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Principal Transformational Leadership and School Climate in Title 1 Schools

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Walden University

College of Education

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Heidi Miller

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Principal Transformational Leadership and School Climate

in Title 1 Schools

by

Heidi Miller

MA, Towson University, 2004

BS, Virginia Tech, 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

Students living in poverty who attend Title 1 schools continue to underperform academically compared to their more-advantaged peers. Researchers have shown that leadership and school climate influence academic outcomes for students, and educators and community members need to understand effective leadership and school climate practices used where students have demonstrated academic growth. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. The conceptual framework encompassed elements of transformational leadership and constructs of school climate. Interviews were conducted in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with 8 elementary principals in Title 1 schools where student academic growth had been documented. Each of the participants had been principal at the schools for a minimum of 3 years. A combination of a priori and opening coding was used to support thematic analyses. Themes describing important practices include *actualizes a compelling vision, promotes positive relationships for building capacity, practices adaptive leadership,* and *fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement*. The identified leadership and school climate practices inform initial preparation and continuing professional development for principals. The findings also inform hiring practices to provide leaders for Title 1 schools. Researchers have shown that a principal's leadership is a powerful and necessary component for improving educational outcomes. Positive social change implications of this study include enhancing the performance of economically-disadvantaged students attending Title 1 schools.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Steve, who has been my greatest supporter throughout this process. His patience, love, and unwavering belief in me have been invaluable. To my amazing children, Nick, Erika, and Karena, I hope that I have taught you to be life-long learners and to never give up on what you believe in and what you know is right. You are my inspiration each day. To my mother, who has always believed in me, I thank you and love you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Andy Alexson, Committee Chairperson, for his guidance, feedback, and sense of humor during my journey to earn this doctorate. He kept me focused on the process and the end goal. I thank Dr. Sally Everts, Committee Member, for providing me with excellent input on writing and cohesion. Finally, I thank Dr. Tina Dawson, Committee Research Reviewer for her expertise and thorough feedback. I appreciate all three of you and for holding me to the highest standard.

Several professional colleagues offered continuous support and encouragement along the way, and I am truly grateful to each of you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty in 1964 and believed that education would provide improved learning opportunities for low-income students to reduce the achievement gap (Richardson, Vafa, & Litton, 2017). However, students living in poverty who attend Title 1 schools continue to underperform academically compared to their more advantaged peers (Hirn, Hollow, & Scott, 2018; Richardson et al., 2017). Children under the age of 18 in the United States currently comprise about 23% of the nation's population yet represent approximately 32% of people living in poverty (Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017; Koball & Jiang, 2018). In addition, many children in this country are in families with incomes only slightly above the poverty level (Koball & Jiang, 2018). This study addressed the need to improve educational outcomes for students attending Title 1 schools.

The topic of this study was transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools that may contribute to students' academic growth. Researchers have shown that effective leadership influences academic outcomes for students and prepares them for career, college, and life (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). School climate has been posited to be a critical component to student learning because it contributes to the emotional connection a student has with their schooling experiences (DeWitt, 2018; Dewitt & Slade, 2014). There is urgency to improve leadership practices and school climate practices in schools that serve Title 1 students because these constructs may have a greater effect on students who are economically disadvantaged

(DeWitt, 2018; Dewitt & Slade, 2014; Hewitt & Reitzug, 2015; Hitt, Woodruff, Meyers, & Zhu, 2018; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Findings of this study may inform principal professional development on effective and school climate practices in Title 1 schools where students are not meeting expectations for academic achievement.

Chapter 1 is organized into sections that begin with background on the topic of the study. The problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions are presented along with an overview of the conceptual framework that grounded the study. The nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delineation, limitations, and significance of the study follow, and the final section summarizes the main ideas in Chapter 1.

Background

The topic of this study was transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools that may influence students' academic growth. Transformational leadership and school climate were themes identified in the literature review that may contribute to student academic growth (Bae, 2018; Bellibas & Yu, 2018; Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015; DeWitt, 2018; Dewitt & Slade, 2014; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hooper & Bernhard, 2016; Rea & Zinskie, 2017; Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Smith & Shouppe, 2018; Stein, Macaluso, & Stanulis, 2017). Transformational leadership is a model of leadership that embraces the importance of inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision along with emphasizing the importance of relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). As Hooper and Bernhard (2016) described, transformational

leadership builds the capacity of the school community to work together for a common goal. A transformational leader purposefully designs structures for collaboration within a school to be culturally responsive and inclusive of all students to support teaching and learning (Hooper & Bernhard, 2016).

School climate is the feeling that students, teachers, and parents have about their school and can be a critical component to the success of a school (McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016). Dewitt (2018) reported that school climate is centered around building a culture of self-efficacy and collective efficacy where all teachers in the school believe they can make a difference in the academic outcomes for all students. Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) asserted that a positive school climate contributes to student achievement, teacher resiliency, teacher retention, and students' sense of belonging. The principal has the most influence and authority over the school and can be most instrumental in creating a shared vision that focuses on a positive school climate (Kempa, Ulorlo, & Wenno, 2017; McCarley et al., 2016).

The gap in practice addressed in this study is that Title 1 elementary schools in a large, urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states that have demonstrated a pattern of growth while other Title 1 elementary schools in the school district have not. The results of the study can be used to support and coach principals in Title 1 schools where students are not demonstrating academic growth. Results of the study may also be useful for professional development for aspiring principals, current principals, and for informing the selection of principals to lead Title 1 elementary schools.

Problem Statement

This study addresses the gap in research by exploring and describing effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth (Goodwin, 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt et al., 2018). Many researchers have investigated effective leadership practices for school leaders. Hitt and Tucker (2016) offered a framework for school leaders to support improved educational outcomes for students, yet this framework was not specific to the context of leadership in Title 1 schools. Woods and Martin (2016) reported on leadership practices that may have contributed to students' academic growth in a high-poverty school, but this case study was limited to one high-poverty school located in a rural setting. In a study on leadership and school climate, Ross and Cozzens (2016) emphasized that leadership practices should include collaboration, diversity, professionalism, and innovation, but the authors did not offer actionable practices for principals leading Title 1 schools. Limited research exists that identifies effective leadership practices within the context of Title 1 schools and how to sustain academic improvement in these schools (Hitt et al., 2018). Although researchers have clearly shown a link between the quality of school leadership, the instructional climate of a school, and student achievement, there continues to be a lack of understanding in how to effectively develop school principals around these constructs (Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller, & Goddard, 2015).

Researchers have suggested that further studies are needed to understand the effective transformational leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to

students' academic growth in the context of leading Title 1 schools in the United States (Hallinger, 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt et al., 2018; Woods & Martin, 2016). Furthermore, Hallinger (2018) stated that studies on school leadership have been conducted for almost 100 years but these studies have not distinguished between leadership in different contextual settings of urban and rural schools. The importance of educational leadership is recognized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with a renewed focus on the importance of leadership and school climate in reaching federal goals in education (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). The requirements of ESSA further support the significance of this study where I explored and described effective transformational leadership and school climate practices for Title 1 schools.

Some Title 1 schools in a large, urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states have demonstrated a pattern of growth in reading, but other Title 1 elementary schools in the district have not. This gap in practice was identified in data from the 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018 Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments for reading. The results of these assessments revealed that 32% (17 out of 53) of Title 1 elementary schools in this school district reported a pattern of growth for three consecutive years on the MAP assessment for reading. The MAP assessment is the metric for elementary schools to monitor student achievement and growth in this school district. This study can support and coach principals in Title 1 schools where students are not showing academic growth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. The study helps to address the gap in practice that less than 34% of Title 1 schools in this school district have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth in reading over three consecutive years. The findings of the study may inform coaching strategies for principals in Title 1 schools where students are not showing academic growth.

The research paradigm for the study is based on the interpretivist assumption, which explores the subjective experiences and interpretations of people in their natural setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To collect data, I conducted semistructured interviews of principals leading Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth. The interviews were used to collect information on principals' perspectives on transformational leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth. The phenomenon addressed in this study was that there are Title 1 schools in this district that have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. Effective leadership practices and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate growth are not practiced universally in this school district.

Research Questions

A case study design is a research approach designed to understand and explore a phenomenon occurring in authentic life experiences and is bounded by time and place

(Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Research questions in qualitative case studies are broad and directly aligned to understanding, explaining, and describing the phenomenon of a research study, and they are informed by a conceptual framework (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The phenomenon of this study is that there are Title 1 schools in this district that have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. Two overarching research questions were designed to explore principals' perspectives on effective transformational principal leadership practices and school climate practices in Title 1 schools that have demonstrated a three-year pattern of academic growth.

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the transformational leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) combined with the construct of school climate proposed by Dewitt (2017). The constructs of transformational leadership and school climate emerged from the literature reviewed on effective principal leadership that grounded and informed the study. The conceptual framework explored a relationship between transformational leadership and school climate for understanding effective transformational leadership and school climate practices that may influence students' academic growth. Transformational leadership and school climate were identified in the

literature review as potentially contributing to improved academic outcomes for students (Bae, 2018; Bellibas & Yu, 2018; Davis et al., 2015; Day et al., 2016; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hooper & Bernhard, 2016; Rea & Zinskie, 2017; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015; Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Smith & Shouppe, 2018; Stein et al., 2017). Figure 1 illustrates the two constructs of the conceptual framework, which are aligned to the problem, purpose, and research questions for the study.

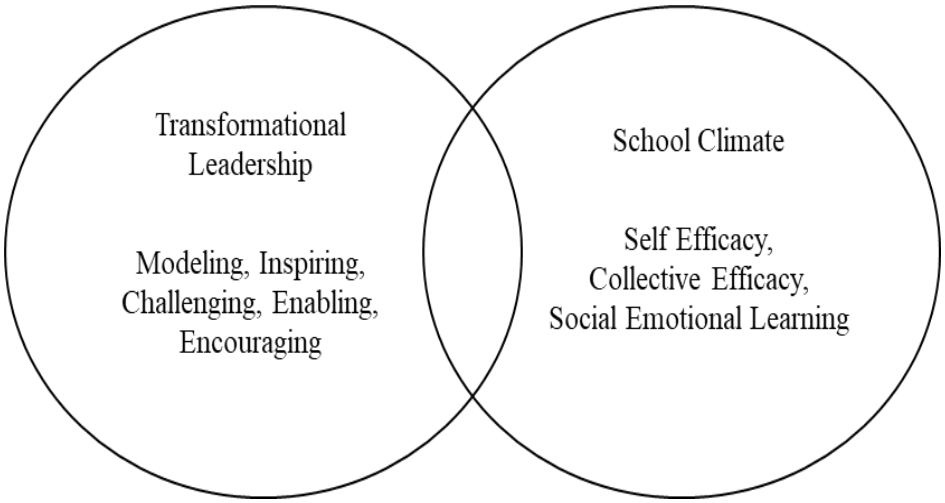

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of transformational leadership and school climate (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, Dewitt, 2018).

