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Teachers Building Trusting Relationships With Students In Elementary Schools And The Principals Who Support Them

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Teachers Building Trusting Relationships with Students in Elementary Schools and the
Principals Who Support Them

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Lindsay N. Kidd

March 2022

Teachers Building Trusting Relationships with Students in Elementary Schools and the
Principals Who Support Them

By

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Dedication

To my husband Paul, an incredible teacher, who has supported me as I set new goals and never doubted my ability to meet them. You made sure each person in our growing family had everything we needed to succeed from the start. I will always remember you driving me to and from late classes because I was pregnant and tired, helping to set a work schedule for me that still maximized the family time I craved, working beside me late into the night as you prepared lessons or graded papers, and encouraging me at every step.

To my boys Levi and Everett. You told me you were proud, came to visit with snacks, and drew pictures for me to keep close while I worked. Thank you for being the sweetest, most fun little guys I could have imagined. You make everything great. When I graduate with this degree, you will be four and two with all of your own goals ahead of you. My dream is that you always remember your value in this world, find or create a path to achieve your goals, and feel joy along the way.

I love each of you so much, and more than that too. I did it!

Acknowledgments

Since kindergarten, I played school with my little sister, teaching her what I learned each day on either my blackboard or whiteboard through the years. When I made birthday and holiday wish lists, I asked for teaching supplies. I knew I would be a teacher. It was my goal, but I only accomplished it because of the people in my life who have made it possible. And now, I have them to thank for helping me reach this level of achievement.

My family--both the family I was born into and the one I married into--thank you. I will never be able to express how thankful I am for the ways you have always supported me. You reminded me I could achieve anything at all and helped me navigate a path to reaching my aspirations. The listening ears on drives to and from class, the financial support, and the love you showed my boys while I have worked toward this goal are only a few of the ways you have positively impacted my life.

In addition to my family, I am grateful for all of the educators who have inspired me and guided me here. Thank you to the teachers who shaped my own education and positive experiences with learning. Thank you to the educators with whom I have worked alongside since student teaching. Thank you to the teachers and principals who made this study possible. Thank you to my committee members Dr. Tschannen-Moran, Dr. Gareis, and Dr. Grant who have shared in my passion and excitement for this work and have shown kindness throughout the process.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all of the educators building trusting relationships with their students. Thank you for doing your best to care for students.

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Abstract

Trusting relationships between teachers and students is a cornerstone of success in the classroom. As a means for continuous professional growth, teachers should have an understanding of other teachers' positive experiences with and accessible strategies for how to build these relationships. Current research is missing the narrative voices of elementary general education teachers in the discussion on trust in the classroom. In addition to how they can achieve trusting relationships, teachers need support from their principals. This study provides a phenomenological analysis of teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities and actions that led to trusting relationships with students and the ways their principals have supported or interfered with their efforts. Three principals selected three teachers each to participate in the study for a total of 12 educators. Each of the participants agreed to one interview designed to address the five facets of trust: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. The interviews were coded to identify additional themes beyond the facets and strategies that support the development of each facet within the themes. Each participant addressed all five facets. Recommendations are presented for policy and practice in the areas of benevolence, openness, and reliability, the three facets that participants addressed most predominately in the interviews, while various forms of communication were the most commonly cited strategies for achieving trusting relationships. Readers will gain access to the heart of teachers' efforts and how principals support these teachers in fostering high trust relationships with their students. This study helps fill the gap in research and supports teachers with building trusting relationships with students.

TEACHERS BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS IN
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND THE PRINCIPALS WHO SUPPORT THEM

CHAPTER 1

Instruction without relationships is an opportunity wasted. The proactive efforts of individual teachers to build trusting relationships with their students can mean the difference between students accessing the learning opportunities provided and passively moving through their school days. Trust between students and teachers is a concept that can be taken for granted or assumed based on time spent together in the classroom, but trust must be actively developed, and teachers must learn what developing and nurturing trust entails. Students perform more successfully in school, emotionally and academically, when they feel connected to their teacher, their peers, and their classroom (Greene, 2014). Elementary school is a critical starting point for proactive relationship-building efforts (Marzano, 2003; Stronge, 2010). When students develop trusting relationships with teachers early in their academic careers, they are more likely to remain open to those relationships in the future (Greene, 2014). High quality relationships between teachers and students may be the foundation of teaching (Marzano, 2007). This qualitative study focuses on classroom teachers' perspectives on building trusting relationships with students in urban elementary schools and the principals who support their efforts.

Statement of the Problem

There is a clear need for trusting relationships between teachers and students that allows those students to access learning. Building these high trust relationships is in schools' interest, especially when they are held to accountability measures linked to student performance.

Beginning with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 with the Race to the Top competition, and the most recent Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

policies mandated or incentivized states to improve equitable practices in schools. Yet there is limited empirical research on how the changes impact urban schools (Daly & Finnigan, 2012). These practices require rigorous standards that are taught, assessed, and sometimes used to evaluate educators based on student progress across a school year. The accountability measures are evolving over time. These continuously higher academic standards and expectations have led to distrust in schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), so a focus on how principals can foster trust and how teachers are creating trusting relationships with their students is more important than ever. Although student learning is the goal of educational endeavors and various sources are pressuring schools to demonstrate high levels of student performance, the importance of time spent on building trust in the classroom cannot be overlooked.

Learning includes student willingness to participate and engage in the lesson and with peers (Stronge, 2010), which students are more likely to embrace when connected by trusting relationships. Student achievement can take many forms throughout a child's academic career and positive relationships establish a foundation for that learning to take place (Marzano, 2007). The proactive work of relationship-building is ongoing and necessary throughout the school year; it is not limited in approach, time of day, or portion of the school year as students work toward achieving academic goals. Teachers must create an environment of trust that develops over time. As teachers establish and maintain trusting relationships with their students, it is critical that they reflect on their practices that support those efforts. Adams (2014) claimed that "with declining education budgets and escalating pressure to improve urban schools, it is important to find low-cost, high yield resources capable of maximizing student learning" (p. 136). Students are able to access the learning opportunities available to them and reach their potential when they develop trusting relationships within a positive classroom setting

(Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Teachers need access to the resources, strategies, and practices that will maximize their time to build trust with students.

Limited research is available to support teachers with developing trusting relationships with their students. The research available can be found in either fragmented pieces with one strategy at a time cited in an article (e.g., Cook et al., 2018; Tinckler, 2017) or short lists of strategies suggested to teachers (e.g., Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Franklin, 2020), but without successful teachers' insights. Research from the perspective of the educators in the field working with students every day and research that provides practical applications on fostering trust is needed. Teachers require time to develop routines, procedures, and expectations with students to allow a safe environment for learning. At the same time, teachers must build individual relationships with students (Stronge, 2010) all while teaching the standards for multiple different content areas. Educators feel the pressure of meeting academic standards that are tested and used in a variety of evaluative ways (Jackson, 2021), ushering the focus toward teaching content standards as early in the year as possible for the sake of time and away from developing trusting relationships. Teachers should understand the value of developing a trusting relationship with students so that they are appropriately prepared to support students as they take their journey through the rigor of learning. To access the information needed on building trust with students, we must listen to teachers about their experiences.

Students' needs vary, and especially so in a diverse urban school population, so it is important that teachers and principals understand potential risk factors and establish trusting relationships. Teachers must develop their own understanding of how to establish and maintain these trusting relationships. School leaders are met with the task of supporting teachers as they provide instruction for sustainable academic achievement. It is important that leaders of urban schools, or schools based in large cities, recognize factors specific to their populations and their

impact on cultivating trust. Diversity is a common attribute of these schools. Diversity includes cultural differences as well as differences in home experiences or socioeconomic status (SES). This diversity and exposure to a variety of experiences can both strengthen the interactions between stakeholders and challenge the relationships due to the differences. Understanding and respecting the cultures of others is an important aspect of diverse schools. The leader sets the example for bringing people together to develop a school-wide culture that includes all people and values their differences (Hammond, 2015; Hurley, 2012). For students who are lacking a trustworthy adult in their lives, a trusting relationship at school can provide new opportunities for them (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Poverty and SES influence student achievement, but classroom communities that foster trusting relationships can counteract some of the barriers to learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Jensen (2009) presented four of the most significant risk factors for students in poverty that impact student success: emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. Tschannen-Moran (2014) asserted that “teachers’ trust in students and parents has been found to be closely related to both the beliefs of teachers and the climate of the schools, and these three together predict student achievement above and beyond the influence of SES” (p. 158). Smith and Hoy (2007) found similar results, with academic emphasis and collective efficacy as close correlates of teacher-student trust in explaining achievement beyond what SES predicts. In their quantitative study on student trust in Belgium, with 2,104 teachers from 84 high schools, authors Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) found that “teachers instructing in low SES schools perceive the students as less teachable, as less able to meet the educational expectations imposed on them, which in turn reduces the level of trust” (p. 96). Because teachers’ trust in students has such a significant

impact on student achievement, even above the factors that may be considered barriers in urban schools, it is imperative that we understand how teachers perceive their roles in this process.

Brookfield (2000) defined trust as the glue that binds relationships between teachers and students and warned that there are multiple consequences for students who do not trust their teachers. For example, “They are unwilling to submit themselves to the perilous uncertainties of new learning. They avoid risk. They keep their most deeply felt concerns private. They view with cynical reserve the exhortations and instructions of teachers” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 162). Considering educators’ voices in the conversation of trusting relationships with students advances the efforts toward productive classroom environments. There is an opportunity to merge theory and practical application as it exists in classrooms today.

Conceptual Framework

Caring about students is how teachers build trusting relationships (Hammond, 2015; Ransom, 2020) and principals have a role in shaping the culture and climate in schools that allows teachers to prioritize trusting relationships with their students (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Noddings (1995) noted that, “We should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, and we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for” (p. 675). When teachers do not establish relationships with their students and support relationship-building among peers, students may disengage from the teacher resulting in missed instruction. Trust in classrooms is a critical element of success (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and each member of the school community is responsible for their roles. “Trustworthy school leaders model trusting relationships with students... that serve as examples for teachers as they work to cultivate these trusting relationships as well” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 13).

There are a variety of ways to consider trust between teachers and students. For this qualitative study, I used Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust as the conceptual framework. This framework was originally designed to understand the complexities of faculty trust in organizations. I used the framework to conceptualize relationships between teachers and students. In this model, trust is a willingness to be vulnerable based on each person's confidence that the other will demonstrate benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness, or the five facets of trust. Benevolence is the most common facet of trust and refers to the teacher acting in the student's best interest. Reliability is the teacher following through with commitments while maintaining the student's best interest. Competence is the teacher's ability to apply a high level of skill to fulfill the commitment. Honesty is a connection of the teacher's integrity and responsibility to fulfill commitments truthfully. Openness is a willingness to share decision making with students while genuinely listening to consider their perspectives as well as delegating responsibilities. As a result of a positive assessment across these facets, the trustor become more willing to risk being vulnerable in a situation (Meyer et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The opportunities to fill gaps in the literature on teachers' and principals' perceptions of trust in the classroom have led to the four research questions that will guide this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How do teachers perceive their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
2. What support do teachers perceive is needed from their principals to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

3. How do principals perceive effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
4. How do principals perceive their roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

General education teachers' and leaders' perspectives on the topic of building trust in urban schools are needed to understand the ways this phenomenon materializes in schools. "Although the importance of teacher-student relationships is fairly obvious, the components of an effective teacher-student relationship are more elusive" (Marzano, 2007). General education teachers' perceptions of their roles in the process of building trusting relationships along with the principals' perceptions of the teachers are lacking in the research literature. Specifically, there is a need for research designed around the diverse populations found in urban schools as relationship-building must be tailored to students served. Urban schools often include students living in poverty and previous research has suggested that developing trusting relationships with students in this population can be more difficult due to perceived differences in cultural values or ethical standards (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Much of the limited current research on relationship-building in the classroom focuses on the strategies that may be used to establish relationships. Research on trust in schools provides critical data on the value of prioritizing trust to positively impact the building (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hammond, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The general education classroom teacher is the key to individual student success (Marzano, 2003), but we need to recognize how the key functions.

It is important that students and teachers develop strong and positive relationships (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). By examining their own experiences, general education teachers and school leaders will provide a better understanding of the ways in which teachers approach

building trust in the classroom. The trust they foster will promote meaningful engagement and achievement in the learning environment. Findings from this study provide teachers an understanding of the teacher's role in developing positive relationships. We will learn what teachers believe are the outcomes of their efforts. In addition, we have firsthand reports of teachers' needs as they pertain to principal support and how those needs align with principal-reported support. School leaders, at a building and district level, can gain an understanding of how to support teachers' efforts in those roles. The information gathered can be used to inform professional learning or gaps in understanding for both teachers and principals. There is an opportunity to capitalize on teachers' strengths as a means for growth within a school. This research contributes to the ongoing focus on student achievement and practices that foster a trusting environment conducive to learning.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used operationally in this study.

1. **Teacher:** The teacher is a general education classroom educator who provides differentiated instruction to all students in the classroom for all or most of the school day.
2. **Trust:** "Trust is an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189).
3. **Urban Schools:** The urban schools in this study are found in a midsize city. The schools serve diverse populations of students with high rates of poverty, limited English proficiency, and family instability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).
4. **Benevolence:** Acting with the student's best interest at heart.

5. Honesty: Being forthright and sharing your thoughts and feelings.
6. Openness: Willingness to share decision making with students while genuinely listening to consider their perspectives as well as delegating responsibilities.
7. Reliability: Following through with commitments while maintaining the student's best interest.
8. Competence: Ability to apply a high level of skill to teaching your students and being effective doing that.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is considerable research to support the importance of trust in schools yet analyses of teachers' and principals' narrative experiences on their perceptions of their roles are lacking. This chapter provides an overview of the literature on building trusting relationships in elementary classrooms. Specifically, major areas reviewed include evidence of the importance and impact of trusting relationships in the classroom, a conceptual framework for understanding trust, and the reciprocal teacher and student relationships. Each of the three areas will be explored further with considerations for the principal, teacher, and student.

Trust is a multidimensional concept infused throughout all aspects of an educational organization. This proposed study is limited to trust between the teacher and students, and the support teachers need from principals to foster this trust. There are multiple definitions and conceptualizations of trust in the literature included below. Researchers from various fields have contributed to the work and similarities persist across them.

Definitions of Trust

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) defined trust as the willingness to be vulnerable with another person based on the confidence that that person has evidenced the qualities of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. These qualities were named the five facets of trust. This definition is based on a review of literature on trust that included over 150 articles on the topic that produced common conditions.

