.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

Every day teachers and administrators come together in schools for one purpose, to educate young people. At the core of this learning environment is the ability of these individuals to work together towards this common goal. Working together is dependent upon relationships which are based inherently upon perceptions of trust. Relationships are usually ongoing as people expect to work with the same network of people over time. As this happens, co-workers develop a reputation based on trustworthiness, and the benefits yield trusting relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). It is the trusted relationships between people that ultimately lead to effective organizational growth. In conjunction with organizational growth and schools, Honig (2006) adds that “school systems now are held accountable for demonstrable improvements in the academic achievement of all students in ways barely imagined just 20 years ago” (p. 1). Because school systems are held accountable for what happens in the classroom, administrators may seek verbal input from their teaching staff in order to gain insight as to what happens in the classroom. In light of this, schools become organizational systems which rely heavily on communication between their participants. Therefore, the issue of perceived trust may come into play because when questions are asked, an assumption exists that answers are truthful and accurate.

However, relationships in the organization are not solely dependent on perceptions of trust; they exist in dynamics of political structures as set forth through a natural hierarchical system. Organizations typically employ power systems which yield
top down administration, specifically through control and supervision that tends to limit autonomy through compliance of rigid and formal procedures and rules (Matheson, 2007). The primary decision-makers at the top delegate power through middle management to the common work force below. Tschannen-Moran’s (2009) research posits that schools naturally employ a hierarchical system set forth by bureaucratic and professional parameters. This means there is a distinct division of labor, each with a specific specialization, written rules, and policies that dictate the complexity of its processes. Since the key to success is a constant flow of information between the levels of the organization, a strong and productive organization is dependent upon the accurate conveyance of information through open and trusting channels of communication. Trust between its participants becomes an important component in the process of communication between these distinct levels, and because recent trends in education involve the cultivation of collegial trust, a key component of an organization’s success relies on high levels of trust (Cosner, 2009).

**Researcher’s Perspective**

As a teacher, I am held accountable for teaching the curriculum as set forth through content standards and benchmarks as mandated by the State of Ohio Department of Education. The Standards for Ohio Educators, published in 2007, also sets the standards for me as an educational professional. Frequently, I am directed to implement programs, policies, and practices set forth by the district. These, in turn, have a direct impact on the students in my classroom. As a result of these district initiatives, other teachers in the building and I, are often asked or required to give feedback to the building principal regarding the effectiveness of these programs or initiatives. It is important that
we, as individuals within a collective group, give appropriate and truthful information back to the principal so that he can make informed decisions or report accurate information upward in the organization.

However, due to natural bureaucratic tendencies which exist in the organization, it becomes a personal decision as to whether or not I, or any teacher for that matter, relay accurate and truthful information to the principal as my boss. For example, in matters where I may not necessarily agree with a particular program or initiative, I may choose to alter the accuracy of the information I present to the principal, perhaps as a method of self-protection. Research-based support of this tactic used states that, “teachers have often described being guarded in what they said – that they often blocked or distorted communication to avoid confrontation with administrators” (Tschennan-Moran, 2009, p. 222). This phenomenon may happen when there is a perceived level of distrust between the teacher and the building principal. Consequently, there is a fine line of distinction between the components of trust in truthful communication and forced compliance. People in positions of power can use their authority to enforce compliance with organizational directives (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Kelly’s (2000) research on organizational communication indicates that people assume “our perceptions, values, agendas, and definitions are concordant. Consequently, we assume that communication is a matter of delivering messages accurately and not a matter of recognizing and aligning divergences between our views and others” (p. 94). Trust, as an established component in the process of communication, has a profound impact on the strength and vitality of any organization, including schools.
As a researcher in the field of education with an interest in school administration and supervision, I am driven to find the basis for trust in leader/subordinate relationships in schools and also substantiate the reasons for why trust matters in education. Organizational growth occurs when students, teachers, and administrators work together in a cohesive and trusting environment. Fullan’s (2003) research indicates that student engagement and learning can only be accomplished through teachers who have a passion for teaching, feel a purpose for their existence, and have the capacity to accomplish this. You cannot do this without a dedicated, highly competent teacher force – teachers in numbers, working together for the continuous betterment of the schools. And you cannot get teachers working like this without leaders at all levels guiding and supporting the process. The principal’s role is pivotal in this equation. (p. 5)

When teachers are dedicated to teaching, students are engaged in learning, and schools succeed. Therefore, it was vital to seek the components of perceived trust between teachers and principals in the organization and determine their impact on organizational growth and continuous improvement in schools.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

As most public school systems are organizations which typically employ a hierarchical system of regulatory power, perceptions of trust between teachers and principals becomes extremely important so that honest and accurate communication can take place between these two levels. Kesby (2008) states:

Leaders really need to engage with other people; to work hard at listening and understanding other people’s desires, issues and stories. Leaders also need to be clear when sharing important messages with other people, so that communication
is effective. The relationships that leaders establish with others are engaging and built on trust. (p. 3)

When federal, state, and district policies and programs are mandated down to the classroom, administrators seek feedback on the effectiveness of these programs from the teachers. In order to do this, schools need to have open and trusting channels of communication, but according to Tschannen-Moran (2009), bureaucratic hierarchy deters the effective flow of communication. Since teachers participate in the decision-making process and give administrators critical information on many issues in education (Smylie, 1992), “increased access to and use of the information are thought to improve the quality of decisions” (Smylie, 1992, p. 53). This increased access is based on an assumption that the information gained is truthful because of established and trusted relationships between teachers and principals. Baier (1985) states that trust is the foundation for cohesive and productive relationships and is necessary for effective communication in the organization.

In light of this, there is an underlying assumption that the information gathered is communicated in a clear and effective manner and that it is accurate and truthful. Rotter’s (1967) definition of trust is “the expectancy that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon” (p. 651). This assumption that what is stated as truth is reliable becomes the basis for perceived trust between people. In contrast, however, employees may be wary of sharing information with their managers, especially that which is negative in nature, because they may feel that they are in a state of dependency and vulnerability (Pech, 2009). Vulnerability is one component of trust because it relates to interdependence and the risk associated with it (Hoy &
Tarter, 2004). We all risk our vulnerability to believe information as accurate until proven inaccurate.

Ultimately, teachers are the ones who work directly with students on a daily basis, and they know what practices work well in the classroom. When asked about these practices, an assumption is made that this information is transferred to the principal in a truthful and accurate manner based on perceived relationships of trust. Pech (2009) and Bryk and Schneider (2002) share that employees are more cooperative and altruistic in their behaviors when established levels of trust exist with their supervisors. Therefore, trust between these levels becomes extremely important because the result directly affects students.

**Purpose of the Research Study**

The overall purpose of this study was to identify and examine the perceptions and attitudes of trust which exist between teachers and their principals. It was also to investigate the effective transfer of information between these two distinct levels in the organization. Though the primary purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of trust as experienced by teachers with their building principal, it was also to investigate teacher perspectives on open and honest communication regarding the practices and procedures associated with educating children in school. Lastly, it was to explore teacher perceptions of the dynamic relationships between teachers and their principals, and by doing so, provided information on how these elements related to trust and the communication process, and ultimately improvement in education.

Research conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), Sweetland and Hoy (2001), Moye, Henkin, and Egley (2005) and Bryk and Schneider (2002) indicated
specifically the importance of trust as it is related to the teacher-principal relationship. Therefore, the purpose of this study was derived from theoretical research on trust, communication, and micro-political dynamics of relationships. As many studies existed which depicted issues of trust in organizations, few related to the issue of perceived trust between teachers and principals and its effect on educating children. Therefore, it was important to bring to light this phenomenon of perceived trust between teachers and their building principal.

**Research Questions**

The research questions revolved around one central theme; how teachers perceived trust between themselves and their principal. Since information was continually transferred between these two levels in the organization, it was important to determine the perception of truthfulness and accuracy in the information conveyed. Several sub-factors came into play. One sub-factor was relevant to the definition of trust as perceived by the teacher. A second sub-factor involved perceptions of delivering truthful and accurate information to the principal and its perceived impact on effective communication. A third sub-factor involved perceived power dynamics in relation to organizational hierarchy. Therefore, the primary research questions and were as follows:

1. How do teachers perceive trust between themselves and their principal?
2. How do teachers perceive trust as it relates to open and honest communication with their principal?
3. How do teachers perceive trust as it relates to the power dynamics and their working relationship with the principal?
Scope of the Research Study

This study gathered qualitative data from ten teachers who worked in any suburban public school district in northwest Ohio or southeast Michigan regions as long as it was within a 15-mile radius of The University of Toledo. The participants were selected through a referral system of colleagues known to the researcher, though the actual participants were not known to the researcher. The participants were all teachers in general education at the elementary level with a minimum of five years of teaching experience. They also had worked for their current principal for a minimum of three academic school years. The criteria for selecting participants were based on establishing a baseline of similarity in the participants’ experiences, educational setting, and backgrounds. Doing so minimized extraneous factors related to group dynamics in middle or secondary education as well as avoided factors related to new or inexperienced teachers or principals. Each interview was conducted, transcribed, indexed, coded, and analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines. The participants followed a two-part interview protocol, and the researcher digitally recorded the interview sessions. Adequate storage capacity was provided for all notes, observations, transcriptions, artifacts, and interviews.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the fact that perceptions were owned by the individual being questioned and were not representative of all teachers. Because of the nature of qualitative research, the findings were not generalizable to the whole population of teachers and principals across the nation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, it was important to consider that “their findings may be transferable . . . but the reader can
make decisions about its usefulness for other settings” (p. 42). Contextually, this study only revealed thoughts and perceptions of participating teachers in their individual school buildings.

Another consideration was that since perceptions held by the teachers were subjective, it was recognized that perceptions of trust were the sole ownership of the individual and were not to be taken as literal or concrete in reality. In Blase and Blase’s (2002) research, they concluded that it was not possible to obtain objective information as different people have different perspectives on the same issue.

Furthermore, the number of participants was limited to 10 teachers within a 15-mile radius of The University of Toledo. The participants were also taken from only suburban public elementary school buildings. This regional and cultural demographic population limits the findings to a more narrow pool, but it does not negatively impact the stories and experiences of the participants and does not affect the overall findings for this population.

Other limitations included the site selection and document availability. Since interviews were conducted at a site chosen by the participant, and in some cases resulted in a place away from their school campus, their responses could have been more or less biased based on the comfort level of the site location. Marshall and Rossman (2006) added that research conducted in the natural setting of the participant may significantly influence their actions or responses. The comfort level of the participant may or may not have been affected by the offsite or onsite location of the interview. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of the inquiry, personal documents held by the participant may not have been available for viewing or collection by the researcher, especially if the interview
was conducted off campus. An on-campus interview may have lead to easier document retrieval since it was in close proximity in time and setting of the interview.

**Delimitations**

Considering this study was about perceptions of trust and relationships between people, it was important to build rapport and trust between the researcher and the participants. Marshall and Rossman (2006) revealed that building trust was paramount in maintaining good relations between the researcher and the participant, as was the consideration of sensitive and ethical issues of research. It also entailed “an awareness of the politics of organizations as well as sensitivity to human interaction” (p. 78). In order to accomplish this, the researcher established an environment which ensured the confidentiality of the information gathered so as to protect the participant from any potential harm or fear of reprisal. Therefore, interviews were conducted on or off the school campus and were at the convenience and individual selection of the participant. The researcher controlled only the aspects of this study which were necessary to ensure that accurate, honest, and open responses occurred.

Furthermore, the sample population in this study was considered large enough to provide confidentiality and assurance of trust between the participants and the researcher, and included general education teachers at the elementary level in K-12 education. Additionally, this study took place between January, 2010 and May, 2011, and all interviews were conducted outside of the regular contracted school day at a site chosen by the participant, and conducive to each participant’s personal schedule. Finally, all interviews were digitally recorded by means of a digital voice recorder for accurate transcription and retrieval of information. Field notes to record observations of body
language and facial expressions were taken to supplement the interviews, and artifacts illustrated by the participants during each interview session were collected.

**Significance of the Research Study**

The importance of conducting a study of this nature was centered upon perceptions of trust and their link to communication and the micropolitical structure of schools and its impact on teaching and learning. Having a greater understanding of perceived trust will hopefully lead to better communication between teachers and principals will benefit schools in the decision-making process.

It was important to understand how micropolitical dynamics involved perceptions of trust between teachers and principals and whether or not this filtered down into the classroom. Current best practices in education stated that overall school improvement comes from information gathered from those in direct contact with the students, i.e., the teachers. “As schools seek to transform themselves into professional learning communities, research into the conditions that foster greater professionalism would be helpful” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p. 243). Teachers work with the students on a daily basis. They know what works well with students. Therefore, high levels of trust which exist between teachers and their principals may lead to the truthful and accurate transmission of information which may result in a higher quality of education and overall improvement in schools.

Important concepts such as how trust emerged between teachers and principals embedded in a hierarchical system were examined. Additionally, the existence of relational trust between two parties was also examined and whether it was enhanced or diminished by expectations and obligations of power dynamics in the workplace. It was
important to bring to light this phenomenon of perceived trust as experienced by teachers. By examining the aspects of trust and how information is delivered, filtered, and received, it was hopeful that persons in leadership roles would look at their own practices and work towards a positive and productive approach to leadership in today’s schools.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

Clarification for terminology used in this study is defined as follows:

*Trust.* “The conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another” (Zand, 1972, p. 549).

*Relational Trust.* Levels of trust which exists between the individuals in the relationship based on respect, competence, and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

*Communication.* The delivery and reception of information which is exchanged and understood between two or more people (Daft, 1997).

*Leadership Styles:*

*Open.* Power is shared openly between leader and subordinate.

*Transformative.* Leaders work with other individuals toward a co-constructed learning community.

*Closed.* Power is held and controlled solely by the leader.

*Transactional.* Behavior of the leader is controlling and reactive to situations which occur (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

*Power.* “The ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs and values of another party” (Rahim, 1989, as cited in Johnson & Short, 1998, p. 147).


Best Practices in Education. Current research-based educational practices which best promote the education and academic growth of young people.

Central Office. School district offices which usually house the superintendent of schools, directors of education, and the board of education.

Conclusion

Trust is an important component in the process of communication and the transfer of accurate and truthful information between people. Multiple factors contribute to the perception of trust which includes building relationships between people and working within natural hierarchies in an organization. It is important to consider teacher perceptions of trust as it relates to the process of communication in the school. Research supports related components of trust with regard to effective leaders who have established high levels of trust with their teaching staff and promote open and honest channels of communication. Reliable communication between teachers and their principals is vital to the development of effective programs and practices in the classroom. Teachers must be able to feel a sense of trust with their principal in order to communicate and transmit accurate, reliable, and truthful information without fear of
reprisal. High levels of relational trust must be established between the participants of the organization in order for this to happen. A truly effective school system relies on its infrastructure to work as a united force with a common goal because the bottom line is the success and achievement of the students in its charge.

The subsequent chapters in this study are organized into four sections. Chapter Two includes the literature review relevant to all components of trust in the organization. Chapter Three encompasses all details related to the methodology of this study and a qualitative research plan. Chapter Four includes an account and analysis of all data presented. Finally, Chapter Five includes a discussion of the results, and conclusions and recommendations for further research in the area of trust in schools.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

What is trust? To answer this one must think of all the areas in their lives which depend on trust. People trust that parents will care for their children’s needs; people trust manufacturers to build and provide reliable products; people trust their finances to banks and investors; people trust the government to protect their rights as citizens. “We are dependent on other people to behave in accordance with our expectations. It is imperative that we have confidence that our expectations of other people will be met” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 549). Trust, then, becomes a vital component in how people act or react in the presence of another person. In the workplace, people are hired and placed together in an environment with common work goals. They don’t get to choose with whom they work. It is just expected that everyone produce the desired outcomes. When trust is examined in the context of the interactions between people, it becomes central in the way they deal with one another, communicate, and interact, and it is of vital importance to the success of any organization (Moye, et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Cosner, 2009). Because of this, it is necessary to understand how individuals trust, how trust is built, and why trusting relationships are needed in the workplace.

Trust is the foundation in effective relationships between people and it is also important in its role in organizational structure (Deutsch, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2001 and 2009; Gillespie & Mann, 2004). Trust, though, does not exist alone as a single component. As outlined in Joseph and Winston’s (2005) research, it is a multidimensional entity and combines such facets such as interpersonal and intrapersonal
trust, the risk of personal vulnerability, honesty, confidence, and reliability. As such, trust becomes pivotal in an organization and in schools as teachers and administrators seek to improve the outcome of education (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

However, a problem may exist within the realm of perceived trust as it stems from the interactions between teachers and their principals. According to guidelines set forth by NCLB, the process of school improvement is driven by the information collected from teachers regarding classroom practices and policies that produce successful student achievement. “Improving instruction in today’s educational system requires a mutual effort between teachers and school leaders” (Jenkins, Roettger, & Roettger, 2006, p. 79). Its successes are often seen in channels of effective communication. Principals are often asked to gather information from teachers, who in turn transfer this information to the central office where the superintendent and board of education reside. This is usually where district decisions are made to address and promote effective school improvement. As Pech (2009) points out, managers in an organization may find that they cannot make informed decisions because a great deal of information is withheld by the employees. “We must accept that employees cluster, find shortcuts, hide errors, fear the unknown, and avoid what they perceive to be obstacles” (p. 31). If this is so, then there seems to be a problem with the reliability and accuracy of the information conveyed and the direct result is the transfer of misinformation. This misinformation may lead to ineffective decisions and may hinder the progress of improvement and organizational success.

In addition to trust as it pertains to building relationships and communication between the participants of an organization, the natural hierarchical tendencies of power and influence in an organization must also be examined. There has always been
positional power throughout history. As Hoerr (2005) points out in his research on the origins of hierarchy, organizational hierarchy developed through an innate need of leadership. As people came together to form communities, individual responsibilities took form, and some people took the lead to make the necessary decisions to promote the survival of the community while others assumed the role of followership and did as they were told. As time went on, organizational hierarchy evolved and people took titles such as president, king, or principal, but the structure of hierarchy and positional power remained intact.

As such, there are leaders and subordinates in any organizational unit. In families, parents hold power over their children. In communities and the nation, governmental officials wield power as the lawmakers and the enforcers of laws. In business, CEO’s and presidents make decisions and hold positional power over their employees. In schools, it is no different. The typical hierarchy of top to bottom administration is basically the same as any other hierarchical structure in society. Educational leaders in the central office make decisions regarding the educational practices in the district. These decisions are sometimes based on information gathered from the principals in the buildings, which is often gleaned from the teachers and support staff in their buildings; the desired outcome is the academic growth and success of its student population.

Because trust is a basic construct in the foundation of all relationships, it is necessary to look at the dynamics of perceived trust between the levels of the organization, specifically between teachers and principals. There is an underlying assumption that the information transferred between the levels in an organization is
believed to be truthful and accurate. With this in mind, it is important to examine perceptions of trust and how this relates to educating children.

Trust

**Trust Defined.**

By definition, “trust is a psychological state comprising of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). This vulnerability exists when we inherently believe in the honest intentions of someone else though it always remains to be proven. Baier (1985) also defines trust as a reliance on the competence of others and whether or not they are willing to look after as opposed to harm whatever is entrusted to their care. She more precisely adds that “we notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted” (p. 234), and Deutsch (2009) adds that trust is usually ignored or neglected and that it is only thought about when challenged or believed to be lost. The vast majority of researchers agree that trust is multidimensional, is dependent on a combination of perceptions belonging to the individual and varying degrees and levels built or diminished over time. Researchers such as Blase and Blase (2003), Tschannen-Moran (2001), Moye and Henkin (2005), Joseph and Winston (2005), Hoerr (2005), Hoy and Tarter (2004), and Sweetland and Hoy (2001) share in these facts along with other researchers too numerous to include herewith. With this in mind, trust exists in every facet of our lives as an integral part of our interactions with others.

**Facets of Trust.**

Because trust does not exist as a lone entity, it becomes important to examine its contributing facets. When speaking of the interactions between people, they are
dependent on whether or not the parties involved have developed a level of trust between them. Established levels of trust are necessary for successful relationships, and it is the foundation for effective communication (Baier, 1985; Cosner, 2009; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Deutsch, 2009). Zand’s (1972) reflection on trust is that it “is not a feeling of warmth or affection but the conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another” (p. 549). Our interactions with each other depend on whether trust or distrust is present.

Tschennan-Moran and Hoy’s (2000) and Hoy and Tarter’s (2004) research on trust shows that it has several important facets which include such things as a willingness to risk vulnerability, benevolence, confidence, reliability, honesty, and openness. All of these facets work cohesively to establish the entity of trust.

To begin, people must be willing to risk a certain amount of vulnerability in order to establish a basis of trust. Trust becomes a willingness to be vulnerable (Rousseau, et al., 1998). Vulnerability is a risk which we all take when encountering new situations. It is inherent in all people. Hoy and Tarter (2004) further state that each individual must put their ability to trust on the line as information is transferred between each other. As people begin to trust the information communicated, they learn to have confidence in their relationship because each episode can be confirmed as truthful and accurate. Each subsequent occurrence is based on their willingness to be vulnerable and accept this information as true. The longer this pattern continues, and the incidents continue to be deemed trustworthy, the level of trust becomes higher and more reliable.

In addition to vulnerability, trust is also relative to a mutual care and concern that each person is seeking the best interests of the other. This benevolence is assumed between each person involved in the interaction, and that both are mutually reliant on the
goodwill of the other (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). Again, as continued patterns of truthful communication between these individuals become established, higher and higher levels of trust are gained between them. Because relationships are usually ongoing, the present and future actions between people are based on mutual goodwill (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). People learn to depend on one another based on this continuation of perceived trust.

Along with risking our vulnerability and assuming benevolence, we are drawn towards a sense of confidence that the information received is reliable. Reliability and confidence are strongly tied together. “Reliability is [the] confidence that others will consistently act in ways that are beneficial [to each other]” (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 254). We can predict with a certain amount of consistency what others’ actions will be based on prior history with that individual. As time goes on, a confidence evolves in their reliability to be entrusted to adequately accomplish a given task (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). According to Tschannen-Moran (2001), the higher the degree of trust, the more likely it is that the information is accurate and reliable. These high levels of trust allow people to become comfortable with each other as they work and can focus their energies on the goals of the organization as opposed to protecting themselves from the ramifications of dishonest intents.

Honesty, then, involves the authenticity and integrity of an individual. Personal integrity involves one’s ability to make a commitment in standing up for the belief of what is right (Deutsch, 2009). People own their own sense of right and wrong. Therefore, “Accepting responsibility for one’s actions and avoiding distorting the trust in order to shift blame to another characterize[s] authenticity” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p.
It is the authenticity of one’s intentions that breeds honesty in one’s character. Honesty is also inherent with openness as it involves a person’s capacity to share relevant information. It is this openness that allows people to share their values and beliefs. When this happens between two people, a signal of reciprocity is exchanged, and there is a belief that the information shared, either personal or organizational, will not be exploited by either party (Hoy & Tarter, 2004).