Transformational leadership has been one of the most influential leadership models applied to educational leadership over the past several decades (Berkovich, 2016). As proposed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) transformational leadership is grounded in the concepts of inspiring and motivating people toward a shared vision to achieve goals at a higher level. Kouzes and Posner (2017) conducted an extensive study of over 75,000 leaders over a 30-year span and their findings resulted in the creation of a leadership framework that identified five exemplary leadership practices that are transformational: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process,

(d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. These practices build motivation for followers to reach their highest potential. Quin et al. (2015) concluded that the five leadership practices from Kouzes and Posner (2017) were frequently identified in high-performing schools. The practices of inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process seemed to have the biggest influence on student achievement (Quin et al., 2015).

School climate is a critical part of effective schools and must be addressed with a sense of urgency by school principals (Dewitt, 2018; Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Schools with strong climates are characterized as having supportive, inclusive, and trusting learning environments for teachers, students, and community members (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kazak & Polat, 2018). The learning environment in schools with positive school climates supports and recognizes all students, with high levels of collaboration among teachers (Dewitt, 2018; Kazak & Polat, 2018; Kouali, 2017).

Two constructs proposed by Dewitt (2018) that may have a strong influence on school climate are self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Self-efficacy in the context of education is a person's belief in their capabilities to increase learning for students (Dewitt, 2018; Versland & Erickson, 2017). Furthermore, a principal's self-efficacy is defined as the principal's own beliefs in their capabilities, which consequently influence their actions and behaviors. As a result, a principal's actions and behaviors define expectations and influence the motivation of teachers to make a difference in the lives of students (Versland & Erickson, 2017). Collective efficacy in the context of education is the belief that collaborative teamwork among school leaders and teachers can make a difference in student learning regardless of obstacles (Dewitt, 2018).

Nature of the Study

The design of this research is a qualitative case study. As noted by Yin (2013), a case study involves studying a single case or multiple cases of a current phenomenon. The phenomenon addressed in this study is that there are Title 1 schools in this district that have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. Qualitative research emphasizes the engagement of the researcher in understanding, describing, and interpreting participants' experiences with a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Stake, 1995). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the ways that individuals experience and approach the world to make meaning of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data for the study were collected through semistructured interviews with school principals. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Rubin and Rubin (2012), semistructured interviews are common in qualitative research and serve to guide the interview with specific questions, as well as allow for follow-up questions based on participants' responses and used as a probe to gather additional information.

The location of this study was a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states. The school district has over 100 elementary schools, 53 of which are identified as Title 1 schools. The population of the study was eight elementary school principals selected based on purposeful sampling based on characteristics aligned with the objective of the study. Participants who could contribute to answering the research questions of the study were selected (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size or scope of this case study was eight elementary school principals leading Title 1 schools. The criteria for participant selection for the study was elementary

principals (a) leading in schools designated as Title 1; (b) leading schools that have demonstrated a 3-year pattern of growth in reading based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5, on the MAP assessment from school years 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018; (c) who have served in their current assignment for at least 3 years; and (d) who I do not supervise.

Data were analyzed through open coding and thematic analysis to ultimately develop overarching themes aligned to the conceptual framework of the study. Thematic analysis of interview data requires a deep interpretation and involvement by the researcher. As explained in Saldaña (2016), thematic analysis consists of statements that bring meaning and identify the participants' lived experiences. Similarly, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011) reported that thematic analyses result in identifying and describing meaning of interview data with careful consideration to both implicit and explicit information obtained during the interview.

Definitions

Barriers to learning: Factors in Title 1 schools that students may experience that may influence academic outcomes, such as limited access to quality preschool programs, less rigorous curriculum, unsafe neighborhoods, less stable housing, and higher teacher turnover (Koball & Jiang, 2018).

Challenge the process: A leader who is creative, innovative, and focused on improvement (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Collective efficacy: The overall belief that teachers and leaders in a given school can make a difference in the lives of students regardless of obstacles (Dewitt, 2018).

Community engagement: The perceived trustworthiness of the principal and whether the principal demonstrates respect toward all stakeholders determines the level of community engagement of parents and teachers. Principals who lead with care for others and understand the social and emotional needs of students are more successful at engaging communities (Louis et al., 2016).

Effective principal leadership: Principals who demonstrate the capacity to build trusting and collaborative relationships with teachers and the community, create a positive school climate, maintain the focus on instruction, develop teachers, and lead by example (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Versland & Erickson, 2017).

Enable others to act: A leader who fosters teamwork and creates a positive and trusting environment; all followers are treated with respect and empowered to perform at high levels (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Encourage the heart: A leader who recognizes the contributions of others and celebrates their accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Idealized influence: The importance of a leader continually modeling a high level of capabilities and work ethic (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Individual consideration: A leader's authentic behavior toward building relationships with each individual and recognizing and supporting the strengths and needs of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Inspiration motivation: A leader who encourages teamwork and is forward thinking, charismatic, and positive (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Inspire a shared vision: A construct of leadership defined as having passion for a shared vision by enlisting others in making the vision a reality (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Intellectual stimulation: A leader who encourages creativity and solicits the input of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Leadership practices: Essential behaviors or activities that leaders apply in their leadership context (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017), as well as observable behaviors or skills associated with effective outcomes (Fullan, 2014).

Model the way: A leader who establishes norms about how all people should be treated and consistently models exemplary behavior for followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

School climate: The feeling that a student, parent, or staff member has about the school environment. This feeling is the result of the care, concern, and support of students and adults in the school (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Shaping a school's climate is the responsibility of the principal and involves building a trusting, supportive, inclusive, and welcoming learning environment for teachers, students, and community members (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kazak & Polat; 2018).

Self-efficacy: In the context of education, a person's belief in their capabilities to increase learning for students (Dewitt, 2018).

Social emotional learning (SEL): Competencies included are self-regulation and self-management skills as well as the ability to collaborate with others (Wrabel, Hamilton, Whitaker, & Grant, 2018). The importance of social emotional learning within

the context of educating students is gaining increased attention in research. SEL is thought to improve students' attitudes and self-respect (Wrabel et al., 2018).

Title 1: A federal program enacted into law in 1965 with the goal of providing financial assistance to school districts with large percentages of low-come students. Funding is intended to support low-income students in accessing high-quality academic standards. Federal funds are distributed based on factors such as the cost of education in each state as well as approximated number of students in poverty in each state (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made regarding this research study. One assumption was that the principals interviewed would be honest and transparent in their responses. To support this assumption, confidentiality was preserved, and the participants were told that they may withdraw from the study at any time with no ramifications. A second assumption was that the findings of my research study would contribute to the improvement of school leadership and student academic growth. The final assumption was that my study would inform professional development for school leaders and provide findings that would inform the selection of school leaders for Title 1 schools. If the results of this study help in identifying transformational leadership and school climate practices, then school leaders in all school contexts will be better informed on how to help improve academic growth and school climate.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem in this study was the gap in research exploring and describing effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth. The research problem was chosen to address a gap in practice in a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states where there are Title 1 schools that have demonstrated a 3-year pattern of academic growth in reading while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the transformational leadership framework developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) combined with the constructs of school climate as proposed by Dewitt (2018).

The scope of this study was eight elementary school principals leading Title 1 schools in a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states (Burkholder et al. 2016). Delimitations are factors that narrow the scope of the study defining parameters for participants, data collection, and time frame. Also included in delimitations are statements about what the study does not include (Burkholder et al., 2016). The delimitations of the study were that only elementary schools designated as Title 1 were selected where student data demonstrated a 3-year pattern of growth in reading based on composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the MAP assessment from school years 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018. Moreover, principals must have served in their current assignment for at least 3 years and were not under my supervision. Furthermore, delimitations were that data were collected through

in-person interviews, and principals serving in middle and high schools were not included in this study.

The methodology of the study is a qualitative case study design that consisted of interviews to examine real-life perspectives of participants to understand a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Questionnaires were not included in this study to focus on in-depth interviews to explore and describe principals' authentic perspectives. Qualitative researchers seek to understand participants' unique experiences related to a specific setting and context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, the results of the study may be transferrable to other educational settings if consideration is taken to understand the demographics and context of the study.

Limitations

The concept of limitations in research is explained as potential shortcomings that may exist in the design or methodology of a study (Burkholder et al., 2016). Limitations of this study are potential bias of the researcher, availability of principals for in-person interviews, sample size, and the researcher's interpretation of data. Although I have a supervisory role, potential bias in the selection of participants was mitigated as no participants selected were under my direct supervision. To address the possibility of conflicts with the availability of principals for interviews, I offered a variety of times and locations for interviews. The sample size was small and consisted of eight elementary school principals. Due to the size of the sample, transferability outside of this school district may be limited. However, the findings of this study may be transferable to other educational contexts because the reader may be able to make connections that apply to

their own experiences and within their own educational context. My interpretation of data was another limitation of thematic analysis in this qualitative research. To lessen this potential limitation, I was consistent in applying concept codes to interview transcript data in this study (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The disaggregation of interview data was shared through the process of member checking for review and accuracy of interpretation. Each participant was included in member checking to review their responses and my interpretation. Member checking was described by Ravitch and Carl (2016) as a process for participants to review and validate the researcher's interpretations of the responses they provided during the data collection interview process.

Significance

The research problem that my study addressed was a gap in research exploring and describing leadership practices and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth. Potential contributions from this study may provide information to support interventions and professional development for principals leading Title 1 elementary schools where students are not demonstrating academic growth. In addition, the study may inform principals of leadership and school climate practices they should focus on. The results of this study should assist in recruiting and hiring principals to lead Title 1 schools by selecting candidates that have demonstrated practices that this study has identified.