Definitions and models of trust can be found in corporate research settings. One example is found in Hurley's (2006) quantitative analysis of the 450 executives from around the world

that he surveyed. The author defined “trust as confident reliance on someone when you are in a position of vulnerability” (para. 3). Hurley highlighted the importance of understanding and managing trust in the workplace, then offered a model with ten factors of trust. Factors included risk tolerance, level of adjustment, relative power, security, number of similarities, alignment of interests, benevolent concern, capability, predictability and integrity, and level of communication. While schools are not corporations, they do have organizational structures that can be similar to the hierarchical designs found in those settings. The ways people interact with each other spans all sectors. The connections between Hurley’s (2006) factors of trust are evident throughout each of the other definitions reviewed here.

Kirtman (2013) presented seven competencies he identified after studying more than 600 leaders in education and their behaviors or skills that related to effectiveness. The second competency is building trust using clear communications and expectations. He emphasized that trustworthy actions must be developed, modeled, and monitored. Trustworthiness is more than integrity and must include competence, being true to your word, directness and honesty about teacher performance, follow-through on commitments, maintaining clear communications, and dealing with conflict.

Trust can also be found intertwined with data from research not specifically seeking a component of trust. Kouzes and Posner (2017) surveyed over 100,000 people from various disciplines around the world to pinpoint the top characteristics for leaders they would willingly follow. Overwhelmingly, four characteristics have prevailed over 30 years: honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-looking. Kouzes and Posner (2017) stated, “It’s clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow someone...they first want to be sure that the individual is worthy of their trust. They want to know that the person is truthful, ethical, and principled” (p. 33). Similar characteristics are woven throughout each of the definitions of trust presented and

interpretations within different disciplines may warrant a focus on one aspect or another. In education, one must consider the complex nature of a school as a system that depends on each of the parts to play an important role in providing the most appropriate learning environment for students' success.

Five Facets of Trust

There are a variety of ways to understand trust. For the purpose of this study, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) definition guided the literature review as well as the methods and analysis for the study: "Trust is an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p. 189). I used the Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) five facets of trust as a framework for the study. Each of the facets has been explored for the purposes of understanding how trust is developed between principals and teachers in complex school systems where interactions and observations shape the feelings of trust (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). This study explored how each of the facets manifests in a classroom. The relationship between teachers and students from the teacher's and principal's perspectives will remain the focus. Figure 1 provides an overview of the key components of each of the five facets as presented by Tschannen-Moran (2014, p. 39) as related to teachers' trust in principals. The definitions of the facets vary slightly when defined for the understanding of relationships between teachers and students, as described in the definition of terms in Chapter 1.

Figure 1

Five Facets of Teachers' Trust in Principals

Benevolence	Caring, extending goodwill, demonstrating positive intentions, supporting teachers, expressing appreciation for faculty and staff efforts, being fair, guarding confidential information
Honesty	Showing integrity, telling the truth, keeping promises, honoring agreements, being authentic, accepting responsibility, avoiding manipulation, being real, being true to oneself
Openness	Maintaining open communication, sharing important information, delegating, sharing decision making, sharing power
Reliability	Being consistent, being dependable, showing commitment, expressing dedication, exercising diligence
Competence	Buffering teachers from outside disruptions, handling difficult situations, setting standards, pressing for results, working hard, setting an example, problem solving, resolving conflict, being flexible

Benevolence is the most common facet and “perhaps the most essential ingredient” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 22) of trust. It means that the trusted person is acting in someone’s best interest without intentionally doing harm to another person (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Principals show benevolence by genuinely caring for the teachers, students, and other stakeholders. This facet also appears as support for the teacher and respectful treatment of the teacher. The teacher feels confident in the relationship and believes the principal will do what is right. If benevolence is lacking in the principal and teacher relationship, overall productivity is in jeopardy of decreasing as teachers spend their energy on protecting themselves in case of future missteps. Benevolence may include the principal considering and being sensitive to a teacher’s needs and interests, protecting teachers’ rights, or avoiding seeking personal gain at the expense of a teacher (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Honesty is a connection of the principal’s integrity and their responsibility to tell the truth during teacher interactions (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). It is related to a person’s character

and authenticity. This means that when a principal says something the teacher believes that the statement is truthful. Honesty also includes keeping promises about the future, whether those promises are made verbally or in writing. Trustworthy principals treat teachers fairly and avoid playing favorites. There are a variety of possible threats to honesty in a school setting including a pattern of breaking promises, a lack of follow-through on consequences or initiatives, or limited transparency in an effort to avoid conflict (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). “The revelation of dishonest behavior may be more damaging to trust than lapses in regard to other facets because it is read as an indictment of the person's character” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 27).

Openness is the act of the trusted person sharing information such as facts, intentions, and feelings. Sharing ideas with teachers both increases trustworthiness and positively impacts teachers' willingness to be open about their own ideas and feelings, strengthening the school's collective effort toward improvement. Principal actions that foster openness may include sharing information about his or her meeting schedule and availability or maintaining an open-door policy. While openness is generally the ideal practice, principals must still be considerate of all confidential or potentially harmful information when sharing with teachers. Openness also includes a willingness to share the decision-making process in an authentic way with the belief that involving teachers will result in better decisions for the school. Without openness teachers may be more reluctant to provide information when problems arise, both small and large, that will impact the school (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Reliability is the teacher's belief that the principal will follow-through with their commitments while maintaining the teacher's best interest (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Consistency and predictability with demonstrating benevolence are key. Over-commitment, difficulty managing time, or being distracted works against any efforts put toward reliability. Examples of reliability include communicating a decision with a teacher who asked a question or

modeling dedication by working a regular schedule and following through with commitments. Without reliability teachers may find themselves worrying about the principal following through with their intentions (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Competence is the principal's ability to apply a high level of skill to fulfill the commitment (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Setting high expectations, maintaining them, and holding teachers accountable in a fair and reasonable manner are skills related to competence. Teachers in one school noted confidence in the principal's competence due to her visibility and awareness of what is happening, including emerging problems, throughout the school, "despite the inevitable difficulties inherent in an urban setting" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 37).

A principal's ability to gain teachers' confidence in each of these facets creates a school environment based in trust. Each of the facets are intertwined and yet, separately important for a successful trusting relationship. Tschannen-Moran (2014) summarizes the importance of these facets.

What teachers seem to expect, above all, is a sense of care, benevolence, or goodwill from their principal. Further, principals who have a reputation for integrity and who encourage open communication are likely to earn the trust of their teachers. Teachers, because they feel vulnerable to the problems that emerge from an incompetent or disengaged principal, also rely heavily on competence as a basis of trust. Principals who are disposed to helping teachers solve on-the-job problems also are more likely to be trusted. (p. 38)

Teacher and Student Trust

Just as principals are responsible for fostering trust with teachers because they hold more power in the hierarchy, teachers establish the trusting classroom setting. Tschannen-Moran (2014) references the ways in which the five facets, among other characteristics, impact people

differently in a given relationship. Developing trust between teachers and students is a reciprocal process. Teachers must trust and exhibit that trust toward their students in the classroom. In turn, students must also perceive the teacher as trustworthy to establish a trusting relationship. There is significant evidence that trust is important in the teacher-student relationship and there are some strategies available to teachers for fostering trust.

Teachers' Trust in Students

Tschannen-Moran's (2014) research illuminated the teachers' value of respect and reliability from students, finding that honesty, openness, reliability, and competence would follow once respect was established. Teachers reported having a harder time trusting the students that they viewed as disrespectful, having negative attitudes, being impulsive, or lacking self-control. At the urban schools where her study was conducted, teachers stressed the importance of honesty in a trusting relationship though they were also able to forgive the students more easily than they were able to forgive adults for breaches in this regard. The facet of competence was less related to academic ability with students and more closely tied to student behavior within the structures of the school and how students act or respond to those structures (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Teachers Developing Trusting Relationships with Students

A positive classroom environment provides a space for students to develop trusting relationships with their teacher and peers. Teachers and students must believe that the other is trustworthy, and teachers have a duty to foster the relationship. Russell et al. (2016) investigated 34 middle and high school teachers' beliefs about the meaning and nature of trust in the teacher-student relationship. Using a grounded theory approach with interviews and focus groups, the authors identified teacher and student actions as well as benefits of the trusting relationship in the classroom. The antecedents, or strategies, for teachers are included in the following section.

Student actions include demonstrating care and respect, being consistent, being predictable, being reliable, making personal connections, complying with rules, and being honest. Benefits found in the study included positive social climate and interactions, increased safety, and academic engagement (Russell et al., 2016). “Students who do not trust their teachers or fellow students cannot learn efficiently because they invest their energy calculating ways to protect themselves instead of engaging in the learning process” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 22). The teacher creates a positive classroom community that allows students to develop trusting relationships with the teacher. Just as teachers prefer systems and interactions within the school that foster trust between them and the principals, students crave the same. “Instead of focusing on monitoring, punishing and rewarding students, programs designed to foster relationship intelligence help teachers develop skills to build relationships with students and to identify students' needs and help them find ways to meet them” (Hart & Hodson, 2008, p. 4).

Beyond the classroom, strong and secure relationships help students develop lifelong social skills (Jensen, 2009; Stronge, 2010). Elementary students are still in the process of learning both academic content and skills that prepare them for a productive future. Tschannen-Moran (2014) presents an argument for prioritizing a trusting classroom environment:

Teachers have a choice: they can organize their classroom with an orientation toward either control or commitment. An orientation toward control takes a pessimistic view of students and suggests that they must be managed with the skillful use of rewards and punishments. An orientation toward commitment by contrast starts with the underlying assumption that as social beings, children do not need to be coerced into wanting to be in positive relationships with their teachers and peers and – they are hardwired to need these relationships. (p. 174)

Strategies for Fostering Classroom Relationships

There are several strategies available for teachers to consider using as a means for fostering relationships in the classroom. Each strategy is based on either research conducted in the field of education or professional judgment from an author who has worked as an educator. Many of the strategies and impacts on the classroom are similar across the research.

Hammond (2015) identified five generators of trust to support the importance of culturally responsive teaching as a factor of building relationships. She defined each of the trust generators and provided examples of ways to foster each. First, selective vulnerability is when people share vulnerable moments and others respect and connect with them. Second, familiarity develops when people regularly see each other in the same setting. Third, similarity of interests allows people to find a point of connection based on likes or dislikes that can reach beyond any differences in race or class. Fourth, people can make connections when someone shows concern for important events. Finally, competence leads to confidence in a person's ability to help and support someone (Hammond, 2015). While this author developed a framework for understanding trust within the context of culturally responsive teaching, other research provides specific strategies and data to support the impact in the classroom.

Teachers can use storytelling to make connections with students, build relationships, and develop shared classroom experiences (Tinckler, 2017; Turner, 2018). Following an ethnographic study of one urban classroom Kasun (2013) argued, "Despite the increasing demands of the accountability movement in education, teachers and students can maintain places of agency and play in meaningful ways that create both community and rigorous learning, when the administration is supportive of such work" (p. 60). Greeting students either during a morning meeting or at the door is a strategy that resulted in a caring classroom community with more highly engaged and less disruptive behaviors (Cook et al., 2018; Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020).

Developing positive teacher-student relationships reduces or prevents discipline problems in the classroom (Marzano, 2007; Boynton & Boynton, 2005). The core of trust and positive relationships is caring, which includes both caring about students and caring for them emotionally and physically (Hammond, 2015). Table 1 presents a sample compilation of the strategies that can be used. The strategies are organized into two themes: Structure and Interactions.

Table 1

Strategies for Fostering Trusting Relationships

Structure	Interactions
Consistently enforce consequences (Marzano, 2007)	Provide help and support (Russell et al., 2016)
Build relationships into lesson (Franklin, 2020)	Smile and greet students (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Cook et al., 2018; Marzano, 2007)
Design intentional structure vs. anti-structure (Kasun, 2013)	Learn students' names (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Marzano, 2007)
Alternate seating options (Stapp, 2018)	Play or joke (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007)
Establish safe environment (Russell et al., 2016)	Get to know the students and listen (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Russell et al., 2016; Marzano, 2007)
Be consistent, predictable, reliable, fair (Russell et al., 2016)	Show affection and care (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Russell et al., 2016; Marzano, 2007)
Provide choice (Russell et al., 2016)	Use humor (Franklin, 2020; Marzano, 2007)
Develop class vision and group agreements (Hart & Hodson, 2008)	Project sense of emotional objectivity (Marzano, 2007)
	Use storytelling (Franklin, 2020; Turner, 2018; Tinckler, 2017)

Students' Trust in Teachers

The five facets can be applied to the classroom environment for teachers and students similarly as it is applied in the school context for principals and teachers, with some minor adjustments. Benevolence in the classroom is evident in the way the teacher cares for students' overall well-being by treating students as individuals with needs and interests. A teacher's honesty, integrity, and authenticity are important in the classroom, regardless of the age of the students. Honesty in the classroom may include the teacher taking responsibility for his or her own actions, apologizing for mistakes, and sharing interests. Openness is more closely related to showing care for students by providing opportunities for voice and choice than it is related to how information is shared, though teachers may choose to share personal information as a way of connecting with students. Teachers must consider the appropriateness of sharing certain information with students while being honest and open with them. Students are generally open with the teacher when the teacher makes time to listen. Consistent structures and fairness provide predictability in the classroom, which allows students to rely on the teacher. The teacher is responsible for providing appropriate instruction with the necessary content knowledge and students depend on the teacher to address learning needs. A benevolent teacher is not sufficient if competence is lacking. A student can sense a lack of trust based on the teacher's interactions with the student, a guarded tone, a negative affect, or a lack of warmth (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Student trust affects a connection with the school, student control of learning tasks, and achievement in reading and math (Adams, 2010). "Once teachers have demonstrated consistent and firm caring, they have laid the groundwork from which they can push students to more ambitious learning goals" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 167).

Principal and Teacher Trust

Trusting relationships are critical throughout the school building. As the leader of the building, the principal establishes relationships with the various school stakeholders. Stakeholders can include teachers, staff members, students, families and caregivers, and community members. Trust allows students to build confidence in their relationship with the teacher. Tschannen-Moran (2014) concluded that authentic and optimal trust creates the following conditions:

A self-reinforcing pattern of trust emerges as repeated cycles of exchange, risk-taking, and successful fulfillment of expectation strengthen the willingness of trusting parties to rely on each other. A history of the failed expectations accumulates and leads to reputations for trustworthiness that can then facilitate and reinforce trust in a wider social context. (p. 64)

The literature included below focuses on the trusting relationships between the principal and teachers, including support for teachers from the school principal. The principal is responsible for the foundation on which all other trusting relationships can develop, including relationships between teachers and students.