In its entirety, trust is a multi-faceted component in building relationships with people. All of these facets of trust are so closely connected that it is difficult to separate their distinct values as independent; they combine to represent a multi-dimensional factor called trust (Hoy & Tarter, 2004; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

**The Process of Building Trust**

Kee and Knox (1970) add that like trust, this sense of confidence in the encounter is built over time. Lewicki and Bunker’s (1996) research posits three levels of trust as they exist in the development of a relationship. The first is provisional-based trust, the second is knowledge-based trust, and the third is identity-based trust. The first stage is based on a provisional assumption that each party desires to maintain the relationship. The relationship will move to a knowledge-based level when each party begins to know and feel a sense of comfort in the knowledge that their actions are predictable and genuine. In the school setting, this might be represented by the assumption that teachers are there to educate children. They all have relatively the same job and responsibilities. As time progresses, the relationship becomes based on an accepted identity of trust. Trust is a given because of one’s established identity in trustworthiness (Lewicki & Bunker,
Each teacher may teach in a different manner; the end result is ultimately the same: children learn. Teachers learn to trust one another based on their experiences with one another and their common purpose in education.

However, because the establishment of trust takes time, there is a period of time between the initial consideration for trust and the definitive realization of trust. Consider the transfer of information between people. Time passes between the initial disbursement of information and the confirmation that it is accurate and can be trusted. The uncertainty in this interim time period relies on a belief of trust. When it is deemed accurate by the receiver, trust is established. If it is discovered to be inaccurate, then trust is diminished. Consequently, the nature of trust is reliant on the fact that it can increase or decrease over time. Just because trust has been previously established does not mean that it will last.

“Most relationships of trust do not take place in a vacuum; they are embedded in social contexts that impose constraints, values, and sanctions that affect the trust relationship” (Tschenann-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 570). The degree of trust in a relationship can change over time. There is ebb and flow of trust as each individual responds to episodes of trust or distrust. Distrust can happen when the recipient finds out that the information conveyed is not accurate or truthful as presented (Tschenann-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The violation of trust occurs not only on a personal level, but also within organizations. A breach of trust may be in the form of broken promises, disclosure of private information, stealing another’s ideas, or lying which are just a few of the possible instances where perceptions of distrust may exist (Bies & Tripp, 1996).

Summarily, each incident of trust in this process is a risk of vulnerability in the belief that the information is true. Building trust is interactive in that it involves at least
two individuals and each other’s trustworthiness (Zand, 1972). It increases with each confirmed account of accuracy and truth, but it can decrease just as quickly if an untruth is discovered. No matter what the form, people communicate with one another and build relationships based on the transmission of information they can trust (Zand, 1972; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; and Cosner, 2009). Trust is earned through repeated and continuous episodes of truthful and accurate information.

**Trust in Organizations**

**Research on Trust in Schools.**

According to Tschennan-Moran and Hoy (2000), trust is pivotal in efforts to improve the quality and productivity of education. School personnel must be able to trust one another in order to accomplish goals and maintain an atmosphere of cooperation and cohesiveness. Louis (2007) and Rus and Iglic (2005) discuss two common forms of trust; relational or interpersonal trust and institutional trust. Relational/interpersonal trust is dependent upon the repeated interactions between individuals (Louis, 2007). Institutional trust is an expectation of appropriate behavior according to the norms of the institution, and that people within the organization trust each other based on the perceived quality and reputation of the organization; it breeds cooperation among its participants (Rus & Iglic, 2005). When put together, both “relational and institutional trust influence each other over time” (Louis, 2007, p. 3).

Trust is also reciprocal, and conversely, “distrust impedes the communication which could overcome it . . . so that suspiciousness builds on itself. When one is interacting with a distrusted person, even normally benign actions are regarded with suspicion” (Govier, 1992, p. 56). If either one of the parties pass along untruthful or
inaccurate information, regardless of the reason, the foundation of trust deteriorates (Govier, 1992). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) further support this by stating that people’s openness in communication can be guarded through suspicion. They “wonder what is being hidden and why. Just as trust breeds trust, so too does distrust breed distrust” (p. 558). Baier (1985) suggests that trust must rely on “ethically and morally justifiable behavior,” (p. 551). She also states that benevolence is important in trust as well because individuals must have confidence that a genuine care and concern is present and that one’s well-being will be protected. People in schools must rely on and trust one another as a means to accomplish a common goal (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Trust is a two-way street. Principals and teachers must share a mutual level of trust and respect, but “a principal must earn trust from her teachers” (Hoerr, 2005, p. 110). When a principal shares an open willingness to offer genuine care and concern for teachers, the teachers will perceive this as a trustworthy gesture. Because of this, they may be more willing to pass along truthful and accurate information back to the principal.

In schools, established levels of relational and institutional trust become extremely important as educational decisions are often made by administrators through staff input. The role of the principal is important in establishing trust (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). Successful schools rely on high levels of cooperation and trust amongst its team members, and it is this reliance on trust in which they share ideas openly and honestly about each other’s work that leads to innovation and professional growth (Gillespie & Mann, 2004). High levels of trust can increase the accuracy of communication in any given situation; conversely, “lack of trust is a serious impediment to many of the reforms taking shape in American schools” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 548). In fact,
research has shown that staff input is extremely important in overall school improvement (Moye, et al., 2004, Reeves, 2004, Fullan, 2001 and 2003, Elmore, 2004, and Patterson, 2003). Therefore, the existing research on trust on schools suggests a strong link between trust, relationships, and performance, but a concerted effort of additional research in this area is needed (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

**Leadership and the Organization.**

Thomas Hoerr (2005) says that “good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people” (p. 7). Most researchers like Martin (1998), Sergiovanni (1992), and Reeves (2002) agree. But, an organization isn’t just about the leader. It is also the people that work in the organization who are equally important. People make up the core of the organization and leaders are responsible for nurturing and challenging people to learn and grow as individuals (Hoerr, 2005). He repeats emphatically, “Leadership is about relationships” (p. 7) Relationships between the leaders and the people who work with them are the basic structure on which productivity and organizational effectiveness rely. Former mayor of New York City, Rudolph Guiliani, in his book *Leadership* (2002) is based on the premise that true leadership involves several elements working simultaneously. Elements such as preparing for the job, working with great people, and developing and communicating strong beliefs all help leaders build successful organizations. He posits that good teamwork is the basis for success. As a leader, Guiliani stated he built trust in the people with whom he worked and was confident that the work he delegated to others was done. It was based on great relationships. The key to better relationships is based on established foundations of trust. Martin (1998) supports this idea through his research; “Leadership is the driving force in societal and organizational
change, and trust is at the root of all great leadership” (p. 41). Inevitably, there are leaders in any organization, and they may be represented as principals or teacher leaders, but ultimately, the leaders of the organization are the ones who set the tone and climate of the workplace. Their leadership helps define the organization’s purpose and creates its vision by forming a culture conducive to all (Martin, 1998). They set the tone by creating a climate and culture to be shared by all the participants of the organization.

Inclusive of this fact, leaders must establish a sense of collegiality among the staff. Hoerr (2005) suggests that collegiality be included in the goals of the organization because collegiality ensures that teachers and principals share a common purpose and work together to create effective curriculum and promote academic success. Thomas Sergiovanni’s (1992) work on moral leadership posits a value system in leadership. Leaders form viewpoints and perspectives based on a mindset of how the world works. This mindset comes from the background and experiences each person acquires over time, and the value of the experience is set as good or bad by commonly shared beliefs by a group of people. These shared values are typically what bond people together in a common cause, and for schools, they are what make a school more than an organization; they make it a community (Sergiovanni, 1992). One’s value system shapes the type of character a person displays. In leadership, what a principal holds of value is what “gives form and substance to the role of principal” (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2007, p. 11). It is good leadership that constructs a successful learning community built on solid positive relationships formed through a shared commitment and common purpose in education.
Effective Leadership.

Extensive research in organizational relationships shows that high levels of trust are paramount to the success of the organization (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Barnett & McCormick, 2004, and Reeves, 2002). In schools, Rallis and Goldring (2000) established that in order for them to be effective and productive, like any organization, there must be a sense of cooperative and cohesive management. It is the principal’s role to nurture and sustain relationships with students and staff and foster collegiality, a sense of community, and a shared common purpose (Ubben, et al., 2007). In order for school communities to work well, supportive relationships must exist. “Working relationships marked by trust, openness, and affirmation require investments of care, time, and interpersonal talent,” (Donaldson, Jr., 2006, p. 67) and the principal is responsible for facilitating cohesive relationships between teachers, parents, and the community (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Their research on relational trust also posits that a principal’s personal style helps create high levels of trust between the participants of the organization. Leaders engage with people; they listen to and understand information presented to them and make decisions based on the reception of what they trust is accurate and truthful information. Teachers convey information to their principals in much the same manner. Channels of effective communication are inherent between teachers and principals when their relationships are built on trust (Kesby, 2008).

According to Martin (1998), people do not trust merely because of a title or position in the organization. Just because one is a principal and has gained the position of leadership through hire or appointment, does not mean that the teachers automatically
trust the principal in his actions or decisions. Establishing trust takes time. It is up to the principal to foster supportive relationships with teachers and immerse herself in the constructs of building trust. “Engaging with people is about creating trust, and as a leader it is important to be the first to trust” (Kesby, 2008, p. 3). Because of their leadership position, it becomes necessary for the principal to take on the risk associated with establishing this initial trust. By remaining constant over time, communication and trust becomes the base of teacher/principal relationships. Teachers may be willing to communicate with their principal, but unless there is an established existence of trust, the accuracy of the communication may be limited in the best case or faulty in the worst (Burke, Sims, Lazzara & Salas, 2007). “Leaders gain the trust of their employees through communication, by keeping their word, and trusting employees first” (p. 44). Principals and teachers build trust in social constructs through fair treatment, shared values, common goals and visions, and consistency in their behaviors related to school progress (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

Sergiovanni’s (1992) beliefs encompass a sense of followership first before leadership. “Followers are people committed to purposes, a cause, a vision of what the school is and can become, beliefs about teaching and learning, values and standards to which they adhere, and convictions” (p. 71). This system of followership is constructed through common practices of professionalism. When teachers and principals are professionals, they are committed to being their own self-managers. In the end, the more professionalism there is, the less leadership is actually needed. Ultimately, “without ideas, values, and commitments, there can be no followership. Without followership, there can be no leadership” (p. 85). It is the principal who sets this tone of
professionalism and communicates the vision of the school to maintain consistency in matters of school productivity.

**Leadership Style.**

Traditionally, the authority of the principal has remained intact as a primary source for decision-making in schools. However, there are many types of leaders in the world of education. Some leaders are dictatorial making rules and expecting people to follow them. Other leaders are more facilitative as they model expected behavior and promote teamwork ideals. But, as Sergiovanni (1992) states, “leadership takes many forms” (p. 123). Some like to command and control, others like to motivate and direct. Current research reveals that many leadership styles exist on a continuum of practice. They range from transactional to transformative, closed to open, authoritarian to facilitative (Blase & Anderson, 1995). In closed leadership styles, a principal will be less willing to take teacher’s suggestions seriously and the teacher may fear reprisal. In a more open leadership capacity, a principal will be more receptive of teacher suggestions and therefore, they are more willing to participate in the decision-making.

Examining leadership styles will help ascertain and focus the different aspects of trust and communication between teachers and their principals. As Malen and Ogawa (1988) suggest, teachers may feel reluctant to challenge a decision or participate in the process simply because of past traditions of principal authority and autonomy. Johnson (1989) contends that leadership style plays a role in this process. Joseph Blase (1991) and his colleagues Anderson (1995), Blase (2002), and Du (2008) have done extensive research in the structures of leadership styles. Blase’s (1995) study identifies a matrix of micropolitical leadership styles which exist on two perpendicular continuums. The
characteristics defined fall between transformative and transactional leadership styles and open and closed leadership styles. Transformative leaders work with others to co-construct the learning community. Transactional leaders exhibit controlling behaviors towards others. Closed leaders do not share power; they make all the decisions. And, open leaders are more facilitative and share power by establishing communicative guidelines and shared responsibility in decision-making. These are the two perpendicular continuums. Within these two continuums fall four distinct leadership dimensions which in themselves are not pure in form, but are viewed as conceptual models of leadership styles. They are as follows: 1) Adversarial Leadership, which has tenets of a power over with some power through capacities; 2) Authoritarian Leadership, which is purely a power over structure; 3) Democratic, Empowering Leadership, which promotes a power with standard; and 4) Facilitative Leadership, which results in a power through and some power over facets (Blase, 1995).

As leadership style plays an important role in this process, Blase and Anderson’s (1995) research on open and closed leadership styles gives relevant background on this subject. They incorporate a tripartite structure revealed as power over, power through, and power with. Power over leadership involves authoritarian styles of leadership based on control and domination. Power through is more facilitative in that the leader motivates others by allowing them to feel a sense of ownership in the problem. Power with leadership is relational in nature and involves issues of teacher empowerment and true democracy in decision-making as a right, not a privilege (Blase & Anderson, 1995). They report that most leaders strive to be somewhere in the continuum of a transformative and open leader. They are taught to demonstrate leadership qualities of democracy and
empowerment and lead through a power with style towards their subordinates.

“Authoritarian and coercive leaders in general have a tendency to misuse power and harm others because they consistently seek compliance and domination” (Blase & Blase, 2003, p. 46). The reality is that most school leaders exist somewhere between a transactional yet open leader. They try to delegate power and decision-making, but they still hold on to traditional leadership qualities that portray a sense of, You do this for me, I’ll do this for you, attitude (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

Sergiovanni (1992) also speaks about a type of leadership called servant leadership in that the leader assumes the role of servant to the community. The principal addresses the needs of the students, teachers, and community as the driving force behind forming goals and making decisions.

Relationships between Teachers and Principals.

Effective relationships between teacher and principal become essential in the operation of the school. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) reveal that good instruction is built on teacher’s job satisfaction, collegial trust, a sense of professionalism, influence, and opportunities for collaboration among colleagues. The influence of power structures from principal to teacher may have negative or positive consequences. According to Johnson and Short (1998), leader-subordinate interactions often produce constructive consequences such as cooperative planning among teachers, support for administrative-based policies, and a willingness to improve teaching strategies through professional development opportunities. Alternately, they may also have destructive consequences such as teacher isolation, low levels of compliance on school policies, and high levels of conflict between teachers, students, and the principal.
Teachers feel powerless and become passive or combative, with the end result a climate of mistrust, low morale, and low motivation to do their job. Repeated negative strategies from the principal such as criticism can have adverse negative effects in teacher behavior and cognition, and ultimately affect student learning (Blase & Blase, 2003).

**Trust and Communication in Schools**

**Communication Defined.**

Communication is “the process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people” (Daft, 1997, p. 560). Over time, as language patterns developed, the physical act of communication remained constant. However, it was not a given that the information transferred through communication was perceived as trusted and accurate. It depended on other conditions such as the type of relationship between the individuals involved, the type of information being conveyed, and the situation at hand during communication. When looking at relationships between people and how they are developed, one must first examine how people communicate. In its basic form, communication is the delivery and reception of information. Its goal “becomes the protection of one’s interest and the reduction of one’s anxiety rather than the accurate transmission of ideas” (Tschennan-Moran, 2009, p. 222). Communication is present both in verbal forms and non-verbal forms, but it is also a process of steps beginning with oneself in intrapersonal communication towards a more global aspect of communication that allows one to communicate across a variety of cultures (Perkins, 2008).

**The Process of Communication.**

Berlo’s (1960) early research in communication confirms that in any act of communication, there are two attempts of influence. One lies within the sender to the
receiver, and the other lies with the receiver to the sender. Each attempts to influence the
other and during this process, but a breakdown in communication can occur at any point.
Relationships, then, were formed between individuals based on information expressed
through this channel of communication. However, a more careful examination of
communication reveals that it does not exist alone. It is consistently paired with a variety
of other components and facets such as trust, power, and the dynamics of social
relationships. Its structure is complex and exists between the sender and the receiver of
information; it is also affected by individual perceptions of all of the above-mentioned
factors (Berlo, 1960).

As communication research shows, communication is a two-way street. Messages
are sent to a receiver through various channels, but the reception of these messages may
be dependent on barriers to effective communication (Kelly, 2000).

The sender may express the message in such a way that it is not heard or received.
The receiver may decode the message inaccurately, misinterpret the sender’s
intent, and respond inappropriately. Inconsistent verbal and non-verbal channels
may mean that the receiver doubts the true intention of the sender and does not
respond at all. (p. 93)

As seen here, trust is the reception of accurate information and is important in the process
of communication. Perkins (2008) states that communication begins with an
understanding of one’s thoughts and words as they are held in their beliefs, attitudes, and
values. Each instance of communication is based on the perceptions of our experiences
with people and situations. It involves our backgrounds, and upbringing, and each person
has a unique blend of experiences and perceptions.
Barriers in Communication.

Quirke (1995) points out that people assume communication is delivered accurately due to shared views and attitudes, but what if this is not the case? A breakdown occurs when the information conveyed is not received as intended. Perceptions and values held by the individual may become a barrier to effective and accurate communication. As defined by Buchanan and Huczynski (1997), “perception is the dynamic psychological process responsible for attending to, organizing, and interpreting sensory data” (p. 46). They further state that people constantly filter information by choosing bits and pieces of information perceived as important to them while not necessarily important to others. This is termed perceptual selection which controls what is heard and how it is heard. Perception is just one barrier to effective communication.

In reality, there are several barriers to effective communication; semantics is another. Semantics involves the meaning of words and/or their symbols. It is based on the assumption that words or symbols may mean different things to different people (Kelly, 2000). Its relevance to trust in effective communication includes the channel used to transfer information. The message and the channel must fit or a breakdown in the intended meaning of the message may occur. For example, research has shown that people prefer a face-to-face meeting for complicated, lengthy, or emotional messages, and preferably, multiple channels should be used to provide a consistency in the messages (Kelly, 2000). If complicated or emotional messages are delivered via hard copy, interpretation is up for grabs. The interpretation of the written word may be skewed by the recipient’s mood, past behaviors, prior established relationship patterns, and level
of trust with the deliverer of the message. Therefore, it is important to choose a proper channel of delivery when communicating with people to ensure a high degree of trust.

**Communication in the Organization.**

“Communication is central to the environment created at work. It influences interactions among coworkers, the impact of what individuals do, [and] who they are” (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005, p. 551). According to Daft (1997), organizational communication is relevant to the intent of the sender to pass along information to influence the behavior of the receiver.

However, it is important to understand that the authenticity of information is at the core of this process. Kesby (2008) states that people, “say things because they think they are supposed to say things, rather than because they believe in the things they say,” (p. 4). A good administrator will often ask teachers for feedback regarding educational practices in the classroom. This is where effective and trustworthy communication comes into play. “School personnel must trust one another in order to cooperate toward accomplishing a common goal” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 551). Additionally, there is also a more open willingness to share thoughts, feelings and ideas with their superiors (Wrightsman, 1974). Teachers are often asked about programs initiated for classroom use. If they do not agree with the program due to less than desirable results in the classroom, the teacher has the choice to either tell the truth about the program’s failure in the classroom or tell the principal an untruth and tout its success. The delivery of this information will be based on the relationship of trust established between these two individuals. If a relationship of trust exists, then the teacher may feel comfortable in disclosing the truth about the failure of the program. On the other hand, if trust does not
exist, the teacher may not feel able to state the truth about the program. Trust is important because “it is a key antecedent of the willingness to cooperate voluntarily . . . [and] encourages behaviors that facilitate productive social interaction” (Tyler, 2000, p. 287). If this is so, then the information conveyed and collected by the principal may be inaccurate due to issues of distrust. Since final decisions regarding educational practices are then made by administrators, “school leaders have the responsibility of establishing strong lines of communication with teachers” (Jenkins, et. al., 2006, p. 37). Teachers must feel able to deliver accurate information to the principal regarding practices and programs implemented in the classroom. However, it is not as easy as it sounds. Perceived trust in leadership is paramount. In the end, the reality is that these decisions directly affect the students.

**Trust and School Improvement**

**Micropolitics and the Organization.**

Before addressing the factors related to school improvement, it is important to understand how micropolitical systems involve power dynamics between teachers and principals, and how these power dynamics filter down into the classroom. Hoyle (1986) defines the micropolitics of an organization as “strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of authority and influence to further their interests” (p. 126). Blau’s (1964) research on exchange theory reveals that people within an organization rely on a social existence based on individual degrees of relative power. Each person reaches a level of accommodation to another in such a way that the benefits and costs allow for mutual gain or mutual interests.
A component of micropolitical dynamics is the degree of power held by the individual. Rahim (1989) defines power as “the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party” (p. 545). Principals can have this kind of power over teachers due to the typical hierarchy of the school organization. In most cases, leaders maintain power over their subordinates. Marshall and Scribner (1991) state that “power is used as a way to manage potential or real conflict, to create group cohesion and collaboration, to enforce a dominant view of the way things ought to be, and to maintain order and regulate behavior through authority and influence” (p. 349). Teachers, then, know that the views of their principal are the dominant view and the way things ought to be simply because of the hierarchical position of power associated with their principal. As Blase and Blase’s (2003) research on power points out that teachers are reluctant to offer truthful information when in the presence of their principal. Often, teachers’ behavior changes due to their subordinate status and perceived wishes of their principal.

“Leaders, because they are in positions of authority and power, must role model new governing values based on relational trust” (Fullan, 2003, p. 67). Schools are typically designed with distinct levels between the superiors of the organization and their subordinates. The top of the organization often yields the superintendent of schools who is governed by the board of education. Below them are the principals of each building in the district, and beneath the principals is the teaching and support staff. Current best practices in education suggest that principals gather information from the teaching ranks to help determine educational practices that work and produce high academic achievement. In light of this, the information conveyed to the principal must be
communicated clearly and effectively, and must be accurate and truthful. “The principal must be able to identify a capable corps of teachers who can act as an academic team or council to the principal and who have an understanding of content standards and appropriate assessments of progress” (Cross & Rice, 2000, p. 62). Even though all levels in the school can make decisions that affect students, the final decision-making power usually lies in the top administrative levels of the organization.

Kelly’s (2000) research points out there are organizational barriers that create status differences between its participants in the form of organizational hierarchy. Research will substantiate that leadership plays an important role in the process of student learning (Blase & Anderson, 1995), and it is well known that “school principals wield power over teachers through formal and informal means” (p. 9). Sweetland and Hoy’s (2001) study of seeking truth in information reveals disturbing facts that the truth can be varnished (putting one’s own spin on information) due to self-protective measures. Political structures which exist in any organization yield versions of the truth and are dependent upon self-serving motives. Their conclusion was that “varnishing the truth may be becoming more common in U.S. society” (p. 291). With teachers and principals being increasingly asked to work collaboratively in setting common goals, both are expected to take on a larger role in the decision-making process (Blase & Anderson, 1995). Additionally, administrators, as managers of the building, may gather information from teachers and pass it along to the top of the organization. This is where established levels of trust become important. Regarding teachers’ perceptions of trust in their leaders, “when trust in the leader breaks down, disastrous outcomes may result” (Burke, et.al. 2007, p. 606). The effect of trust on school improvement is therefore tremendous. Heifetz
and Linsky (2002) add that each day, people must decide to contribute openly or keep quiet in order to avoid conflict. Whenever people decide to voice conflicting or unpopular initiatives, they risk vulnerability and criticism. “Principals who manage their schools with a command-and-control leadership style will likely pay a price in effectiveness” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p. 244). With this in mind, if diminished levels of trust exist, communication may be skewed and decisions may be based on biased or inaccurate information.