Researchers have shown that effective leadership and school climate practices contribute to academic outcomes for students, preparing them for career, college, and life (Day et al., 2016; DeWitt, 2018; Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017;

McCarley et al., 2016; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Potential implications for positive social change from this study include improving principal leadership practices and school climate practices that may improve academic growth for students attending Title 1 elementary schools. Improving transformational leadership and school climate practices may have a greater influence on students' academic growth in Title 1 schools. Transformational leadership begins with a strong vision for the school that includes setting direction for improved academic growth for all students and ensuring a positive school climate (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Summary

The research problem in this study addressed the gap in research exploring and describing effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth (Goodwin, 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt et al., 2018). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. The gap in practice addressed in this study was that there are Title 1 elementary schools in a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states that have demonstrated a pattern of growth in reading while other Title 1 elementary schools in the school district have not. Effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 schools need to be explored and described so these practices may be operationalized in school districts to ensure that all student groups demonstrate academic growth. The two research questions were aligned to the problem and purpose of the study

and were designed to explore and describe principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership and school climate practices. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore and describe principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 schools that have demonstrated a pattern of growth in reading over 3 years and where the principal has served at the school for at least 3 years.

As a result of the literature review on the topic of effective leadership practices presented in Chapter 2, components emerged that formed the conceptual framework for this study: transformational leadership and school climate. The literature review began with an overview of the history of educational reform aligned to supporting the needs of Title 1 schools. Next, the literature review included both qualitative and quantitative studies that helped identify and describe transformational leadership and school climate as related to the context of leadership in elementary schools. In Chapter 3 I describe the research design of the study, while Chapter 4 includes the data and data analysis. In Chapter 5 I will present a discussion of the findings and implications of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem in this study sought to address the gap in research exploring and describing effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth. The gap in practice addressed in this study is that there are Title 1 elementary schools in a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states that have demonstrated a pattern of growth in reading while other Title 1 elementary schools in the school district have not. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. Identifying and describing principals' perspectives on effective principal leadership practices and school climate practices may support leadership development for principals at Title 1 schools throughout this district to improve academic outcomes for students.

The achievement gap between students who attend Title 1 schools and their non-Title 1 peers is well documented (Bae, 2018; Dewitt & Slade, 2014; Hirn et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2017; Woods & Martin, 2016). Over 40% of U.S. students under the age of 18 attend Title 1 schools (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2019). Decades of educational and legislative reforms have sought to increase student achievement, but low growth and achievement and high dropout rates for students attending Title 1, compared to students attending non-Title 1 schools, continue to persist in U.S. schools (Adams & Forsyth, 2013; Herman, Gates, Chavez-Herreias, & Harris, 2016; Rea & Zinskie, 2017; Richardson et al., 2017; Woods & Martin, 2016). The transformational

leadership and school climate practices of principals are powerful and necessary components for improving academic outcomes for economically disadvantaged students who consistently underperform (Bae, 2018; Dewitt, 2018; Herman et al., 2016; Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Effective principal leadership is essential for student achievement and is the second most influential factor for student achievement, preceded by the teacher (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Prothero, 2015).

Multiple researchers have examined the importance of providing students in Title 1 schools with a quality education under the leadership of an effective principal (Bennett, Ylimaki, Dugan, & Brunderman, 2014; Brown, 2016; Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Goodwin, 2015; Green, 2015; Herman et al., 2016; Woodruff, Meyers, & Zhu, 2018). However, literature suggests that further research is needed to determine the effective transformational leadership and school climate practices that contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 schools in the United States (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Woods & Martin, 2016). In this qualitative study, I explored and described transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 schools in a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states, where students have demonstrated a 3-year pattern of academic growth.

Chapter 2 is organized into five sections. The first section offers a history of educational reform in the United States and the influence of legislative reforms over the past 60 years intended to improve academic outcomes for students attending Title 1 schools (Casalaspi, 2017). Included in this section is a summary of key points of the current federal education policy in the United States, the ESSA that was enacted into law

in 2015 (Soung, 2018; Young et al., 2017). The next section synthesizes research on transformational leadership, which is one of the constructs of the conceptual framework for the study that supports effective school leadership and student outcomes (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). The third section provides an overview of research on instructional leadership because this leadership style influences student achievement and builds instructional capacity in schools (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). School climate constitutes the fourth section and provides a synthesis of research that present findings that suggest the importance of positive school climate to support student outcomes. The final section elaborates on aspects of social and emotional learning in schools and the connection to academic growth (DeWitt, 2018; Kazak & Polat, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Louis et al., 2016).

Literature Search Strategy

The literature reviewed for this study was obtained through electronic retrieval methods in eight primary databases accessed through the Walden University Library as well as Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed journal articles that aligned with the research topic were gathered using the databases of Education Source, Emerald Management, Education Database, ERIC, EBSCO Host, ProQuest, Sage, and Taylor and Francis Online. Key terms used in these searches included instructional leadership, transformational leadership, urban schools, high poverty schools, Title 1, principal leadership, student outcomes, school climate, school culture, and school leadership. The articles were reviewed and selected based on alignment to the problem, purpose, and

research question of the study, along with relevant constructs of the conceptual framework for this study. Literature significant to the research topic was selected.

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon addressed in this study is that there are Title 1 schools in this district that have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. To support the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework for the study consisted of the transformational leadership framework developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) and the school climate constructs proposed by Dewitt (2018).

The transformational leadership framework created by Kouzes and Posner (2017) is the result of decades of evidence-based research on effective leadership practices in contexts across the world. The five exemplary leadership practices identified in the research by Kouzes and Posner (2017) consist of (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), these exemplary leadership practices endure over time regardless of the leadership context or generational factors such as age.

The leadership practice of model the way emphasizes the importance of modeling desired behaviors for others, setting examples through words and actions, and clearly articulating beliefs and values along with developing a clear vision that is shared by followers. Kouzes and Posner (2017) described the power of using storytelling, symbols,

and artifacts to reinforce their beliefs and to motivate followers. Inspire a shared vision refers to leaders who are passionate and visionary and create conditions for others to see themselves and their contributions in the vision. More importantly, Kouzes and Posner (2017) emphasized that the vision statement should be created by all stakeholders in a collaborative manner with the leader. The third exemplary leadership practice is challenge the process. This leadership practice involves having the courage to embrace challenges and changes while supporting followers along the way. Challenge the process encourages creativity, innovation, risk-taking by all, and learning from mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Enable others to act involves collaboration and building a trusting environment among followers. Kouzes and Posner (2017) emphasized the critical component of listening attentively and appreciating the perspectives of others to show respect. Frequent face-to-face positive and supportive interactions with followers is key. The final exemplary leadership practice is encourage the heart, which supports high expectations that a leader has for themselves and their followers. Leaders need to be visible and offer feedback and recognition to others on progress toward the vision. Figure 2 displays the tenets of Kouzes and Posner's (2017) transformational leadership framework.

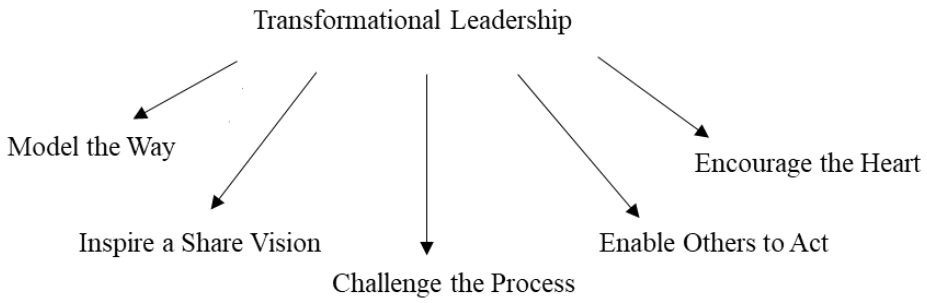

Figure 2. Exemplary transformational leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

The second component of the conceptual framework for this study is school climate. The National School Climate Center (NSCC; n.d.) and the National School Climate Council (2007) co-constructed conditions for positive and sustainable school climates. The conditions called attention to the qualities and characteristics of a school, such as the organizational structures, interpersonal relationships within a school, lived experiences of stakeholders, and teaching and learning practices. Dewitt (2018) suggested that school climate is a necessary component for 21st century learning and should be included along with communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Dewitt (2018) and Dewitt and Slade (2014) argued that school climate influences student achievement and students' sense of belonging. The researchers further proposed that positive school climates are enhanced when teachers and students have a voice and can contribute to school improvement efforts.

Social emotional learning consists of skills and knowledge that students need to possess to manage their emotions, demonstrate empathy for others, make good choices, and be capable of having positive relationships with others. Dewitt (2018) emphasized SEL as a key component in creating an inclusive and positive school climate. Dewitt

(2018) prioritized the importance of schools recognizing marginalized students and their experiences within the climate and culture of the school along with the SEL needs of the marginalized students.

Dewitt (2018) and Dewitt and Slade (2014) argued that collaboration among staff is essential for sustainable and positive school climates that influence student learning and build self-efficacy of teachers and students. The construct of collaboration is defined as the purposeful actions that leaders apply to build the instructional capacity of teachers. In like manner, it is vital that relationships are developed with all stakeholders in a schoolhouse by considering the constructs of self-efficacy and collective efficacy of teachers to support meaningful collaboration (Dewitt, 2018).

Self-efficacy (Dewitt, 2018) as defined in the context of education, is a person's belief in their capabilities to increase learning for students. First introduced by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy referred to the belief that an individual has in their ability to accomplish a goal. Actionable practices described in Dewitt (2018) that promoted self-efficacy include offering teachers support through meaningful professional development, facilitating opportunities to observing other teachers, providing resources, collaborating to co-construct goals, and providing ongoing individual feedback on progress.

Collective efficacy is the overall belief that the teachers and leaders in each school can collectively make a difference in the lives of students regardless of obstacles (Dewitt, 2018). Collective efficacy, as proposed in Dewitt (2018) can be enhanced by listening to the voices of teachers, engaging teachers in professional learning communities, co-teaching and mentoring, focusing on positive practices that are

occurring in the classroom, and designing faculty meetings with time to collaborate on a problem of practice. Figure 3 shows the constructs of school climate that are part of the conceptual framework for the study.