Principals Developing Trusting Relationships with Teachers

The principal sets the example for the school culture through modeling (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Tschannen-Moran (2014) asserted that, “within the asymmetrical relationship, it is the responsibility of the person with greater power to take the initiative to build and sustain trusting relationships” (p. 41). As the formal leader of the school, the principal will lead with the intent to provide structure, foster relations among teachers, develop a vision for the school with teachers, and create opportunities for change and improvement (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018).

A desire to be a trustworthy leader is not sufficient in the dynamic school setting where emotions, pressure, and needs vary; therefore, it is important that principals understand their roles in fostering trust. Over time, the interactions between a principal and a teacher that demonstrate care and consistent benevolence become the basis for trust. However, teachers may depend on a leader's reputation, assumptions made about the leader, and structures within the school to determine how trustworthy a leader is initially (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). "Trust judgments can be influenced by one's disposition to trust; by values and attitudes, especially attitudes concerning diversity; and by moods and emotions" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, pp. 53-54).

Teachers' perspectives on how and when trust develops in a school is invaluable. In a two-part qualitative case study, Bukko et al. (2021) interviewed 14 teachers and included 26 faculty members in a focus group to understand their perceptions of one principal's trust-building dispositions and actions. The participants made five recommendations for principal actions that foster trust that correspond with the five facets of trust identified by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999). The authors determined that while pressure to implement changing initiatives was challenging for teachers, specific actions by the principal to support the teacher counteracted the challenge (Bukko et al., 2021).

Understanding diverse populations, of both teachers and students, is an important element in developing and sustaining trusting relationships. Brezicha and Fuller (2019) explored the ways gender and race/ethnicity impacted a teacher's feelings of trust toward a principal, suggesting that current research is lacking in this area because it neglects to consider personal identities. Based on survey data that included 1,206 principals and 38,412 teachers from multiple states over five years, the authors made two key conclusions. First, teachers were more likely to trust principals who shared their own race/ethnicity. This relationship stood, even after controlling for

other school characteristics. The authors also noted that although race/ethnicity did affect trust, it was not the overwhelming determiner as the structure of trust is more complex than one identifying characteristic. Second, there was an inconsistent relationship between gender matches and trust. While many factors play a role in building and sustaining trusting relationships between principals and teachers, once established “trust allows teachers to know that their principals will support them or at the very least, not deliberately harm them” (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019, p. 27).

Support for Teachers

Teacher support from the principal demonstrates a desire to put trust, specifically the benevolence facet, into practice. The way the support takes shape may differ among teachers in approach or actions. Teachers are more willing to do more for the school or for the students, accept constructive feedback, and meet high expectations when there is a high level of support present in the relationship (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In a quantitative study of 151 teachers from 10 elementary schools in Turkey, Taşdan and Yalçın (2010) found a positive connection between principal support and teacher trust in both the school and the principal, concluding that as principal support increases so does teacher trust.

The nature of high stakes testing and accountability puts an emphasis on school performance, with a spotlight on the principal and the teachers (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). “Teachers need trust from their leaders and with their colleagues to cope with the stress of changing expectations and the demands that the accountability movement places on them” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 252). Bukko et al. (2021) agree and found that increasing trust in the school might positively affect teacher self-efficacy by supporting them through the challenges while implementing reforms. Principal support and teacher trust are highly correlated (Demirtaş et al. 2017). When teachers view the principal as trustworthy, they are more likely to

be satisfied with their careers (Eğimli, 2020; Olsen & Huang, 2019) and confident that the principal is invested in their well-being (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018). The leader creates a positive working environment for the school community that guides the teachers' work in their own classrooms. It is important to learn from teachers directly how the principal's support has affected them.

Summary

To know what is currently happening in the classroom and make decisions about how to move forward, we must include teachers and the principals who lead them in the conversation. A student's full potential cannot be realized without the presence of positive relationships (Stronge, 2010). As Tschannen-Moran (2014) noted, "without trust, students' energy is diverted toward self-protection and away from the learning process" (p. 252). Further, "a multicultural society with diverse values and shifting populations make the cultivation of trust a significant challenge" (p. 253). With the understanding that teachers and students flourish in environments that are caring and respectful, trust is a critical element of school success (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Additional research is needed to understand how teachers and principals perceive their roles in developing the critically important trusting relationships in schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The study on general education teachers building trusting relationships with students was conducted with a phenomenological approach. I sought to discover the perceptions of general education teachers and principals across three elementary schools in one urban school district on building trusting relationships based on the following four research questions.

1. How do teachers perceive their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
2. What support do teachers perceive is needed from their principals to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
3. How do principals perceive effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
4. How do principals perceive their roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

Research Approach

Phenomenological research supported the search for an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1997) and how they find themselves relating to the world through day-to-day living (Vagle, 2018).

As educators we must act responsibly and responsively in all our relations with children, with youth, or with those to whom we stand in a pedagogical relationship. So for us the theoretical practice of phenomenological research stands in the service of the mundane practice of pedagogy. (van Manen, 1997, p. 12)

A phenomenological study allowed me to illustrate similarities and differences for a group of educators who have had experiences with building trusting relationships with students. I studied the phenomenon of trusting relationships in the context of general education classrooms and the educators who experienced this phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach supported the research questions for the study by focusing on the “phenomenological attitude-where we question what we typically take for granted. We enter into a questioning mindset, where we try to become curious about things we have otherwise treated as obvious” (Vagle, 2018, p. 13). Teachers spend every day building relationships with students so that they can provide the most appropriate instruction for them, but how exactly teachers go about fostering those relationships requires more study.

Participants

Participants included a heterogeneous group of three principals and nine general education teachers in three urban elementary schools. The recommendation of twelve total educator participants for this sample was based on the Creswell and Poth (2018) guidelines suggested for phenomenological research. Using criterion sampling, all participants were employed in one urban school district, which united the participants with a common experience and delimited the scope of the study. The principals were the gatekeepers for the study and once the principals selected the teachers from their schools, I contacted the teachers directly with an invitation to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Sources

I gathered data through individual interviews with each participant. Each participant was interviewed following the semi-structured interview protocols, found in Appendix A for teachers and Appendix B for principals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I refined the interview protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using my pilot study (Kidd, 2021) on general education teachers

building classroom community through trusting relationships. The teachers responded to questions pertaining to research questions one and two about their perceptions of their roles in building trusting relationships. The principals responded to interview questions pertaining to research questions three and four. They were first asked several questions about their perceptions of trust, followed by specific questions about the five facets of trust.

Data Collection

First, I submitted the research proposal to the university EDIRC committee to review the details of the study for approval. Then, I submitted the necessary documents to the participating school district for review and approval. Next, I contacted potential principals to identify participating schools and work with the principals to gather information about potential teacher participants. To identify willing principal participants, I contacted schools based on geographic zone across the district as a way to capture varying demographics to the greatest extent possible. Then, I communicated the opportunity to participate in the study based on the principals' selections. Once the participating teachers confirmed participation for each school, I interviewed the teachers and principals in no particular order. We identified a distraction-free space to meet that was conducive to recording the conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants read and signed the consent form prior to beginning the interview. The consent form can be found in Appendix C. I reminded participants that they had the choice to leave the study at any point in the process and that they could decline to answer any question they wished without penalty of any kind (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All communication and data collection were carried out by email, phone, and video conference.

I invited each participant to meet for either a face-to-face or a virtual interview using the Zoom conference platform. All twelve participants chose the virtual interview option based on their personal preferences. I recorded each of the interviews using the live transcription option

available on the Zoom platform. First, I documented basic interview data including the time, date, and participant identifier. Second, I led introductions, provided an overview of the study, reviewed the consent form, asked if the participant has any questions, and asked for permission to begin recording. Next, I asked my prepared questions, starting with an opening question that invited the participant to share about his or her current role in the school. I used probing questions to request more information about responses throughout the interview as needed based on participants' responses to the interview questions.

The transcriptions and video recordings were stored on a personal computer that were locked when not in use. Each electronic transcription was sent via email to the participant to allow the participant to review and edit if necessary. The participants either did not return communication or emailed acknowledging that they did not see any need for changes. Both of those options were presented to participants at the end of the interviews. The saved files were deleted after the final dissertation was completed. I adhered to the Creswell and Poth (2018) procedures for preparing and conducting interviews.

Principal Participants

I contacted each principal by phone to request their participation in the study. I provided an overview of the study with Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facet framework with definitions for benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. I shared the list of research questions and reviewed the consent form. Each of the three principals originally invited to participate agreed to do so. Once each principal agreed to participate, I sent a follow-up email with the same information as well as the district's approval letter and consent form attached. In the email I asked them to provide the list of selected teacher participants and their contact information with a deadline to submit.

Each principal selected three teachers who have demonstrated the ability to develop trusting relationships. In addition to the three selected teachers, principals identified one additional teacher that would be invited to join the study if any of the other three teachers chose not to participate. It was not required that the principal had witnessed all five facets from a potential teacher participant. Principals were not restricted by any other factors such as grade level, years of experience, levels of education, gender, ethnicity, or age.

Each principal had the option to meet face-to-face or virtually and each of them chose a virtual interview. We found a time that suited both of us for conducting the interview. I used the semi-structured interview protocol over approximately forty-five minutes to address research questions three and four. In the interview, I sought to understand each principal's perceptions of teachers' roles in building trusting relationships effectively. Their responses examined overall experiences with teachers and were not limited to the three selected teachers. I used the interview protocol suggestions from van Manen (1997), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018) to design the questions that aided my exploration of the research questions. Table 2 provides the pseudonyms and years of experience in education of each principal participant. Administrator experience includes all years as an assistant principal and principal. Total experience is years of administrator experience in addition to years in education serving other roles, such as teaching.

Table 2

Principal Participant Experience in School Years

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	
	Administrator	Total
Christine	9	19
Danielle	5	18
Francis	14	31

Teacher Participants

Once the principals provided the teachers’ contact information, I emailed each teacher individually. In the email, I provided an overview of the study, the list of research questions, the consent form, the district’s approval letter, and my contact information. Unlike principal participants, teacher participants were not asked to review the five facets.

After the selected teacher participants agreed to participate from each school, I moved forward with interviewing each teacher. We determined a time suited both of us for conducting the interview. Each teacher had the option to meet face-to-face or virtually and all chose to meet virtually. I used the semi-structured interview protocol over approximately one hour to address research questions one and two. In the interview, I sought to understand the teacher’s perceptions of his or her role in building trusting relationships. Table 3 below provides the pseudonyms and years of experience of each teacher participant and the grade levels they have taught.

Table 3

Teacher Participant Experience in School Years

Pseudonym	Experience	Grades Taught
Abby	3	Second
Brianna	2	Second, Fifth
Erica	8	First, Second, Fourth
Gillian	10	Fourth, Fifth
Heather	25	Second – Seventh
Ivy	27	Third, Fourth
Jessica	23	First – Fifth
Katie	3	First, Second
Lisa	8	First, Fourth

Data Analysis

I analyzed each of the interviews to understand the lived experiences of each participant and used the Creswell and Creswell (2018) data analysis process to guide my work after collecting the data. To begin, I read all transcripts from all principal interviews and then all teacher interviews. This approach allowed me to gain a sense of general ideas and overall meaning across all interviews as well as by educator category, noting any predominant ideas and using a priori coding. I also read the four interviews from one school consecutively to gather any meaning from participants with particularly similar experiences, again noting predominant ideas and using a priori coding. Next, I coded the interview data by reviewing the overarching ideas and transcripts to identify emerging codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) based on the participants' language (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After identifying emerging codes, I read the transcripts again to identify text examples that supported the expected codes that were based on the five facets of trust (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using a spreadsheet, I created a page with each a priori code from the conceptual framework, including benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. I copied and pasted quotes from the interviews that pertained to each of the codes accompanied by the pseudonym for each participant. By using quotes and pseudonyms I was able to return to the original transcripts for reference or additional information. While coding the data by facet, I identified key characteristics that differentiated honesty and openness refining the definitions presented by Tschannen-Moran (2014) and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015). The basis for the shift was grounded in the explanation of openness as meaning approachable and open to accepting ideas of others (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Honesty related to the teachers' actions that demonstrated them being authentic or true to themselves for the students. Openness relied on the teachers' willingness to receive communication from students or choices made by students. After coding each interview, I identified and defined the themes that emerged. I also identified similarities and differences between participant data. Finally, I analyzed the themes and determined an appropriate representation for the narrative description of my findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I strived to "reflectively bring into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (van Manen, 1997, p. 32).

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

There are delimitations, limitations, and assumptions designated to guide the study. While there were a multitude of avenues by which to study this topic, I focused on the general education teachers in urban schools who built trusting relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the recent past, present, and future state of education. Safety was a

priority and was a consideration throughout the study. The new challenges that educators have experienced influenced the nature of as well as the development of relationships in schools (Goldberg, 2021).

Delimitations

There were four main delimitations for this study. First, three urban schools in a single school district are included. While there were opportunities to learn from teachers from schools that served students in other physical locations, the populations varied beyond the scope of this study. Next, only general education teachers were considered for the study. Though there are many other teacher categories that build trusting relationships, the populations vary in class size, access to students, and time spent with students. Third, only elementary level teachers were included. While there may be relationships built at other levels of education, the time spent with students varies and the impact of relationships with higher grade level teachers differs from elementary level relationships. These other opportunities for research were also beyond the scope of the study. In addition, the focus of the study was in-person relationship building. There was, however, a question about virtual teaching and its effects on in-person teaching as a way to honor the work that teachers have done throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the focus remained on the active work of building trusting relationships rather than maintaining classroom management as these two terms may have evoked different responses from participants due to the literature and training associated with classroom management.

Limitations

The nature of the pandemic posed limitations to the study. The phenomenological approach described by Creswell and Poth (2018) focuses on meaning behind the shared experience of less than sixteen people rather than producing a generalizable theory that others can apply to practice (Vagle, 2018). In addition, the interviews were a means to access

participant recollections that may or may not be factual (van Manen, 1997). The study was dependent on educators giving an hour of their time to meet for an interview. The COVID-19 pandemic-related safety concerns affected my access to educators for face-to-face meetings for conducting interviews.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that principals would select appropriate teachers to participate in the study. The principals used their understanding of trust to guide their selections, but that was only going to be successful if the principals had conducted either formal or informal observations of the teachers working with students. The second assumption is that participants would respond honestly during the interviews. There are built in reviews of the confidentiality protocols for the study, however, teachers knew that they were selected to participate by their principals. Selected stories or details included in the data analysis of the final dissertation may reveal clues about teachers' identities to their principal despite the use of pseudonyms.