Willower (1991) states that “the teacher is in the best position to know what decisions should be made in his or her classroom, by the high level of training required for teacher certification, and by the rhetoric of the professionalism” (p. 444). Teachers are used to having autonomy in their classrooms. They protect it and value its existence. Willower (1991) reveals that “teachers will typically value autonomy, order, and time and will attempt to protect their interests along those lines” (p. 446). Willower also examines the social relationships between people in an organization and finds that individuals in the organization possess varying degrees of social cohesiveness according to norms, values, and traditions. In a typical school building, the principal is the boss and the teachers are the subordinates. Historically speaking, most teachers believe that the principal holds certain managerial tasks as a priority and that “teachers tend to assume a reactive rather than a proactive stance to administration in those decisions that the administration makes regarding curriculum and instruction” (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 153).

Johnson and Short (1998) address issues related to power bases among principals and their subordinates. “The power base chosen by the principal potentially affect[s] such
psycho-social dimensions for teachers as conflict, compliance, and empowerment, either positively or negatively” (p. 147). Furthermore, “teachers identify the principal’s power and allow the principal to influence their behavior” (p. 147), and this can have constructive or destructive consequences. Examples of constructive consequences might be seen as support for administrative initiatives, volunteering for committee work, or cooperative teaching strategies. Destructive consequences might include feelings of isolation, lack of support for classroom initiatives, low levels of compliance on directives, or feelings of alienation or oppression (Johnson & Short, 1998).

Where power relationships exist, so does conflict. Conflict occurs when people have competing values. All members of the school organization, students, teachers, administrators, and parents can have conflicting notions of what should happen in school. Willower (1991) further states that conflict is viewed as a change agent in the organization. It allows for individuals or groups to affect existing power relationships. Johnson and Short (1998) define conflict as either intrapersonal or interpersonal. Intrapersonal conflict is felt internally by an individual. It is how one individual handles the decisions to make one choice versus another. For example, there may be instances where a teacher feels conflicted in deciding whether to serve on a committee formed by the principal, or whether to remain neutral and back away from that responsibility. Neutrality offers an escape from thoughts of possible retribution.

In contrast, interpersonal conflict deals with two or more individuals and the projection of each person’s opinion on the other (Johnson & Short, 1998). In this same instance, the teacher serving on the committee may have a contradictory opinion with another committee member which results in a disagreement. Conflict becomes a natural
progression in the bureaucracy of the organization in that there is generally a dominant successor; someone wins and someone loses power in the conflict. Politics exists where behavior is regulated in order to avoid chaos and disorder, and where power is distributed unequally between the members because of status and hierarchy (Willower, 1991). Martin (1998) reiterates that effective leaders value employee attitudes and recognize that they play an important role in achieving organizational goals. Trust in leadership by employees is imperative for without it, the profitability of the organization declines.

**Organizational Dynamics.**

Micropolitical structures exist in any type of organization, and whether or not these individuals trust one another when they communicate may become an important factor to consider. Effective communication is a key element in the environment created at work (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005). Marshall and Scribner (1991) define politics as:

> an encompassing three-sided equation involving management, people, and their actions. Power is used as a way to manage potential or real conflict, to create group cohesion and collaboration to enforce a dominant view of the way things ought to be, and to maintain order and regulate behavior, both formally and informally, through authority and influence. (p. 349)

Power as defined by Rahim (1989) in Johnson and Short (1998) is “the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs and values of another party” (p. 147). Additionally, it is important to understand how micropolitical systems involve power dynamics between teachers and principals, and how these power dynamics filter down into the classroom.
Marshall and Scribner (1991) introduce micropolitical analysis through key individuals like Joseph Blase, whose research revolves around teachers and principals who use political strategies to mutually manipulate relationships and conflicts. Blase (1991) states that “teachers develop what they call a ‘political’ perspective towards others with whom they regularly interact” (p. 356). What he means by political is the natural tendency of subordinates in an organization to influence and protect themselves at the workplace. Blase (1991) identified several strategies that teachers used to influence and protect themselves from their school principal. Some of these tactics were exchange, bargaining, threats, bluff, flattery, biasing information, acquiescence, conformity, ingratiating, and passive-aggressive behaviors. Depending on the perceived leadership style, as reported by the teachers in this study, different tactics were used in an attempt to influence or protect themselves in their job. Closed leaders exhibited behaviors identified by the teachers as non-supportive, authoritarian, egocentric, indecisive, unfriendly, and inaccessible. The political reactions from teachers towards principals of this nature were avoidant behaviors, confrontational, ingratiating, non-compliant, and documentary in recording specific incidents of perceived mistreatment.

**School Improvement.**

With all this political power and control, one needs to be concerned with how it affects the most important product of schools; academically successful students. School improvement is and has been the focus of educational reform movements for many decades, and there are a multitude of educational reform practices circulating the nation. Each one boasts a cure for the ailments of modern schools across America. The most current stems from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) whereby the premises of effective
schools and standards-based education rank amongst the top. Effective schools focus on the practice of educators who deem school process, the school environment, and the structure of the school are the primary factors in promoting student achievement. Witte and Walsh (1990) reveal in their study that prior educational theories linked student performance to differences in socioeconomic factors, racial and/or family characteristics, or physical characteristics of the school. For the last decade or so, new theories involve the concept of what actually happens in the school. Effective schools are determined by strong leadership, high expectations for achievement, teamwork, discipline, order, and a focus on the fundamentals of skills and homework (Witte & Walsh, 1990, Sergiovanni, 1992, Owings & Kaplan, 2003). Standards-based education focuses on schools adhering to curriculum set by academic content standards and criteria measured by high-stakes testing and school accountability. The strength of standards-based education relies on raising the quality of teaching through rigorous teacher preparation programs, quality professional development, and stricter teacher accountability requirements. Doing so will eventually lead to higher a quality of education and a higher quality of student learning (Delandshere & Arens, 2001).

A byproduct of best practices in education states that overall school improvement comes from information gathered from those in direct contact with the students; the teachers. Teachers are the ones who work with students on a daily basis. They know what works. Consequently, collaboration between administrators and teachers is also at the focus of current research. Pounder (1998) reveals that shared decision-making between administrators and teachers leads to a higher quality of decisions and produces more genuine results. “When principals extend trust to teachers through shared control, they
provoke greater trust in response” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 582). According to Leithwood, et.al. (2004), it is well known that principals have a direct and indirect effect on student achievement through their knowledge of quality instruction and the teacher evaluation process. By improving teacher instruction through effective feedback, the principal effectively promotes academic success in the classroom.

An interesting consequence of school administration is that administrators, once removed from the classroom, may become distanced from the daily interactions with students and can be too far removed from the truth of what works best with educating children. To follow the constructs of effective schools’ measures, administrators should remain more involved and visible in the classroom (Hoerr, 2005). In order for this to happen, administrators must share their leadership capacity amongst all the shareholders in education (Lambert, 1998). Shared leadership involves:

- a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of community. (Lambert, 1998, p. 5)

A relevant sidebar is brought up in Ray’s (1997) article on the home-schooling trend in America reveals that the home-schooling industry has exploded in the last two decades due to a continued and growing distrust of schools and the conflicts present in this diverse society. Home-schooled children typically fall outside of the norm in education as their needs and the wishes of their parents do not match the focus of the traditional school. Schools have traditionally taught to the middle population. They cater to the middle of the pack, the norm, the majority. Educational reform requires teachers
and administrators to leave behind old theories of ranked achievement and find new and innovative ways to cater to the educational needs of all children, not just the middle or the majority. In order to develop programs and initiatives which meet the needs of all students, teachers must be able to effectively communicate accurate and truthful information to their principals (Ray, 1997). However, institutional change is a slow process and cannot occur without a united corps of educational professionals who trust one another.

Remembering Martin (1998), who believes that administrators must first trust their employees, Hoy and Tarter (1995) report that principals who involve their teachers in the decision-making process do so with great trust because ultimately, the outcome of those important decisions remains the responsibility of the principal. In order for improvement in schools to take place, truthful and accurate information must be passed back and forth between the different hierarchical levels of the organization.

Again, trust in the channels of communication plays the important role here. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) report that trust is a necessary component, and without it, it will seriously impede educational reform. It is interesting that Blase and Blase (2003) conclude that “principal mistreatment [of teachers] had serious deleterious consequences for all major aspects of classroom life including the quality of instruction” (p. ten5). In light of this, it is imperative that effective relationships between teacher and principal exist. Leithwood, et.al. (2004) reveal that good instruction is built on teacher’s job satisfaction, collegial trust, a sense of professionalism, influence, and opportunities for collaboration among colleagues. The influence of power structures from principal to teacher may have negative or positive consequences. According to Johnson and Short
leader-subordinate interactions often produce constructive consequences such as cooperative planning among teachers, support for administrative-based policies, and a willingness to improve teaching strategies through professional development opportunities. Alternately, they also may have destructive consequences such as teacher isolation, low levels of compliance on school policies, and high levels of conflict between teachers, students, and the principal. Teachers feel powerless and become passive or combative, with the end result a climate of mistrust, low morale, and low motivation to do their job. “In general, teachers described feelings of ‘stress,’ ‘paranoia,’ ‘insecurity,’ ‘fear,’ ‘dread,’ ‘self-doubt,’ and lowered motivation with regard to classroom teaching” (Blase & Blase, 2003, p. 105).

Because effective and accurate communication relies so heavily on high levels of trust between principals and teachers, it is paramount to the success of decision-making and overall school improvement. In order for open and honest communication to take place in an organization, trust is necessary. When high degrees of trust exist, people are more likely to disclose more accurate, relevant, and complete data when asked about problems concerning the organization.

**Conclusion**

The overall effectiveness of a school system boils down to the achievement and success of its student population. Willower (1991) notes that relationships between teacher and student play an important role in this process and that “teachers have altruistic motives and work hard to establish good relationships with their students” (p. 444). A truly effective school system will rely on its infrastructure to work as a united force with a common goal. Morgan (1986) adds:
By recognizing that an organization is intrinsically political, in the sense that ways must be found to create order and direction among people with potentially diverse and conflicting interests, much can be learned about the problems and legitimacy of management as a process of government, and about the relation of the organization to society (p. 142).

School administrators are heads of these public organizations. As such, their role in leadership is to manage the values and viewpoints of teachers, community members, and students, and ward off difficulties and deal with complexities before they become crises (Willower, 1991). The conveyance of information throughout the various levels of the organization is vital to the development and implementation of its procedures, policies, and programs. Teachers must be able to convey information relevant to the instructional process to the administrators of the district. They are at the front lines of education; they know what works. “The teacher is in the best position to know what decisions should be made in his or her classroom” (Willower, 1991, p. 444). Knowing this, administrators must be able to gather important information from teachers in order to facilitate relevant decisions in the operation of the system.

Trust, then, affects all dynamics of a productive organization. It is inherent in effective communication, organizational relationships, and micropolitics in the organization. As such, trust is an important component in effective academic instruction. Research has shown that effective leadership is central to the overall improvement of schools in that these leaders will exhibit characteristics of open and trusting styles. Teachers who trust their administrators share truthful and accurate information upward in the organization. The higher the level of trust, the more open the channel of
communication. The significance of examining issues of trust between teacher and principal will reveal its link to effective communication, organizational relationships, and the overall improvement of schools.

Given the literature on trust and its many connections to relationships, communication, and organizational success, trust is essential. Therefore, I am lead to ask the following research questions: 1) How do teachers perceive trust between themselves and their principal; 2) How do teachers perceive trust as it relates to open and honest communication with their principal; 3) How do teachers perceive trust as it relates to the power dynamics and their working relationship with the principal? I hypothesize that trust is dependent on the depth of the relationship which exists between the teacher and the principal. I suspect that the higher the level of trust between the individuals, the more effective the relationship and the more reliable the information passed between them. Of the studies which currently exist on trust between teachers and principals, the findings suggest that this is the case (Martin (1998), Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000), and Johnston & Venable (1986).
Chapter Three

Research Design and Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of trust with their building principal. Another purpose was to examine perceptions of leadership style and its relation to trust and effective communication as well as its impact on power dynamics in the school building. Its design was qualitative in nature and lent itself to a participant-oriented research method known as phenomenology. Qualitative research is achieved through listening to others’ stories and is an interpretation of their personal narratives (Glesne, 2006). As such, “qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (p. 4). Additionally, phenomenology focuses on lived experiences which a group of people have in common because they have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Because teachers exist together as a collective group and experience situations surrounded by dominance set forth by organizational power structures, this study fell easily into this research method.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Since quantitative methods only provide a numerical support in research, for purposes of this study, it was more important to have an in-depth examination of the way teachers feel about issues of trust and how they related to the process of communication and a relationship with their principal. Collecting the participants’ stories relative to perceptions of trust, communication, and leadership characteristics fit more readily with qualitative research. Phenomenology is grounded in collecting information through in-
depth interviews with a smaller set of participants (Creswell, 2007). Since this study analyzed the perceptions of ten participants, a qualitative study was in order. Furthermore, according to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study in qualitative research also lends itself to interviews as it may include observations, documents, or artifacts of the participants.

Quantitative analysis examines a large participant sampling through survey and is important when analyzing data on a larger context. In the alternative, qualitative analysis reveals a more in-depth examination of the raw data. “Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur and that one should therefore study that behavior in those real-life situations” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). Hence, it was important to have conversations with the participants in this study to gain a more in-depth perspective of their feelings and experiences. Therefore, this participant-oriented research became a viable method of data collection and analysis.

**Setting, Population, or Phenomenon**

Hierarchy is typically present in any organizational structure. With organizational hierarchy comes the power associated with the different levels of the organization. Since many public schools have a hierarchical organization, the roles that teachers and principals play revolve around the same power structures. Teachers are typically subordinate to their supervisor, which in many cases is a building principal. Communication between those two levels is important in the decision-making process (Johnston & Venable, 1986). Therefore, the setting of this study was not bound to a certain school district or regional area. It was sufficient to examine the thoughts and perceptions of any teacher who has experienced perceptions of trust with their principal,
and it was important to “find people to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118).

Because of the sensitive nature of the information sought in this study, teachers were selected through a referral system of colleagues known to the researcher. The researcher then used a snowballing technique once an initial contact had been made. Snowball techniques reveal potential participants through “people who know people” (Patton, 2002 as cited in Glesne, 2006, p. 35). It was important to use this technique because of the potentially sensitive nature of the information gathered about trust and the relationships between the teachers and their principals. Actual participants were not colleagues of the researcher, and were not personally known by the researcher. This avoided ethical and political issues associated with research conducted in one’s own backyard (Glesne, 2006).

The researcher interviewed 10 candidates who volunteered and were willing to talk about their experiences of trust with their building principal. Permission to participate in this study was in the form of signed consent and cooperation was established through a promise of confidentiality and a professional sense of rapport. Initial rapport was established through a sense of collegial acquaintance associated with teachers belonging to a collective group as a profession. Continued rapport was built through open conversation as guided by the interview questions. “People will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues once they know you” (Glesne, 2006, p. 113). Informed consent ensured the participant’s volunteer status, revealed any potential effects of well-being, and allowed for a voluntary withdrawal from the study at any time (Glesne, 2006).
The researcher selected teachers from any suburban public school district within a 15 mile radius of The University of Toledo purely for reasons of convenience in time and distance. This narrow regional population does limit the findings of this study and this limitation was discussed in Chapter One. Furthermore, this region allowed the researcher easy access to the participants with insignificant travel time and minimal expenditures.

The researcher did not interview any teachers in the same school building as herself so as to remain distanced from colleagues known to her.

Ten teachers were interviewed to ensure a large enough sample to elicit confidentiality amongst the participants and created a trusting atmosphere where teachers felt comfortable divulging potentially sensitive information. Ten is considered a sufficient number in a phenomenological qualitative study (Creswell, 2007), and because of the nature of the in-depth interviews and conversational magnitude of collecting each participant’s story, a larger population, while certainly would add to the dynamics of the study, was not necessary. The researcher primarily collected stories shared by teachers who had experienced the same phenomenon. Four of the participant interviews took place away from their school campus at convenient locations to the participants which resulted in a two-fold effect. One effect allowed for an atmosphere conducive to speaking freely without fear of reprisal for known participation in this study, and a second effect allowed for a greater sense of trust between the participant and the researcher. By personal and individual choice, six of the interviews took place at each participant’s school campuses, but were held outside of their contracted working day. The effects were similar in nature to the off campus interviews. On-campus choices resulted in the participants feeling comfortable in their own setting free from distractions at their job, the open public, or
their homes. The second effect allowed for a greater sense of trust between the participant and the researcher. Participants were allowed to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were also entitled to read, examine, or obtain the results of the study if so desired.

Researcher’s Role, Subjectivity, and Ethics

The participants were made aware of the parameters of the study as well as the researcher’s role. All interviews were private and each participant was guaranteed complete confidentiality not only in their participation, but also in their responses and reflections brought forth in the interview. The researcher’s role was that of a learner. As a learner, the researcher was not perceived as an expert on the subject of trust, merely an interested student seeking knowledge (Glesne, 2006). The researcher merely sought information, responses, and perceptions of how teachers felt about issues of trust between themselves and their building principal.

As personal bias and subjectivity can be an issue in any study, especially a study involving perceptions of trust between people, the researcher remained objective and refrained from confirming or denying any personal experiences with perceptions of trust. Subjectivity and personal bias are always present, but the researcher was constantly aware of their presence. The researcher was also aware of any ways the participant might distort any perceptions revealed (Glesne, 2006). This further substantiated the need to use participants who were not personally known to the researcher as friends or personal colleagues.

Each of the participants gave their consent through signature and were fully informed of their rights as a participant. Participants were only asked to respond to
questions in which they felt comfortable in disclosing their responses. They also had the
right to discontinue the interview process at their discretion without fear of shame, guilt,
or discomfort. The interviews were bound by guidelines set forth under the Office of
Human Subjects Research at The University of Toledo, the Institutional Review Board at
The University of Toledo, and the National Institute of Health.

Ethics and moral behavior were also considered in the eventual publication of this
study. Participants were assured of their personal level of confidentiality and that the
connection between their pseudonyms and their real identities would never be revealed.
All interviews and observations became the personal property of the researcher and
became the researcher’s ethical and moral responsibility in character.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected in the form of personal and private interviews. Interviews did
not consist of groups of people even if there were participants who worked in the same
building. It was important to ensure the participant’s comfort level in speaking openly
and honestly with the researcher, therefore, all interviews were on a one-on-one basis.
This allowed for more conversation and flexibility surrounding the initial research
questions. This type of in-depth conversation probed deeper into the feelings and
perceptions of the teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In order to facilitate an
ambience of ease and openness for the participant, interviews took place at a site, time,
and location convenient to the participant. A two-part interview protocol was used along
with a digital voice recording device. The protocols were written on paper and handed to
the participant in order to allow for a visual representation of questions. This form also
allowed for additional notes or representations to be indicated in writing. Two graphic
illustrations were used to help the participants visualize their own perceptions of what characteristics were necessary in developing trust with another person as well as developing trust with a principal in the school setting. Both the paper protocols and the graphic illustrations became the property of the researcher, but copies may be made and given to the participant at his/her request. The questions were structured in such a way as to progress from a broad or general concept to more narrow and focused concepts.

The digital audio recordings allowed for a truer representation of responses in connection with vocal patterns and inflections. The researcher also recorded and made observations in the form of field notes which included minimal but significant body language, posture, levels of intensity, or levels of comfort or discomfort. This also allowed for a more exact and accurate transcription of the interviews. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. They were listened to as many times as necessary to ensure complete accuracy in transcription. The need for follow-up phone calls was addressed at the time of the initial interview for additional clarification of issues or points though no actual follow-up phone calls were needed.

**Observation**

Observation was a necessary process in the collection of data. Glesne (2006) stated that researchers must carefully observe, experience, and record all details with respect to the situation observed. The overall goal in research is to “write or communicate findings” (p. 52). Even though the interviews were digitally recorded through audio means, there was a need to observe significant body language, facial expressions, and vocal patterns of the participant. Therefore, hand jotted notes accompanied the interview sessions in increments of five minute markings. Observations included, but were not
limited to, body positions, facial expressions, and/or vocal inflections. All of these factors helped reveal levels of comfort or discomfort as information was presented. It was important to observe “the events, acts, and gestures that occur” (p. 54), with the observation. Video tape recording was not used.

**Interviewing**

The interview procedure consisted of an open-ended question format. An initial interview protocol was used (Appendix A) and consisted of nine open-ended questions constructed by the researcher concerning general concepts of trust. Questions were presented to the participant with ample time given for responses. A paper copy of the interview questions was given to each participant prior to the inception of the interview. Each participant was also given a graphic illustration (Appendix C) on which to denote characteristic traits they considered necessary to build trust between two people in general. Notes for both the interview protocol and graphic illustration were written down or stated verbally and were taken at the discretion of the participant. Further probing of related questions took place according to the participant’s responses and the information brought forth through each question. Each primary question was general in nature and was narrowed with subsequent and related questions dependent upon the participant’s answers. However, due to the nature of conversation and free will, the initial questions lead to additional issues not previously brought up with the other participants.

It was also important to maintain a certain level of flexibility as the direction of the participant’s responses did not fall in a logical order represented by the research question protocol. However, Glesne (2006) makes an important point. The more deviation from the original set of interview questions, the more frequently the researcher
will need to return to the previous participants to keep the entire process consistent. It was necessary for the researcher to maintain control of the interview process.

A follow-up interview protocol (Appendix B) was used and consisted of fourteen open-ended questions constructed by the researcher concerning a more narrowed direction of trust in the school setting. As in the initial interview session, questions were again presented to the participant with ample time given for responses. A paper copy of the interview questions was again given to each participant prior to the inception of the interview. A second graphic illustration (Appendix D) was given to each participant at this interview as well, but this graphic was more directed at obtaining characteristic traits necessary for building trust between a teacher and a principal. As in the previous interview, notes were written down or stated verbally and were taken at the discretion of the participant, and further probing of related questions took place according to the participant’s responses and the information brought forth through each question. Each question narrowed the inquiry towards trust as it pertained to schools with subsequent and related questions dependent upon the participant’s answers. However, due to the nature of conversation and free will, these questions also lead to additional issues not previously brought up with the other participants. It was again important to maintain a certain level of flexibility as the direction of the participant’s responses did not fall in a logical order represented by the research question protocol. Clarification of terms and responses was again a possibility so it was necessary to set up the parameters for future contact if necessary to ensure the accurate and total understanding of the information. No follow-up phone calls were made after the completion of the second interview session.
Most of the interview sessions took anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, though more time was allotted if it was deemed necessary and relevant. None of the interview sessions lasted more than 40 minutes, and additional sessions did not occur. Follow-up phone calls were not necessary. For organizational purposes, an interview log was kept along with a binder for temporary storage of transcribed interviews. This allowed for easy visual representation of the transcribed interviews and is solely the interest and personal record keeping habit of the researcher.