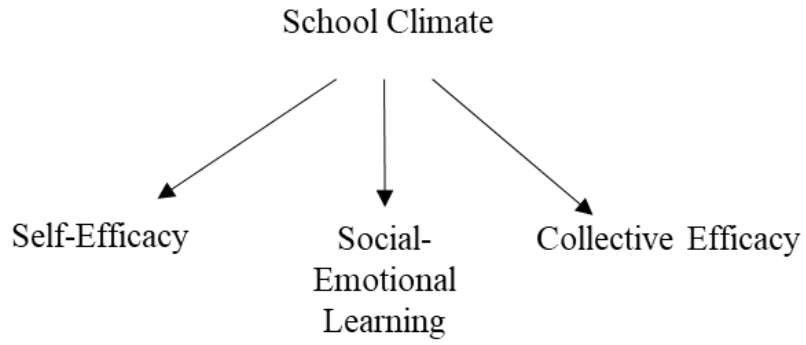

Figure 3. Constructs of school climate (Dewitt, 2018)

The conceptual framework supports this study by emphasizing the importance of effective transformational leadership and school climate practices of principals leading Title 1 schools since these constructs may have a greater effect on students who are poor (Dewitt, 2018; Hitt et al., 2018; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Researchers have shown that school climates with caring principal leadership reported an indirect but positive relationship between collective efficacy of teachers and academic supports for students resulting in improved academic growth (Louis et al., 2016). In addition, researchers have suggested that the mindset, beliefs, and self-efficacy of the principal may influence the climate of the school (Kellar & Slayton, 2016).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The literature review is organized into five sections. In the first section, I offer a history of educational reform in the United States that examined the influence of legislative reforms over the past 60 years that were intended to improve academic

outcomes for students in poverty attending Title 1 schools (Casalaspi, 2017). Included in this section is a summary of key points of the current federal education policy in the United States, ESSA that was enacted into law in 2015 (Soung, 2018; Young et al., 2017). In next section, I present research on transformational leadership that is one of the constructs of the conceptual framework for the study that supports effective school leadership and student outcomes (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Shatzer, Caldarella et al., 2014). In the third section, I provide an overview of research on instructional leadership since researchers propose that this leadership style influences student achievement and builds instructional capacity in schools (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). School climate constitutes the fourth section and provides a synthesis of research that presents findings that suggest the importance of positive school climate to support student outcomes. In the final section, I elaborate on aspects of social and emotional learning in schools and the connection to academic growth (DeWitt, 2018; Kazak & Polat, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Louis et al., 2016).

History of Educational Reform in the United States

To establish the importance of principal leadership in Title 1 schools in the 21st century, I have provided background from the past 80 years on educational reform in the United States designed to provide federal assistance to schools. There were at least 12 bills reviewed by congress between 1940 and 1963 with the purpose of providing aid for education, however, only two of these bills were enacted into law. As reported by Casalaspi (2017), bills were introduced between 1940 and 1963 and consequently passed as legislation to provide aid for education, although not specifically for Title 1 students.

Included in these bills were the 1941 Lanham Act and the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The Lanham Act provided federal aid for any school district that was affected by construction of U.S. military bases. The NDEA provided federal funding to support science and math education as a result of the competition created by Sputnik (Casalaspi, 2017).

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced legislation known as, the war on poverty that included initiatives aimed at reducing and eliminating poverty in the United States (Richardson et al., 2017). The legislation was officially entitled the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). One initiative of this legislation was to redesign the role that federal government had in education. The result of this legislation was the development of a federal program, Title 1. The goals of the Title 1 legislation were to provide schools with extra funding from the federal government based on the percentage of students that qualified for federal assistance and to improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged students (Hirn et al., 2018; Nelson, 2016; Richardson et al., 2017).

The passage of ESEA was contentious and politically controversial as private and parochial schools demanded that their students receive educational aid along with public schools. Several political groups disagreed with the funding formulas that would allocate funding for schools for students who were Title 1 (Casalaspi, 2017). The issue of race and equity emerged when public schools that were segregated believed they were entitled to federal dollars equal to desegregated schools. With negotiation from the Johnson

administration and Congress, compromises were reached and ESEA eventually became law (Casalaspi, 2017).

ESEA was the most progressive law every passed, according to the Congressional Digest (2017), and established the groundwork for efforts to close the achievement gap between Title 1 students and their advantaged peers. To that end, a shift in educational priorities occurred in the early 1980's when a report entitled A Nation at Risk was generated by President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, which declared that education in the United States was mediocre and less rigorous than many other nations (Bae, 2018). A Nation at Risk included an emphasis on standards-based education with established accountability measures for student achievement in all public schools in the United States (Bae, 2018).

An outgrowth of the standards-based educational movement resulted in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, which was a reauthorization of ESEA. The NCLB Act of 2001 included the Title 1 funding components from ESEA with added guidelines for states to create assessments aligned to standards with high achievement targets and measurable academic goals for all students (Bae, 2015; Herman et al., 2016). As reported by the Congressional Digest (2017), NCLB was significant because it focused on the need to identify students who were not making progress and emphasized the urgency of disaggregating student data to address the needs of traditionally marginalized student groups. NCLB created a national dialogue on educational issues and equity that united many parents, educators, and political officials to recognize the urgency of increasing educational outcomes for all students (Congressional Digest,

2017). In contrast, critics of NCLB were concerned with the feasibility of setting high academic goals and the pressure of accountability placed on educators (Congressional Digest, 2017).

The NCLB federal education policy existed until it was reauthorized under President Barack Obama in 2015 as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In contrast to NCLB, ESSA is grounded in continuous support and improvement for schools (Bae, 2018; Herman et al., 2016; Rea & Zinskie, 2017). Multiple contributing factors to student success were included in ESSA, including effective principal leadership, school climate, equity, student growth and achievement, and college and career readiness (Bae, 2018; Herman et al. 2016; Rea & Zinskie, 2017; Young et al., 2017). The inclusion of effective principal leadership under ESSA emphasized the importance of leadership, and recognized the role that professional development for principals has in improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap (Day et al., 2016; Hitt et al., 2018; Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017; Jacob et al., 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2014; Quin et al., 2015; Woods & Martin, 2016; Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017).

ESSA was updated in 2017 by U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy Devos with a template for states to use to fulfill the federal requirements of this legislation (Congressional Digest, 2017). The template contains accountability measures for all student subgroups, and empowers states to be innovative, creative, and flexible as they develop programs to support student achievement and close the achievement gap. As indicated in the Congressional Digest (2017), ESSA directs all states to ensure that

schools provide positive school climates, with rigorous academic programming to prepare all students for the future. As a result of ESSA, there is a renewed focus on a comprehensive education for all students. Improved academic outcomes for all student groups is the goal of ESSA, along with emphasizing the positive school climate, equity, student growth and achievement, principal professional development, and preparing students for college and careers (Bae, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Equity is a critical part of addressing barriers to learning to ensure that the educational needs of Title 1 students are met, and that all students have access to a quality education (Rea & Zinskie, 2017). School climate may influence the educational experience of students by supporting a sense of belonging (Wrabel et al., 2018). Lastly, ESSA emphasizes continuous professional development for principals and the importance of preparing all students to be college and career ready (Soung, 2018; Young et al., 2017). Figure 4 shows the constructs included in ESSA.

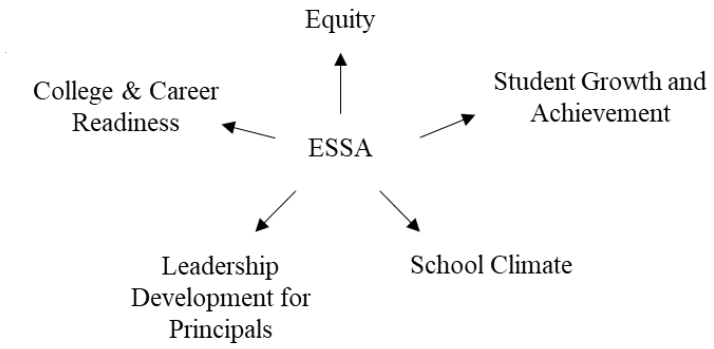

Figure 4. Constructs of ESSA (Bae, 2018).

Transformational Leadership

Researchers have developed leadership models in education that are generally characterized by a set of unique leadership qualities that are clearly articulated and can be

applied to different educational contexts (Berkovich, 2016). Examples of leadership models identified in research that are specific to education are provided. Hitt et al. (2018) proposed a model that identified seven leadership constructs or competencies for effective school leaders. According to Hitt et al. (2018) effective school leaders demonstrate competencies of (a) persistence, (b) inspiration, (c) consensus building, (d) support for teachers and the understanding the importance of developing their capacity, (e) having a commitment to students, (f) analyzing problems and developing solutions, and (g) applying inquiry methods to gain more information on solving problems.

Meyers and Hitt (2017) focused their research study on identifying leadership characteristics of effective principals leading challenging schools in need of improvement. Findings of this study proposed that principal leadership characteristics in the context of leading a school in need of improvement should consist of (a) the belief that positive change can and must happen; (b) a strong moral mission and ethical guide; (c) determination, courage and competitiveness; (d) the willingness to disrupt complacency and proceed with a sense of urgency; (e) systems thinking and adaptability; (f) hope and enthusiasm; and (g) effective communication and ability to build relationships.

The transformational leadership theory, according to Berkovich (2016) has been one of the most influential leadership models in education over the past several decades. Prior to being recognized as a leadership model for educational leaders, this leadership model was designed for political and business leaders (Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leadership is primarily driven by the school's leader applying positive

influence and motivation on their followers (Bush, 2014; Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leaders in education put forth effort in creating a positive school climate, building relationships, and communicating a shared vision that is agreed upon by staff (Urick & Bowers, 2014). As defined in McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2016), transformational leadership is key to the success of a school by leading the staff and students in the development of a shared vision, values, and goals.

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders consistently motivate and empower followers to reach their highest potential, focus on individual needs, and develop and coach the leadership potential of others. Bass and Riggio (2006) reported four components of transformational leadership in a conceptual framework that consisted of (a) idealized influence, (b) inspiration motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual considerations. Idealized influence, as posited by Bass et al. (2006) refers to the importance of the leader continually modeling a high level of capabilities and work ethic. While inspiration motivation consists of a leader who encourages teamwork, is forward thinking, charismatic and positive. Intellectual stimulation encourages creativity and solicits the input of followers and stakeholders.

The final component of Bass and Riggio's model of transformational leadership is individual consideration that is defined as a leader's authentic behavior toward building trusting relationships with each individual and recognizing and supporting the strengths and needs of others (Bass et al., 2006). Kouali (2017) suggested that transformational leadership may result in greater teacher job satisfaction, teacher effort and teacher effectiveness because principals who practice transformational leadership understand the

importance of being visible and respecting the unique personal needs and feelings of teachers.

Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) offered an overview of transformational leadership that emphasized the unique role of the transformational leader to understand school culture as influenced by the values, beliefs, and mindsets of teachers, students, and families that shape their behavior. Transformational leaders must have the capacity to analyze structures for collaboration that may perpetuate an existing organizational culture of the school that may be unintentionally marginalizing certain student groups. The leader who practices transformational leadership, according to Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) deliberately works to establish a common vision with common values and beliefs. Along with a common vision, the transformational leader maintains an inclusive learning community with both teachers and parents that is built on trust, respect, and civility. Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2015) proposed a model of differentiated leadership that included transformational leadership as a key concept. Transformational leaders in this model emphasized the importance of the principal consistently (a) supporting individuals and teams through school improvement initiatives, (b) building collaborative teams, (c) inspiring a vision, (d) motivating followers, and (e) being a role model.

Sun and Leithwood (2015b) proposed that transformational leadership is a key component to promoting positive teacher emotions that have an influence on improving teaching and learning. These emotions included collective teacher efficacy, commitment of teachers, and teachers' trust in others. McCarley et al. (2016) identified a correlation between transformational leadership and a productive school climate that promoted a

supportive and trusting school environment. Furthermore, McCarley et al. (2016) asserted that positive school climates promoted improved student achievement, contributed to teacher retention, and improved overall relationships between teachers and students. Eliophotou-Menon and Loannou (2016) suggested that transformational leadership has a positive effect on teachers' trust in the leader, job satisfaction, commitment, and desire to learn.

Transformational and distributive leadership have been compared by researchers as having similar components. A meta-analysis by Karadağ, Bektaş, Coğaltay, & Yalçm (2015) examined the relationship between educational leadership styles and student achievement. As a result of this study, the researchers suggested that both transformational and distributive leadership styles have the greatest effect on student achievement, especially at the elementary school level (Karadağ et al., 2015). Similarities between transformational and distributive leadership styles included leaders who listened and cared about their employees, along with understanding the individual and personal interests and needs of employees. Furthermore, similarities consisted of displaying supportive actions throughout the schoolhouse and represented and supported change initiatives at the school. Karadağ et al. (2015) suggested that educational leaders must practice instructional leadership as well, but within the constructs of either transformational or distributive leadership, and not as the sole leadership style.

Researchers have recommended an integrated approach between transformational and instructional leadership. Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) and Dou, Devos, and Valcke (2017) supported a combination of components between transformational and

instructional leadership. Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) found that transformational leadership and behaviors of the principal had a direct influence on the work environment, school climate, motivation, and innovation of teachers. Transformational leadership, according to Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) consisted of core constructs that were determined to have a positive influence on student achievement that included (a) setting direction for the school, (b) developing the capacity of teachers, and (c) designing structures for collaboration that enabled followers to have leadership roles.

Drawbacks of transformational leadership in educational settings have been reported by researchers. According to Berkovich (2016), transformational leadership lacks clearly articulated constructs to define this leadership style. Moreover, Berkovich (2016) and Urick and Bowers (2014) stated that transformational leadership shared many characteristics of other leadership styles, such as participative leadership, instructional leadership, and ethical leadership that may contribute to the vague definition of this leadership theory. Similarly, findings from a study by Mayes and Gethers (2018) reported a disconnect between principals and teachers as to what actions represented transformational leadership. While principals perceived themselves to frequently be demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors, teachers' perceptions were that the principal seldom demonstrated transformational leadership practices (Mayes & Gethers, 2018). The construct of charisma, or idealized influence, has also been questioned by researchers as this construct had not been consistently demonstrated in transformational leader. In addition, Berkovich (2016) claimed that there is a lack of extensive research on the link between transformational leadership and student outcomes.

Some researchers supported instructional leadership over transformational leadership. As argued in Hattie (2015), transformational leadership has a smaller effect size when compared to instructional leadership, however transformational leadership style is representative of over 80% of school leaders. Hattie (2015) defined effect size as a standardized measure of the strength of a relationship. Transformational leadership, according to Hattie (2015), focuses on (a) setting a vision for the school, (b) agreeing on common academic goals, (c) protecting teachers from outside influences, and (d) giving teachers autonomy in the classroom. According to Hattie (2015), this leadership style has a small effect size of .11, as compared to the effect size of instructional leadership that is .42.

Instructional Leadership

A leadership model in education that researchers often compared with transformational leadership is instructional leadership. This leadership style centers on improving teaching and learning with improved educational outcomes for students (Mayes & Gethers, 2018; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Researchers have suggested that principals who practice instructional leadership have more direct and indirect effect on student achievement than transformational leadership (Shatzer et al., 2014). Furthermore, instructional leadership has evolved from a principal directed leadership style to a shared instructional leadership model where teacher leaders participate and collaborate to enhance instructional leadership (Shatzer et al., 2014). Based on research presented by Hattie (2015), instructional leadership is primarily focused on students with the expectations that all staff are responsible for student learning. Instructional leaders design

professional development to improve the instructional practices of teachers, seek input from students and staff, establish high expectations for learning, and are fully engaged in monitoring classrooms to ensure quality instruction is operationalized in the schoolhouse (Hattie, 2015).

Researchers have asserted that instructional leaders ensure that consistent structures are in place to monitor instruction and apply research-based instructional strategies to improve teaching and learning (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). An instructional leader supports teachers in designing rigorous and challenging instruction for students with a balance of both formative and summative assessments (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) proposed that instructional leadership may improve (a) instructional delivery and classroom management of the teacher, (b) classroom climate that is focused on students, and (c) cognitive engagement of students with rigorous content and student assignments. Although instruction is the primary focus of instructional leadership, the urgency of creating a shared vision and positive school climate are operationalized through school leaders that apply this leadership style (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Furthermore, Terosky (2016) posited that instructional leaders are focused on student learning, collaborative planning time for teachers, and empowering teachers and staff to take ownership.

Instructional leaders provide meaningful feedback to teachers on instruction, evaluate teacher effectiveness, and build the capacity of the school staff to implement evidence-based practices (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Along with focusing on student outcomes, instructional leaders seek to develop and sustain a school staff that is fully

committed to supporting student learning with an emphasis on equity and student engagement in the learning process (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). A study by Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, and Merchant (2014) examined successful principal leadership and found that instructional leadership influenced teaching and learning, professional development, and collaboration among teachers while improving school climate.

The Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington, College of Education (2019) proposed a framework for instructional leadership that suggested that school leaders should focus on learning for both students and adults while measuring improvement in both. Moreover, instructional leadership starts with the principal as the lead learner who is reflective and adjusts to the diverse needs of the school community. Principals who focused on instructional leadership and create structures for teacher collaboration facilitated improved academic outcomes for students (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Furthermore, Ross and Cozzens (2016) recommended that school leaders enhance their instructional leadership by practicing increased collaboration, professionalism, understanding of diversity, innovation, and reflection of leadership practices.

An instructional focus on student learning is essential for students who may be marginalized due to race and poverty (Woods & Martin, 2016). Without an intense focus on quality instruction in the classroom for all students, the achievement gap for marginalized students will continue to widen (Woods & Martin, 2016). Along with supporting quality instruction, Woods and Martin (2016) identified five components that improved academic outcomes for students in poverty. The components are (a) providing basic needs for students, (b) designing academic interventions, (c) focusing on reading

instruction, (d) arranging extended academic time, and (e) building relationships with students.

Students in poverty may face barriers in education. Poverty was identified as a significant risk factor for low student achievement in a study by Hinn, Hollo, and Scott (2018). To mitigate this risk factor certain instructional strategies were investigated and found to have significant influence on student achievement for students in poverty. Hinn et al., (2018) suggested that the instructional strategies of providing opportunities for students to frequently respond during instruction and giving positive feedback to students resulted in higher student achievement in schools in poverty.

Researchers have shown that principals encounter obstacles when implementing instructional leadership. As stated in Hattie (2015) most principals do not engage in instructional leadership as their primary leadership style. In like manner, Shaked (2018) suggested barriers that principals may face that may prevent them from applying instructional leadership practices in their schools. Findings from the study indicated that principals

- reported having limited time that is free from daily distractions;
- expressed a lack of understanding of the definition of instructional leadership;
- believed their primary role was to attend to the social and emotional needs of students and teachers;
- held the perception that their primary role was to focus on the daily operations of the school building with a focus on student safety.

School Climate

School climate is a combination of factors in a schoolhouse that influence a person's perceptions or feelings about a school (Smith & Shouppe, 2018; Sopko & LaRocco, 2018). Common factors that define school climate include safety, relationships, a sense of belonging, and connectedness to school (Martinez, Coker, McMahon, Cohen, and Thapa, 2016). Students who participated in extracurricular activities have a more positive perception of school climate and have an increased of feeling of connectedness to school (Martinez et al., 2016).

An additional factor that influences school climate was identified in research as trust (Adams & Forsyth, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). As expressed in Green (2017), building trust among students and families who have been traditionally marginalized by race and poverty may take time, but school leaders should act with humility and align their words with their actions. Adams and Forsyth (2013) argued that trust is essential in high-poverty urban schools. A principal can establish trust between teachers and parents by making good decisions regarding instructional priorities, showing professionalism and collegiality toward teachers, encouraging community engagement, and showing honesty through interpersonal relationships and interactions (Kars & Inandi, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Similarly, when trust exists among staff members, collaboration improves and unites school professionals toward a common vision for improvement (Adams & Forsyth, 2013).

The Wallace Foundation (2013), an organization that works to improve educational outcomes for disadvantage students, included the development of school

climate as one of five key effective principal practices that influenced student achievement. According to the Wallace Foundation (2019), social and emotional learning is an important component of school climate and has been linked to future success in life for students. In addition, the Wallace Foundation (2019) stated that social and emotional learning included supports for students to develop non-cognitive skills such as interpersonal skills and character development.

Responsiveness rather than reactivity is key to supporting the unique needs of low-income students (Kraft et al., 2015). Kraft et al. (2015) suggested structures for collaboration that supported students in the area of school climate along with academics. Recommendations from the study included

- coherence and consistency with instruction to empower teachers to effectively teach the curriculum;
- establishing structures for a safe, disciplined, and orderly learning environment for all students;
- identifying students with social and emotional learning needs in order to create targeted supports for students;
- collaboration with families to solicit their support with structures for collaboration in place to sustain an orderly learning environment for their students.

In a study by Smith and Shouppe (2018), the effects of school climate on the academic outcomes of students in reading and math were examined. Results of the data analysis revealed that although school climate significantly effects reading and math achievement outcomes, the effect on reading achievement was most remarkable. Findings

of the study emphasized the importance of positive school climates especially for schools designated as Title 1. Smith and Shouppe (2018) posited that supports for students attending Title 1 schools need to address the unique needs in schools with greater levels of poverty. As a result of the study, Smith and Shouppe (2018) provided recommendations for principals to focus on to improve school climate. The focus areas are school environment, relationships, instruction, and safety.