Trustworthiness Measures

There were multiple trustworthiness measures used to ensure I accurately portrayed the phenomenon as participants have experienced trust in their classrooms. First, bridling was used as an active and "ongoing practice of naming and questioning one's own judgments" (Vagle, 2018). It was critical to maintain an openness to understanding the participants' experiences by acknowledging my own experiences. Below is a statement about my experience with this phenomenon. I also maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study to monitor for judgments or personal understanding that may have interfered with the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018).

Researcher as Instrument Statement

I was interested in learning how principals and teachers perceive their roles in building trusting relationships. This research was focused on urban elementary schools in one school district. My intent was to present my analysis of the data on educator perceptions across similarly situated schools. Understanding this group of educators' feelings and perceptions of their jobs will assist building and district leaders provide support for educators and the diverse students they serve.

My work experiences as a general education teacher and administrator in urban schools over the last nine years have helped shape the research in terms of approach and interview protocols. I am currently in my fourth year as an assistant principal in an urban elementary school. I taught in the first, second, and third grades for six years total. As a former teacher and current administrator, the topic of trusting relationships is relevant to my work experiences in schools. Many of the perceptions, feelings, and beliefs of educators who serve the diverse student population in urban schools were familiar to me.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation supported the understanding of teachers' perceived roles in two key ways. First, I followed the semi-structured interview protocol that addressed teacher perceptions from two different perspectives. Each teacher was asked broad questions that focused on their experiences with trust in the classroom. Then, the teachers were asked to address the five facets specifically and individually, defining each before teachers responded. Moving from the broad to narrow questions gave participants opportunities to reflect on any general stories they chose to share and then those that may have addressed a more specific definition of trusting relationships. The interviews with principals helped to justify the themes as by analyzing the different perspectives. The principals provided insight about trust in classrooms from both a larger

building perspective and as an observer of the teachers' roles in establishing the relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Member Checking

Member checking also played an important role in ensuring accuracy. I shared the interview transcript with each participant by email and requested that they review it for accuracy of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). None of the participants addressed changes that needed to be made. In addition, I shared major findings with the participants by email and asked for any comments they chose to share (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) or additions to the interpretation they wished to make (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants will receive a final copy of the dissertation once complete.

Ethical Considerations

Participant safety was a primary consideration. All communication for planning the interviews was carried out by phone, email, or video conference. Interviews were conducted by video conference, based on each participant's preference. This research study was reviewed by the William & Mary EDIRC committee. The next step in the approval process was submitting all required documentation to the participating school division. Division, school, and educator identifiers were kept confidential by using assigned pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are found in all transcripts, notes, and analysis in the final dissertation. All data, including a pseudonym key, were stored on a personal, locked computer that was only accessible with a password. Participants were provided a copy of the consent form to read prior to the interview and personally reviewed the consent form with each participant before beginning the interview. Each consent form was kept in a personal, locked desk to maintain confidentiality (Creswell & Poth,

2018). The participants who chose to share their experiences can trust that I carried out the study with their best interests at heart.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The focus of this chapter is on my findings, structured by the four research questions. The Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) five facets are used as the framework for organizing the findings for research questions one and three. The facets informed the interview questions designed to support these research questions and the facets were used as a priori codes. Additional themes and strategies emerged during the coding process. The additional themes are based on a majority of participants including a discussion of that element of trusting relationships with students. There is a clear interdependence of the facets and connections between them. Many of the participants' responses related to more than one facet, so a finding may be located under one primary facet while another is also referenced, or the finding may be located under more than one facet depending on the prevalence across interviews. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Research questions one and two in the corresponding sections below include responses from the teacher participants; and research questions three and four include the principal participants.

Research Question 1

How do teachers perceive their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom? Research question one is based on the teacher participants' perceptions of building trusting relationships with their students in the classroom. I asked each teacher two sets of questions designed to evoke responses illuminating their practices. The first set of questions used wording with alternate definitions of each facet and a second set that directly named and defined each facet.

Definition of Trust

Each participant shared their definitions of trust in the classroom between teachers and students. Many of their definitions detailed elements of the facets, such as consistency and follow-through, and are included in the analysis of each facet below. Erica claimed, students “need to know that you care about them before they’ll do anything for you.” Safety arose as a main theme for their relationships and for Abby, “really above all just safety in my classroom.” Other safety concerns included students feeling comfortable enough in the classroom to take risks and share openly about mistakes or worries without a sense of fear. The importance of trust throughout all aspects of the relationship, including academic and personal, was also dominant. Gillian stated, “Being able to trust your teacher allows them to be a lot more vulnerable with taking chances in their learning.” Ultimately, Abby conveyed her role in the classroom, “If I am not creating a trusting relationship or trusting environment, then they’re not going to be fully into their education, fully into doing assignments.” Participants also addressed a belief in student success. Brianna maintained “very high expectations for my kids” with an emphasis on “mutual respect” and Jessica stated students “have to know that you believe in them.” Gillian summarized trust as “believing in each other, believing in what is said, believing in what is being done, and then also believing that what is said will get done.”

Benevolence

Benevolence, or acting with the student’s best interest at heart, was the most prevalent facet across the teacher interviews. Although there is overlap between the facets, teachers discussed aspects of benevolence through stories of responsibilities or actions almost twice as many times than they discussed honesty, reliability, or competence. Two main themes surfaced: care for the individual and growth mindset. Within the themes, there were also strategies or actions that the teachers shared as ways they have demonstrated benevolence.

Care for the Individual. Each of the nine teachers addressed the importance of caring for the student as an individual as well as valuing the students and what they bring to the classroom. Every student was a valued member of the class. Erica shared, “All of our voices are important, but not one of our voices is more important than another, and that includes me. I’m here to help facilitate and guide and kind of move us through this space and learning together.”

Helping students understand the reasons why things were taking place in the classroom or in their learning was also important to the teachers. When talking with her students, Abby shared with them that relationships are important “because I care about your success...and I want to see you succeed.” Brianna shared a similar sentiment with her students: “I care about your grades because I care about you as a person... as someone outside of just a student in my classroom.” Heather interprets division initiatives for students and considers ways she can implement them while still maintaining a high level of care for her students and their needs. The participants expressed value in providing explicit expectations and why those expectations existed, claiming this approach helped students process what needed to take place for the class to be successful.

Participants have used several ways to demonstrate benevolence in their classrooms. The most predominant strategy for showing benevolence, discussed by all teacher participants, was having conversations with their students to get to know them personally. The conversation could take many forms such as small group meetings during lunch, scheduled one-on-one thirty second chats with individual students, or informal discussions during recess or on the way to the bus for dismissal. Gillian claimed that “being mobile in the classroom and being able to walk by someone and just have a quick conversation” was valuable when getting to know students. One conversation at the beginning of the school year was not sufficient for building high trust relationships.

Other forms of non-verbal communication, such as written response notebooks or notes to the teacher, also strengthened relationships and were more appropriate for certain students compared to others. Regardless of the form of communication, being available to talk about anything, listening with the intention to understand, responding to show active listening, and recalling specific details were all important. Ivy emphasized the importance of “the way I choose words” when talking with students with a positive tone and let them know she cared about them and wanted to know how she could help.

Teachers demonstrated benevolence in several other ways that supported their efforts to build trusting relationships with their students. Lisa said her work “starts at the beginning of the day when I’m always at the door and I’m greeting them. I’m saying good morning and we have a special way to greet each other.” Lisa’s day began with greeting her students, but her evenings and weekends included students as well. She shared that her students enjoyed seeing her outside of school. Lisa and Jessica took time to visit students outside of school to see them perform or play at a sporting event. Brianna made eye contact with her students as they entered the room and as she spoke with them so that students knew she saw them and valued talking to them. Katie joined in recess activities, such as swinging with students, to spend additional time getting to know them. On Fridays Erica’s class participated in an activity that supported students’ self-esteem. Each student wrote his or her name on an index card. Then, the teacher redistributed each card to a different student, who wrote something kind about that student. Cards were returned and each student then got to keep the card with the kind message from someone else. Erica shared that students kept their messages in special places in or around their desks so they could see them at any time.

For the strategies to be successful, the acts of benevolence required consistency over time throughout the school day and year. Consistency is addressed as a theme of reliability but was

critical to teachers' explanation of care for students. Some strategies could be implemented daily, such as greetings at the door, while others would take place weekly, such as informal conversations. In addition to consistency, teachers valued extending goodwill to students as a way to build trust. Ivy stated that "Doing the right thing, every day" and being "consistent with the students" were pillars of the trusting relationship.

Growth Mindset. Maintaining a growth mindset and supporting students doing the same was another way six of the teacher participants acted in their students' best interests. Abby shared that she tells students that her goal is to help them grow and she "talks about growth mindset [with students] and how it's okay to make mistakes as they learn." To do this, teachers shared that they may have needed to alter assignments for students, find intervention opportunities, or make informed changes if a lesson was not as successful as planned. Teachers also took a proactive approach in planning instruction or reteaching either academic skills or social skills. Katie claimed benevolence included using what a teacher has learned about a student through relationship-building to provide support. She suggested, "pull them aside, and [in a] gentle way use your relationship with a student, use what you know, and examples that you know that they'll understand; and try and explain." Brianna stated that she uses her relationships with students "so that I can help them grow and succeed in school and outside of school and in life."

The teachers in this study had various strategies for creating a learning environment that supported a growth mindset. Setting academic and personal goals with students was one way to instill a growth mindset. Brianna asked students to set personal goals and she worked with the students to set academic goals, discussing why that goal was important. Katie used mistakes as learning opportunities and when students wanted to change an incorrect answer, she had them share their revised understanding. Other ideas teachers talked about included giving students

neutral suggestions for making decisions for next steps and time to think about a response to a question posed. Gillian expressed, “anything that’s said or done, it’s got this purpose of this is where we’re going and I’m helping you get there.”

Honesty

Honesty, or being forthright and sharing your thoughts and feelings, can be described using two main themes: authenticity and transparency. Within the themes, there are also strategies or actions that the teachers shared as ways they modeled honesty.

Authenticity. Authenticity, which all nine teachers addressed, appeared in the form of having integrity, being genuine, and taking responsibility for actions and mistakes. Abby stated that she “tried to be authentic by using assignments and books and things that I truly believe in and that I care about.” Jessica said, “I talk to them all the time about integrity. Be a person of your word. I don’t try to be something that I’m not.” She also shared that trust is about “being genuine in what you’re saying and doing.” Ivy shared a similar sentiment about the importance of being herself in front of students, “If you’re not real, they know that.” Making mistakes can occur during the learning process. Teachers modeled taking responsibility for mistakes and how to move forward. Briana believed that if a mistake was “on my part I [will be] owning up to it and taking responsibility for it.” In addition, she told a story about revealing an error to a colleague while a student overheard the conversation. In response the student shared with her, “I heard you in the hallway and you said that you didn’t think you did as good as you could have done.” In response to hearing the teacher’s admission, the student set a personal goal to make improvements with his own effort with schoolwork. Teachers shared that understanding how the teacher’s culture is similar or different from a student’s, answering truthfully, and designing assignments that the teacher believed in were all ways for maintaining authenticity.

Transparency. Transparency on behalf of the teacher while engaging with the students through honesty and sharing in appropriate situations was a way that the participants built trusting relationships. Six teachers shared the importance of honesty through transparency. Abby demonstrated honesty when “I give some of myself to them and really show them who I am so that they can trust me, and I think that comes through conversations... and me answering questions as well.” Teachers shared personal information to relate to students, discovered connections, and also modeled effective forms of communication that students could use. Katie said, “sharing emotions is really important... They’ll use that same sentence stem” she modeled to share their own emotions either with her or other students. Lisa showed pictures of her family and home to her students and valued “being honest with them about myself and my feelings.” The extent to which each teacher shared about themselves with students varied, but maintaining transparency provided opportunities for building relationships.

Openness

Openness, or a willingness to share decision making with students while genuinely listening to consider their perspectives as well as delegating responsibilities, can be discussed with three themes: willingness to change, student choice, and delegating responsibilities. Openness requires the teacher to take in and accept ideas from their students. Teachers used scheduled morning and afternoon meeting times as well as impromptu meetings as needed with the whole class for opportunities to share and discuss a variety of topics. Heather said she was “approachable” and “not going to judge them” as she remained open to students’ thoughts and opinions.

Willingness to Change. A willingness to change was important to all nine teachers and required active listening for input. Active listening included hearing what students had to say, recording or remembering what they shared, and then using that information to enhance their

school experience. Katie used openness to “modify [class expectations] to what [students] think is best... so that they feel like they have a say and conduct that leadership in establishing what they want their classroom family and their classroom home to feel like.” Abby described a time she assigned a math website for students and changed the assignment based on student input. Her students responded to the assignment with a request to work on a different website because they had already completed the required number of minutes on the one assigned. Students preferred to complete a different but reasonable alternate task, and Abby granted the request. Brianna shared how openness applied to lesson planning and making instructional decisions.

I have them write down either different experiences we've done that they've really enjoyed, different activities we've done within learning that they really liked, so that I can pull that engaging piece of what I know that they like—not just me thinking, “oh yeah, they have fun with this.”

Teachers listened with the intent to learn from their students, who provided input that teachers then used to positively impact learning.

Student Choice. Five teachers provided various opportunities for students to make their own choices in the classroom. Students made choices about where to sit in the classroom, which class reward they would like to work toward, or which math activity they would like to do when they complete the assigned work. Gillian and Erica asked students to vote on different choices, such as whether to go outside on a cold day. Lisa’s students voted on the weekly Star Student, who was recognized for positive contributions to the class and granted special leadership roles in the class. Katie liked “students to have a lot of choice in what they do.” Teachers found that providing choices for students throughout the day created opportunities to hear their perspectives.

Delegating Responsibilities. Each of the nine participants discussed their students having class jobs or responsibilities that made the classroom successful. The jobs in each classroom differed in the way they were structured or used. Some teachers chose to assign jobs at different points in the year while others never assigned specific jobs, and some had students volunteer for a role while others had them apply for positions. Rather than assigning jobs to specific students, Abby had students spin a wheel when a student's help was needed to complete a task. Gillian gave students the responsibility for "taking care of their learning materials, taking care of their personal item, and maintaining their work." Beyond tasks, Lisa gave students "time to teach each other instead of me being up at the front of the room, always teaching." Erica shared her orientation toward empowerment, telling students, "I don't do anything for you that you can do for yourself." Regardless of the methods used, students had roles in the classroom that contributed to their own development and the overall success of the class.