**Document Review**

Documents consisted of the hard copy interview protocols, hard copy notes taken by the researcher, hard copy graphic illustrations drawn by the participant, and digital audio recordings. Creswell (2007) suggested several forms of qualitative data such as “observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials” (p. 129). The digital audio recordings were uploaded onto a computer hard drive and were accessed electronically. From there, they were transcribed. Once transcribed, they became documents of this study and were stored on the hard drive of the researcher’s personal computer. Two other forms of document representation were the two graphic illustrations of trust each participant filled out. The first was a visual representation of what characteristics were necessary to establish trust between two individuals in general. The second was a graphic representation of what characteristics were necessary to establish trust between a teacher and a principal in the school setting. Each of these graphic illustrations were scanned and stored electronically into the researcher’s personal computer. No other pertinent document forms such as memos, emails, or other written
communication from their principals were produced from the participants for this study. All documentation was reviewed solely by the researcher.

**Data Management**

Once the data was collected, it was managed in a logical and organized process. To ensure accurate collection, a digital voice recording device was used to record all personal interviews. All digital data was uploaded and managed electronically on a computer. Creswell (2007) suggested developing a master list of information and a data collection matrix which the researcher followed. This allowed for easy retrieval and identification of collected data. A media management software program was used for digital recordings, and transcriptions of interviews were stored in electronic file folders. A two-part interview protocol was used with a hard copy on paper and was collected at the end of each interview session. Additionally, pseudonyms were used on the interview protocol in order to protect the participants’ anonymity.

**Data Analysis**

Once transcription was complete, data analysis began through the use of a coding system. Glesne (2006) suggested a progressive process of sorting and defining data through patterns. Patterns were identified and established by examining recurring themes and sub-themes through usage of similar vocabulary and terminology. Color-coding of themes and sub-themes was used in this process. Each major theme was coded with a different color and corresponding values of color attached to each sub-theme. Color-coding ensured easy identification of patterns and themes. Since qualitative research lends itself to aspects of the unknown, it was impossible to establish a complete color-
coding system until the data was collected and analysis began. Each line of the transcribed interview was numbered for ease of retrieval.

The data was transferred and stored on a hard drive and external data storage drive which belongs to the researcher. All hard copies of notes, interview protocols, and graphic illustrations were scanned and stored digitally as well.

**Trustworthiness**

It is important to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of any study. This can be accomplished through the triangulation of data sources and the researcher’s ability to interpret the data. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) compel researchers to interpret their data based on the what, why, and how of analysis. They suggest a conscious examination of what is observed as well as thoughts about what might have been missed. They also advise researchers to reflect upon and think critically about the research process as a whole. “Time at [the] research site, time spent in interviewing, and time building sound relationships with participants all contribute[s] to trustworthy data” (Glesne, 2006, p. 167). Since interviews, observations, artifacts, and note taking were used in the data collecting process, triangulation occurred naturally. Another factor that was important in assuring validity was the number of participants used. Ten was an appropriate number of participants to use in a qualitative study as it was enough to ensure the overall protection and confidentiality of its participants (Creswell, 2007). This lent itself to an increased level of credibility in the data collected.

**Timeline**

The research proposal was submitted in December, 2009. Its defense was in May, 2010, and was subsequently submitted to the IRB. The IRB research protocol was
approved in August, 2010, and interviews commenced immediately thereon. The interview process took place between August and October, 2010. Coding and data analysis took place in October and November, 2010. Final defense of this research study took place in February, 2011.
Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine teacher perceptions and attitudes of trust with their building principal in relation to the effective transfer of information between these two distinct levels in the organization. Trust in organizations is not a new topic, and while there are ample studies regarding organizational trust, there is limited research on perceptions of trust between teachers and principals (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Since there were relatively few pertinent studies on the subject of perceptions of trust, this study involved seeking the answers to these primary research questions: 1) what are a teacher’s perception of trust between a themselves and their principal, 2) what are a teacher’s perception of trust as it relates to open and honest communication with their principal, and 3) what are a teacher’s perception of trust as it relates to the power dynamics in their working relationship with their principal?

Chapter Four is an account of the data collected and it is based on the perceptions that teachers have of trust and its effect on their working relationship with their building principal. The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis is a method which allows for the use of verbatim transcripts to describe the total experience of the participant, and allows for textural and structural descriptions as well (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher used this method for her phenomenological study. Additionally, this chapter provides the researcher’s epoche of her own experiences with perceptions of trust. The participants in this study are also described which will add a better understanding of the population. Since it is necessary to see how the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data, the
procedures are also described in detail herein. Finally, themes, and subthemes are discussed through textural and structural descriptions of the overall experience.

The representation of the participants’ words is an important factor in supporting the results of this study. “The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Therefore, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim, and included filler words, pauses, and vocal hesitations. However, changes in vocal intonation, laughter, facial expressions, hand gestures, and body movements were not included as part of the written transcription, but aided the researcher in interpreting the verbal expressions. Omitting this did not significantly impact the overall analysis of the words spoken in each interview. Abbreviated, slang, and industry specific words were transcribed as is. The interviews were casual in nature and were treated as dialogue, discussion, and conversation between the participants and the researcher.

**The Researcher’s Epoche and Personal Experiences**

In a phenomenological research study, it is important for the researcher to offer a personal account of his/her experience indicative of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In order to avoid any personal bias, it is necessary to divulge this information so that the participants become the main focus of discussion. This epoche is important because it allows the disclosure of the researcher’s viewpoint and doing so keeps it distinct and separate from the experiences of the participants.

Though I have always found the relationships between people a fascinating interest since my undergraduate studies in human psychology, I became interested in
concepts of trust and its impact on working relationships in the school building and education several years ago when my colleagues and I started experiencing issues of distrust with our principal. As time progressed, the trusting relationships between these teachers and the principal began to deteriorate and eventually lacked any belief of trust in the information presented. Because of the sensitive nature of these issues, the researcher has concluded it would be inappropriate to describe them in detail at this time. Upon furthering my career in educational administration, my focus on the perception of trust narrowed to include topics concerned with relationships and communication as well as effective school administration, and overall school improvement.

After working under several principals myself, I began to wonder how trust fit into the overall picture of working relationships between teachers and principals, effective communication between the levels of the organization, and overall school improvement. I began to take a back seat view of the relationships some of my colleagues had with our principal and watched their interactions and discussions pertaining to school programs and initiatives. I began to notice an emergent pattern; there seemed to be a separate and distinct difference between the ideas and beliefs the teachers presented while in the presence of our administrator and the ideas and beliefs presented in his absence. They would tell him what they thought he wanted to hear, and then behind his back state their real feelings to me. This led me to wonder whether or not truthful information was being delivered to the higher echelons of educational administration. If my principal was told inaccurate information, then how could he truthfully represent input from his teaching staff to the central office administration? And for that matter, why did these teachers feel the need to be dishonest in their conveyance of information? Through
observation and inquiry, this perception of ineffective communication seemed to stem from an overall lack of trust between these particular teachers and our administration. Therefore, I became interested in knowing if this phenomenon existed outside of the school district in which I was employed. I also wondered if the opposite were true; with high levels of trust between the teacher and principal, did communication and the transfer of information become more reliable? This personal phenomenon led me to focus on trust as the topic of my research.

This study has illuminated my awareness of the importance of trusting relationships between the participants in the school organization. When two people trust one another, they are able to work together and accomplish tasks and goals at a much faster pace and more efficiently than as individuals. In schools, it is vitally important that administrators and teachers work together to create successful learning environments for students. In order for truly beneficial working relationships to exist, teachers and administrators must build solid trusting relationships. If trust is not present, then each party seemingly moves to protect their own interests and work as individuals instead of a team.

Realizing that I have experienced this phenomenon of distrust first hand as an observer and participant, I can understand and sympathize with any teacher who has experienced trust or distrust with their principal. This fact does allow for personal bias to enter into the parameters of my study. However, since the entity of trust or distrust is a universal concept and is present in most people’s daily interactions, whether part of one’s job or one’s personal life, I am able to remain objective and withhold any personal bias from altering or affecting the outcome of my study. Furthermore, to keep any
unintentional personal bias at a minimum, I re-examined the data to make sure I was looking at it from a non-subjective viewpoint. And finally, it was not my intent to lay burden or blame on any one party, especially one’s principal, in a relationship of trust.

I planned to find 10 research participants who were all elementary teachers in general education with at least five years of teaching experience and who had worked for their current principal for at least three years. I felt that this population would alleviate the variables present in beginning teachers and first year principals. Through a system of referrals, I was able to interview 10 teachers who volunteered to participate in my study.

**The Research Participants**

Because of the potentially sensitive nature of the information I sought, I thought it might be difficult to find teachers who would be willing to talk to me about concepts and perceptions of trust with their principal. In light of this, I determined it was necessary to employ a research tactic that would allow me to gain access to teachers without the consent, knowledge, or permission of their administrator. My feelings were that if my participants’ principals were aware of the nature of my study, and were aware that I was interviewing one of their staff members, that the principal might not allow me access to their staff. Furthermore, if access was allowed, the information divulged in the interview might somehow be skewed, and the existing relationship between the teacher and the principal might be compromised. In bypassing the principal’s knowledge not only of the study, but also the identity of the participant, the honesty and accuracy of the information sought would be obtained more comfortably as I could assure the participant of complete anonymity. The interviews, therefore, had to take place outside the contracted teacher work day. The tactic I used was a snowballing technique which allowed me to ask my
own fellow colleagues if they knew of any teachers who might be willing to participate in my study. From their referrals, I was able to obtain three names of potential participants, and from those original participants came the additional seven. The result, I was able to gain access to 10 public school regular education elementary teachers from six different schools within a 15-mile radius of The University of Toledo. All 10 teachers who volunteered were used in this study, and their information is included in the data results.

The 10 research participants were general education elementary teachers. They were also Caucasian females with a wide range of teaching experience from seven to 25 years. All 10 participants had worked for their current principal within a range of at least three years up to 11 years. The principals referred to by the participants had been in their buildings a minimum of three academic years; three were female and seven were male, though in some cases, comments were made regarding a former or past principal for comparison. All participants were fully informed of their rights, consent was formally obtained, and every attempt was made to ensure complete confidentiality and anonymity. Five of the interviews took place outside of the teachers’ contracted working day during the school calendar year, and the remaining five interviews took place during their summer break.

To protect their identity, pseudonyms were created in place of their names, and any personal family, school, or district information was excluded. The participants’ schools were all from public suburban districts of the same demographic makeup in order to equalize the potential phenomenon. It was thought that the overall makeup of a large urban or rural setting or a small private setting might present with too large a variance in the constructs of the relationships between teachers and principals in those settings. Table
Table 1

**Description of Research Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current Grade</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Years with Current Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phenomenological Data Analysis Process**

The analysis of the data from this study was based on the participants’ interviews, transcribed verbatim including significant vocal pauses and filler words, artifacts collected during the interview process, and relevant visual observations witnessed during the interview sessions. This triangulation was necessary to ensure that several sources of data were obtained to validate the information (Creswell, 2007). The researcher began the analysis process by transcribing each participant’s interview verbatim from a digital...
audio recorder. The recording was played in five-second intervals, paused, and then transcribed. For review, the segment was rewound, listened to, and compared with the transcribed text multiple times before proceeding to the next five-second segment. Not only did this method allow for complete accuracy in transcription, it also allowed for time to reflect on the responses given by the participants. Once the transcription was complete, the researcher played the entire recording one final time to hear the transcription word for word as a whole unit in addition to each individual five-second segment. Doing so allowed the researcher greater depth of understanding to the conversation in its entirety.

Then the researcher performed a line-by-line analysis of the text to identify significant statements related to the general research statements. Each significant statement was color-coded and matched to similar significant statements in each of the individual transcribed interviews. These significant statements were sometimes broken down into short phrases or singular words of similarity in an attempt to identify common phrases spoken collectively by the participants. The researcher created interpreted meanings of these significant statements and they were reproduced in the form of a chart for ease of viewing and accessibility. Table 2 is a sampling of the chart of significant statements and interpreted meanings. The color-coded significant statements were categorized into 12 general concepts which included the following categories: transfer of information, body language, follow-through, openness, building trust, diminishing trust, time, aspects of leadership, respect, gender, organization, and caring. These categories were interpreted as sub themes and then organized into three main categories or primary themes which were denoted as communication, reliability, and
Table 2

*Examples of Significant Statements and Interpreted Meanings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Interpreted Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I think any principal, whether you’re new to a building or part of a building you need to me respectful of what you find in your building, and how you can help your staff grow, and continue to work together.</td>
<td>The teachers perceive the principal to be respectful and fair to the entire staff without judgment, bias, or favoritism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- As a principal, I want him to respect me; I want him to have compassion, and effective communication.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I think the principal needs to be fair, she needs to listen to everyone, she will get to the bottom of the problem, and she will not side with any one person, she treats everyone equally.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trust is accepting whatever is said without question.</td>
<td>The teachers define trust as a belief that others will accept their views as individual and hold those views in complete confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trust is being able to go to someone and knowing that I can agree or disagree and be confident that my concerns are going to be taken seriously.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

relationships. Transfer of information, body language, follow-through, and openness were all sub themes of communication; building trust, diminishing trust, and time were all sub themes of reliability; and, aspects of leadership, respect, gender, organization, and
caring were all subthemes of relationships. For example, as denoted in Table 3, reliability is a theme derived from the interpreted meanings of significant statements found in the sub themes of building trust, diminishing trust, and time.

**Table 3**

*Examples of Themes from Interpreted Meanings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Some teachers believed that it took time to build trust. They believed that trust needed to be established through repeated experiences with each individual person.

2. Some teachers believed that there was an initial sense of trust, and that it grew or diminished because of the experiences one had with an individual.

3. Some teachers believed that trust was not something they consciously were aware of.

4. Some teachers believed that perceptions of trust and distrust varied with each individual. They also believed that trust was not a constant. It could change at a moment’s notice and was regulated by each encounter with an individual.

5. Some teachers believed that an individual could be trusted until that person did something to take away that belief of trust.

6. Some teachers believed that once trust was broken, it took a long time for trust to be re-established.

7. Some teachers believed that establishing trust was a byproduct of their upbringing and stemmed from their experiences as a child with their family members.

8. Teachers believed that the only people with whom they had total trust were members of their own families such as parents, siblings, children, and spouses. They believed this because they had grown up with these individuals, had multiple years of experience with these individuals, and had a heightened level of comfort in knowing how these individuals reacted in situations.

9. Teachers believed that the longer they knew someone, the easier it was to trust that person.
10. Teachers believed that family members were easy to trust because they were generally known for the longest period of time.

In addition to color-coding, the data were arranged visually using graphic charting. This allowed a visual representation of themes and sub themes and further validated the interpretation of the data. Figure 1 shows an example of an organizational chart used for the theme of communication and sub themes of transfer of information, body language, follow-through, and openness. Similar organizational charts were made for each of the remaining two themes and eight sub themes. Finally, to triangulate the data interpretation, a word search using the “Find” feature in Microsoft Word 2010 © assisted the researcher in finding all statements using a particular word in their composition. Doing so avoided missing any significant statements related to a theme or sub theme.

![Figure 1. Example of an Organizational Chart of Theme and Sub themes.](image)

Themes and sub themes were formed from the researcher’s interpreted meanings of the participants’ significant statements, deemed meaning units (Creswell, 2007, Moustakas, 1994). In addition, it was necessary to establish a baseline of what each participant felt trust meant to them. Their individual connotations of the term trust were obtained from each of the participants. Their verbatim representations are shown in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name</th>
<th>Connotation of Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Trust means that you can rely on that person’s integrity to be honest and forthright with you and that you feel that whether you are in a good position or in a bad position, you have an outlet with that person that you can choose that person to help you along with things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>I think it means that there are no-holds-barred. I mean you give everything to believing that person. It’s just more of a peace that I’m in good hands, and I trust you with my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Trusting would be accepting whatever is said. If you trust someone, you will accept what they say to you without question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Trust for me means that you are able to believe that the person you are dealing with is honest, is believable, and cares about you. Trust is knowing that something is the way it should be. You believe it; it’s kind of like being the truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Trust is confiding in someone and being able to tell someone things, and they’re going to confide in you, and not tell other people. Trust is taking each others’ interests to heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Trust is having confidence that someone is going to do the things they say they’re going to do, that they’re going to follow through, that they’re not going to stab you in the back. They’re going to be there to support you, and that you have confidence what you say to them is going to be kept private, or that what you ask of them is going to have morals when dealing with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>When I think of trust, I think of friendship. It’s important to be able to say things to people and know that your wording isn’t changed, your ideas aren’t changed, and you can communicate with someone and have them effectively understand what you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Janis
Okay, when I think of trust, I think of not withholding information. When you trust someone, you know that they are telling you the entire story. When you trust someone, you know they are telling you the truth. Trust, for me, is getting all the information up front.

Judy
When I think of trust, I think it’s when you can put your whole self into that person and know that they will not violate your confidence. They will support you because you can come to them and discuss things. They encourage you, you give of yourself freely, and in return, it’s a mutual effort. They do what they say.

Tanya
Trust is being able to go to someone and know that I can talk to them and agree or disagree with them, and know that I’m going to be taken seriously, not judged, and won’t be harmed for what I say.

Theme and Subtheme Descriptions

Data for this study were categorized and organized into three main themes each with underlying sub themes. Each sub theme was taken from the participants’ significant statements and interpreted meanings. Then, each sub theme was connected to a more general idea and identified as a main theme. These themes and sub themes are supported with actual quotes from the participants’ own statements as well as composite textural and structural descriptions by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). A composite textural description gave greater visual representation of what was experienced while composite structural descriptions represented how the participant group experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The organization of the data is set forth in a logical sequence which begins with the participants’ knowledge and
experiences of trust in a general sense, and then progresses to a more narrow experience with trust in connection with their principal and education.

**Theme I: Communication**

In order for trust to be established, people have to have interaction with each other usually through some form of communication. Communication can be present in verbal forms through vocal expressions in dialogue between people. However, it can also be present in non-verbal forms such as facial expressions, eye contact and body language. Details related to communication between two individuals are described herein, and it is divided into four sub themes: transfer of information, body language, follow-through, and openness.

**Sub theme A: Transfer of Information.**

A major component of communication involves the transfer of information from one individual to another. In fact, communication cannot happen without at least two people involved; it is an inevitable form of human socialization (Perkins, 2008). Each participant in this study described their experiences with communication between themselves and another individual in detail.

For Tanya, communicating with her principal was “knowing that I can discuss or disagree with him and believing that my concerns are going to be taken seriously.” It was also about being able to “communicate openly and truthfully” matters related to education and instruction. She felt it was important to “be comfortable in communicating to the principal.”

Judy’s experience with communication and her principal involved seeking “clear communication between all groups and the leader of the school. It is paramount that
everybody is on the same page and understands the expectations and roles.” She also felt that she could comfortably walk into her principal’s office and “easily tell him matters related to education,” but she was not sure there was a mutual understanding of the information. She felt that the principal did not always get the point she was trying to make because he would just “nod his head as if to say he heard, but I don’t think he really understood.”

Janis’s ideas about communication involved “not withholding pertinent information.” She believed it was important to have all of the information available in any given situation. “I want information. I don’t want to have to ask for it because if I feel like I have to ask for it, you’re trying to come up with stories.”

Furthermore, Natalie stated that communication was “an understanding of what is being said.” She believed it was important “to be able to say things to people, and to talk to people, and to not have your words and ideas changed by someone else.” She substantiated this by stating:

If you say something, and then their perception gets twisted, it comes out as if you have said something completely opposite. If they don’t understand what you’re trying to say to them, or they don’t understand what your point is, then I think communication is ineffective.

Amy stated that communication is also about confidentiality. “If I’ve said something expecting it to be kept private, then I expect it to be kept private.” She further stated that listening is also a key factor in communication. “Listening is a huge issue for me. People need to really listen to the information that is being said, and they need to understand that information as well.”
Casey believed, “When I communicate with someone, it is my job to make sure the message gets across the right way. I need to be clear in how I say things and leave nothing to ambiguity.”

Chris’s interpretation of communication is “an exchange of information. It is a two-way street.”

The transfer of information is just one part of communication. The participants also spoke about several forms of body language as important components of communication. They ranged from facial expressions, hand gestures, body posture, and eye contact.

**Sub theme B: Body Language.**

Sometimes communication is not verbal. People can give non-verbal cues when they are speaking to one another. Non-verbal codes of expression are learned in much the same way as verbal language, and people take these non-verbal communication codes into the workplace right alongside the verbal codes (Perkins, 2008). The general intent of the researcher in her discussions with the participants surrounding communication was to avoid discussions involving non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions, and hand and body gestures, but they are incorporated unintentionally nonetheless. Several participants brought up body language as an important component of communication; in light of this, the participants’ interpretations of body language were included as a sub theme of communication.

“I think a person’s, um, body language, and how they’re acting says a lot about communication. If they’re always looking off to one side, or down, that tells me they may not be telling me the truth,” said Janis. She continued:
Um, so when they’re speaking to me, I can really tell that they’re listening to me because they are looking at me, eye to eye. If someone is not doing that, kind of looking off, it doesn’t make me really believe what they’re saying.

She said that she got a lot of things from visuals. What she saw in the way they held their body or their mannerisms was really important. Natalie was having a conversation with her principal about her teaching assignment, and she said that she could tell he wasn’t speaking to her truthfully by his body language.

He gave me some lame reason, and I could just tell he wasn’t telling me the truth.

It was in his voice and his eyes. It was the way he held his body. I could just tell it was a total lie.

When I asked her how she knew that, she replied:

Well, his voice didn’t seem to have that sincerity factor in it, and his eyes were kind of narrowed, I guess. I don’t know, you know, I just knew it was a canned response. People just know when it’s fake.

Amy had a similar experience with her perception of her principal’s body language. She said:

He seems to be sincere, but it’s really hard to tell. It’s hard to see what’s real when he’s around you because he pretends to be compassionate, but it’s almost like an act. It seems fake. It is just the way he holds his body, kind of like he tries to back away a little when he’s speaking to you, and there’s just something in his voice that puts that doubt of sincerity in your mind.

Jill said that her principal’s body language gave off a lot of negativity. She said:
He just stands there in the hallway with his arms folded across his chest and a
scowl on his face. You can tell just by this that he is grumpy. I don’t think he
really likes kids all that much, and when you pass him in the hallway, he just nods
his head as if to say hello, but you can tell he doesn’t really want to be there; he’s
just going through the motions, you know.

On a more positive note, Chris said that her principal’s body language spoke
volumes about her integrity. “My principal sometimes doesn’t have to say anything. She
just gives you a little wink and a smile, and you know everything is good.” She also said
that it was easy to see that her principal loved her job and cared about kids.