Researchers have shown that a positive relationship exists between a caring school climate and student achievement (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Smith & Shouppe, 2018). Furthermore, Louis et al. (2016) found that caring principal leadership has indirect effects on the overall welfare of students and teachers. Principals who practiced caring leadership facilitated school environments that provided emotional, social, and academic supports for students, along with promoting meaningful relationships between students and teachers (Louis et al., 2016).

Parent engagement is a factor that is influenced by school climate. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) proposed that principals have the ultimate responsibility to build a school climate that is welcoming for parents and encourages them to be engaged with their child's education. The findings of the study concluded that parents were more engaged with the school when they perceived the principal as welcoming and demonstrating leadership practices that were supportive of parental involvement (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Furthermore, Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) emphasized the importance of principals in high poverty schools to demonstrate greater emotional literacy themselves to meet the social and emotional needs of families in poverty.

Schools need to be responsive and practice adaptive leadership to meet the educational needs of the community (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016). Kershner and McQuillan (2016) argued that adaptive leadership requires transformational leadership practices that include collaboration and a shared vision among members of a school community. Adaptive leadership is a leadership style that engages in addressing complex and challenging issues in schools by building relational trust and creating conditions for growth and sustainable change (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Furthermore, schools are a complex and diverse social system and need adaptive leaders who understand how to address the needs of our changing student demographics and build capacity around learning and equity (Leppard, 2018).

Characteristics of a positive school climate reinforce academic goals, support student learning, and inspire staff to provide a quality education with equitable access for all students (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). According to Hooper and Bernhardt (2016), the importance of establishing and promoting positive school climate is essential for developing a shared vision. All components of school improvement efforts must be reflected in the vision of the school that is operationalized in the school climate (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Equally important is that all school processes and programs aligned to the school vision be continually monitored to ensure that they are reflected in the school climate and have a positive influence on student achievement for all students (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016).

Researchers suggested that effective principals established a positive school climate through a shared vision that sets direction, and builds the capacity of staff (Garza,

Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014; Goodwin, 2015). Sun and Leithwood (2015a) stated that effective principals established clear goals aligned with the school mission that is consistently communicated to all stakeholders. Past studies have shown that student motivation, achievement, and a sense of belonging is indirectly enhanced when principals supported collaboration among staff and created positive school climates (Day et al., 2016). Similarly, studies exist that examined effective principal leadership practices in high performing schools and found that effective principals understood the value of professional development for teachers in strengthening their capacity (Huggins et al., 2017; Quin et al., 2015; Woods & Martin, 2016). According to Kellar and Slayton (2016) additional studies are needed that investigate the supports for principals around the psychological and structural factors that influence school climate.

Summary and Conclusions

Principals have a key role in the educational outcomes for students in their schools, along with supporting and developing staff, building relationships, and encouraging parent engagement. Researchers have shown that the principal is second only to teachers in influencing student achievement. Therefore, it is critical that the principal possess effective leadership skills to meet the demands of their own unique educational experience in leading within the context of their school. Various leadership theories and styles in education have existed for decades, however the popularity among preferred leadership styles is dynamic and has been a frequent topic of research studies. Recent studies in conjunction with enduring and influential publications over the past several decades have supported transformational and instructional leadership as important

factors that influence student achievement. Recently, school climate has become another factor that has indirect influence on the academic outcomes and future success of students.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. Aligned with the purpose of the study, the literature review describes the conceptual framework that grounds the study that is a combination of Kouzes and Posner's (2017) transformational leadership model and the constructs of school climate as proposed by Dewitt (2018). An overview of the history of educational reform and legislation to improve educational outcomes for low income students attending Title 1 schools is presented followed by a review of literature on transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and school climate. A synopsis of the literature review emphasizes the importance of principals demonstrating leadership styles that are most influential depending on the educational context. There are unique leadership practices that are thought to be important for principals leading Title 1 schools with low income students.

In Chapter 3 I describe the methodology used to gather the data for my study to answer the research questions. In Chapter 4 I present a discussion of the data, while Chapter 5 presents the findings, conclusions, and implications for further research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. The study was needed to address the gap in practice that less than 34% of Title 1 schools in this school district had demonstrated a pattern of academic growth in reading over 3 years. The findings of the study inform support and coaching strategies for principals in Title 1 schools where students are not making academic growth in reading.

The major sections of Chapter 3 are the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. Included in the methodology are details on the participant selection process, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection, and the data analysis plan. Each section provides an explanation of how these components were applied in the research study.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon of this study was that there are Title 1 schools in this district that have demonstrated a pattern of academic growth in reading while other Title 1 schools in this district have not. The research design was a qualitative case study. As noted by Yin (2013), a case study involves studying a single case or multiple cases of a current phenomenon. Similarly, Lambert (2012) defined a case study as a thorough investigation of a group, event, or an individual within an authentic real-life context. In addition, Lambert (2012) proposed that case studies are usually characterized as small-scale research studies. The research design of a qualitative case study was appropriate for

this study because the study examined and described the perspectives of participants based on their experiences in an authentic real-life context of an elementary school. This study meets the criteria of a small-scale research study because eight elementary principals were selected as participants based on purposeful sampling.

Research questions in qualitative case studies are broad and directly aligned to understanding, explaining, and describing the phenomenon under study and are informed by the conceptual framework of the study (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The two research questions in this research study were:

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Role of the Researcher

I designed interview questions aligned with the two research questions for the study and conducted semistructured interviews to gather data through in-person, interviews with eight principal participants who met the criteria of the study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Rubin and Rubin (2012), semistructured interviews are common in qualitative research and serve to guide the interview with specific questions, as well as allow for follow-up questions based on participants' responses and used as a probe to gather additional information.

I have over 25 years of experience in education as a teacher, principal, and principal supervisor, but I have no supervisory role over the principals selected to

participate in this study. Although I am an executive leader in this school district, one component of the criteria for selection of participants for the study was that I did not directly supervise any of the participants. The potential for a power relationship with participants was mitigated because participants were told they may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions, and confidentiality of participants was guaranteed. Incentives to participate in the study were not provided.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The location of the study was a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic states. The population of the study was 110 elementary school principals. The school district has 110 elementary schools, 53 of which are identified as Title 1 schools. Participants were selected based on purposeful sampling that selects participants based on characteristics aligned with the objective of the study. Purposeful sampling is a sampling method where participants who can contribute to answering the research questions of the study are chosen (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size of this qualitative case study was eight elementary school principals. Criteria for selection of participants for the study were: (a) elementary principals leading schools designated as Title 1; (b) elementary principals leading schools that had demonstrated a 3-year pattern of growth in reading based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the MAP assessments from school years 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018; (c) elementary principals who had served in their current assignment for at least 3 years; and (d) elementary principals who I do not supervise.

Eight elementary principals were selected and invited to participate because these were the only Title 1 schools in the school district that met the criteria for the study. I sent an e-mail to the selected principal participants with information about the study. Included in the e-mail was a description and purpose of the study along with the research questions. A research study approval letter from the school district was included along with time limits for the interview. Participants were asked to respond to the invitation to participate in the study through e-mail, and I scheduled the schedule the interviews at their schools in a private location that the principal specified.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, instrumentation refers to the tools developed to be used to gather data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The instruments used to gather data for this study were semistructured interviews conducted using an interview question guide (Appendix A). I developed an interview question guide with explicit follow-up questions to guide the interview and provide consistency in asking follow-up questions. An interview question guide is a protocol that structures the order of interview questions and includes prompts for each question to capture similar information during each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews are common in qualitative research to gather the lived experiences of participants. Qualitative researchers seek to interpret phenomena and understand the meaning and perspectives of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Grounded by the conceptual framework for the study, I developed interview questions that answer the study's research questions. The conceptual framework for the study combined the transformational leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017)

with constructs of school climate proposed by Dewitt (2018) and Dewitt and Slade (2014). To ensure content validity of the instrumentation I asked three professional colleagues to review the interview questions for clarity and content. Two colleagues possessed doctorate degrees and one was a doctoral candidate. All three colleagues hold supervisory positions in their school districts. I triangulated the data by reviewing interview transcript data from eight different principals with varying levels of leadership experience across the school system. Triangulation of data involves using multiple data collection methods to ensure validity of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited participants for my study using the participants' school district e-mail addresses. I crafted the body of the e-mail using the sample consent form template from Walden University. This consent form provided an overview of my doctoral dissertation purpose, methodology, background information, procedures, sample interview questions, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, and steps taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality. I provided my contact information, and informed consent was obtained in a reply e-mail from the participant with a response of "I consent." Signed consent forms were completed at the beginning of the interviews.

Once e-mail consent responses were received, interviews were scheduled with each participant at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The data collection instrument was the semistructured interview. An audio recording was made of each interview. Once the data have been transcribed, member checking occurred as participants were asked to review the transcript and my interpretation of their responses

to the interview questions for accuracy. As posited by Ravitch and Carl (2016) member checking is a process for participants to review and validate the researcher's interpretations of the responses they provided during the data collection interview process.

Data Analysis Plan

The goal of qualitative research is to develop descriptive statements about a context-specific phenomenon that may be applied or be useful to broader contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As presented in Saldaña (2016), thematic analysis of interview data requires a deep interpretation and involvement by the researcher. In like manner, thematic analysis consists of statements that bring meaning and identify the participants' lived experience. Similarly, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011) reported that thematic analysis results in identifying and describing meaning of interview data with careful consideration to both implicit and explicit information obtained during the interview.

I analyzed the data in this qualitative case study through thematic analysis and open coding to develop common themes in the data and develop thick descriptions. Burkholder et al., (2016) explained open coding as a system to organize common themes that present in the data and subsequently categorize the themes using a label. Burkholder et al. (2016) proposed that themes emerge through the examination of data. Themes were aligned with the research questions that are specific to transformational leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth in reading of students in Title 1 schools. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Trustworthiness

One goal of qualitative research is trustworthiness. This construct is also referred to as validity. Components of trustworthiness included the research design, data collection, data analysis and summary of findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Trustworthiness as defined by Ravitch and Carl (2016), refers to the credibility and rigor of a study and whether the findings provide an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences. There are several components that were applied in this study to increase trustworthiness of a qualitative study, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

A component of credibility that increases trustworthiness is the researcher's competency in understanding the nuances that may emerge during the study, including variations in patterns and themes that may occur in the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Burkholder et al. (2016), credibility is interpreted as the believability of the findings of the study based on the data provided. Ensuring credibility for this qualitative case study involved peer review, member checking, thick descriptions, and reflexivity.