Reliability

Reliability, or following through with commitments while maintaining the student's best interest, was discussed in terms of three main themes: consistency, follow-through, and privacy. The teachers shared their commitments to ensuring they demonstrated reliability through both their words and actions. Brianna shared a story about a particular student with whom she was committed to developing a relationship.

I have no relationship with him, so I started. I got this composition notebook, and I just wrote him a letter, and I left it on his desk. And at the end I told him he could write me back if he felt comfortable, but he didn't have to. And for 3 weeks straight that composition book sat on his desk and didn't move. And then one day I was printing something. I came back and it was on my desk, and I opened it and he had shared everything that was going on at home that was affecting his life and, and why he felt like,

“maybe I didn't really want to share that with her at first.” But taking that initiative to say, I want to know more about you so that I can help you in any way that I can. I care about you. It's not just about school, but it's about life also and so that was how we communicated—not face-to-face, but through that notebook for the next 5 weeks of school. And then he started talking to me face-to-face, and I heard his voice.

Teachers also shared how they learned from their mistakes in the classroom when they accidentally did not consistently follow-through with their intentions. When this happened, the classroom became a “snowball of chaos,” according to Jessica. Reliability required teachers to make careful decisions about their own actions and words daily that affected students’ perceptions of trust in their teachers over time.

Consistency. Consistency was an important concept to seven participants in multiple ways across the classrooms. Katie stated, “If you don’t have consistency, they don’t know what to expect.” One form of consistency required teachers to consider their schedules and routines, “so that [students] know exactly what’s happening,” according to Abby. Jessica said that she “maintain[s] a very tight schedule...posted in the classroom so they know what’s coming next.” Consistency in communication of instruction and expectations was another aspect of the trusting relationship. Ivy shared that reliability was “doing the right thing, every day, consistently with the students, whether it’s instruction or things we talked about in the classroom that aren’t academic.” Briana found value in providing consistency to all students so that they feel seen as some may not experience it in their lives outside of school, saying, “You greet your kids at your door...A lot of them don’t have that established greeting with somebody...making eye contact.” Routines and procedures allow students to trust that they understand expectations for each day, allowing their focus to remain on their learning.

Follow-Through. Seven participants contributed to the definition of follow-through as doing what you say you are going to do for or with students, while also holding them accountable for their actions. Teachers gave examples of opportunities to build trust. Erica used her board to list the students' activities for the day, "so then they feel like, okay, I can be prepared" because she is going to follow that list. She also shared the value of follow-through even when students did not see the actions take place immediately, telling students, "I've got you. You might not see it full picture in the moment." When instructing students throughout the day, the teacher may need to provide additional academic support at a later time. Gillian noted the importance of letting the student know, "We're going to talk or work on this later, then actually following-up with them." Jessica believed, "When you say you're going to do something, you do it...I think I showed through my words...and actions." Follow-through with routines and expectations provided students an environment in which they could trust the teacher would do as they said.

Privacy. Privacy was the third theme that emerged from five of the teacher conversations on reliability. Ivy stated that students "do not want to learn from somebody they don't like, or trust, or can depend on." Gillian defined reliability as "keeping the student's trust so if the student tells you something that it stays between you and that student, that it's not something that's broadcast it to the entire class." Heather wanted students to know that "we can have that conversation that they need to have no matter what it's about" and extended student privacy to include other teachers or staff members who work outside of her classroom. She did not share information about students, and she expected her students to maintain the same level of privacy for their peers. Maintaining student privacy created a safe space for students to confide in their teachers, developing their trusting relationships.

Competence

Competence, or the ability to apply a high level of skill to teaching students and being effective doing that, can be described with one main theme from the teacher interviews: knowing the students. The teachers also acknowledged the importance of addressing mistakes, including students in their learning, and continuously growing as educators. Katie shared that while in her student internship she taught a math lesson incorrectly but admitted to her mistake and corrected herself.

I was supposed to be teaching my students area or parameter and we were using Cheez-Its and I don't know what I did, but I taught that lesson completely wrong. So, the next day I came back, and I was like, so friends I messed up and we're going to learn that again. But guess what, you get a round two of Cheez-Its. So, they were happy.

In addition to doing their best with their own competence, teachers valued including students in their learning to increase ownership. Erica shared a story about a lesson she facilitated on Martin Luther King Jr.'s contributions to our lives today. As students asked questions about his life, she helped students create timelines. As students mapped out the events, Erica could see the impact on their learning as they came to conclusions and realizations for themselves.

They were using strategies that we talked about in social studies, they're using literacy, they're using math, and they're making these connections...asking different questions and they can just remember it so much better because they had ownership over putting it together. They're invested in it. They're not just learning the content.

Continuous learning and reflection were ways teachers addressed their own competence. Abby stated, "We have to always be continuing our learning to make sure that we are using the best of research, the best that is out there to give our students what they need and to get them to where they need to be." Teachers shared that books and social media supported their continued

growth. Brianna stated that there “is always something I can be doing to grow and something else that I can be learning because I don’t know everything.”

Competence was the least discussed facet during interviews. Although not directly discussed in the interviews as competence, the high academic and social expectations teachers set for their students, the effort they put into teaching, and the examples they set all demonstrated the teachers’ competence in carrying out their roles.

Knowing the Students. The theme in competence was knowing the students, which all nine teachers believed was critical for student success. Beyond knowing the students was also applying what the teachers knew to further their students’ education, which could include being competent in the available support that the student needed to access. For example, when students confided in Heather about a concern or struggle, she asked students to help determine what they needed by offering school counselor support. Using assessment data helped teachers prepare and plan future instruction. Jessica said, “It’s knowing your kids, knowing and assessing and being able to have a pulse on how they’re getting the information.” Katie used the relationships built through conversation addressed within the benevolence facet and valued including student interests in lessons to make them more “approachable and understandable for students.”

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted schooling beginning in March 2020 affected the ways teachers built relationships with their students when schools closed their doors for in-person learning. Teachers reflected on their practices at the time and how the pandemic influenced how they built relationships when they returned to the classroom. Lisa said virtual learning provided “a glimpse into what actually goes on in their households... I realized the importance of my role in their lives because the things I do for them...they’re not necessarily getting from home.” Teachers shared a preference for building relationships in person. Jessica

stated she preferred having students learning in-person because “it’s their presence, it’s their energy, it’s the feeling, their vibe” that helped them build relationships. The virtual learning experience heightened the importance of trusting relationships with students. Brianna shared that relationship-building “was never something that was really honed in and focused on the importance prior to the pandemic.” Heather found that technology helped her maintain relationships that she built during in-person learning on days when she was not with her students. She recounted how 90% of her students chose to log on to an optional teacher greeting the morning of an asynchronous virtual learning day. Although she was not required to host a morning welcome, she offered it to her students and because of the relationships she had built in the classroom, students wanted more time with their teacher.

Challenges to Fostering Trust

Teachers shared challenges to their efforts to build trusting relationships with their students. Being new to the position or working with a new administrator was a hurdle for some to overcome. As a new teacher, Abby “somehow got all of the kids who were new to our schools and so it was a really rough transition...I didn’t really know how to establish that trust.” Another challenge for teachers was working with the diverse population of students and meeting the variety of needs, such as support for their trauma and food scarcity. Jessica noted, “Education is not always a priority in the home, and you’re worrying about where you’re living...where your next meal is coming from.”

While the teachers shared several ways they positively interacted with students throughout the day or year, they also faced some challenges. Working with diverse populations in an urban setting entailed working with students with needs such as emotional support following trauma or food scarcity, was one barrier to establishing trusting relationships. Another barrier was working in a new environment. Being new to a position or working with a different

principal was challenging for some teachers. Another new challenge was working with students virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although teachers preferred working with students in-person, teachers shared that they gained a new perspective on their roles from living through a period of virtual instruction. Principals noted the measures teachers took to reach all students, such as delivering supply bags during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers came to a deeper appreciation of students’ home experiences and reflected on the value of the array of ways they worked with students while at school.

Summary of Research Question 1

Teachers’ responses relevant to research question one illustrated the value and use of each facet for building trusting relationships with their students. Each teacher discussed all five facets, though the prevalence of each facet varied. While teachers shared more detail about benevolence, openness, and reliability than about honesty and competence, there was evidence of widespread importance of particular aspects of each, which became themes for the findings. Table 5 provides an overview of the themes for the five facets and the number of teachers that specifically addressed each.

Table 4

Number of Teacher Participants who Discussed Themes of Each Facet

Facet	Theme	Participants (n)
Benevolence	Care for the Individual	9
	Growth Mindset	6
Honesty	Authenticity	9
	Transparency	6
Openness	Willingness to Change	9
	Student Choice	5
	Delegating Responsibilities	9
Reliability	Consistency	7
	Follow-Through	7
	Privacy	5
Competence	Knowing the Students	9

The teachers' relationships with their students provided the foundation for the work in all aspects of their roles. The positive interactions along with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and working in an urban school setting created a dynamic learning environment.

Research Question 2

What support do teachers perceive is needed from their principals to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom? In response to Research Question 2, teacher participants shared their thoughts on support from the principals. Teachers responded to questions on ways their principals showed them support as well as ways principals can unintentionally interfere with teachers building trusting relationships with their students. There are two primary themes and two secondary themes presented based on the number of participants that addressed the particular theme.

Supportive Actions

Two primary themes emerged as supportive principal actions: principals assuming goodwill to teachers and fostering relationships with the teacher. The first primary theme is assuming goodwill by the teacher, which seven of the nine teachers discussed. Erica stated, "Assuming goodwill all around is helpful." Overwhelmingly teachers valued their principals demonstrating trust in them by having confidence in their decisions for students. Abby shared, "She trusts me to do what I think is best. She's not forcing anything down my throat like you have to do this to build a relationship or to be a good teacher... letting me be who I need to be." Gillian emphasized that the principal "supports by not being supportive," meaning that there is freedom as a teacher to determine what is in the best interest of the students.

The second primary theme is relationships with the teacher that include providing targeted support based on individual needs, which a different combination of seven teachers discussed. Ivy asserted that it was beneficial to her own relationship with the principal when they

were able to make personal connections about interests or backgrounds. Praise and openness from the principal helped the teachers build relationships with their own students. Abby was reassured to hear from her principal that what she was doing for her students was benefiting them academically or socially. She was able to share the same messages with her students. Lisa also appreciated the principal “understanding we get frustrated sometimes, and we are going to need extra support, and just making sure that she kind of sees both sides- the student and the teacher and doing whatever she can to support us.” Erica and Katie noted the importance of being able to approach their principals for support and being comfortable doing so because of the established trust. For Abby, the two primary themes merged as she found it helpful when principals got “to know teachers so that they also have a trusting relationship with teachers, then they can trust them to do the right things in the classroom.”

Two secondary themes emerged as supportive principal actions: visibility and professional development. These are considered secondary themes because four of the nine teachers discussed visibility and three of the nine discussed professional development. Katie was the only participant that shared about both. Participants shared that visibility supported them because principals had the opportunity to get to know students throughout the building they lead and learn about how each teacher functions in their respective learning environments. By visiting classrooms during morning meeting or to read a book, for instance, the principal learned how to support the teacher’s efforts with students. Brianna said her principal was supportive by “always coming in and checking on [students] and pulling them out for a quick conversation or walking them down in the hallway to take a quick break, coming out at recess and playing with them.” Katie shared that her principal has supported her by helping a student “get back on track” during a lesson while visiting the classroom. By taking these actions with students, teachers believed the school was presenting a unified commitment to relationship-building.

Offering professional development was another supportive action that teachers recognized. Professional development was shared in different forms, based on the individual's or school's needs. Ivy said her principal shared educational articles that would benefit the teachers' professional growth. Lisa said her principal planned trainings on poverty and trauma that gave insight into their students' lives. With the knowledge gained from these training, she developed a deeper understanding of what some of her students may have experienced and strategies she could implement in the classroom, which helped build relationships with the students. Katie shared that she felt comfortable reaching out to her principals for advice.

If we do feel like we're not accomplishing our goals or we're not creating strong enough relationships, there are a lot of experienced teachers around that she can send you to or she can help you talk with, and then they can help you look at a situation from a different angle and see a different way to approach it.

Ineffective Actions

Although most comments on support were based on positive experiences from teachers' principals at the time of the interview, teachers also shared ways principals interfered with their efforts to build relationships with their students. When asked to consider ineffective actions, teachers required more time to consider their experiences. Four teachers provided examples of ineffective actions from principals they had worked with previously. A different teacher gave a counteraction to the supportive actions already shared during the interview. Another teacher was unable to provide any examples of principals' ineffective actions. The existing relationships between principal participants and the teachers they selected to participate in the study may have impacted teachers' reflections on experiences.

Two themes emerged as ineffective actions: suspicion and lack of meaningful communication. Suspicion included principals' micromanaging classroom efforts and teachers

being fearful of seeking the principal's support. Gillian experienced principals who micromanaged various aspects of the day, including dictating the classroom management style the teacher was expected to use or requiring school-wide initiatives that diminished teacher autonomy. Lisa shared a negative experience with a student needing to visit the principal due to a behavior concern "because the kid would just be sent back to our room after five minutes and they would normally have candy in their hand." The teacher was seeking support from the principal, but the principal negated the teachers' efforts to correct a behavior she was unable to manage in the classroom independently.

Clear and meaningful communication about expectations and changes in expectations was important to teachers. A lack of meaningful communication for Abby occurred after inviting the principal into the classroom for support. Despite an expectation for kind communication with students, the principal yelled at a student. The principal's actions harmed Abby's relationship with the student, who trusted her to care for her, as well as Abby's relationship with the principal. Brianna shared her struggle to help students understand expectations and procedures when the principal did not consistently follow them herself. She gave the example of yelling and running down the halls in celebration of a fun event. While the intentions were positive, Brianna was tasked with explaining to students why they could not do the same, straining her role as the teacher ensuring student safety in the halls. Teachers and principals should have conversations if expectations are going to change and they "have to be on the same page," according to Heather. Teachers believed that the most supportive principals had confidence in their abilities to do what is in the best interests of their students, while maintaining availability when needed for special circumstances. Teachers shared their limited experiences with principals who unintentionally interfered with teachers' efforts, though their overall recollections were positive. The teachers'

current principals had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the teachers' efforts to build trusting relationships with students.