It’s just the way she carries herself. She’s energetic, smiles a lot, gives kids hugs
and high fives. She doesn’t always have to say stuff, she just gives off that
positive vibe in her demeanor. That’s how I know she cares.

While body language was important in the believability of the information being
communicated, follow-through in a timely manner was also an important factor.

**Sub theme C: Follow-through.**

Another sub theme related to communication was follow-through. It was the
expectation that when someone said they were going to do something, it got done in a
timely manner. Teachers felt that when two people spoke to one another, there was an
assumption that if one party said they were going to do something, then the other party
believed that it would get done.

Chris stated, “Regarding an individual, if they say they’re going to do something,
they do it and you trust them to get it done.” When I asked Chris to give me an example,
she said:
Well, for instance, my daughter, when she said she wanted to buy my cousin’s house, I knew she would go through with it. It wasn’t just talk. My cousin took her house off the market based on the fact that my daughter would buy it. That’s a huge trust issue there. My cousin, and I for that matter, didn’t have to worry that my daughter would back out. We both knew she would come through.

Amy included follow-through in her definition of trust. She said, “Trust is believing that someone is going to do the things that they say they’re going to do. That they are going to follow through.” She also felt that follow-through went along with honesty and integrity in an individual. “If people say they’re going to do something, the follow-through shows that they are honest and have integrity.”

Allison further corroborated this in her statement:

It’s important to believe that he will come through on the job. If he says he’s going to do something, then I should know that he’s going to do what he says. I believe him. It’s all about the follow-through.

Perceptions of distrust became evident when there was a lack of follow-through.

For Tanya, follow-through also involved a sense of time.

If someone asks you to do something, then you have to do it in a timely manner. You find out, though, that it’s not everyone’s practice. For instance, I had an issue at school that I needed my principal to address quickly. He said he would take care of it. Then, three weeks later, the issue still isn’t resolved. There’s no follow-through, and you go, gee, if I’d known, I would have just taken care of it myself, but you said you’d help. That’s not follow-through. I mean, three weeks . . . come on.
Judy felt:

My principal likes to shift his responsibilities to others if there is a problem. He doesn’t follow through. He doesn’t do what he says he will do. I mean, jobs are thrown on other people’s shoulders, and there’s no consistency. No one really knows who is supposed to be doing what. He [the principal] isn’t really interested in taking care of business and following up on what’s supposed to get done.

There’s no trust there.

The research participants also felt that openness was necessary in communication. Each party involved in the communication process had to be open in their ability to transfer information to another.

**Sub theme D: Openness.**

Part of communication involved a feeling of openness with another individual. Most of the participants felt that communicating openly and honestly was important in building trust with an individual. Table 5 is a numerical representation of the level of comfort each participant felt in being able to openly and honestly communicate with their respective principals. One (1) represents the lowest level of comfort felt by the participant and ten (10) represents the highest level of comfort.

**Table 5**

*A One to Ten Scale of Comfort Level in Open and Honest Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Numerical Level of Comfort</th>
<th>Reason (paraphrased)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>For the most part, I can speak to him about anything, I just am careful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>I can tell him anything because at this point in my career, I’m strong in my 81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
beliefs and it doesn’t matter whether he likes what I have to say or not.

Janis  3  I feel uncomfortable going in to speak to him about things going on in my room. I really don’t get answers from him. He just beats around the bush just to get the conversation over with.

Natalie  0  No comfort whatsoever. However, I do tell him the truth. I’m not there to give him B.S., but it’s not a comfortable feeling.

Amy  6  I’m careful about the things that I say.

Casey  8  We share the same interests so it’s easy to talk to her openly.

Jill  0  I keep my mouth shut. I’m tired of getting in trouble for actually caring about what happens in my classroom. I get slapped around verbally for caring about kids.

Chris  10  I can tell her anything. She may not want to hear it, but I tell her anyway.

Allison  8  I trust her, I can talk to her honestly. But, it’s only an 8 because I guess it depends on the situation. I would only hold back if the information was hurtful in some way.

Penny  2  I really can’t talk to him anymore. In the beginning I could, but not now, not after all that’s happened. I’m just uncomfortable talking to him about anything.

Speaking openly and honestly to her principal comes easily to Judy, but there is a negative side to it.
I can tell him very easily what’s going on in the classroom. The problem arises because he doesn’t really want to know. He does not come into the classrooms very often; he is not evaluating or participating. He doesn’t go to curriculum meetings, and he doesn’t know what’s going on in his own building.

She felt she could speak to him about any matter related to education, but she was not sure of his level of understanding. “The staff seems to know more about what is going on than he does.” Her final comment on the issue was this: “I can talk to him, but it’s not what it really should be. There is no dialogue or growth here.”

For Janis, the intensity is a little more prevalent.

I do not feel comfortable going in to speak to him about things going on in my room, or in the building. I’m never given an answer to my questions. I just need an answer sometimes, but I don’t get one. Also, he never really wants my opinion. He has that attitude that ‘what I say goes, and you have no opinion.’ So, he’s not willing to be open and embrace people’s ideas.

Natalie is just as uncomfortable in speaking openly and honestly with her principal.

I really have no form of communication or trust with him. I just feel that we are total opposites. I am not comfortable with him in any way, shape, or form, and I am not able to communicate with him effectively. There has to be a total openness in conversation. I need to feel relaxed. If I can relax, then I can have a conversation with someone and tell them exactly how I feel without them twisting my words around. With my principal, he would twist anything I said around for his benefit and my detriment.
Amy was careful about the things that she said in front of her principal. She felt that for the most part, she could speak openly to him, but, “I definitely watch my wording so that I get an outcome that is more desirable. I do think things through before I go in there to avoid having any issues with him at a later date.”

Casey had a very high level of comfort in speaking to her principal. She felt it was because she and her principal were alike in their thought processes and shared similar interests. “I can go to her and talk about anything and she would listen to me and not judge me for my opinions.”

Jill’s level of comfort is very low. Her reasons are many. I can’t really say what’s on my mind. I’ve tried in the past, you know the first couple of times I did it, and said this is my opinion, and he would get mad, and then he would hold it against me because I didn’t agree with him. I disagreed with him one time about a reading program the school was initiating. I didn’t think it was very productive for kids. It actually made them hate reading even more. So, I told him about it. He didn’t like what I had to say. The next year, he gave away the duty that I usually had, and gave me a crappy one. Over the years, I’ve lost supplemental contracts, he doesn’t choose me for committees anymore, he’s changed my teaching assignment for no good reason, and he doesn’t approve my requests for professional development. It really hurts, you know. So, I keep my mouth shut and I don’t say anything but what I think he wants to hear. I don’t feel comfortable telling him my true opinion of anything because I’d probably get in trouble. It’s really hard when you can’t communicate honestly with your boss.
Chris, on the other hand, can tell her principal anything. “Oh, I can tell her anything. I’ve told her things she doesn’t necessarily want to hear, and things she does, but, yes, I can tell her anything. I just say what I have to say.”

Allison was also very comfortable in speaking openly and honestly to her principal. She stated:

Yes, I can talk to her now. We had a rough start, but we have a good relationship after all these years, and I can talk to her about anything. It’s because we’ve been together and built a good sense of trust that we can do this.

For Penny, though, she struggled with the ability to speak openly to her principal. Her history involved many principals over her teaching career. The longest she had ever worked for any one principal was about three years, so she developed a sense of mistrust because she did not feel like they were there long enough to build any kind of real relationship. When asked about openness, her reply was this:

No. I really do believe that our superintendent is worried about information getting out to the public. So, he might say to our principal, ‘I need this from your people, or I don’t want this information to get around.’ So, we’re only told a little bit of information, and they’re only being as open as they are allowed. You know, I don’t really trust anybody at this point. I used to, but not after all the things that have happened.

Textural Descriptions.

The preceding verbatim text from each participant allowed the researcher to develop an overall representation of what the experience of communication was and the understanding of it as well (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The participants’
experiences in perceiving trust with their principal was connected to the process of communication. Communication was found to be the transfer of information between at least two people. In fact many of the participants felt that the principal was the foundational piece of the puzzle in the communication of the school. The principal was the one who was responsible for maintaining open channels of communication between the teachers, students, parents, and the community. Most participants agreed that communication also involved listening to the other side. Listening to what others say was just as important as being the speaker. Most felt that communication was a two-way street; that it was important for the person delivering the information to deliver it in such a way so that it could be understood and received as intended.

Body language was another factor related to communication. Several of the participants spoke about body language as an important tool in the reliability of the information being communicated. Negative body language such as narrowed eyes, folded arms, grim facial expressions, and lack of eye contact when speaking all left the participants with a feeling that the communication could not be trusted. Positive body language included smiles, energetic body movements, hugs, and high fives. These types of body language left the participants feeling that the communication could not be trusted.

Follow-through was also important to effective communication. Follow-through and time seem to be connected to each other. In order for follow-through to become important in communication, follow-through must happen in a timely fashion. Too great a lapse in time in follow-through has a negative effect on the trust of that communication.
Finally, openness completed the participants’ experience with communication. Half of the participants felt that they could be fairly open when communicating with their principal. The other half had serious reservations about communicating openly. Their reasons were similar. The half that felt comfortable in communicating did so because they did not feel any fear in communicating openly. They spoke their mind without fear of consequence because it was their nature to do so, or they spoke their mind without fear of consequence because they had developed a great trusting relationship with their principal. The half that did not feel comfortable in communicating openly felt so because of poor trusting relationships or they did not want to get into trouble with their principals.

**Structural Descriptions.**

How the participants experienced communication was a result of their daily working environment. All participants had to communicate with their principal at some point in their working relationship. Some communicated on a daily basis while others avoided it by staying physically away from their principals. When the participants experienced communication with their principals, they were in his/her office, in the school hallways, their own classrooms, or in meeting or conference rooms. Communication could also be presented through written or electronic means. The incidences of communication were brief encounters lasting a time frame of several seconds to a few minutes. The briefness of these encounters was due to the nature of the school day and the duties of a teacher compared with the duties of the principal. Chances for the exchange of information through communication are by nature, brief encounters for teachers and principals.
Theme 2: Reliability

The participants discussed reliability as an overall factor important to trust. In order for trust to exist between individuals, the information transferred via communication must be deemed reliable. Reliability involved believing the information gained was truthful and accurate according to the participants. Furthermore, reliability also involved matters of timeliness, and follow-through. Not all participants felt the same way about their principals and the reliability factor.

Sub theme A: Building Trust.

Once each participant discussed their connotations of the word trust (Table 4), it was important to discuss how these individuals gained trust. The participants varied in their descriptions of how trust was established with another person in general, but were more cohesive in their descriptions when it came to establishing trust with their building

![Figure 2: Janis’s graphic.](image-url)
principal. Each participant was asked to fill out a graphic which could depict the characteristics necessary to build trust between two people. Generally, when establishing trust with an individual, the participants differed in their beliefs.

Janis, for example, was a very trusting person with people from the very beginning. “If you’re a stranger on the street, I’ll totally trust everything that you say. That person would have to do something to me to make me not trust them.” She has an inborn sense of trust with people. In Figure 2, Janis represents that in order to build trust, she needs to be able to listen, have a good attitude towards others, and be open to communication. Furthermore, on the other side of the graphic, the other person needs to present a positive body language, be upfront right from the beginning, and communicate openly.

Jill has a somewhat similar belief although she does hold back a little at first. I mean initially, you have kind of a small trust . . . if you just meet someone, you know, there is an inherent sense of trust in mankind. I think that mankind typically likes to believe other people. We always try to give people the benefit of the doubt. So, initially, there’s that first sense of trust, and then as your relationship builds, I think it just gets bigger and bigger, or until you experience things that are done where you are not quite sure of the other person’s integrity, then you learn to distrust that person.

When dealing with trust and one’s family, Jill had similar feelings as did most of the participants.

I trust my family, my mom and dad, my sister and brother. That goes without saying because I know them intimately. I do trust some of my friends, and my
colleagues, but I wouldn’t say I trust them as much as I trust my family. I mean, you work with people, and you kind of get to know them; you evolve with them, but do you trust them totally? No, not totally. You kind of trust them, but it’s a guarded trust. I only experience total trust with my family. I’ve lived with them day in and day out, and I know them.

Figure 3 is her representation of what it takes to build trust between two people. In order for Jill to trust someone, she has to be an honest person, has to care about that individual, and feels there has to be some sort of relationship between herself and that individual. The other person also has to possess those same characteristics. For Jill, it is equal attributes on each side of the graphic.

Figure 3. Jill’s graphic.

Allison agreed as well. “I think I trust people. I’m more of a positive person; I look at people kind of... well, I hope that they would treat me like I would treat them. So, I
Figure 4. Allison’s graphic.

would start on a positive and then build on that.” Her graphic on trust is represented in Figure 4. She believes that both people must possess a sense of honesty, sincerity in their actions and words, and loyalty to each other in order for trust to exist.

Penny, too, has the same thoughts on building trust. “Some people say you have to earn it, but like I said, I usually trust people from the beginning. Maybe I wouldn’t trust them with my deepest secrets, but I’m not distrustful to start off.” Her graphic on establishing trust depicted being open as a person and trying to see what the other person is going through. She doesn’t believe in being judgmental and that leads her to a sense of openness with others. She also has a sense of caring for others, and that if “someone trusts me with things that are close to their heart, the last thing they need me to do is spread that information around.” She feels that she needs to portray a sense of confidentiality to the other person. In order for her to trust someone else, that person has to exhibit selflessness, integrity, and be non-judgmental.
On the other hand, there were several participants who felt that trust needed to be earned right from the start. Natalie stated:

Oh, you definitely have to earn your trust with me. I’ve learned that in life. I think you have to earn trust with other people, and people have to earn trust with you. It takes years to build trust, especially a very secure type of trust; it takes years.

But, she also added in respect to growing up and her family, “I think as you grow up, trust is always there, and it provides a good sense of security. I do trust my family; I always have. It’s people outside of my family that have to earn my trust.” Her representation of trust is depicted in Figure 6. She believes that she must be comfortable with that individual in order for trust to exist, that there must be a total sense of openness in her demeanor, and that she must be an honest person. For her to trust another individual, that person must be helpful, must be able to offer good advice, and be good at listening.

Figure 5. Penny’s graphic.
Figure 6. Natalie’s graphic.

Amy also added,

I just think having the experience, you know, I’m kind of careful in the beginning, I’m very careful, but I think having the experience over and over that somebody’s dependable and you can count on them, it just develops over a period of time.

Her graphic is represented in Figure 7. She also feels that in order for a sense of trust to be established, both parties need to possess the same characteristics. Each person has to exhibit a sense of honesty and integrity. She stated that honesty and integrity are at the base of any relationships. They also have to be caring individuals with compassion for each other, and be able to listen to each other. Furthermore, there has to be a sense of openness between each person, and there needs to be a reciprocal belief that each person can express their opinions and ideas and do so without judgment.
As far as Casey is concerned,

I definitely think it takes time and experience in getting to know the person. It takes a while to get to know that person and actually feel that you could trust them. I definitely think that the longer you know someone, the better the trust you’ll have with that person.

In relation to trust with her family, she added, “As far as my family is concerned, though, I’ve grown up with them; I’ve been living with them; I have years of experience with them, so I trust them completely.” Casey’s graphic on trust is represented in Figure 8 and represents an equality of characteristics for both people. She thinks that both people need to exhibit a sense of honesty. It is also important to have multiple experiences with that person which allows them to get to know each other. Lastly, each person has to show that they genuinely care for one another.

*Figure 7. Amy’s graphic.*
For Chris, it was totally the opposite. “I don’t trust anybody to start off. I mean, you don’t know them, why should you? When I first meet someone, do I trust them? No way, uh-uh, I don’t know them, no.” However, she does trust her family, but only because they’ve earned her trust. For example, with her oldest daughter, she trusts her completely because over the years she’s proved to be trustworthy. “I know that my daughter will come through with what she says she will do. I trust her. She’s always been that way. She always does what she says, and I’ve never found that to be untrue.”

However, for her other daughter, it was a different story.

With my other daughter, I don’t trust her that much. She seems to lie. I’ve caught her in lies, especially when she was a teenager. I mean, I know why she did it; it was so she wouldn’t get in trouble with me, but I learned that I couldn’t trust her at that time. She’s better now that she’s older, but I guess you never know.

Chris’s graphic is represented in Figure 9. On her side of the equation, she needs to have experience with the other individual. She also needs to have built a relationship with that
individual and have a respect for that individual. Concurrently, the other person has to exhibit honesty, be caring as an individual, and be altruistic in their behavior and motives in order for trust to be inherent.

![Diagram showing what does it take to build a relationship of trust?]

Figure 9. Chris’s graphic.

The conversations changed direction at the inception of the follow-up interviews. When building trust with an administrator, the participants’ thoughts were more cohesive in nature. A graphic illustration on building trust between a teacher and an administrator was presented to each participant. They were asked to provide characteristic personality traits that were necessary in order to build trust between themselves as a teacher and their perception of an ideal principal. It was not intended to represent the present relationship with their principal.

For Allison, she stated:

I’ve built trust over the years my principal. We’ve developed a trust for each other by working together over time. We seemed to have common goals, a common
excitement over producing something important to both of us, and because of this, we’ve developed trust with each other.

Her graphic on building trust with a principal is shown in Figure 10. She is able to trust a principal if he/she is supportive, is positive, and offers constructive criticism without being derogatory. Her personal characteristics included compassion for a principal, supportive attributes toward the teacher, and an allowance to be confrontational as she defended her professionalism as a teacher. She defined what she meant by being allowed to be confrontational as being able to voice her opinions and be respected for them.

For Judy, she had established trust with one of her former principals because of, “working together, and she helped me grow as a teacher. I came to respect her because we seemed to have the same agenda which was to help kids.” Her graphic on trust with a principal is represented in Figure 11, and portrays characteristics which include a mutual respect for each other, an acceptance of responsibility in their respective roles as a
teacher and administrator, and clear communication to a principal in order to establish trust.

Figure 11. Judy’s graphic on trust with a principal.

Jill’s representation of establishing trust with a principal is represented in Figure 12. Her representations of characteristic traits are equal on both sides of the graphic. Each person has to exhibit honesty towards one another, they must have a mutual respect of each other, and a relationship has to exist in order for trust to be present. She stated:

You need to be honest with each other. You have to feel like whatever information is coming out of your mouth is true and the other person’s mouth is true and that it is believable. There also has to be some kind of respect. I have to respect that he is my boss, and he has to respect me as a professional teacher. There also needs to be a relationship. I may not have it right away, say with a first year principal, but over time, a working relationship will naturally develop. Hopefully, as it develops, trust develops too.
Figure 12. Jill’s graphic on trust with a principal.

For Natalie, she also had a former principal with whom she had established trust.

I trusted him because I felt that he respected me. He treated me as a professional, he was personable, he was approachable, and he seemed to care about me as a teacher and a person. I felt his behavior was genuine. That’s how I knew I could trust him.

In her graphic depiction of trust with an administrator (Figure 13), she felt that she needed to have respect for an administrator, have compassion as an individual, and be able to effectively communicate with him/her. She felt that the ideal administrator would need to present himself as being honest and forthcoming in his demeanor, that he should expect effective teaching from the staff, and be personable and likeable.
Figure 13. Natalie’s graphic on trust with a principal.

Amy’s graphic on trust with a principal was the same as her graphic of trust in general. “I expect the same things from my boss as far as trust goes that I would expect from someone else.” Figure 14 is this representation. On her side of the equation, she must be honest and have integrity as an individual. She must also be a caring and compassionate
person and be able to listen to her administrator. Furthermore, she must be open in her thought processes. Her ideal principal needs to exhibit the same characteristics with a few added traits. She feels that a principal must stand behind and support the teaching staff with parents and the community. With these traits, trust can be built.

Table 6 is a compilation of all characteristic traits the teachers felt they possessed which were necessary to build a relationship of trust between themselves and a building principal. These characteristic traits were actually self-perceptions of the type of person they felt they were and needed to be in order to develop a trusting relationship with someone else, specifically a principal.

Table 6

*Teacher Self-Perceptions of Characteristic Traits Necessary to Build Trust*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compassion</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Similar Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 is a compilation of all characteristic traits the teachers felt an ideal principal should possess in order for a trusting relationship to exist between them. These traits were not necessarily indicative of their own individual principals, but were merely representative traits they deemed desirable in the ideal principal.
Table 7

*Perceived Characteristic Traits of an Ideal Administrator*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Appreciative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Timely Follow-through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Interests</td>
<td>Loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personable</td>
<td>Professional Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Positive Body Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One question that was asked during the conversations regarding trust with their principals was one which involved putting the level of trust each participant felt that they had with their current principal. The number scale used was from one to ten with one being the lowest level of trust the participant felt and ten being the highest level of trust. Table 8 represents this data and the reasons for the perceived level of trust.

Table 8

*Level of Trust felt by each Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level of Trust on a 1-10 Scale</th>
<th>Reason (paraphrased)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>He doesn’t follow-through; he’s not accessible; and he’s not organized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>He doesn’t communicate; he doesn’t follow thru; he doesn’t foster that spirit of working together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Well, I’ve lost trust with him because of the things he has done;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
he withholds information from me; he’s lied to me and I’ve caught him in those lies.

Natalie 0  He has no respect for me; he doesn’t communicate effectively; he isn’t honest and forthcoming; I think he treats me like dirt.

Amy 4  He just not been that honest; he has not shown a lot of integrity; his compassion seems like an act; it’s hard to know what’s real and what’s not with him.

Casey 9  She is fair. She listens to people. She’s not one-sided; she’s equal with everyone. We have the same beliefs, similar interests, and she holds my confidence in the information I give her.

Jill 0  He does things against you and behind your back. He isn’t fair; he shows favoritism. He lies.

Chris 6.5  I just know from experience, she tends to make up things just to get herself off the hook. I don’t know if she is telling the truth or not.

Allison 8  We have developed a good, honest working relationship over the years. She shows me respect. We had a common goal and share the same
vision for the school.

He is really here for his own agenda; I don’t think he speaks the truth; I just can’t talk to him.

Sub theme B: Diminishing Trust.

Another part of reliability is the potential to have perceptions of diminished trust. All participants at one time or another have experienced feelings of diminished trust, whether it was with their family, friends, co-workers, or their principal. This feeling of distrust happens for very similar reasons. When asked to give specific circumstances of how trust was lost with a particular person, statements like the following were expressed:

Tanya’s perception of trust was diminished during a conversation she had with her principal. “I didn’t know if I could trust the fact that it wasn’t going to go farther than those four walls,” so she held back a portion of the information she had wanted to tell him. For Judy, her sense of trust was diminished because, “He [the principal] doesn’t follow through. He doesn’t do what he says he will do. He doesn’t communicate. He doesn’t really foster that good working environment between the staff.”

Janis had a lot to say on the topic of distrust:

If someone does something to me to make me not trust them, like lying to me for example, it’s being dishonest and I don’t trust them. Once you do something, like you lie to me, or you don’t tell me the entire story, it’s hard for me to trust you. It only takes one strike and it’s like a long time for me to get that back with you.