I solicited the input of three qualified colleagues to engage in peer review. Two colleagues possessed doctorate degrees and one was a doctoral candidate. All three

colleagues held supervisory positions in their school districts. My colleagues provided input on the data analysis and findings of the study. Burkholder et al. (2016) stated that peer review is a process where the researcher solicits input from trusted and qualified colleagues on the progress of the study in terms of data analysis and potential findings. Member checking refers to the process of having the study participants review the transcript of their interview as well as soliciting their feedback on the findings of the study (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided participants with transcripts of their interview to obtain feedback on my interpretation of the data. Lastly, I developed thick descriptions that included detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and evidence to justify the findings (Burkholder et al., 2016).

I maintained and documented interview notes as well as annotations on any adaptations to the study that were needed to the complexity of qualitative research to ensure reflexivity and self-reflection (Burkholder et al., 2016). Reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher engages in self-reflection of their own skill set, communication style, and potential biases during all parts of the research study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) offered a list of guiding questions that may support a researcher in operating from an inquiry model to gather the authentic experiences of the participants. The questions focused on how the researcher presents themselves during the interview process, their communication style, listening skills and other complex issues that may impede the gathering of authentic experiences of the participants.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is when a research study has meaning for broader audiences beyond the context of the study. Burkholder et al. (2016) suggested that it is the responsibility of the audience to apply meaning that is relevant to their own context. However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to establish a clear description of the setting and research design so the reader can apply findings of the study appropriately to their own lived experience and context. Similarly, Ravitch and Carl (2016) argued that the research study must contain thick descriptions that include detailed descriptions of the data and context where the study occurred. Thick descriptions supported the reader in transferring and applying various constructs of the study to their own educational context. I developed thick descriptions along with making judgements regarding the depth and breadth of the descriptions.

Dependability

A solid research design is necessary for a study to be dependable. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described dependability as structures for how the data are collected and aligned to the research problem and purpose, and whether the data is stable over time. Dependability requires the researcher to have a strong set of reasons for how the data are collected and whether the data answers the research question. One way to ensure dependability is through audit trails. Burkholder et al. (2016) explained that an audit trail provides a detailed explanation on how the study was operationalized and the process involved in analyzing the data. I maintained an audit trail that consisted of detailed explanations on the processes applied in the study.

Confirmability

Although the qualitative researcher brings varying levels of subjectivity to the study, the methods applied to the study must be grounded in confirmable procedures, data analysis, and explanation of findings (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability of a study exists when similar conclusions about the data analysis and findings of a study would be made by other researchers (Burkholder et al., 2016). A researcher needs to understand how their own biases may influence the interpretation of the data (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). I mitigated potential bias and ensured confirmability in this study through the processes of peer review and reflexivity. These processes required engagement and self-reflection on my part to understand my own skill set, communication style, and potential biases during all parts of the research study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures require that the participants are provided with information about the study prior to their participation through informed consent (Burkholder et al., (2016). Informed consent were obtained from participants that specified the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the study, expectations of the participants, the procedures for data collection, the steps that were taken to maintain confidentiality, and clarification that they may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions. I provided study information and requested informed consent via e-mail and through signed consent. Interested participants who wished to participate responded to the e-mail with the response of “I consent.” There were no risks associated with the study.

Walden University's Internal Review Board (IRB) provided requirements for all steps of the research process to further ensure ethical procedures were followed. The IRB approval number for the study was #12-24-19-0755368. In addition, the school district that was described as the site of the study had provided approval for this study. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained by deidentifying all data. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews, and of my initial interpretations of their data. Transcripts of the interviews were stored on paper and on an external flash drive and will be maintained for a minimum of 5 years. Once the final dissertation was completed, an executive summary was provided to the participants.

While I am an executive leader in this school district, one component of the criteria for selection of participants was that the I do not directly supervise any of the participants selected. The potential for a power relationship between myself and participants was mitigated because participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions, and confidentiality will be guaranteed. In addition, no incentives were offered to the participants.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I provided a synopsis of the methodology of this qualitative research study and identified the research design as a qualitative case study. The sample size was eight elementary school principals selected to participate through purposeful sampling. I outlined specific criteria for selection of participants for this study along with a description of the research instrument. I concluded Chapter 3 with a discussion on the constructs of trustworthiness and ethical procedures that were adhered to in this study.

Chapter 4 will present the data and data analysis. In Chapter 5 I will present a discussion of the findings and implications of this qualitative case study.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Chapter 4, I provide a description of the methodology applied for gathering, recording, transcribing, and coding interview data. Moreover, I present an interpretation of the data using thematic analysis for this qualitative case study. The research problem in the study was the gap in research exploring and describing effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrate academic growth. The research questions that informed the methodology for my study are:

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

The research questions are broad and directly aligned to understanding, explaining, and describing the phenomenon of my research study and are informed by the conceptual framework of the study (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I selected a qualitative case study design to collect data through in-person interviews to understand the participants' unique experiences related to the research questions for my study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A case study requires studying a single case or multiple cases of an existing phenomenon and is typical of a smaller scale research study (Lambert, 2012). The purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may have

contributed to students' academic growth and to coach other school leaders on these practices (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The study of leadership and school climate practices is needed to support and coach principals in Title 1 schools where students are not demonstrating academic growth. Furthermore, findings from this study may be useful for designing professional development content for aspiring and current principals, along with informing the selection and hiring of principals to lead Title 1 elementary schools. This chapter is organized into sections that consist of the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary. I received approval to conduct the study from both my school district Institutional Review Board and from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, approval #12-24-19-0755368.

Setting

The data for this qualitative case study were gathered through individual, in-person, in-depth, semistructured, and open-ended interviews. In-depth qualitative interviews offer a researcher detailed information that includes examples, experiences, and stories from the perspectives of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, open-ended interviews provide the interviewee with the opportunity to respond the way they choose and extend their responses while being guided by the researcher using interview prompts as needed. A benefit to in-person interviews in qualitative research includes the opportunity to observe the participant in their natural environment while listening, observing, and noting patterns of behavior and actions in authentic settings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A total of eight elementary school principals from a large urban-suburban public school district in the mid-Atlantic region met the criteria for my study. The criteria for selection of participants consisted of elementary school principals in schools designated as Title 1, schools that have demonstrated a 3-year pattern of growth in reading based on a district-wide assessment, principals who have served in their current assignment for at least 3 years, and principals who I do not currently supervise. Out of approximately 40 Title 1 elementary schools in this district, only eight principals met the criteria for the study. There were no personal or organizational conditions that may have influenced participants or their experiences as a part of the study.

Out of the eight participants, seven held master's degrees and one participant earned a doctorate. Seven participants served as principal in only one school, and one participant had served in more than one school as a principal. Two principals were male and six were female. Four principals were African American and four were Caucasian. Participants have held careers in education spanning between 17 and 30 years, with the average being 23.9 years (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Information

Career characteristic	Range	Average
Years in education	17–30	23.9
Years in school district	7–25	18.9
Years as assistant principal	1–7	3.8
Years as principal in current school	4–13	8.4

Data Collection

In this qualitative case study, I conducted eight in-person interviews with principals who met the criteria for the study. The purpose of the interviews was to collect and analyze principals' responses to interview questions. After being granted IRB approval from Walden University, I received permission from my school system's IRB as well as permission to use internal system-wide data to inform selection of participants for my study.

I began the process of collecting data by first recruiting eight participants using my Walden University e-mail account and sending invitations to principals using their school e-mail addresses available on the school district public website. The e-mail invitation included the leader consent form with an attachment that provided more information on the study. The leader consent form included an introduction to the study, interview procedures, any potential risks and benefits, information about confidentiality of principals, and a brief explanation of the process of transcript review and member checking. In addition, the leader consent form indicated that a signature for consent would be obtained before the interview. The consent form attachment offered further information on the study along with criteria for the study, approximate length of the interview, potential use of findings from the study, and information on the interview questions that would be sent to principals in advance so they could prepare for the interview.

All eight principals agreed to participate in the study and sent me a reply e-mail indicating they would participate. I replied to each principal to schedule a time and location for the interview that was convenient for them. At the beginning of each interview, each participant signed a paper copy of the consent form and agreed for the interview to be recorded. I informed all principals that their identities would be protected. To protect the identity of participants, I labeled each transcript with a P, that represented the term participant, followed by a corresponding number, for example, P1, P2, etc.

I interviewed the eight principals using an interview guide I created that consisted of eight open-ended questions aligned with the two research questions for the study with follow-up prompts used as needed (Appendix A). The interview guide supported the construct of a semistructured interview format where I prepared a series of questions in advance designed to answer the research questions in alignment with the conceptual framework of the study. As a characteristic of semistructured interviews, a set of follow-up questions were applied to gain specific examples or to extend the responses of the participants (Lambert, 2012).

Table 2 displays each interview question with alignment to the research question and constructs from the conceptual framework.

Table 2
Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

Interview questions	RQ 1: Transformational leadership practices (model, inspire, challenge, enable, encourage)	RQ 2: School climate practices (self-efficacy, collective efficacy, SEL)
1. How did you establish a shared vision at your school?	X	X
2. What processes are in place for collaborative teacher planning and teamwork?	X	X
3. In what ways do you establish and model norms about how people should be treated in your school?	X	X
4. How do you encourage and recognize the contributions and accomplishments of your staff?	X	X
5. How have you worked to creatively challenge existing processes or practices that marginalize underserved students in your school?	X	
6. How do you determine and support the social emotional needs of your staff and students?		X
7. What personal leadership characteristics do you believe supports the success of your school?	X	X
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your leadership or climate practices?	X	X

All data were gathered through one-on-one interviews in either a private conference room or office for confidentiality purposes. The principals were given a choice as to the time and location of the interview. The duration of the interviews ranged from 32 to 45 minutes. All eight interviews were completed over a period of two and a half weeks. Each principal was interviewed once. Table 3 presents the location, frequency, and duration of the interviews.