Research Question 3

How do principals perceive effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom? Research Question 3 is based on the principal participants' perceptions of effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with their students in the classroom. I asked each principal, Christine, Danielle, and Francis, only one set of questions that directly named and defined each facet. Christine claimed, "Trust is probably the number one thing in productive classrooms." Once the relationship had been established, Danielle stated, "Whether it's on academic instruction or whether it's behavioral instruction, they're listening because they know that teacher has a heart for them." The teacher and student relationship exists for the purpose of academic growth, but the personal relationship demonstrates care as well as respect for the individual and their beliefs.

Benevolence

The principals shared that valuing the student and demonstrating care are important for teachers building trusting relationships with students when acting with the student's best interest at heart. Christine described benevolence as "showing the student that you're interested, and you care about them." Valuing the student was found in the support teachers provided students. This support took many different forms, such as a referral to the guidance counselor or principal or setting up a mentor relationship. Getting to know students through their academic efforts or conversation helped teachers build relationships. Danielle saw success with relationships between teachers and students required "small steps at the beginning [of the year] to lay the foundation." Francis valued when a teacher "takes those moments to have conversations with kids when they need to talk to somebody; they aren't afraid, and the kids aren't afraid to answer

a question.” Teachers demonstrated care by giving their time, such as eating their lunch with students, delivering supplies to students on the weekend, or finding extracurricular programs for students to join.

Honesty

Principals perceived teachers who shared personal information, admitted when they made mistakes, and modeled expectations as demonstrating honesty. Francis shared that she has witnessed teachers having conversations with students where the teacher and student have created a relationship that allows both to be honest with each other. Christine summarized honesty this way:

If you need to apologize for something you have to because kids have to see you as a human being... [Honesty] is displayed every day because a lot of time we’re working on those social emotional pieces with kids... we’re also teaching kids to be able to express themselves.

Francis claimed, “[you] have to teach kids to be honest, and you have to explain what honesty is, and even model it and show it and talk about it.” Danielle shared a similar value in teaching and re-teaching concepts such as honesty as needed. Providing students information and being honest with them only yielded greater opportunities for students to develop relationships with their teachers.

Openness

Listening, delegating responsibilities, and providing student choice were three main themes principals discussed. Danielle summarized openness in terms of effective teaching:

The smallest thing that we can do is listen to kids. And so, when I say listen it could be listen to the choice that that student is making, giving them room to make mistakes, have

choices in their learning. All of that is listening to the desire for how that student wants to learn.

According to two of the principals, teachers created opportunities for students to share and discuss any issues during morning meeting, lunch bunch gatherings, or individual student conferences. Francis believed in teachers “giving [students] an opportunity to show or demonstrate that they can be trusted.” Teachers do this by assigning class jobs or leadership roles. Christine saw teachers assigning responsibilities, such as daily jobs for students or peer tutoring opportunities “throughout [the] classroom to let the kids do the heavy lifting and learning rather than just the teacher doing that.” Principals highlighted teachers who sought input from their students and listened with intention to maintain open lines of communication.

Reliability

Consistency and follow-through were the two main themes for reliability. Danielle shared that reliability included being available for all students and “teachers like that, that are always willing to go above and beyond for kids- that’s huge.” Principals shared the importance of being at work on time and maintaining a consistent daily schedule so students can rely on that stability. Teachers discussed reliability as having consistent and predictable routines and expectations as well as predictable actions when interacting with students. Francis claimed that without consistency, there was “discombobulation and the kids are never sure which way they should go.” Follow-through with lesson planning, lesson delivery, and feedback to the student was vital to successful relationships. Christine stated, “Teachers have to follow-through with what they say, what they promise, what they tell kids that they’re going to do to keep their trust.” Principals shared the importance of maintaining specific characteristics of reliability to support teachers’ efforts to build relationships.

Competence

Principals highlighted the importance of knowing students' various characteristics and the range of students that were in the classroom. Christine said, "I think it's all about knowing your kids and what instruction looks like, particularly in terms of meeting their needs, and not just emotional needs, not just academic needs, the whole child." Teachers should also know where to find support for students and how to provide enrichment opportunities that may go beyond the core curriculum. Danielle had a teacher who built a greenhouse in the classroom as a way to teach science standards, but the learning extended beyond the lesson. Students were able to continue learning through observation and real-life experiences with the process of the plant's life cycle because the teacher understood the curriculum and knew how to reach the students. Francis shared, "The competent staff who know their craft, know their craft, know their kids, who built those relationships... They have high standards, high expectations." Competence required teachers to know how to meet the needs of their students in order to support their overall success at school.

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Principals were not specifically interviewed about the COVID-19 pandemic related to relationships between teachers and students. While discussing the efforts teachers make to meet students' needs, however, Danielle shared a story about one teacher who exceeded expectations during the period of time when students were beginning to return to school once they reopened.

She was a first-grade teacher. And then we had to condense the classes last year and we had to shift because there wasn't a need for that first-grade teacher so she had to teach second. And she was like..., "Okay, I'll do it." And then maybe within a couple of weeks we were like, "Oh, and guess what? The class is so large that we have to put you in the gym." And so, she went into the gym... She still has a smile on her face, like this has not

rocked her world, and just peacefully did everything that we asked her to do. And I will never forget that, and she had, maybe, I want to say 23, 24, kids. During COVID in the gym and the acoustics are bad, but she made it work. She stayed and she, you know, set the whole gym up... It was just amazing. And every day this woman came in with a smile, and she was ready to go. I mean, one of the most reliable teachers, ever. And she's still here.

The three principal participants reflected on their years as administrators to consider each of the five facets and how they relate to teachers and their efforts to build trusting relationships with students. Participants valued teachers who consistently maintain high expectations for themselves and for their students. Table 5 below provides an overview of the themes for the five facets and the number of principals that specifically addressed each.

Table 5

Number of Principal Participants that Discussed Themes of Each Facet

Facet	Theme	Participants (n)
Benevolence	Value the Student	3
	Demonstrate Care	3
Honesty	Share Information	2
	Admit Mistakes	2
	Model	3
Openness	Listen	3
	Student Choice	3
	Delegate Responsibilities	3
Reliability	Consistency	2
	Follow-Through	2
Competence	Know the Students	3

Principals spend limited amounts of time in each classroom but gain perspective of the daily work teachers do in their schools by visiting classrooms, walking through the halls, and having conversations with the teachers and students. Each principal's role includes many

different tasks and expectations though supporting teachers as they build relationships is critical to student and teacher success.

Research Question 4

How do principals perceive their roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom? Principals described two main ways they supported teachers' efforts to build trusting relationships with students: develop relationships with teachers and develop their own relationships with students. There were several ways principals developed their relationships with teachers. Conversations with teachers were critical for getting to know teachers and providing timely support. Christine held Friday check-in meetings to ask questions and provide feedback or advice. She also started the practice of texting three teachers per day to let them know she was thinking of them. Francis brought teachers together for input on decisions that impacted both staff and students as often as possible when time allowed for shared decision-making practices. Other supportive efforts included allowing teachers autonomy, conducting classroom visits without a formal observation, giving teachers time to complete tasks, and being approachable and consistent. Francis maintained an open-door policy for her teachers to visit her office as needed to seek support or share ideas. Each of the three teachers from Francis's school verbalized a similar sentiment about feeling welcome in her office. Heather felt comfortable approaching Francis "knowing that her door was always open." As a professional development opportunity, Danielle provided time for lead teachers to facilitate a professional session on building relationships with students. Christine suggested that principals should "stay in your lane, especially in the early stages of relationship building."

It is important to allow teachers to build relationships with their students while the principal is also building them with students. Francis said she was "in and out of the classrooms all the time, so you can hear what's going on; you can see what's going on." Christine checked on

students at various grade levels frequently “making sure they’re on track.” Danielle held town hall meetings and book studies with students to get to know students and support teachers’ efforts to build trusting relationships simultaneously.

In addition to supporting teachers’ efforts to build relationships, these three principals were also faced with supporting teachers as they navigated challenges associated with teaching an urban school population. Only principals were asked how the urban setting impacted their schools. The principals noted that trauma, fear, and past experiences with schools may impact a teacher’s efforts to build relationships. Christine stated, “In an urban school setting, kids and families come in and they automatically may not come from a place of trust, maybe based on some trauma that they’ve experienced, maybe based on... the hierarchy of needs.” Danielle recalled that at one school “it took everything to get teachers not to focus on the part that we don’t have control over, which is when they go home.” Principals supported their teachers in a variety of ways so that the teachers could develop the trusting relationships their students need.

Summary of Findings

Brianna emphasized her beliefs about trust in her classroom when she stated, “I’m very adamant that building relationships is a huge game changer. And not just them as people, but also in their academics. I think everything is intertwined and related within that.” All 12 participants have demonstrated characteristics and actions associated with the five facets of trust. Benevolence was discussed by all participants with several examples and rich stories that provided context to the facet while competence was the least prominent facet across the interviews. Both teachers and principals shared ways that principals provide support. In addition, teachers shared ways principals, unintentionally undermined teachers’ trusting relationships with their students. The interviews questions were designed to invite participants to recall and share important stories of their experiences that captured their efforts as teachers to build trusting

relationships with students or as principals who provide support. The interdependence of the facets as well as the potential to build upon multiple facets with one action demonstrated the broad reach trust has across teachers' responsibilities and actions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to uncover teachers' perceived responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom and their principals' roles in supporting them. This chapter includes a summary of the major findings from Chapter 4 and a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature in Chapter 2. Also provided are implications for policy and practice as well as recommendations for future research with consideration for the delimitations and limitations of this study.

Summary of Major Findings

Many of the major findings discussed in this section support the research on trust, and specifically, the five facets of trust. The results stemmed from an analysis of nine teachers from the three schools and the principals from those three schools. Interview data between schools were analyzed to discern differences among leaders. There were no differentiable data from the separate schools. The findings are based on similarities among teachers and among principals across each of the schools as educator groups rather than groups of educators by school. Principals' experiences with teachers building trusting relationships mirrored many of the same as the teachers' experiences. The teacher participants built trusting relationships with their students in similar ways as their principals did with them.

Teacher-Student Trust

Research Question 1 asked teachers to explore their perceptions of their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students; Research Question 3 asked principals to share their perceptions of effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with

students in the classroom. The five facets of trust are used as an organizational framework for this section. In addition to the normal dynamics of building trust with students, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unusual challenges to the teacher's role in building trusting relationships.

Benevolence was important to teachers in terms of respect for the individual student and maintaining a growth mindset. Respect was demonstrated through valuing individual students' contributions to the classroom and helping students understand why decisions were made the way they were. Honesty, as evidenced through authenticity and transparency, strengthened relationships with students. The trustworthy teachers maintained integrity and taking responsibility for their own actions. Openness on the part of teachers included a willingness to make changes to their classroom practices based on student input, allowing for student choice, and delegating responsibilities. A willingness to change included hearing what students had to say, recording what they shared, and enhancing the students' education with that information. When the participating teachers discussed reliability, it was discussed in terms of consistency, follow-through, and privacy. None of the participants discussed student performance on assessments as a means of describing competence; rather, the focus was on continuous learning and knowing students as individuals in order to make the best decision for them.

Principal Supports

Research Question 2 asked teachers to consider their perceptions of what is needed from their principals to support their efforts to build trusting relationships with students. The teacher participants shared supportive actions they had experienced while working with principals that encouraged trusting relationships with their students. Supportive actions included demonstrating trust by allowing teachers to make decisions for their classrooms and maintaining confidence that those decisions would be in the best interest of their students. Additionally, when principals

built relationships with the teachers as individuals, teachers noted this as supportive. Visibility and planning professional development were also seen as supportive actions.

When the teachers shared principals' actions that impeded their efforts to build relationships, they noted that while some of their stories involved their current principals, many related to former principals. Ineffective actions included the principal lacking trust in the teacher to make decisions for students as well as a lack of meaningful communication.

Research Question 4 asked principals to examine their perceptions of their own roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom. The principal participants described developing relationships with teachers while allowing autonomy, being approachable and consistent, visiting classrooms, and providing time to complete tasks as supportive actions. Principals also shared the value of building their own relationships with students through classroom visits, walks with individual students, and town hall meetings. While building relationships with teachers and students, principals also provide support with navigating the challenges they faced in the urban schools they served, including student and family trauma, fear, and past negative experiences with education that can impact teachers building relationships.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings from Chapter 4, the following conclusions were drawn. The definition of trust based on the five facets of trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) were evident throughout the trusting relationships explored in this study. In addition, the other authors' definitions of trust included in Chapter 2 can be seen across the interviews. Hurley's (2006) factors of trust were evident in the interview data. Risk tolerance was found in the teachers' openness and willingness to trust students with choices in their learning or responsibilities in the classroom and a student's willingness to share ideas or suggest

changes. Security was evident in the conversations between teachers and students about personal or academic concerns that were kept confidential. An alignment of interests was cultivated when teachers and students shared personal stories to build connections and principals did the same with teachers. A benevolent concern was evident across all interviews through the actions participants took to ensure they met the needs of teachers and students. Capability was found in the teacher's or principal's ability to address student needs by identifying specific supports for progress. Routines, procedures, and traditions met the need for predictability. Honesty, and more specifically the theme of authenticity provided data on integrity and the value placed on teachers and principals committing to what they promised. Finally, communication played a role in both honesty and openness as teachers and principals shared expectations and listened as a way to gather information that could be used to provide meaningful support.

Teachers and the trusting relationships with their students were the focus of the interviews. Principals were not selected for this study based on the degree of success in building trusting relationships with their teachers; however, the teachers highlighted many ways the principals developed trusting relationships with the teachers. The findings are aligned with Tschannen-Moran's (2014) conclusion that benevolence is the most common facet. When discussing trusting relationships during the interview, participants may have considered their own definitions of trust that may have been characteristic of this specific facet. The least prevalent facet was competence, suggesting the teachers' focus was on the interactions with students rather than how their own capabilities impacted their relationships with students. The teacher participants built trusting relationships with their students in parallel fashion to the ways their principals did with them. Teachers shared how the principals spent time developing relationships with them through conversations, checking-in throughout the day, sharing information, and setting an example.

Teachers and Students

The five facets of trust were present in the ways teachers approached building trusting relationships with their students in the classroom. Strong relationships reach beyond the classroom to support students' lifelong social skills (Jensen, 2009; Stronge, 2010). When teachers spoke about setting goals and addressing social or emotional needs, they were addressing long-term aspects of success for their students. These teachers had an understanding of students' desires to have positive relationships and an "orientation toward commitment" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 174). Several teachers addressed the human element that has to be considered when working with students. Students are individuals with interests and needs that can vary from one child to the next.