Natalie’s experience with diminished trust was evident in her emotional statements. She even stated that she felt the tensions rising in her body even as we spoke about this topic.
There are people out there who are out for themselves. They don’t care about the people around them, and they don’t care who they hurt along the way. I don’t trust people like that; it’s almost like a competition. I think there’s no trust when there’s a competition. I could tell what he [the principal] said was a total lie. You know, all the hard work I do as a teacher . . . and then someone just throws mud in your face without a reason, it really tears you up inside. It breaks down the trust. I don’t think he has any respect for me as a teacher; he treats me like dirt so that pyramid of trust isn’t going to matter. There is no trust, and the reason why is because of a lot of politics and even his upbringing. He’s a womanizer; it’s a gender thing. He’s a man, I’m a woman, and he’s going to put me in my place as a woman. I also look at him as far as how he treats other people, and he’s not very good at treating other people decently, so I don’t trust him. So, whatever he does to one person, he could easily do to me. So, no, there’s no trust at all.

Amy’s perceptions of distrust also stem from watching how others are treated.

You kind of see how people relate to other people. If you hear someone constantly talking about other people, then you kind of know, gee, I better watch it. If they could do that to one person, they could do that to me. If I talk to somebody confidentially, then I expect them to keep it private. I don’t tell others’ secrets; I don’t expect them to tell mine. If they do, and it has happened, then that trust isn’t there. It would take a while to earn it back.

For Casey, her sense of distrust also comes from learning that a tightly held secret was released.
You know, I told a friend a secret and I assumed it would be safe. Then, all of a sudden, everybody else seemed to know. I felt betrayed. She was a good friend. Next time, I will be more cautious, if there is a next time. Right now, I don’t trust her very much.

Allison believes that trust is diminished much like that of Casey’s beliefs.

You gain trust by telling someone a secret, but if you hear this secret from someone else, then you’re losing that trust with that person. You just say, well, I’m not going to trust that person again. There’s lessons learned as far as how much I trust someone. I lose trust with people who have broken my confidence. They might have said something hurtful to me, or I might have found out about it. I might have said something to them in confidence and then they’ve gone and broken your trust with what I call cattiness. It hurts, and then I don’t trust.

For Jill, she is always guarded with her sense of trust.

I am pretty guarded because there seems to be a lot of politics in the school. You never really know for sure what the truth is. It’s hard to trust someone like my principal because he’s been caught in so many lies and I don’t really know for sure what his agenda is. I also don’t trust him because he’s done some pretty mean things to me which I’d rather not talk about now. As far as people in general, I don’t really trust people I don’t know. I might initially trust them just for the benefit of the doubt, and it stays that way until we build trust with each other or until they do something that takes that trust away. It would have to be something untrustworthy or would hurt me or harm me, and then I’m going to back off and I’m not going to trust them.
Chris distrusts people because she’s caught them in lies. “I couldn’t trust her [a friend] with anything ‘cause she was lying. I found out about it, and then I didn’t trust her so much.”

And finally, Penny’s sense of trust is diminished because, “I couldn’t confide in her [a friend] anymore my true feelings; I always felt judged no matter what I said. It was really hard and hurtful.”

Most of the participants did not have a sense of trust with their current principal and the reasons were all similar. They could not establish a sense of trust because: “He seemed to be self-motivating. He was out for himself” (Tanya). “He doesn’t respect me” (Natalie, Judy, and Jill). “I don’t really believe what he says to me” (Judy). “He doesn’t tell me the whole story” (Janis). “I’m not comfortable around him because I never know how he will use my words against me” (Natalie). “I’ve seen how he treats other people, and if he can do that to another person, he can do that to me” (Natalie). “It seems to be situational. There are times I can trust him, but there are times I cannot. Because of that, I never really know for sure. I just think there is a breakdown of integrity and honesty with him” (Amy).

I never really had a total sense of trust with either of the principals I worked for. I mean for the first one, I had a kind of business working relationship. It was a friendly sort of relationship, but I was always guarded. I didn’t really get to know her on a personal level, probably because I only worked for her for three years. This current principal, I don’t trust him at all because I’ve caught him in lies, not only with me, but also with other teachers. He seems to have his own agenda. He doesn’t come across as a caring individual, and frankly, he’s been mean to me.
He’s kind of a bully. He shows favoritism, and I’m not one of his favorites, I guess (Jill).

I don’t trust principals who are there for their own motives, their own advancement. All the principals I’ve worked for have used this place as a stepping stone for their own careers. It’s hard to trust people like that. You wonder if what they say is the truth, or if it is just what they want you to think is the truth. They come, they stay for a few years, then they leave to jump up the ladder (Chris).

I don’t trust him because I think he’s here for his own agenda. You know, he’d talk the talk, and created a feeling that seemed like he was very appreciative and caring, but then when it came right down to it, you knew that was far from the truth based on the things that he actually did. He was only here for the advancement of his career (Penny).

**Sub theme C: Time.**

Another factor of reliability concerned time. The passage of time was necessary in determining if the experiences and behavior of the other individual were deemed trustworthy and reliable. As time progressed, and the number of trustworthy incidences increased, the more trust was felt in the relationship. If incidents occurred which diminished trust, then it would take more time to re-establish trust, or in the event of continued episodes of distrust, trust was lost altogether and remained permanent.

For Janis, she stated, “I’m a very trusting person with people from the very beginning. So you have to do something to me to not make me trust you. If you’re a stranger on the street, I’ll totally trust everything that you say.” She had an inborn sense of trust with any individual and gave them the benefit of the doubt. She also stated,
though, that “it only takes one strike and it’s like a long time for me to get that trust back with me.” With her principal, her level of trust is pretty low. She initially trusted him in the beginning of her teaching career, but over the years, has developed a lack of trust because she has caught him in some lies, has determined that information has been purposefully withheld from her to her detriment, and has reprimanded her for inconsequential occurrences.

Natalie’s experiences with building trust with anyone outside of her family must be earned. “Well, I think you have to earn your trust with me, and I think it takes years to build an effect of trust.” The only people she totally trusts are her family members and it is because she has spent a lifetime living with them, experiencing events with them, and being intimately connected to them on a daily basis. “Sometimes, you’re not even aware of trust, but it’s there. As you grow up, it’s always there.” Outside of her family, “when you are out in the public, and you’re looking at things, that’s when you’re vulnerable to trust.” With people at work, for example, she believes, “I’ve learned over the years, that you know, that there are personality conflicts. Some people you’re going to get along with; some people you’re not.” With her principal, her level of trust is at the bottom.

I have no trust for the man at all, either on a personal level, or on a professional level. No trust at all because of the things he has done, because of how he has treated me and other people. He’s not very good at treating other people decently, so I don’t trust him anymore.

Amy believes that gaining trust takes time as well. She looks at the individual experiences with people as a way to determine trustworthiness. Over time, she begins to
count on that individual because they have never done anything to counteract that sense of trust.

I think just having the experience, you know, I’m careful in the beginning, I’m very careful, but I think having the experience over and over that somebody’s dependable and you can count on them. I think over a period of time, it just develops.

However, at any point in the relationship, if that person did something to diminish the trust, it would take some time to earn it back. When asked if she trusted her principal, she said her level of trust was fairly low, but that it also depended on the situation at hand. There were some instances where she trusted her principal. For example, she can trust him to do his job in an administrative sense because he goes to the appropriate meetings, he does the staff meetings, and gives staff evaluations. For these instances, she trusts him. However, there are also just as many other instances where she doesn’t trust her principal. “I think it’s just that he has not been honest with me, he has not shown a lot of integrity in so many situations that it’s hard to see what’s real and what’s not.”

Casey also believes that trust takes time. “I definitely think it takes time. Um, experience, getting to know the person. I think it takes a while to get to know someone and to actually feel that you could trust that person.” She feels that the longer she knows someone, the higher the level of trust she will feel with that person. For example, she would trust her mother because she’s known her for twenty-nine years, but she wouldn’t trust someone that much with whom she had only known for a year. Concerning the level of trust with her principal, she rated it fairly high though it was not the highest. She attributes this to lifetime experience.
It’s probably because it boils down to lifetime experience. For me, the highest level of trust would be my family. I’ve only known my principal for seven years, so I don’t think I could give her all my trust just because I haven’t known her as long as my family.

Jill’s experience with building trust is also dependent on time.

Well, I think it takes time. It’s something that doesn’t happen for awhile. I mean initially, you kind of have an inherent sense of trust in that mankind typically likes to believe other people. We always try to give people the benefit of the doubt. As your relationship builds, I think trust just gets bigger and bigger. You need time to be with that person and time to find out the things that they tell you are true, and that they have your best interests at heart.

She trusts her family the most, and trusts her colleagues on a different level. She trusts the ones she’s worked with the most and who have provided consistent acceptable behavior. With her principal, initially she trusted him in the beginning as a new principal while she was also a new teacher. Then, over the years, as experiences and incidents of distrust occurred, her level of trust diminished with each passing year. At present, she has no trust for her principal. “I don’t trust him at all because he’s done things against me. I used to feel like I could trust him, but I’ve been bitten with spite too many times, so now I don’t trust him at all.”

Chris’s experience with trust is completely the opposite of Janis’s. Chris doesn’t trust anybody at first. “Initially, when I meet someone, there is no trust. No way, uh, uh. I don’t know them, no.” When I asked her how she developed a sense of trust with people, her reply was, “They have to earn it.” In reference to her family, she said, “You always
trust your family. These are people who would never do you wrong. They would never say bad things about you, or try to trick you, or mislead you.” For anyone outside of her family, people need to earn her trust. When I asked her what it would take for her to build trust with someone, her reply was:

Well, it’s the background knowledge you have with that person. I would need some sort of relationship, I would have to care about that individual, and I would expect to have experience with that person in order to have trust.

When I inquired about the level of trust she experienced with her principal, she stated, “I mean at the beginning, I didn’t trust her at all. She was so wishy-washy. You never knew where she was coming from. She is better now, though, I’ve learned a few things about her by working with her.” At present, her level of trust is about half and half. There are times when Chris wonders about the information her principal presents to her. “I gotta wonder about things like that. Is it just her opinion, or is it like a real rule that’s come down from the central office? Who knows?”

Allison, like Jill, has an inherent sense of trust with people. “I’m a positive person and I like to trust people. I like to start on a positive and then build on that. But, there’s lessons that I learn as far as how much I do trust someone.” She also adds:

Understanding honesty takes time, too. You don’t really know if someone is honest with you unless it is consistent over time and you keep finding out through experience that the person is being honest. I know I’m honest, but one never really knows about the other for sure.

When asked about the level of trust she experienced with her principal, she replied, “My former principal, the one I only had experience with for a year, I didn’t have such a great
relationship with, but my current principal, I’ve worked with for awhile, and I’ve grown to trust her pretty much.”

In Penny’s case, she builds trust over time as well.

I learn to trust people from verbalizing with them, talking to them, seeing what their thoughts are, um, seeing that they’re caring individuals; that they do not feel any necessity to put themselves first all the time. Um, I have friends that I know I definitely can trust because they are there for you and that’s it.

Penny’s level of trust with her current principal is very low. She has worked under numerous principals in her teaching career, has been working for her current principal for three years, but has held herself back in the trust department. She says she’s noticed a little pattern developing. Most of the principals she has worked for had only stayed for a short time, about three years each. She called it, “the honeymoon period because the principal comes in and shows all this energy and enthusiasm, makes all kinds of promises, and then by the third year, their true selves come forth.” Her current principal did the same thing.

He appeared honest in the beginning, worked hard, showed enthusiasm, talked to everyone, didn’t seem to take sides, but then he started getting caught in some lies, stabbed a couple of teachers in the back including me, and I started not to trust him anymore. Now, there’s been too much that has happened, too much hurt, I’ve seen his true colors, so to speak, and felt his wrath. I don’t trust him.

Textural Descriptions.

In connection with communication, the participants also set forth reliability as an important factor. They all believed that information was reliable if it could be deemed
trustworthy. This trustworthiness developed over repeated episodes of confirmed acts of truth. The believability of information presented to the participants was dependent on their level of trust with an individual. For all of the participants, they felt complete reliability when speaking about their respective family members. With co-workers and their principals, the reliability factor took time to develop. Building a relationship of trust was important to reliability.

Two of the participants had a very strong sense of reliability in the information presented to them by their principals. Two more participants were right in the middle and could go either way. Sometimes they trusted the information given to them by their principals, and sometimes they questioned the reliability of the information. The remaining participants did not feel that the information their principals communicated to them was reliable or trustworthy. They felt this way because of numerous and confirmed episodes of untruthful information.

Most of the participants felt the same way about trust in the school setting, though not all participants trusted their principals. There were only two participants who felt they had established trust with their current principal. The other eight did not have trust with their current principal. However, some of the participants had worked previously for other principals and had established trust with them. In general, if there was a feeling of trust between the teacher and the principal, the reasons were due to continued and progressive instances of reliability, and if there wasn’t a sense of trust, the reasons again were due to repeated instances of distrustful and unreliable information.

Most teachers also felt that in order for trust to be established, the passage of time was necessary. Only one of the 10 participants felt total trust right from the beginning.
The other nine participants ranged from having no trust at the beginning to initial low levels of trust with advancing higher levels of trust as time progressed.

**Structural Descriptions.**

Teachers and principals work in the same building each day of each school year. Although a teacher’s classroom is separate from the principal’s office, there are instances where the two will cross paths on a regular basis. The structural experiences of the participants involved the passage of time as years of working in the same building produced compounded instances of contact, meetings, dialogues, and observations. All participants had been teaching for a minimum of five years and had also worked for their current principal for at least three years. The longest relationship between the participants and their principal was eleven years. Eight of the participants had worked for more than one principal in their careers. Two of the participants had only worked for their current principal. The younger the relationship, the lesser the opportunity for encounters between the teacher and the principal, and the longer the relationship, the more opportunity for encounters between the teacher and principal. Each positive incidence of reliability and truthfulness helped build a relationship of trust. Each negative incidence of unreliability or untruthfulness allowed for a diminished relationship of trust. As time progressed, and the teacher and principal grew to know each other better, the greater the possibility for building a relationship of trust became. However, more time could also allow for a diminished relationship of trust as incidents of proven unreliability came to light as was the case for all but two of the participants and their relationships with their current principals.
Theme 3: Relationships

The participants also spoke about the importance of having a good relationship with someone in order to trust them. Developing this relationship took time, but also was dependent on mutual respect for each other and whether or not they genuinely cared for one another. Building a positive relationship was also dependent on whether or not the participants felt their principal exhibited positive leadership characteristics. Issues related to gender and relationships were also brought forth by two of the participants and are discussed as well.

Sub theme A: Aspects of Leadership.

The participants discussed their viewpoints on the characteristics of leadership and what it takes to be considered a good leader in educational administration. The participants were first asked to give characteristic traits about which they felt made up a great leader. Then, the participants were asked to tell whether their current or former principals fit their overall description of good leadership. Positive and negative characteristic traits were discussed and revealed through their dialogue.

Tanya felt that a good leader should be able to follow through in a timely manner with concerns and decisions in education. She also felt that a good administrator must be accessible and have a personal interest in not only their job, but the people with whom they work.

I think a principal needs to follow through. If you ask them to do something, then they need to get it done and not wait three weeks, and then you go and find out it wasn’t done. Also, a principal needs to be accessible with an open-door policy. You have to be able to feel like you can go to them and they will help you with a
problem. Also, a personal interest is important. We have a nice staff here, and we all trust each other. It would be nice if our principal would take a personal interest in us as people, not just teachers.

When asked about whether or not her principal fit her ideal description of a principal, she indicated that her principal was lacking in all of these areas. She felt frustrated and overwhelmed, and even a little unsupported as a teacher. “I feel kind of looked down upon. I’m not respected. I need help sometimes, and I find that I go to my colleagues more than the principal because I know he’s just not interested in helping.” She stated her principal couldn’t really be counted on to follow through with a request, found that he just harbored himself in his office, and his door seemed to be closed most of the time.

Judy’s ideal principal would be a person she deeply respects and could go to for help at any time. Also, she felt that a good principal would take on a responsibility for the staff and students and be made to feel like they were all part of one team. Lastly, she felt that a good principal would provide clear communication to all the groups so that expectations and roles were clearly defined.

Any principal needs to be respectful of what is found in the building and help the staff grow and continue to work together. A good principal will foster that team spirit. That person needs to have a clear vision of leadership and encourage the staff to participate in this direction. And then, he has to have a responsibility to the students, staff, and parents. He is the voice to the parents, and he sets the tone for the building.
The principals she has worked for do not fit completely into her ideal characteristics either. Her perspective with her current principal was:

He does not give us clear communications. He likes to shift his responsibilities to others, which isn’t a bad thing unless it’s done all the time, and with him, it’s done all the time. He doesn’t know our students; he doesn’t mix very much; he stays in his office and just operates out of there.

Her former principal was much more accessible and really fostered a good team spirit among the staff and students. She said the atmosphere in the building was completely different with the former principal as compared to her current one. She felt that the principal had a very important role in the success of the school building.

Janis’s perceptions of the ideal school leader would exhibit good body language like eye contact, friendly gestures, and positive facial expressions. “I want to know that they’re really listening to me and that they are concerned about me; I get a lot from people by visual things.” She also thinks a good leader will be up front from the beginning and offer all of the information. “I don’t want to have to ask for information, I think it should be presented in truth right from the start.” Lastly, she would like to have a good working relationship with her principal in that, “He would think of me as a person who wants to do the best in my job and look at me like the professional that I am.”

When asked if her current principal fit into her perspective of an ideal principal, the answer was no. She felt:

Well, many things have been kept from me. Um, I’m told one thing, and then I find out it’s not the truth; it’s something totally different. I mean, if they don’t
have the answer, then say so. Don’t make it up just to satisfy my question and 
then have me find out it’s all a lie anyway.

She also felt that she was unsupported in her professional endeavors and did not feel like 
she had the best professional relationship with her principal. There was an incident where 
her job was on the line because of a possible R.I.F (Reduction in Force) and she was told 
to relax and that everything would be fine, when in fact, it was not. She lost her job. “I 
asked several times, what do you think, what is your opinion? And, nothing was said 
except, ‘You’re fine.’ I got the words that everything’s going to be okay, and it totally 
was not. I lost my job.”

Natalie’s perceptions were similar as well. Her ideal principal would respect her 
as a professional teacher, would have effective communication skills, and would realize 
that she is a person, not just a teacher.

What I want him to realize about me is that I’m a very personable person, I’m a 
very effective teacher, and that I’m honest and forthcoming. I think he should 
know that. I think there needs to be a mutual respect.

Her current principal does not fit her ideal description in any way.

No, not with this principal. With the other principal, the one I had before, 
absolutely. My current principal does not have any respect for me. Uh, I feel that 
he is kind of a control freak, I think he likes to control women, and I think he likes 
to dominate. I think there is a strong good-old-boy mentality going on. It’s like 
the men are going to get together and they’re the ones who get the promotions and 
all that. I think he’s a womanizer myself. And, I think that he likes the very young
women around him, and the ones that are the most experienced, the ones who are
the most trustworthy and effective as teachers, he shuns.

She did have a former principal who more closely fit her mold for the ideal principal.

My other principal had a really good heart, and he respected everybody and he
complimented everybody and he was a very effective communicator. I mean what
he would say to one teacher, he would go and say to another teacher because it
was a positive thing to say. He was a caring person and he was approachable.

Amy’s perception of the perfect principal included a principal who was honest
and had a lot of integrity. She felt that a principal needed to be a caring and
compassionate individual, and also had to be open with others and accept their
viewpoints. This included the ability to be a good listener as well. When asked whether
her current principal fit into this ideal description, she indicated that it was dependent on
the situation at hand.

Sometimes. It’s situational. A lot of times, he doesn’t really know what he is
supposed to be doing. He likes to look like he knows what he’s doing, but he gets
cought and tries to cover his tracks. It looks bad and there is a breakdown in the
honesty of his intentions. There are times when he seems to be compassionate,
and you feel like you can trust him, but it’s really hit or miss. It goes back to
what’s good for him. And it goes with what I said initially. You can’t really be
like that and have a lot of trust with that person.

Jill, Chris and Penny felt approximately the same way. Their version of the
perfect principal would have characteristics of honesty, respect, unselfish motives,
consistent behavior, integrity, care, and professionalism.
I think you need to be honest with each other, but I also think you really have to have respect because this is your boss. Your principal needs to be able to trust you as well. And, you have to have a relationship, a good working relationship (Jill).

I need the principal to be consistent and I would need them to genuinely care for the people they work with. You know, some principals just use the place as a stepping stone in their career. They don’t care about anyone but themselves. I think that principal needs to be there because they want to do something important for the school (Chris).

A principal should appreciate me as a teacher, and trust me because I’m a caring individual with children. He knows I work hard for the children, and have a hard-working attitude with a good work ethic. He needs to know that I believe in being honest and forthcoming. The principal has to also be caring, not have their own agenda, and be a true professional who’s out for the kids, not himself (Penny).

All three of the women did not feel that their current principal fit their ideas of the perfect principal. Jill stated, “Not at all. There isn’t anything honest about him. I have no respect for him, and I don’t have a relationship with him either. I avoid him at all costs.” Her reasons included perceptions of politics and unfair treatment.

Uh, I mean he has his buddies, he has his favorites. He sees to it that they are taken care of. I mean I used to feel like he valued my opinions, but over the years, as I’ve voiced them, I’ve gotten bit. I give what I think is a professional opinion because I’ve been asked for my input, and then I get slapped around, verbally slapped around because it was not what he wanted to hear.
Chris stated that her principal was wishy-washy and that she never knew where she was coming from. She changed her mind all the time and presented information differently to different people. Other principals she had worked for didn’t fare much better.

I think she was unprofessional as a principal. I mean she was consistent, she seemed to care about the building, I think she was honest to a point, but really, that was only if she liked you. She just happened to like me, but there were many of my colleagues whom she didn’t like and things didn’t go so well for them. I think that is very unprofessional on her part as a principal. You need to rise above that as a building principal. Then, I had one principal who was a total goof, oh my God, I don’t even want to get into it, he doesn’t apply to any of what I’ve said. I don’t know what he did in the office, but it wasn’t being a principal, I can tell you that.

Chris absolutely refused to talk about this particular principal for personal reasons and she did not want to disclose them in this interview.

For Penny, some parts fit her principal and some parts did not. For that parts that were representative of the perfect principal, she felt that he “talked the talk and created a feeling that seemed like he was appreciative and caring.” She had her suspicions, though, about his true intentions. On the surface, he appeared to fit some parts of the mold, but her intuition told her that it was an act; she just did not have anything to prove that it was so.

Casey and Allison, on the other hand, had principals who fit well within their perspective of the perfect principal. Like everyone else, they both believed that the perfect principal would exhibit characteristics of honesty, care and compassion for others,
professionally supportive, and a positive demeanor. “My principal shows a dedication in wanting to be there and doing what’s best for kids. We all work together to make our goals” (Casey). “I think my principal is organized and gets the job done. She prioritizes her workload and comes through on the job. She has sincerity, trustworthiness, and respect” (Allison).