Regardless of the grade levels they taught or the number of years they had been in education, which spanned from 2–27 years, the data were consistent across teachers of all levels. Teachers discussed taking responsibility for their actions, apologizing for their mistakes, and sharing personal information. The teachers described openness in terms of releasing control and decision-making power to students through choice and roles in the classroom. Teachers also made time to listen to students as they shared both personal information as well as instructional ideas. Reliability through consistency and predictability with structures and actions were important to teachers and present in the research, as were providing the appropriate instruction and addressing learning needs through intervention or counseling support (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Teaching is a reciprocal process. In addition to teachers trusting students to make decisions and hold leadership roles in the classroom, Tschannen-Moran's (2014) research included struggles with developing trusting relationships with students who demonstrate particular characteristics including disrespectful, negative, or impulsive behavior. In her study,

Tschannen-Moran (2014) noted that teachers found forgiveness of students easier than forgiveness of adults. Teachers in this current study were not specifically asked to consider students they would not trust, and they did not share stories about students with these characteristics. While some teachers did share stories about students who were challenging to build relationships with, each story was accompanied by a positive attitude about the process of working with the student to address needs. Russell et al. (2016) also listed actions from students that included complying with rules. None of the twelve participants shared characteristics from the research related to disrespect, negativity, impulse, or compliance.

Teachers shared numerous strategies for building and maintaining trusting relationships with their students. Many of them are similar to those presented in the research and listed in Chapter 2. Other strategies go beyond those currently available to teachers in the research. Below are the strategies shared by teachers that are either similar to or beyond the research. The strategies are organized by facet, and some are listed more than once as the strategies often support multiple facets simultaneously.

The strategies that teachers and principals shared as actions demonstrating benevolence are found below in Table 6. The previous research list as well as the findings in this study are considerably longer than the strategy lists for any of the other facets. Participants repeatedly shared strategies for benevolence, both when asked specifically to share about the facet as well as when they shared their definitions of trust or expounding upon examples of the other four facets. The strategies show a focus on maintaining a safe and caring relationship that can thrive in the learning environment, designed in the student's best interest.

Table 6*Strategies to Develop Benevolence*

Previous Research	Findings in This Study
Build relationships into lesson (Franklin, 2020)	Uninterrupted one-on-one time to talk
Design intentional structure vs. anti-structure (Kasun, 2013)	Growth mindset, social-emotional lessons Intentional assignments
Establish safe environment (Russell et al., 2016)	Attend student events outside of school Create safe space to be individuals, take risks
Provide help and support (Russell et al., 2016)	Connect learning to real-life
Smile and greet students (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Cook et al., 2018; Marzano, 2007)	Intentional seating arrangements Lunch with the teacher
Learn students' names (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Marzano, 2007)	Play at recess with students Give students contact information
Get to know the students and listen (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Russell et al., 2016)	Daily greeting at the door Maintain traditions
Show affection and care (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Russell et al., 2016)	Make eye contact when culturally appropriate Write notes to students
Project sense of emotional objectivity (Marzano, 2007)	Provide neutral suggestions to resolve conflict Academic and personal goal setting

Honesty was the least represented facet in the previous research, but this study did produce additional strategies for teachers to consider using in their own classrooms as presented in Table 7. Teachers demonstrated honesty by being authentic and true to themselves as well as showing integrity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The class vision and group agreements (Hart & Hodson, 2008) align with Tschannen-Moran's definition of honesty that includes honoring

agreements while the use of storytelling (Franklin, 2020; Turner, 2018; Tinckler, 2017) aligns with Tschannen-Moran’s (2014) being true to oneself and telling the truth.

Table 7

Strategies to Develop Honesty

Previous Research	Findings in This Study
Develop class vision and group agreements (Hart & Hodson, 2008)	Share personal stories
Use storytelling (Franklin, 2020; Tinckler, 2017; Turner, 2018)	Hold daily morning meeting
	Answer questions truthfully
	Take responsibility and admit mistakes
	Share emotions
	Explain “why” behind decisions
	Design class expectations
	Show personal pictures of family or hobby
	Use humor

Openness involves the teacher welcoming the opinions of students, designing the classroom to offer student choice, and maintaining open lines of communication. The findings in this study have contributed to the list of available strategies in Table 8 for teachers to consider putting in place. There are a variety of different ways to implement the strategies and should include a consideration of the other four facets.

Table 8

Strategies to Develop Openness

Previous Research	Findings in This Study
Design intentional structure vs. anti-structure (Kasun, 2013)	Offer flexible seating options
Alternate seating options (Stapp, 2018)	Remember information shared to include in lessons
Provide choice (Russell et al., 2016)	Classroom jobs
Get to know the students and listen (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Russell et al., 2016)	Explain why
	Ask for feedback
	Morning meeting
	Make opportunities for voting
	One-on-one conversations
	Provide choice when possible

The strategies presented in Table 9 provide options that could be used to support efforts of developing the prominent themes of reliability. These strategies invite the teacher to plan and act intentionally and review expectations with students as ways to establish trust and create a consistent learning environment.

Table 9

Strategies to Develop Reliability

Previous Research	Findings in This Study
Consistently enforce consequences (Marzano, 2007)	Put one to two ideas in place at a time
Design intentional structure vs. anti-structure (Kasun, 2013)	Maintain clear and consistent communication Reinforce consistent routines
Establish safe environment (Russell et al., 2016)	Provide a visual schedule to follow Keep information confidential
Be consistent, predictable, reliable, fair (Russell et al., 2016)	Avoid public shaming
Provide help and support (Russell et al., 2016)	Hold students accountable Review expectations at transitions

The strategies presented in Table 10 encompass a wide range of knowledge and skills that are important for establishing trust with students. An understanding of the other four facets and their roles in trusting relationships is evident in the strategies for demonstrating competence. In addition, instructional actions are represented as actions that demonstrate competence.

Table 10*Strategies to Develop Competence*

Previous Research	Findings in This Study
Build relationships into lesson (Franklin, 2020)	Check for understanding
Design intentional structure vs. anti-structure (Kasun, 2013)	Practice self-reflection Prepare in advance for difficult conversations
Establish safe environment (Russell et al., 2016)	Implement a social emotional curriculum Be prepared
Provide help and support (Russell et al., 2016)	Have a back-up plan for lessons
Learn students' names (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Marzano, 2007)	Know your students Relate lessons to interests
Get to know the students and listen (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Russell et al., 2016)	Respect all cultures Listen for input
Show affection and care (Franklin, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Russell et al., 2016)	

The strategies teachers used to build relationships with their students were presented through stories and examples of their experiences. Participants provided context for each strategy and used them strategically over time as needed and as appropriate to meet the needs of their students. Many strategies mirrored those found in the research cited, but teachers' input has provided a more extensive list of options.

Principals and Teachers

Principal support for teachers is an aspect of benevolence and was the focus of Research Questions 2 and 4. Kirtman's (2013) effective leader competencies included using clear communication and expectations to build trust while developing, modeling, and monitoring

trustworthy actions. Teachers discussed supportive principal actions that mirrored Kirtman's (2013) list of competencies. Teachers valued seeing their principals interact with students and modeling relationship building both with the students and with the teachers. Communication of expectations as well as changes to those expectations was important to teachers. Monitoring trustworthy actions was evident in the ways principals held follow-up conversations with teachers concerning students or teacher accountability. The Kouzes and Posner (2017) characteristics of leader trust, honest, competent, and truthful were shared during the interviews as they were evident across the facets of trust.

Benevolence can appear as support for teachers and respectful treatment of teachers and as the person with the higher level of power, the principal is responsible for maintaining the relationship (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). All of the ways teachers shared that their principals supported them demonstrated benevolence on behalf of the principals. Check-ins with teachers, making personal connections, and providing adequate time for teachers to complete tasks show support through benevolence. Bukko et al. (2021) found similar results in their study on principal practices that build trust. The participants identified an individual relationship with the principal and trust from the principal as a professional as important factors of a trusting relationship, which were the two leading themes for principal support in this study.

While benevolence was the most prevalent facet in the supportive relationships, each of the other four facets played an important role in principal support for teachers. Tschannen-Moran (2014) includes authenticity and keeping promises in the definition for honesty, which teachers did as well when describing their principals. Teachers described their principals giving them autonomy to make decisions for their students and then maintained that level of trust as the teachers carried out the decisions. Bukko et al. (2021) stated in one teacher recommendation that "the principal should show integrity by acting in ways that reflect their words" (p. 67).

Teachers shared multiple ways their principals maintained openness in an effort to provide support with building trusting relationships. Being approachable, sharing ideas, and using shared decision-making practices were all ways the principals and teachers shared that they function in the school setting, which directly corresponds to Tschannen-Moran's (2014) research on openness. Bukko et al. (2021) included teacher participants who considered offering suggestions important. A willingness to change based on feedback requires a work environment with a principal who supports teacher autonomy and trusts that teachers make appropriate decisions that are in the best interest of students. The teacher participants in this study shared that they do feel confident that they can make decisions that their principals will support.

Consistency and follow-through were key themes when teachers addressed their own reliability with students in the classroom and when principals shared about teacher reliability. Despite the high value placed on these themes in other areas of the study and in the literature, they were not predominant when teachers discussed principal support. Perhaps teachers considered these actions were commonplace for their principals or assumed other responsibilities took precedence as supportive actions.

Competence as the principal is an important facet when considering support for teachers. Holding teachers accountable for high expectations was important to principals, which aligns with research from Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), who noted that trustworthy principals' follow-through on consequences and avoid reducing transparency as a way to minimize conflict. One principal also shared that she takes teacher arrival times seriously and is committed to upholding the expectations for all by addressing concerns with individual teachers. Teachers noted that visibility was a valuable way to learn how teachers build relationships with their students and gain awareness of what is taking place throughout the building, which compliments the research by Tschannen-Moran (2014). Principals stated that they build relationships with

students as a way to support teachers. The principals' efforts demonstrated competence as they handled difficult situations and set an example for relationship-building for teachers. Modeling is a way for principals to set the tone for the school's culture (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Another form of competence that both teachers and principals addressed was the principals' work to address challenges of the urban school. Teachers noted professional development as one support that they appreciated from principals. Identifying a need and determining an appropriate response is a form of problem solving to help teachers care for their students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The focus of this section is on recommendations for policy and practice based on the findings of the study. Benevolence, openness, and reliability were the three most commonly addressed facets during the interviews. Conversations in various forms was the most common strategy for building trust with students. Table 11 provides an overview of the four recommendations based on findings and the literature from Chapter 2 that supports the approach.

Table 11*Recommendations for Policy and Practice*

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Benevolence as the most common facet and teachers value relevant professional development	Develop other facets with teachers building from benevolence	Bukko et al., 2021; Hart & Hodson, 2008; Kirtman, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014
High importance placed on conversations between teachers and students	Plan opportunities to hold conversations	Kirtman, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014
Willingness to change based on student feedback requires risk	Establish work environment that values autonomy, trust in teacher professionalism	Hurley, 2006; Kirtman, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014
Consistency and follow-through support trust through the facet of reliability	Create building expectations and routines	Tschannen-Moran, 2014

Benevolence

Because benevolence was the most common facet that participants discussed and due to the interdependence of benevolence with the other four facets, there is an opportunity to capitalize on benevolence to provide support for growth with the others. Although the aspects of benevolence may have been most accessible to teachers during the interviews, each facet is important in a trusting relationship. For example, without competence there is no true instruction in the student’s best interest because the teacher does not know either the content of the lesson or how to teach the lesson appropriately.

Teacher support includes providing learning opportunities to build professional capacity; participants noted that they value professional development that is directly related to the students they teach. Because trusting relationships are directly related to teachers and their students, I

recommend a workshop approach for support using benevolence as the starting point for teachers who are ready to build upon the care they have for their students. Using Hunzicker's (2010) checklist for effective professional development, the workshop should be supportive, job-embedded, instructional-focused, collaborative, and ongoing. The recommended approach meets each of these criteria.

The format of each workshop should revolve around the work teachers are currently doing as a means for collective growth and support. First, principals should recognize teachers' efforts to build trusting relationships with students using each facet in a five-part professional development series that promotes continuous and future growth (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), beginning with benevolence and an understanding of the interdependence of facets. Participants shared that they appreciated being verbally recognized for the positive work they were doing for and with students. Notable accomplishments may be gathered through a survey to teachers about actions in their classrooms, visits to the classrooms, or a combination of both. Teachers valued principal visibility within their classrooms as a way to get to know teachers' classroom expectations and how they are building relationships. While visits to the classroom were meaningful as a way principals gathered information, both principal and teacher participants shared that there are barriers to regularly spending time in classrooms. Recognizing those barriers, a survey to teachers would show value for those whose actions were not recognized through classroom visits.

Showing appreciation is an element of benevolence, which will in turn support principals with building trusting relationships with teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Modeling the practices associated with each facet, either by the principal or recognized teachers, will also support teachers' growth (Kirtman, 2013). Second, principals should provide the recognized teachers' opportunities to share, co-teach, or collaborate with other teachers so they can learn

from each other as they grow professionally (Bukko et al., 2021). One teacher shared that she enjoyed learning from new skills or ideas from colleagues. Another shared that the principal had been a great source for identifying a colleague to contact for support.

The value of the workshop will be found in the growth and development of teachers invested in the opportunities provided. It is important that teachers have an established commitment of care as the foundation for the workshop. For teachers who are not prepared for this step, it is critical that the principal provide targeted support as needed for the individual teacher to reach a level of care for the students.

New teachers may take on a teaching position with different understandings of how to build relationships with students based on varying higher education programs or exposure to models. One teacher shared how she struggled with student relationships her first year because she lacked the knowledge of how to establish trust with her students. The workshop should be repeated yearly to continuously highlight ways teachers are successfully building relationships. This will support new teachers by providing ongoing, job-embedded training. Teachers at every level of experience or grade level can add value to the conversation because years of experience did not dictate participants' level of engagement in building trusting relationships with their students. In addition to schools providing professional development, the district should provide a pre-service training on the value of building trusting relationships with students from the beginning of the year and how to do so from the first day of school. Wong et al. (2012) highlight the importance of establishing procedures with consistency from the first week of school, which coincides with the teachers' and principals' stories about consistency and follow-through. This recommendation focuses on helping teachers develop their skills to build trusting relationships and adopt a proactive approach to student success at school (Hart & Hodson, 2008).

Conversations

Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly stated the importance of teachers' hosting conversations with students as a means to get to know them, assess them, and set goals with them. Because talking and listening were such a high priority for teachers and principals, I recommend a school-wide commitment to plan opportunities for the conversations to take place. Collective teacher efficacy will positively affect efforts to implement school improvement strategies, communicating high expectations, maintaining a focus on academic success, and students' emotional engagement (Donohoo, 2018). A building-level initiative with expectations for all teachers would support an effort to ensure all students have access to the opportunity to build trusting relationships with their teachers. To make this a successful endeavor, the principal should listen to teachers.