**Sub theme B: Respect.**

The participants also discussed feelings of respect as a necessary part of building a relationship with someone. Respect needed to be mutual and needed to be earned over time with repeated episodes and affirmations of incidents proven trustworthy. Judy stated, “When you have a principal, you want to be able to respect that person. You want to be able to think . . . this is a leader; this is a person I can go to.” She also stated, “Any principal, whether you’re new to a building or part of a building, you need to be respectful of what you find in your building, and think how you can help your staff grow and continue to work together.” For Natalie, she believed, “As a principal and looking at me as a teacher, I want him to respect me. That’s the first thing.” Even though her experience with her current principal did not reflect a sense of mutual respect, she had an idea of what respect would look like between a boss and a subordinate.

My husband was a boss, and he had 150 men working underneath him, and every single person that I talked to or knew, and these were all men, said that they totally respected my husband and it was because he treated everyone the same. He remained calm, open, and honest with his employees. He respected everybody as a person, and everyone respected him as a person, too.

Jill’s experience with respect and a principal was as follows:
I think that with a principal, you really have to have respect in order to build trust because this is your boss. I mean, he’s your boss, and you have to have some kind of respect for that person to trust them. And, a principal needs to be able to trust you and respect you as well in order for you to trust them and have a relationship with them.

She also stated that relationships took time to develop, but most importantly, she felt that honesty, relationships, and respect were all connected together.

Chris felt it was hard for her to trust people she didn’t respect. She stated:

Maybe I don’t think they have a whole lot of value to their lives, or they don’t conduct themselves in matters that are respectful. It is hard for me to trust anyone where I don’t have a respect for the way they live their life, or the way they handle themselves in society.

In Judy’s case, she could respect a person who showed genuine care and concern for all. “I respect a principal who is a true leader, who sets the bar and expects everyone to reach that bar. I respect someone who is positive, who encourages, and is a cheerleader, you know, for the school.”

Sub theme C: Gender.

Only two of the participants brought forth statements concerning gender but it seemed to be important as a factor in their relationship of trust with their principal.

Natalie had emotional statements regarding gender issues. As she stated previously in her comments about diminishing trust, she felt her principal was a womanizer and specifically stated that it was a gender thing. “He’s a man, I’m a woman, and he’s going to put me in my place as a woman.” In further support of gender disparity,
she attributed it to her principal’s upbringing and a good-old-boy mentality. She also stated he liked the younger women teachers because they seemed to stroke his male ego.

Jill felt that her principal had his buddies, his favorites. They were the young, cute teachers whom she called his groupies. She stated, “He likes it when they clamor around him like he’s a king.” She also stated, “You know, he’s a man, it’s kind of that my way or the highway philosophy with him.”

Sub theme D: Organization.

Organization seemed to surface as a component of building relationships in the workplace and in life. In order for a teacher to sense a desire to build a relationship with their principal, they needed to feel like their principal was an organized person. However, organization as a component also surfaced and was connected to aspects of positive leadership, effective communication and time as a factor of reliability. The participants discussed organization as one part of a multitude of related factors.

Tanya stated:

Our past principal was very organized and very self-motivating. If there was a problem, she was the first one we went to and she would direct us as to where to go or how to handle the problem. She had all the answers.

When asked if current principal was organized from her perspective, she stated:

He’s not really organized, like as in delegating things out. So things kind of go elsewhere, for example, if you email him a question, you don’t hear a response. Then, when you follow up, he’ll act surprised when it didn’t get solved yet. I’m like, hey, just give me an answer, okay.

Judy wants a principal to be organized as well. She stated:
I need somebody who will say, ‘okay, we need to take care of this, and I will call the proper authorities and I will talk to them, and we will get this child the help that they need;’ I need that kind of person who is organized and gets things done.

Janis felt that her principal was “very organized with whatever he needed to have in place.” However, as far as building a relationship with her current principal, there were so many other negative things about him that this was the only positive thing she could think of.

Amy felt that her principal was anything but organized. “He is never prepared for anything, never, and he always gets caught being unprepared.” She said he seemed to be always working on something in his office, but she was never quite sure what it was because many times, he’d been caught off guard and did not know what was going on in his own building. “He just lacks organization, and then he has to cover up for his lack of organization.”

Allison’s perception of a good leader is:

A good leader has organization. That is a key element because when people have issues that come up as they do in life, a good principal will be able to separate the personal from the professional, and keep the professional stuff the priority. They are able to organize and get the job done.

Penny also believes that a good principal is an organized principal. “They are excellent workers and they do what they say they are going to do. They’re very organized.”
Sub theme E: Caring.

When building relationships between people, another important component seemed to be a sense of caring, concern, and a feeling that there was a personal interest on the part of the administrator. It was the human factor that was important in building relationships. The participants discussed aspects of benevolence, care, and concern as an important aspect of a good working relationship with their principals.

Tanya felt that, “having a personal interest is important. We have a really nice staff here, and we’re like a family.” She also indicated that the staff had grown to trust one another and that her former principal fit well within the scope of this description. “She was personable and knew us on a personable level. She would say goodbye to us on Friday afternoons, tell us to have a good weekend. Things like that.” Her current principal “was getting there, but it’s not exactly the same as we’re used to.”

Janis stated that a principal needed to be positive and show that they truly cared for their staff.

A principal just needs to be very caring and positive with everyone in the building. Students, teachers, staff, custodial . . . they need to be that positive person because they’re the person that umbrellas everybody else and keeps everybody together.

For her current principal, she stated that:

Um, I feel like he presents himself to be caring of others, and concerned for your bests interests, but deep down inside as a powerful administrator that he is, I feel like it really doesn’t matter. I feel like I’m just the little person and he tells me what to do. I’m not confident around him and I get on edge because of his
sarcasm. That was his power over me. I never could tell if he was serious or not. This really lowered my confidence level, and my idea of how he is not really concerned for others, and especially not me.

For Natalie, caring was an important part of being a good leader and developing positive relationships.

Caring is a big one. I think I care about what people think, and I think an administrator needs to care about people too. Some people are really good at leading, and it has to do with their contact with other people and how they treat them, or respect them, or care about them. People will work well for you if you treat them with care and compassion and respect.

Her current principal does not fit her perception of a caring and compassionate leader.

My principal now? Um, no. I’m afraid of him. I am literally afraid of him because he doesn’t care about me. He has his favorites, and he promotes an unfairness in the building, and I’m not in the loop, let’s put it that way. When you are not in that loop, it becomes a very scary situation. I feel the bad vibes, and there’s a lot of bad karma. I think we could have a lot better atmosphere in the building if he were a different kind of person.

Amy also believes that a principal needs to have a sense of caring in order to have good leadership and build effective relationships. “Caring definitely needs to be on both sides of the equation. A lot of times, people aren’t caring or compassionate towards others. They are really more about themselves.” When asked about whether her principal fit into her idea of a caring and compassionate leader, she replied, “Um, I think it’s situational. I think there are a lot of times where he can be caring and compassionate, but
it’s really hit or miss. It goes back to what’s good for him.” She felt his compassion was more of an act and seemed fake.

Personally, he seems like he is a caring person like when people have issues in their personal lives, he does seem like he shows us care and concern.

Professionally, it’s just situational, you know. It depends on what else he has going on. He’s above others for sure. And, if it fits into his agenda to show care and concern, you know, then he will. And, he can show it, but you just don’t know how fake it is. It’s not always fake, but it definitely is at times, and you just know that it is.

Jill thought, “You kind of have to care about one another to build a relationship of trust.” She felt that if there was no mutual care and concern, there would not be a sense of trust. “You’re not going to trust that person unless you actually care about the other person and they care about you.” When asked about her relationship with her current principal, she responded emphatically,

Absolutely not! I don’t think he cares about me at all. I certainly don’t care about him. There’s a lot of politics in my school, and when you have politics, caring goes right out the window. It’s every man for himself, you know. And you know, I don’t even think he cares about kids that much either. That’s pretty sad, you know. A principal who doesn’t care about kids . . . that’s sad.

Chris needs a principal to “genuinely care for whoever is in the building.” She felt that if they were just there for their own motives, then they wouldn’t be a very caring individual and it would show. Her current principal showed aspects of caring, but it was dependent upon whether she liked the teacher or not. “She just happened to like me, so
she cared about me, but there were many of my colleagues whom she didn’t really like and things didn’t go over well with them.”

Penny also felt that a good relationship was based on both people exhibiting care and concern for one another. “I can trust people because I can sense that they care about me; they’re caring individuals. They do not put themselves first all the time.” When asked about care and the role of a principal, she replied, “The principal can be caring, too, in that they care about your thought processes. They don’t just have their own agenda.” In connection with her own principal, she did not feel he was as caring as he needed to be to build the best working relationship.

He doesn’t seem to care about how I feel and how I work, or about my professionalism. He created a feeling that seemed like he cared at first, but when it came right down to it, I knew that the things he said and did were just for the advancement of his own career or what was most important to him.

Textural Descriptions.

The participants’ perspectives on the qualities they considered positive characteristics of leadership involved terms such as honest, caring, supportive, positive, professional, informative, effective, organized, respectful, respected, role model, consistent, involved, open, appreciative, and personable. Only two of the participants felt that their principals fit within the scope of what they believed made up a good leader. The other eight participants had varying degrees of whether their current principals fit into their vision of a good leader. About half of the participants felt that their current principal didn’t fit this vision of leadership at all.
**Structural Descriptions.**

In any hierarchical organization where leaders and subordinates interact, there are subordinate perceptions of what characteristic traits good leaders, mediocre leaders, and poor leaders possess. The participants all had experience in working under a leader at their respective schools. Some worked for only one principal, while others worked for many principals during their careers. Each teacher developed a sense of what good leadership represented and connected that perception to their own principal. All participants reflected upon their current principals, while some participants took the time to reflect upon their former principals.

**Conclusion**

Chapter Four reflects the research findings from the participants’ significant statements, their direct quotes, and the researcher’s interpreted meanings. Communication was the first major theme necessary for perceptions of trust and contained the sub themes of the transfer of information, body language, follow-through, and openness. The second theme related to perceptions of trust was reliability. Its sub themes were building trust, diminishing trust, and time. The third major theme connected to perceptions of trust was relationships which included aspects of leadership, both positive and negative, respect, gender, organization, and a sense of caring. All participants used a graphic illustration to represent the characteristics necessary to build trust with another individual as well as to build trust between themselves as a teacher and a principal. These illustrations were helpful in visually representing their perceptions of the overall experience. Chapter Five includes discussions of the findings, the three major
themes, the research questions, implications of the results in education, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for further research.
Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

Chapter Five includes five sections: overview, discussions of results and conclusions, implications of results, recommendations for practice and further research, and concluding remarks. A review of the study and the procedures is provided in the overview. The results and their discussions include composite descriptions, and analysis of the research questions, methodological practices, and conclusions. The implications to leadership and the field of education are included in the implication of results, and recommendations for practice and further research focus on the importance of positive relationships between leaders and their subordinates and how these relationships affect education as an industry. Finally, concluding remarks are provided specific to this study.

Overview

A teacher’s perception of trust with their principal was the central idea in this study. Its methodology was qualitative in nature and used a phenomenological approach. Three major research questions were the focus of this research. First, how do teachers perceive trust between themselves and their principal? Second, how do teachers perceive trust as it relates to open and honest communication with their principal? And third, how do teachers perceive trust as it relates to the power dynamics and their working relationship with the principal? Conclusions concerning the significance of the study to the field of education and school improvement are discussed.

The process involved in the study consisted of an extensive literature review centered on aspects of trust. This included a definition of trust, its many facets, how trust
is developed as well as diminished, its connection to education and the school organization, and its connection to leadership in schools. Furthermore, trust was also connected to aspects of open and honest communication between two individuals. Therefore, aspects of communication were also defined and delineated in connection with organizations and people. Lastly, the literature review included research on trust and schools through a discussion of the micropolitics of an organization and school improvement.

The researcher developed her study to utilize a phenomenological research methodology which focused on the perceptions teachers had of trust and their working relationship with their principal. The study consisted of collecting data through one-on-one interviews, artifacts, and observations. An extensive data analysis followed which involved the transcription of recorded interviews, a line-by-line analysis of the transcription, color-coding, identifying and charting significant statements, and interpreting meanings of these statements, identifying themes and sub themes, and developing tree diagrams.

The interviews, artifacts, and observations provided the researcher with sufficient data to identify three major themes and twelve sub themes. The qualitative nature of this study allowed the researcher to gather a vast amount of information related to trust from teachers who currently work with their principal during the school year. Teacher perceptions of trust gave the information necessary to gather data for the research questions. The researcher was able to collect enough data to substantially support the objectives of this study.
Discussion of the Results

Three major themes were established from the analysis of the data: communication, reliability, and relationships. From these themes, twelve sub themes were developed. Communication included the sub themes of transfer of information, body language, follow-through, and openness. Reliability included building trust, diminishing trust, and time. Relationships, then, included leadership, respect, gender, organization, and caring. Composite textural descriptions are taken from the total group of individual textural descriptions and depict the “experience of the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 138) and are included below. Various quoted phrases from the participants will help provide an “understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) of trust. Then, conclusions drawn from the results of the themes are presented. Finally, the practices of effective methodologies are presented, and recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research are set forth.

Composite Descriptions.

The perception of trust was categorized into three major themes, though all three themes were interconnected in some way with each other. It was hard for the participants to talk about one aspect of trust without bringing in other aspects of trust at the same time. The first theme of trust was connected to communication. In order for two people to trust one another, there was usually some form of communication between them, whether it was the transfer of information, the observance of some type of body language, or the knowledge that another individual presented himself as open and receptive to another person and followed through with their words or actions. Statements the participants
made about communication included phrases such as “communication is about being open about all feelings and all things involved,” “it is the ability to be open to be able to say our opinion,” or “clear communication between all groups is paramount so that everybody is on the same page and understands the expectations.” These statements were all interpreted to mean that communication was an important component in any relationship of trust.

The teachers also felt that people need to be able to trust one another to be open to voice their opinions without fear. Comments like, “Is he being serious with us or joking with us, we don’t know, so we feel very uncomfortable talking with him at any moment,” left teachers with feelings of doubt and discomfort in the reliability of the communication. Subsequently, the teachers felt that clear communication was important so that all people had an understanding of the meaning of the information. If the message was not clear, then doubt was cast as to the seriousness of the message and the reliability of the information and integrity of the relationship was compromised.

The second major theme involved the reliability of the information presented during communication. Reliability began with building trust between two individuals, but also included phrases related to diminished trust and factors of time. The participants collectively made statements such as “I could trust him because I’ve known him a long time and I knew he would do the things he said he would do,” and “It takes years to build trust; experience and years.” For most of the teachers, building trust with their principal took many years. Statements like, “We’ve just known her a long time, and we’ve grown to be able to trust the things she says,” represent that time-honored relationship of trust. For some people, even though trust had been established, it became guarded after time.
“Initially, I trust people, but if they do something to hurt me or harm me, then I’m not so eager to trust them anymore,” “I really have an inborn sense of trust with people; I trust them until they do something to take that trust away,” “Once you lose my trust, it’s hard to gain it back,” and “It takes years to build trust. Experience and years.” Reliability is connected with the perception of trusted information relayed between two individuals and is dependent on substantiated incidents over time.

The third theme regarded relationships between two people. In order for two people to trust one another, a positive relationship between them had to be established. Some teachers stated they needed to have a “relationship with a person before they could trust them.” Therefore, relationships in the workplace included aspects of leadership, respect, organization, and benevolence. The participants made statements concerning their perceptions of positive leadership characteristics and compared them with the characteristics of their own building leaders. The participants described positive leadership characteristics as “honest, caring, supportive, positive, professional, informative, effective, organized, respectful, respected, role model, consistent, involved, open, appreciative, and personable.” When the participants compared these characteristics to their own building principals, most of the participants felt their principals did not exhibit many of them, and some felt their principals did not exhibit them at all. Statements and phrases such as the following were revealed: “He doesn’t follow through,” “He’s not very motivating,” “He just doesn’t communicate or listen to us,” “She just isn’t honest and I don’t believe much of what comes out of her mouth,” “I just can’t speak openly to him. I’m afraid of what he’ll do to me,” “Well, there are times when I think if I say something, she will just twist it around and use it against me,” or
“Well, she is the boss; I’m just going to do what she says to do.” These participants did not feel they had a very positive or trusting relationship with their principal. Only two of the 10 participants felt that their principal fit their description of the ideal principal. Statements such as, “I have total confidence in her. She is a problem solver. She’s fair. She’s consistent. She’s easy to work for,” or “I’ve built a lot of trust with her. She is very fair and she’ll listen to anyone. She treats everyone equally,” show what it was like to have a principal close to their perception of the ideal administrator.

**Discussions and Conclusions of the Three Themes.**

Though not definitive, the results of this study provide vital information and data in the area of perceptions of trust between teachers and principals. The conclusions submitted herein are considered successful regarding the themes presented.

All teacher participants placed great emphasis on the importance of effective communication in relationships and in the workplace. They agreed that in order for two people to have effective communication, they must be able to say things to one another without having their wording or ideas changed. It was also important to have a mutual understanding of the information presented during that communication. That understanding was connected to the relationship they had with the other person. Communication is inevitably a social construct that demands some type of interaction between people, and it can exist in verbal and non-verbal forms through our words and behaviors (Perkins, 2008). When two people interact, there is usually some form of communication. In a verbal sense, it is the words spoken to one another that are up for interpretation. The teachers felt that sometimes when they spoke to their principals, their words were twisted around so that the meaning was completely the opposite of what they
intended. This tended to happen when non-verbal cues were included as part of that interpretation.

Interpretation of body language came into play as communication bounced back and forth between them. Some teachers felt that the information they were hearing was a fake or canned response, and they could tell through non-verbal facial cues such as indirect eye contact, body gestures such as backing away while talking or folded arms across the chest, or vocal inflections such as sarcasm. For example, one teacher stated, “It was obvious he didn’t get what I was trying to say to him; he was looking at me with this quizzical look; otherwise he wouldn’t have questioned my motives. I could easily see through his act.” Other teachers could tell that their principal was telling them the truth because of years of experience in finding out that the information they were told was actually true. Comments similar to what one teacher said summed it up for most. “I’ve built trust with her because over the years, she’s allowed me to flourish as a teacher and I can see that she really does her job for the good of all, not just the few.”

All of the teachers felt that effective communication was dependent on the established and trusted relationship with the other person. Only those teachers who felt they had a strong, solid, and trusting relationship with their principal also felt that the conversations they had between each other were also trusting. Those teachers whose relationships were not firmly cemented in trust felt that communication was tentative and unreliable and should be treated as such.

Communication also was dependent on timeliness. The teachers felt that part of the communication process was dependent on the amount of time it took to act on the information presented during communication. If a principal was asked to do something as
part of their role as an educational leader, and that task was not done in a timely manner, then the teachers felt that there was a breakdown in the effectiveness of the communication or there must have been some misunderstanding in the expectations of the message delivered. Comments such as the following were made in this regard: “When we need help in the classroom, there is an expectation that he will be there to help. Often, he’s not there for us, so we’re frustrated and overwhelmed. There’s no follow-through on his part,” “He doesn’t follow through. He doesn’t do what he says he will do. He often just throws those jobs onto other people, so we’ve learned not to count on him for much.”

Openness was also a factor of effective communication. It was important that both people felt a sense of openness with each other; both must share a sense of being open-minded in being able to share their ideas without fear of judgment or ridicule as well as being open and available to listen to one another. In general, openness brought forth comments such as “I need him to be able to listen to me openly and honestly so that I can go to him and not be afraid that my comments will be taken the wrong way,” or “I feel pretty open to be able to say my opinions to him,” and “I feel like she’s open to listening to me. We’ve built a solid relationship and I can go and talk to her about anything.” It was interesting that most teachers felt that they could be open and honest with their principals in their ability to communicate to them. In fact, seven out of the 10 teachers interviewed stated this. They felt it was their duty and responsibility to say what was on their minds. This did not necessarily reflect a mutual convergence of the minds. However, just because they could voice their opinions, it did not mean they felt their principals were open to them, nor did they believe that they received truthful information from their principals in return. However, three teachers held back on the information they
communicated to their principal out of fear of judgment and reprisal. In their cases, their teacher-to-principal relationships were fragile enough to warrant this type of behavior. Their silence was a practice of self-preservation.

The second major theme of trust focused on reliability, and while connected to communication, was centered more on aspects of building trust or diminishing trust over time. The information that was communicated could be deemed reliable and trustworthy if positive relationships of trust were established. These relationships of trust took time, however, but there was no guarantee. Relationships were vulnerable to perceptions of diminished trust as well. Some teachers had learned that their sense of trust was situational. They could trust their administrators in some aspects such as showing up for work, attending meetings, and what they termed “doing administrative tasks.” However, when it came to presenting information, supporting the teachers in their classrooms, or backing them up with parents or the community, their sense of trust diminished and the reliability of that information also deteriorated. They learned over time which areas were trustworthy and which areas were not. Building trust took practices of “leaders who get the job done and solve problems,” “leaders who are personable, motivating, and help us grow as a staff,” “leaders who give us encouragement, and work together as one big family,” “leaders who listen to what we have to say, treat us like real people, and step up to the plate and handle the tough stuff.” Most of the teachers in this study at one time felt a sense of trust initially with their principal, but over time, only two of the 10 teachers maintained a high level of trust with their administrator.

Diminishing trust dealt with leaders who “did not tell the whole story” and left out important pieces of information. The teachers also felt that they could not trust an
administrator who “did not follow through with what they said they would do,” “were sarcastic in their remarks to teachers,” “were vindictive in their treatment of teachers,” “were caught in lies,” “were seen treating other people disrespectfully,” “were seen as selfish and self-motivated and out for themselves,” and who “were not approachable and fostered that good-old-boy mentality.” Again, the teachers in this study predominantly felt a sense of diminished trust with their own administrators over time. Eight of the ten teachers ranged from partial distrust dependent on certain situations to total distrust regardless of the situation.

The third theme of trust involved the relationship between the teacher and the principal. Perceptions of good leadership and organization were at the core of the relationship, but mutual respect and benevolence were also paramount to a solid, trusting relationship. As stated previously, the teachers felt that good leadership revolved around several important characteristic traits. They included having great integrity, being professional, informative, appreciative, personable, consistent, and honest. The teachers all believed themselves to be positive, honest, and open individuals so there was a collective sense that it was up to the principal to exhibit these good leadership characteristics in return in order to gain trust and establish a good working relationship. Comments such as the following were revealed: “I’m a pretty honest person, but if he doesn’t respect me as a professional and as a teacher, then our pyramid of trust isn’t going to matter,” “I want a principal who respects me and has compassion. I also want him to be effective at communication,” “You know, it’s a mutual response. I’m there as a teacher for the students, and between he [the principal] and I, there has to be that mutual respect,” “It’s not that she was a perfect leader, but she had integrity so I can respect her
decisions and trust her even though I didn’t always agree with her,” or “You have to have some kind of respect for that person to trust them; the principal needs to be able to trust and respect you as well in order for there to be that sense of a good relationship.”

All in all it can be concluded that the three themes which focused on the central idea of trust involved effective communication, honest and reliable information, and solid, positive working relationships between teachers and their principals.

**Discussion and Conclusions of the Research Questions.**

This study focused on a central research idea surrounding teacher perceptions of trust with their principal. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, the results were not definitive, but merely provided information about perceptions of trust and helped answer the three primary research questions. The first research question focused on how teachers perceived trust between themselves and their principal. Most of the teachers felt that they had a diminished perception of trust with their principal due to years of substantiated instances on the part of their principal in withholding information, making untruthful statements, displaying a lack of mutual respect and lack of professionalism, showing favoritism, lying, a lack of support, displaying motives of self-interest, and showing a lack of involvement in the school. Trust was dependent on a mutual feeling of respect, support, benevolence, and openness. Except for one teacher, trust existed initially at their first encounter between the teacher and the principal. The reasons varied from positional trust to an innate sense of trust in human nature. As time progressed and years of working together increased, the perception of trust was diminished in varying degrees due to continued experiences of untrustworthy behavior. Only two of the 10 teachers maintained
positive trusting relationships with their principals. This was due to well-maintained and acceptable behaviors of mutual respect, care, and concern for each other.

The second research question involved the perception of trust as it related to open and honest communication between the teacher and the principal. Most of the teachers felt that they could be open and honest in communicating information to their principal. However, these same teachers also felt that it was not a two-way street. They felt that the information they received from their principal was less than accurate or honest. The reasons for these feelings ranged from believing that the principal was purposely withholding accurate information because of mandates from higher up in the central office, or they were purposely withholding information or outright lying to them due to their less than desirable characteristics as a person in leadership. Only two of the teachers felt that their principals were totally honest with them. Three of the teachers felt that they could not divulge accurate or honest information to their principal at all. They were simply too scared to tell the truth, or withheld or distorted information for fear of getting in trouble and jeopardizing their careers as teachers. They told the principal exactly what they thought he [the principal] or the central office wanted to hear regardless if it was their personal beliefs or not.

The third research question concerned the teachers’ perceptions of trust as it related to the power dynamics between themselves and their working relationship with the principal. All of the teachers perceived themselves as subordinates to their principals. They considered their principal the boss, whether male or female. Two of the teachers were considered teacher leaders and held a slightly higher positional level than that of a regular classroom teacher because they assisted the principal in his/her absence from the
building, though these teachers also considered their position still a subordinate role to the principal. Most of the teachers felt that they were leaders of their own classrooms, but that they did what they were told from the administrative level. The teachers felt that the better the working relationship and the higher the level of trust they perceived with their principal, the more they felt the distance between those distinct levels in the organization dissolve. There was a greater sense of partnership and a lesser display of power dynamics. On the opposite side, the teachers also felt that the less desirable the working relationship due to lower levels of trust, the greater the distance between these distinct levels in the organization and the greater the display of power dynamics. There was less of a sense of partnership in the workplace and a greater sense of control and compliance because of positional power.

Leadership style was part of the whole picture as well. The participants had better working relationships with principals who exhibited leadership characteristics of openness and collaboration. They felt part of a team all centered around the same goals and visions of the school. Authoritative styles of leadership resulted in a lower level of trust and a general concern in issues of trust in the workplace.

Effective Methodological Practices

The ability to capitalize on the opportunity to do one-on-one interviews was the most effective research practice. It gave the researcher the opportunity to listen to what the participant had to say regarding any question that was posed. The participants seemed to be open and honest in their discussions and presented some clearly emotional answers. For some, the questions brought forth discomfort and tension. Quite a few teachers brought up the aspect of anonymity. They wanted to make sure their answers and
discussions could not be connected to their personal identities. After reassurance, the researcher felt confident that the information they presented was deeply honest and heartfelt. Considering this, it was also an effective research method to conduct interviews outside of the teachers’ contracted working day. Doing so allowed the researcher to bypass the permission of the building administrator and assure the participants’ anonymity in this study.

Once the interviews were complete, another effective methodology in research was the coding process which allowed the significant statements to be identified and categorized into themes and sub themes. Color-coding the significant statements helped visualize the different themes, and then using charts and tables to further categorize them was also beneficial.

**Implications of the Results**

The contributions to the field of education as implicated in the results of this study are primarily focused on helping administrators become better leaders in schools. Great leadership is just one part in the process of overall school improvement. According to Lambert (1998), “leadership lies within the school, not just in the chair of the principal” (p. 3). Therefore, this study may also help teachers understand the dynamics of trust and communication as it pertains to their relationship with their principal. It may help both teachers and administrators close the gap of positional power and form real partnerships focused on similar goals and shared visions. Lambert (1998) supports the best case scenario as a shared leadership involving teachers and principals. Furthermore, according to *Standards for Ohio Educators* published by the Ohio Department of Education (2007), principals should create a shared vision for continuous improvement and establish and
sustain collaborative relationships and shared leadership. If teachers and administrators better understand the complex structure of trust and communication and the relationship these two entities have with working relationships, then overall school improvement is certainly possible.

This study involved teacher perceptions of trust, and while there was a significant amount of information on organizational trust, there was little on the perceptions that teachers had of trust with their principal. It was important to gather information pertaining to a teacher’s perception of trust because teachers are at the foundation of the school structure. The teacher is the one who is in the classroom and is closest to the students, and is the one who directly impacts what happens in the classroom. Their open and honest communication about what happens in the classroom is of vital importance to their principal and central office administration. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute significantly to the understanding of trust between teachers and principals.

The first implication is based on the first research question regarding perceptions of trust from a teacher’s perspective. The teacher participants’ perception of trust was that it must be present in any working relationship, it must be mutual, and it is dependent on respect built over time. Respect stems from trusting one another, and trust is based on the interactions and experiences between people (Hoerr, 2005). Stephen Covey’s (1991) well-known and highly-acclaimed win-win philosophy is achieved when a climate of trust is built and perceived by both employer and employee. His philosophies regarding working relationships in business can parallel that of working relationships in schools. School leaders must establish respect and instill faith in their staff based on their openness, honesty, and integrity (Sosik & Dionne, 1997). Administrators must realize
that it is up to them to build that bridge of trust with their teaching staff. “A principal must earn trust for her teachers” (Hoerr, 2005, p. 110). With most of the teacher participants, there was an initial sense of trust due to their experiences with human nature as well as their belief in positional trust. However, it was the administrator’s responsibility to return that initial sense of trust and behave in a trustworthy manner through repeated and consistent actions deemed honorable.

When leaders bring people together in trust, in a commitment to common purposes, and in a belief that acting together rather than apart will make them more effective with children, those people will mobilize to serve children better. (Donaldson, Jr., 2006)

However, with eight out of the 10 participants demonstrating low or non-existent perceptions of trust with their administrator, there is an apparent conflict between what current research maintains regarding best practices in educational leadership and what these participants felt about trusting relationships with their administrators. Research shows that trust should exist, but this study reveals that trust is still elusive. It is hoped that educational leaders will grasp the importance of building a climate of trust between themselves and their teachers.

The second implication was related to the perception of open and honest communication between the two positional levels in the school organization – the teachers and their principals. Communication “was an important input variable in developing trust with a subordinate” (Burke, et. al., 2007, p. 623). In order for accurate and honest information to pass back and forth between a teacher and a principal, the teacher participants believed there must be a mutual level of respect and trust. If the
teachers and their principals did not trust one another, then the possibility of withholding pertinent information or distorting the truth was present. Administrators must be made aware of the importance of good trusting relationships between themselves and their teachers. They must be open to accepting the truth even if it is not what they want or expect to hear. “Even when people disagree, individuals can still feel valued if others respect their opinions” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 42). Total agreement can be a good thing, but it can also lead to stagnation of ideas and organizational growth. Too much of a good thing can have negative effects; therefore, good organizational growth is dependent on the diversity of ideas and opinions gathered from the workforce. Schmoker (2006) attests, “administrators [benefit] greatly from hearing disagreements and alternatives to some of their ideas” (p.135). The teacher participants trusted leaders who presented themselves as part of the team, were open and honest about their intentions, and were selfless individuals who were caring and compassionate about people and students. This benevolence was matched on the part of the teacher and they, in turn, became more productive in their work habits (Burke, et. al., 2007). They felt that good leadership was inspiring and motivational and that a good principal would foster that community spirit and help everyone grow professionally. “Focusing on adult-adult relationships and consciously building a team is not an option for principals; rather, it is essential if a faculty is to grow and develop” (Hoerr, 2005, p. 111). The teacher participants expected that a good leader would listen and allow teachers a voice and address issues of importance in their classrooms. “Effective leaders combine a strong sense of moral purpose, an understanding of the dynamics of change, [and] great emotional intelligence as they build relationships” (Fullan, 2003, p. 93).
Considering seven out of the 10 participants felt they could openly and honestly tell their principal anything regarding educational practices, the results of this study are encouraging for administrators. However, five of these same seven participants felt that communication was not a two-way street. While the participants could offer information to their principal, they did not feel that the information received in return was open or honest. Remember, also, that three participants could not talk to their principal at all for fear of reprisal. Reciprocal communication is important to solid trusting relationships and is relevant in overall school improvement.

The third implication was focused on the perception of trust as it related to the organizational power dynamics in the school setting. The teacher participants usually held the subordinate position while their administrators usually carried the leadership capacity. Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers’ (1992) research supports the fact that teachers typically focus on instructional matters of the classroom while principals typically focus on managerial tasks, but they also state that teacher leader roles often bring teachers and principals closer in hierarchical levels because they bring a balance between the classroom and the management of the building. Teacher leaders are still teaching in the classroom, yet they hold some degree of leadership capacity as they typically assist a principal in their managerial tasks. Three of the teacher participants held such teacher leader positions, but still considered themselves subordinate to their principal. All of the teacher participants felt that their principal was the boss and that they would comply with a given directive when asked.

More current research reveals that the hierarchy between these two distinct levels is reduced due to a more collaborative decision-making approach (Donaldson, Jr. 2006).
“A new model of school leadership must honor relationships as an integral dimension of leadership” (p. 37). Two out of the 10 teacher participants felt their opinions were validated and appreciated by their principals, and also felt they were part of school improvement processes. They perceived relationships of trust and felt they were more equal in their ability to impact the decisions made in their buildings. Current best practices focus on great school leadership as the responsibility of a great leadership team. It encompasses the abilities and talents of a team of individuals oriented on a shared vision (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Unfortunately, the other eight teacher participants felt their opinions were of little or no value and that the principal made unilateral decisions with no regard for teacher input. These teacher participants, whose relationships with their principals were less than desirable or trusting, felt they had little to no impact on the decisions made in the building. These results and reported perceptions do not seem to follow what is considered current effective educational leadership practices. Despite current trends suggested by Marzano, et.al. (2005), Donaldson, Jr. (2006), Hoerr (2005), and Ohio Department of Education (2007), there seems to be teacher and principal relationships still bound by old-school practices of unilateral command and control.

The implications of the results are also presented in the recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Perceptions of trust are an important consideration in the area school leadership, teacher participation, and overall school improvement. Educational leaders must be aware of the impact of trust in good working relationships. It is well-known that people who
trust one another have better relationships and produce better results when working together. The following recommendations for practice in the educational setting will help teachers and administrators work together as partners in the educational process. These recommendations are supported by the data collected from this study and supported by the literature in the industry.

**Effective Guidelines for Trust in Organizational Leadership**

1. Effective communication is the ability of two individuals to transfer information in such a way as it is received and understood as intended. An administrator needs to be an effective communicator both as a deliverer of information and a receiver of information. Administrators need to support an atmosphere of positive communication so that discussion is encouraged and promoted through listening and open dialogue.

2. Exhibiting positive body language is important in the process of communication. Examples of positive body language include maintaining eye contact while speaking and listening, pleasant facial expressions, maintaining an engaged body posture, and implementing encouraging body gestures such as handshakes, high fives, or pats on the back. Administrators need to practice and exhibit positive body gestures when speaking to or among their teachers, students, parents, or other educationally interested constituents.

3. Follow-through in a timely manner is also an important part of the communication process. A good leader will do what they say they will do as quickly as possible. The less time that elapses between the indication of action and the action itself, the more reliable the action becomes. An administrator needs to follow through in a timely manner on all requests and actions so that teachers feel supported and students get the help they need.

4. Openness is another factor in communication. A good leader will exhibit a sense of openness as part of their leadership ability. Openness entails being able to keep an open mind and allow teachers to present their ideas and express their opinions
without fear of retribution. An administrator needs to be open to new ideas and receiving information from teachers. Teachers should not feel they have to tell an administrator what they think they want to hear.

5. The reliability of the information received is dependent on established high levels of trust. The higher the level of trust between a teacher and a principal, the more trustworthy and reliable the information. An administrator needs to exhibit positive leadership characteristics to support the process of building trust with their teachers.

6. Good working relationships are important to overall school improvement. Good leadership is at the core of developing good working relationships. An administrator needs to possess good leadership attributes such as being honest, benevolent, supportive, positive, professional, informative, effective, organized, respectful, respected, good role model, consistent, involved, open, appreciative, and personable.

7. Mutual respect is also important in developing good working relationships. An administrator needs to respect their teachers and the teachers need to respect their administrator. This respect is usually earned through consistent behavior built up through time and is present on both sides of the relationship. Incidents deemed trustworthy and reliable support relationships of mutual respect.

8. A good leader will show benevolence toward their teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. An administrator must exhibit a care and general concern for all through their professional demeanor. It must be the focus of their professional attitude. Showing benevolence has a positive effect on developing and maintaining positive relationships in the workplace.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This study produced some interesting results in the perceptions of trust that teachers have of their principals and their relationships with them. Since most of the teachers in this study felt that their perceptions of trust were diminished in respect to their relationship with their principal, it would be beneficial to find out how wide spread this
phenomenon is in the field of education. A quantitative study would produce a numerical representation of this perceived phenomenon.

Additionally, since only elementary teachers were interviewed, it would also be beneficial to find out if teachers at other levels in education felt the same way. Middle level and secondary education teachers may or may not have the same perceptions of trust as their counterparts in the elementary, but it would benefit the industry to find the answers there as well.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the principal’s perception of trust in connection to their teachers’ perception of trust. The interconnected dynamics between these two sets of data might shed some light on the complexity of working relationships in the school setting. A two-sided representation of perceptions of trust would also be beneficial.

Lastly, it would be interesting to look at gender relationships and trust between principals and teachers. It was not a focus of this study, but yet it surfaced through discussion. All 10 participants were female, and all but two of their respective principals were male. Interestingly enough, the two female principals were connected to the two female participants who had the highest established level of trust. The other eight relationships were male/female dynamics with varying degrees of diminished trust. It would be beneficial to examine the perceptions of trust as it relates to gender differences or similarities between teachers and administrators.

**Concluding Remarks**

This research study involved seeking information regarding teacher perceptions of trust with their principal. The data collected provided valuable information on
perceptions of trust, but it also provided insight into the complexity of communication, relationships, and effective leadership in schools. The results cannot be considered definitive because they do not represent the entire population of teachers, but the results of the study can be considered successful as they add to a minimal but growing base of research on teacher perceptions of trust in education. The teacher participants in this study felt that reliable communication was a huge factor in the ability to trust their administrator. They felt that communication should be a two-way street and that information should flow freely between these two individuals. The teachers in this study further agreed that the reliability of the information transmitted was dependent on the establishment of strong relationships of trust. The teachers who exhibited the highest levels of trust also felt that the information they presented and received was highly reliable. The teachers who felt their level of trust was diminished in any way deterred their belief that the information was reliable or truthful. Lastly, the teachers in this study felt that in order to establish trust with their administrator, there must be some sort of relationship with that administrator. A good relationship was based on perceptions of good leadership characteristics, a mutual sense of respect, and a feeling that their administrator demonstrated benevolence as an individual.

This study gave 10 teachers the ability to have a voice and address their feelings and expressions concerning their perception of trust in their administrator. Its qualitative design gives credence to the importance of hearing what others have to say as they speak openly about their experiences. Administrators will benefit from reading their words by addressing their leadership practices to create successful learning partnerships with their teachers and students; teachers will benefit in knowing that their experiences are
important to the overall process of educating children; but most of all, children will benefit because the bottom line of education is the success of its student population. Good solid trusting relationships work most effectively and produce the best possible results.
References


Appendices
Appendix A

Initial Interview Protocol

Teacher Perceptions of Trust with their Principal
Protocol for Initial Interview

Participant Questions

Note to Participant: The questions asked herein will be considered your personal perceptions regarding trust, its meaning, and your experiences with trust.

1. Please state your background information regarding your teaching position. Include grade level, subject(s) taught, years of teaching experience, years at present position, supplemental positions, committee work, and/or any other relevant information related to your teaching career.

2. Considering the term “trust,” how would you define its meaning?

3. Can you tell me how you develop a perception of trust with an individual?

4. Can you give me some examples (list) of people with whom you experience a perception of trust?

5. Can you describe for me how you developed this perception of trust with these individuals?

6. Considering one (or more) of the people you spoke of in Questions 3, can you think of a specific incident where a perception of trust was present?

7. What was it that gave you this perception of trust?

8. Considering trust again, can you tell me about an instance (or instances) where your perceptions of trust was diminished with these individuals?

9. What was it that lead you to this perception of distrust?

In my research, I have discovered that trust does not stand alone as a single component between two people. There are several facets of trust such as a willingness to risk vulnerability, benevolence (care and concern for others’ best interests), confidence,
reliability, honesty, and openness. All of these play an important role in the ability to trust.

I’m going to show you a graphic on trust. I’d like you to think about it over the next few minutes and come up with three (or more) personality traits that would complete the blank lines on this chart that show how trust is established between two people.
Appendix B

Follow-up Interview Protocol

Teacher Perceptions of Trust with their Principal

Protocol for Follow-up Interview

Participant Questions

Note to Participant: The questions asked herein will be considered your personal perceptions regarding trust, its meaning, and your experience with trust and your principal. It may include your perceptions of the level of trust you experience with your principal(s), your perceptions of the working relationship you have with your principal(s) past or present, and your perceptions of their leadership style as a principal. The information revealed through this interview will be kept strictly confidential.

1. In your teaching career, how many principals have you worked for?

2. How long have you worked for your current principal?

3. Let’s take a look at the graphic chart on trust I gave you at our last meeting. Can you tell me about the words you chose?

4. Looking at this chart, and thinking about your building principal as a person, does this chart depict the perceived trust you experience with your principal?

5. Can you tell me why it does/does not? Or, what words would you change and why?

6. When you think about your school, do you think there is a climate of trust? Why or why not?

7. Can you to tell me about how you perceive the level of trust which exists between you and your principal?

8. In general, when speaking to your principal, can you describe your level of comfort in speaking openly and truthfully with him/her?

9. Do you feel you can speak openly with your principal about matters related to teaching and instruction?
10. Was there ever a time when you agreed with your principal on matters related to education? If yes, can you tell me about it?

11. Was there ever a time when you disagreed with your principal on matters related to education? If yes, can you tell me about it?

12. Considering leadership style in general, can you think of three attributes you think a good principal should have to lead a school building?

13. Considering the leadership style involving your principal, can you think of three attributes which describe his/her leadership of your school building?

14. Considering trust and the leadership style of your principal, can you tell me about your perceptions of how your principal fits within the facets of trust I spoke of at our last meeting?
   a. Willingness to risk vulnerability?
   b. Benevolence (care/concern for others’ best interest)?
   c. Confidence?
   d. Reliability?
   e. Honesty?
   f. Openness?
Appendix C

Graphic on Trust/General

What does it take to build a relationship of trust?

List three characteristics on each side that lead towards establishing trust.
Appendix D

Graphic on Trust/Specific

What does it take to build a relationship of trust?

Teacher

Principal

List three characteristics on each side that lead towards establishing trust.
Appendix E

Human Subjects Approval and Consent Form

To: Dr. Dale Snauwaert, Ph.D. and Gail Scarr
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership

From: Barbara K. Chesney, PhD., Chair
Wesley A. Bullock Ph.D., Vice Chair
Walter Edinger, Ph.D., Chair Designee

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 08/02/10

Subject: IRB #106836
Protocol Title: Teacher Perceptions of Trust with their Principal

On 07/23/10, the Protocol listed below was reviewed by the Vice Chair of the University of Toledo (UT) Social Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board (IRB) via the expedited process. Modifications were requested and approved by the Chair on 08/02/10. The Chair and Vice Chair noted that a signed and dated Consent form is required prior to an individual taking part in this research. This action will be reported to the committee at its next scheduled meeting.

Items Reviewed:
- IRB Application Requesting Expedited Review
- Letter of Introduction (version date 08/02/10)
- Assessments (version date 08/02/10)

This protocol approval is in effect until the expiration date listed below, unless the IRB notifies you otherwise.

Only the most recent IRB approved Consent/Assent form(s) listed above may be used when enrolling participants into this research.

Approval Date: 08/02/2010  Expiration Date: 08/01/11

Number of Subjects Approved: 10

Please read the following attachment detailing Principal Investigator responsibilities.
ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT – INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Teacher Perceptions of Trust with their Principal

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dale Snauwart, Ph.D., principal investigator, 419-530-2478;
Gail D. Scarr, student investigator, 419-704-5748

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, Teacher Perceptions of Trust
with their Principal, which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr.
Dale Snauwart. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of communication and trust
between teachers and the principal of their school.

Description of Procedures: This research will take place in the participant’s classroom or other
agreeable location best suited to the participant. You will be asked to answer questions concerning
your perceptions of trust provided on an interview protocol guide as well as complete a diagram
related to the components of trust. Your participation will consist of one initial interview and one
follow-up interview. Each interview will take about twenty (20) to forty (40) minutes. Both interviews
will be audio taped for accuracy of transcription.

*Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audiotape during this research procedure?

YES ☐ NO ☐ Initial Here

After you have completed your participation, the research team will debrief you about the data, theory
and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study, including loss of confidentiality.
Other risks associated with participating in this study may include anxiety or cause you to feel upset.
If so, you may stop at any time without repercussion or fear of reprisal.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you
will learn about how educational research experiments are run and may learn more about
communication and trust between teachers and principals. Others may benefit by learning about the
results of this research.

Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research
team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms
with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be
presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to
protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of
benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with The University of
Toledo. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation or experience any physical or psychological distress as a result of this research, you should contact a member of the research team, Dr. Dale Snaauwaert, 419-530-2478; and Gail D. Scarr, 419-704-5748. If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, please feel free to contact the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board, Dr. Mary Ellen Edwards, in the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today’s date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

Name of Subject (please print)   Signature   Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Signature   Date

THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO
SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

The research project described in this consent form and the form itself have been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral & Educational Review Board (SBE IRB) for the period of time specified below.

SBE IRB #: 106836   Approved Number of Subjects: 10

Project Start Date: 06/21/10   Project Expiration Date: 08/01/11

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