Teachers expressed appreciation for opportunities to voice their ideas on decisions being made for their students or for themselves. One principal brought groups of teachers together when decisions needed to be made for students or for teachers, as long as there was a reasonable amount of time to gather the valued input. Another principal invited lead teachers to plan a professional development session on building relationships with students. Principals should consider practicing shared decision making to further trust-building efforts through conversations across the school. By gathering input and distributing leadership to the teachers implementing the plan, the principal would be practicing openness (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), again modeling for teachers how to establish relationships (Kirtman, 2013). To maximize efforts of maintaining true openness, it will be critical that principals are trained in shared decision-making practices. For example, the Hoy and Tarter model of decision-making provides a guide for determining who would make an impactful contribution to the process (Hoy & Tarter, 2008).

Informal conversations could be planned by the teacher team for specific times during the school day that fit within the class schedule. Some planned times could include conversations at lunch while the other students eat in the cafeteria, walking with the line leader or caboose as the class walks to recess, or check-ins at student desks while the class packs their bookbags for dismissal. The decision-making team would set a minimum number of interactions for teachers to include throughout the day or week and provide ideas for implementation. It would be important for the team to consider how teachers will maintain appropriate levels of supervision and care for the students not meeting with the teacher. Because teachers are currently having small group and individual conversations with students, their voices during problem-solving would be critical. Both teachers and principals discussed the importance of teacher autonomy. The decision-making team would set the minimum number of conversations, but each teacher would determine how and when the conversations would take place. The initiative would be a commitment to building and maintaining relationships with students.

Openness

A willingness to change based on student feedback requires risk on the teachers' part was an important theme from the teacher interviews that related to openness. Teachers must trust their principals will support their decisions. In turn, principals must trust that the teachers are making professional decisions based on the best interests of their students. The teacher participants shared stories about making choices based on students' needs. Students shared concerns with their teachers and the teachers adjusted requirements or expectations based on the information students provided. Some decisions required immediate action, while others could wait while teachers gathered student or principal input. Confidence to make decisions or approach the principal requires openness from the teacher as well as principal (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

All teachers that shared stories about decision-making in the study were comfortable handling those decisions because of the trust from their principals. Again, both teachers and principals discussed the importance of teacher autonomy. I recommend that principals establish a work environment that values autonomy with a high tolerance for risk (Hurley, 2006). Principals should maintain an open-door policy for teachers that choose to share new ideas and seek feedback, then follow-up with teachers after they implement the idea. One principal shared that she felt confident in the success of her open-door policy and her appreciation for risks teachers take for students; and the three teachers from her school shared the same sentiment. For teachers who are making daily decisions within their classrooms, visibility and recognition is going to be key to ensure the principal is aware of what is taking place in the classroom while maintaining teacher autonomy. A teacher claimed that because the principal had seen the way she interacts with students, she felt the principal's trust in her to make sound decisions for students. It is the principal's responsibility to support teachers as they teach students and honest feedback on performance is critical to success across the building (Kirtman, 2013). Being approachable and valuing professionalism was key to principal-teacher trust.

Reliability

Consistency and follow-through were important themes of reliability for all participants. I recommend principals and teachers again practice shared decision making to support success in these main themes of reliability. This continued practice of shared decision making will enhance the conversations that support teachers' and students' best interests (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) in an effort to streamline initiatives across the school. This process will support teachers' efforts to implement the initiatives consistently, whether they are school-based or district-based. Teachers expressed difficulty with consistently implementing initiatives when the initiatives themselves were inconsistent from classroom to school to district or an initiative lacked a solid plan for

implementation. Consistency, which is a tenet of positive behavioral interventions and supports found in many schools, provides students a structure upon which they can depend, or trust (Leach & Helf, 2016). In addition, the principal should protect daily schedules in the classroom as a way to allow teachers time to follow-through with routines and procedures. Buffering teachers from outside disruptions and setting the example for follow-through are ways principals demonstrate competence and reliability for teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Each of the four recommendations for policy and practice reflect the importance participants placed on these specific attributes of trusting relationships with students.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several opportunities for continued research on the topic of trusting relationships in the classroom. The delimitations and limitations of this study are opportunities for extensions of this study for future research. There are ways to expand the study conducted by modifying the four research questions to explore additional aspects of trust-fostering behaviors in schools. General education teachers and principals were the only participants considered in this study. Other teacher groups, such as special education or talented and gifted teachers, or other school leaders, such as assistant principals or grade level lead teachers, could be considered for participation. Their experiences may offer a different perspective or level of insight on the topic. Another extension of this study would include consideration for relationships with families in addition to students to understand the role students' families play in the classroom relationships.

Revisions to the methodology would also provide several options for addressing the topic in an alternate way. The study is designed as qualitative and phenomenological. An ethnographic study where the researcher immerses themselves in a classroom or school would provide a deeper understanding of what teachers and principals do from an observer's perspective rather than the self-reported stories. A comparative study of an urban school, suburban, and rural

school would provide an understanding of the differences that do or do not exist in trusting classrooms between the three types of settings. A second comparative study between elementary and secondary teachers would provide insight on the differences and similarities in the perceptions of each.

Other forms of qualitative data collection would also support the body of knowledge on trust between teachers and students in the classroom. The researcher could include observations either by the principal or researcher with a defined observation instrument. Other forms of data collection could include participants' journaling from the beginning of the school year about their integrations of the five facets. Additional information is needed on relationship building in the virtual learning environment, so a study with a focus on such would broaden understanding of the topic. Only principals were provided an advanced copy of the five facets addressed in the interview. If the researcher provided teachers with an advanced copy of the facets and their definitions, the participants may be able to recall or share more examples pertaining specifically to each facet. Finally, an action research study on the professional development sessions from recommendation one would provide insight into the success or opportunities for growth to consider for future action steps.

The use of qualitative data limits the scope of the study and therefore understanding of the topic. A quantitative analysis of teachers' responsibilities and actions to build trusting relationships and principals' supportive actions across a time period in the school is one option. Another quantitative study could include a comparison of academic achievement in high-trust classrooms versus low-trust classrooms from the beginning to end of the school year. Additionally, an intervention study that requires participants to take a course on fostering trusting relationships with student, with a pre and post-test to understand their perceptions would support a professional development program in K-12 schools and higher education programs.

Summary

Teachers work with students daily to provide an education that meets their needs and offers the experiences necessary to develop their skills. A trusting relationship between student and teacher is the foundation for such work to successfully occur. Principals support teachers' efforts to foster relationships through modeling and honoring their own trusting relationships with teachers. This phenomenological study examined how elementary school general education teachers perceived their responsibilities and actions in the classroom to cultivate and maintain their relationships with students. The five facets of trust were prevalent throughout the teachers' experiences and additional themes emerged as well as several strategies teachers used to foster relationships with their students emerged. Offering their perspectives and experiences with trust, each of participants' contributions add valuable insight to the field of education.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Teachers

Date/ Time of Interview:

Location:

Participant Pseudonym:

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers perceive their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?
2. What support do teachers perceive is needed from their principals to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

Opening

- Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.
- You were selected to participate in this study by your principal as someone who builds trusting relationships with your students. I'm grateful that you have agreed to spend your time with me today so that I can capture your experiences. You have important knowledge that will be a valuable contribution to further current research. I value anything you choose to share during our conversation.
- Keep in mind that you have a right to decline to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Do I have your permission to record the interview?

Interview Questions

1. Let's begin with your teaching experience. How long have you been teaching and what grade levels have you taught?

Now let's talk about your beliefs and experiences with trust in the classroom between you as the teacher and your students.

2. How would you define trust in your classroom?
3. Can you tell me a story or give me an example of what trust looks like or sounds like in your classroom?
4. What do you believe is important about establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with students?

Please consider your experiences for the following questions that pertain to specific aspects of trusting relationships.

5. What do you do to build trusting relationships with students in your classroom?
6. How do you show students that you care about them and want what is best for them?
7. What do you do to maintain good communication with students?

8. What does authenticity look like in your relationships with students?
9. Tell me about some ways that students share in the responsibilities of the classroom?
10. What role does consistency play in supporting trusting relationships with students?
11. How do you see interdependence or vulnerability playing out in your relationships with students?
12. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted what you believe or how you approach building relationships with your students?

For purposes of this study, I have defined trust as “The willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else based on the belief that that person has certain characteristics. In the definition of trust I am using, there are five characteristics--or facets--of trust. These are benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. I am going to briefly describe each one at a time. As I do, please share anything that comes to mind about how you foster any of these facets in your classroom.

13. Benevolence is acting with the student’s best interest at heart.
14. Honesty is being forthright and sharing your thoughts and feelings.
15. Openness is a willingness to share decision making with students while genuinely listening to consider their perspectives as well as delegating responsibilities.
16. Reliability is following through with commitments while maintaining the student’s best interest.
17. Competence is your ability to apply a high level of skill to teaching your students and being effective doing that.

Please consider the principal’s role in supporting you as you build trusting relationships with the students in your classroom.

18. How does your principal support your efforts to build trusting relationships with your students?
19. How might a principal’s actions unintentionally inhibit a teacher’s efforts to build trust with their students?
20. What could your principal do to support your efforts to build trusting relationships with your students?
21. In your experience, how important is trust to teaching and learning?
22. Is there anything else you’d like to add or any questions you wish I’d asked?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your comments and insights have been very helpful. The next step is reviewing the transcription recorded today. I will email you a copy of the transcription for your review. Please email me any corrections or points of clarification. I will then share major findings with you by email and ask for any comments you choose to share or additions to the interpretation you wish to make.

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Principals

Date/ Time of interview:

Location:

Participant Pseudonym:

Research Question:

RQ 3: How do principals perceive effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

RQ 4: How do principals perceive their roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?

Opening

- Thank you for your participation in this study.
- The interview will focus on your perception of your role in building trusting relationships to establish a classroom community.
- The interview may take between 30 and 45 minutes.
- You have a right to withdraw from the study.
- I will use the insights from this interview for a dissertation study. I may also share the findings in presentations or publications with the hope that it will become a useful resource for teachers and school leaders.
- Your identity will be kept confidential. You will be referred to only by a pseudonym.
- Here is a copy of the consent form. Please review and sign. The second copy is yours to keep.
- Do I have your permission to record the interview?

Interview Questions

As a former teacher, I saw the importance of developing trusting relationships in my own classroom. I chose to explore this topic for my dissertation research because it's important to include teachers' voices in the conversation about what makes a classroom successful.

1. Let's begin by telling me about your experience. How many years have you been an educator and how many of those years have you been a principal?
2. Tell me about the role you think trust plays in productive classrooms?
3. How would you define trust in the classroom?
4. In your experience, how does a skillful teacher build trusting relationships with students?
5. Can you tell me a story or give me an example of what trust looks like or sounds like in a classroom?
6. What do you believe is important about establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with students?
7. Are there any ways that you think trusting relationships play out differently in an urban school setting than in other contexts?

For the purpose of this study, I focus on the five facets of trust I shared with you previously. I am going to name each one at a time along with the definition of that facet. Please share an example or a story about a time when a teacher demonstrated characteristics of the five facets.

8. Benevolence is acting in the student's best interests.
9. Honesty is being forthright and sharing your thoughts and feelings.
10. Openness is a willingness to share decision making with students while genuinely listening to consider their perspectives as well as delegating responsibilities.
11. Reliability is following-through with commitments while maintaining the student's best interest.
12. Competence is your ability to apply a high level of skill to teaching your students and being effective doing that.

13. What do you do on a daily/weekly/monthly basis to support teachers as they develop and maintain trusting relationships in the classroom?
14. How might a principal's actions inhibit teacher' efforts to foster trust?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to add or a question you wish I'd asked?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your comments and insights have been very helpful. The next step is reviewing the transcription recorded today. I will email you a copy of the transcription for your review. Please email me any corrections or points of clarification. I will then share major findings with you by email and ask for any comments you choose to share or additions to the interpretation you wish to make.

Appendix C

Table of Specifications

Research Question	Teacher Protocol	Principal Protocol
1. How do teachers perceive their responsibilities and actions in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?	2-17, 21	
2. What support do teachers perceive is needed from their principals to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?	18-20	
3. How do principals perceive effective teachers' roles in building trusting relationships with students in the classroom?		2-12
4. How do principals perceive their roles in supporting teachers in their efforts to build trusting relationships with students in the classroom?		13-14

Appendix D
Consent Form



William & Mary
School of Education

*Teachers' Perceptions of Building Trusting Relationships in Urban Schools
and the Principals Who Support Them*

I will conduct a study of teachers and principals in urban schools and their perceptions of regarding building trusting relationships with students in the classroom. Your participation in this research is important as it can inform our understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Knowing the context of the study, leaders at the district and building levels as well as teachers of similarly positioned schools can make decisions to continue, revise, or cease current practices in the classroom or support for teachers in the school.

Your consent here indicates your approval to record information during an interview with you and the researcher. I seek your consent to take notes of discussions and collect written information on forms for this interview. The audio recording and notes will be kept on a password protected computer and will be used only for research purposes. The material will be used to inform my dissertation work as well as future publication and professional presentations. When individual quotes are used to illustrate important points, your identity will be masked and your name will not be identified. As a participant, your involvement in the study is purposeful. I guarantee that the information obtained will be kept confidential.

I, _____, agree to participate in this study *Teachers' Perceptions of Building Trusting Relationships in Urban Schools and the Principals Who Support Them*. I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be kept confidential and that only the researcher may determine my identity. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in the study's report of results and the researcher will make every effort to keep information obtained in this study confidential. I also understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are crucial for this study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study, without having to specify a reason, at any time by notifying Lindsay Kidd by e-mail lindsaynkidd@gmail.com. I am aware that the focus of this study is on my perceptions as they relate to my professional experiences. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee and chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary at [757-221-2358](tel:757-221-2358) or tjward@wm.edu.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to the researchers collecting interview data and supporting materials as a part of this study.

Date

Participant

Date

Researcher

VITA

Lindsay Nachman Kidd

Educational Background

Ph.D. William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership (2022)
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M.A.Ed. William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Elementary Education (2012)

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Major: Interdisciplinary Studies- Linguistics (2011)
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Professional Experience

Assistant Principal Saunders Elementary School, Newport News, VA (2018- Present)
Cooperating Teacher Greenwood Elementary School, Newport News, VA (2016- 2018)
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Lead Teacher Greenwood Elementary School, Newport News, VA (2014- 2018)
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