Table 3
Location, Frequency, and Duration of Each Participant Interview

Participant	Location	Frequency	Duration
P1	Principal's office	One interview	32 minutes
P2	Conference room	One interview	40 minutes
P3	Principal's office	One interview	38 minutes
P4	Principal's office	One interview	45 minutes
P5	Principal's office	One interview	41 minutes
P6	Principal's office	One interview	40 minutes
P7	Principal's office	One interview	36 minutes
P8	Principal's office	One interview	35 minutes

The interviews were recorded using an app on my cell phone called Temi, which is a recording app that enabled simultaneous recording of interviews while transcribing to text for a small fee. I converted each text transcription into a Word document. Along with recording the interviews using the app, I took notes while following the interview guide to maintain consistency for each interview. At the conclusion of each interview, I reminded participants that I would send them a copy of the transcript for their review so they could make edits or corrections as they chose. I thanked them for their time and

thorough responses. Two out of the eight participants sent a few minor edits that consisted of adding more detail to a few of their responses.

After each interview, I listened to each recording to become more familiar with the responses and perspectives of each principal as well as made additional notes on the interview guides. Using the Word document generated for each interview, I numbered each line of the text, printed a paper copy and continued notations in the margins to support reliability in data analysis. The total number of pages of transcripts generated from the eight interviews was 71 pages using a 1.5 inch spacing between lines to provide space for notes. Throughout the interview process the recording app that I selected worked seamlessly and generated accurate transcripts of the interviews. No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection process, except for a minor interruption during two of the interviews. In both instances, a telephone rang in the principal's office and the principal answered the phone. I paused the recording app during each of these minor interruptions. In both cases, parents were calling with a concern about their student. Both principals addressed their concerns immediately and conversations were productive and supportive. Consequently, I made notes on the interview guides to document the responsiveness of both principals by answering the phone after school hours and displaying genuine concern for the parents.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to intensely focus on what the participants communicate within their unique context and life experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I began my data analysis by printing out a paper copy of each transcript and

assigning each transcript with letter P followed by a number to protect the identity of the participants. By protecting the identity of participants, I was able to attribute direct quotes and other responses accurately throughout the data analysis and results sections. Next, I e-mailed a Word document of the transcripts to each participant for member checking to review and validate the transcription of the interview and provide input as needed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each of the eight participants responded that their transcript accurately reflected their interview. Two participants added a few details to extend upon their responses.

I began the process of thematic analysis through the first cycle of coding using in vivo coding that involved highlighting, interpreting, and annotating the participants' own language from sections of the text (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). According to Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2011, thematic analysis of interview data requires a deep interpretation and involvement by the researcher and attention to both implicit and explicit information obtained during the interviews. Next, I reviewed the highlighted and annotated sections from the transcripts, field notes, and observations made during the interviews to triangulate the implicit and explicit data from all participants to create codes organized by the interview questions. Coding in qualitative research consists of labeling and organizing data to find patterns and themes across the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Table 4 indicates the results of the first cycle of coding determined through in vivo coding of taken from actual transcripts from participants.

Table 4
First Cycle Coding: Codes Determined Through In Vivo Coding

Interview questions	Codes
1	Reflects on own beliefs. Solicits input and beliefs from all staff. Has a core leadership team. Teamwork. Focuses on the "why." Examines visions from other schools. Encourages and listens to teacher voice. Looks at student achievement data. Sense of urgency. Adjusts for shifting demographics. Is passionate about students.
2	Examines data. Is present. Learns and plans with teachers. Uses meeting protocol and processes for planning with teachers. Schedules time for collaborative planning. Respects teachers' input and time. Learns from the past. Empowers staff. Creates teams to solve problems of practice. Creative scheduling. Delegates roles. Includes support staff. Stays focused.
3	Welcomes parents. Models professionalism and positivity. Emphasizes sense of belonging. Includes school counselor. Proactive. Respects confidentiality. Has meeting norms. Supports teachers. Models ways to communicate to student. Treats everyone with respect. Has courageous conversations with staff. Has a climate team. Relationships matter. Has code of conduct.
4	Recognizes teachers in weekly newsletter. Encourages sharing of success with students at faculty meetings. Recognizes their efforts with students. Has meaningful, individual conversations with staff. Uses social media to promote staff. Notices small things. Gratitude journals. Writes thank you notes. Includes pictures in staff newsletter. Solicits input from staff. Encourages teachers to recognize each other. Stays connected to staff.
5	Courageous conversations about race and ethnicity. Has sense of urgency. Self-reflective. Teamwork focused. Looks at data. Has high expectations for self and others. Focus on beliefs. Reflect on teaching practices. Examines student data for underserved student groups. Book study on equity. Problem-solve with teachers. Create mentoring programs for students. Recognizes value of school counselor. Invest in professional development of staff. Understands poverty's impact on students. Builds capacity of adults. Creative scheduling to maximize time on task. Supports professional development.
6	Empowers school counselor and social worker. Supports SEL needs of staff. Knows staff and students. Identify students at risk. Has a plan. Notice teachers. Be available. Problem-solve with teachers. Has proactive response team. Has passion for students. Has a safety team. School wide processes for student SEL needs. Teamwork. Structures for collaboration in place. Respects feelings of teachers. Shows empathy for staff. Builds trusting relationships. Focused on students. Staff greets students every day. Student ambassadors. Restorative practices. Promotes positive school climate. Relationships matter.
7	Shared leadership. Invests in professional development for staff. Non authoritarian. Works hard. Visible and accessible. Builds relationships. Engages with students. Treats everyone with respect. Models professionalism. Passionate about the job. Stays focused. Believes in staff. Problem solver. Open door policy. Understands demands of teachers. Caring. Committed to students. Strong communicator. Reflective. Flexible. Everything is important. High expectations for self. Builds relationships. Active listener. Lead learner. Open minded.
8	Believes in teamwork. Sense of purpose. Intrinsically motivated. Grows people. Builds capacity of adults. Recognizes people's strengths. Advocate for students. Problem solver. Strategic when hiring staff. Teaching and learning focus. Cares about people.

For the second cycle of coding, I concisely summarized and combined similar codes to be more succinct. Next, I organized the condensed codes into categories and identified the emerging themes across the data. Table 4 displays the codes from the data aligned with the four overarching themes that emerged.

Table 5
Second Cycle Coding: Themes Within and Across Coded Data

Codes	Categories	Themes
• Focus on beliefs • Sense of purpose • Advocate for students • Sense of urgency • Teaching and learning focus • Solicits input	• Defining school mission	• Actualizes a compelling vision
• Welcomes parents • Models professionalism • Effective communication • Active listener • Trustworthy • Visible • Values & respects people • Shows empathy • Caring	• Leading by example • Establishing relationship	• Promotes positive relationships for building capacity
• Resilient • Demographic shifts • Courageous conversations • Equity • Culturally responsive	• Embracing challenges	• Practices adaptive leadership
• Develops teams • Instructional leader • Creates schedules • Protocols • Encourages input • Provides feedback	• Promoting teamwork • Planning instruction	• Fosters collaborative actions Focused on improvement

The themes that emerged from the data were: (a) actualizes a compelling vision, (b) promotes positive relationships for building capacity, (c) practices adaptive leadership, and (d) fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. The results gathered from the eight interviews, along with my informal observations and field notes are presented in the next section and are organized using the four themes that emerged from the data. Direct quotes from the interviews are provided as evidence of the authentic experiences and perspectives of the participants. Furthermore, there were no discrepant cases in the study.

Results

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may have contributed to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. The results and findings of the study revealed four themes from the data analysis that are aligned to the research questions and conceptual framework for the study. The conceptual framework for the study combined transformational leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) and constructs of school climate (Dewitt, 2018) and are supported by participants' responses in this section.

The following research questions informed the study:

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principal's perspectives on school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

The four themes emerged from commonalities identified across the data. Following each theme, I developed theme statements that provide insight on the theme as it occurs in the data. Each theme is presented with the corresponding theme statement followed by the results (Saldaña, 2016).

Theme 1: Actualizes a Compelling Vision

Principals create a vision for the future by collaborating with others around shared beliefs and creating conditions for the vision to be carried out.

Shared beliefs. All eight principals focused on their own beliefs and the beliefs of their staff as they created and updated their vision. P1 shared that "Our vision was around making sure that we ensure that all of our students were career and college ready when they graduated from high school," while P2 explained that, "We spent time looking at our mission and vision statement and collectively designed our shared vision and mission about how we wanted to move our school forward. We worked to develop our belief statements as a school." P3 expressed that they wanted to understand the beliefs of teachers and where they see themselves in terms of helping students. P3 stated "What is our why, and why are you here? This can be a very challenging school to work at, but it can be the most rewarding school at the same time."

Both P4 and P5 stated that they examined the hopes and dreams that staff had for their students along with examining their beliefs about the students they serve. P5 stressed that "I want our students to leave us and be prepared for middle school and have all the tools as learners to be able to make choices for themselves and have those opportunities." P6 commented on changing student demographics as connected to beliefs

about students and emphasized that teachers must understand the importance of culturally responsive teaching to support all students, and how this must be incorporated in the vision of the school.

P7 emphasized the importance of the vision beginning with the beliefs of the principal and shared, “I think the administrator has to know why they are at the school, know their purpose for being at the school, and really be invested in the groups of students they serve. P8 discussed beliefs of adults and how these beliefs are important in the development of a vision and stated,

> We came together as a team at one of the faculty meetings and we talked about the beliefs and we talked about our values and what is important to us to develop our vision. We focused on what we would do to become the school we expected to become, and we looked for commonalities.

Stakeholder input. All principals discussed their process for gathering input from staff when creating and revisiting their school’s vision. P1 and P2 explained how they also looked at visions from other schools before crafting their own and first met with the core school progress planning team to draft the vision before presenting the draft for input from all staff and parents. In addition, P1 and P2 had the belief that they can learn from their colleagues in other schools with similar student demographics and needs. P3 revealed that they met with each staff member individually first, then came together with the core school progress planning team. P3 stated,

> One of the first things that I did was I came in, I started doing interviews with every single teacher and sometimes couple that with a meeting with the grade level and get as many voices as I possibly could.

P4, P6, P7, and P8 met with all staff members in a larger group first to gather input and then continued developing the vision with the core school progress planning team. P4 communicated "I had an open meeting for staff if they would like to come." P8 shared that they wanted to hear from parents as to what things they can do better as a school. P8 explained how the focus of their vision has changed over time and stated,

> When we initially developed the vision, the focus was really based upon academic expectations. But over the years we've looked at the total child and being able to provide supports for the social, emotional, and physical needs of the child.

Two of the five transformational leadership practices from Kouzes and Posner's (2017) leadership model are Inspire a Shared Vision and Enable Others to Act. The findings in Theme 1 support both leadership practices. Principals worked to create an ideal image of what their school can become in order to develop a compelling vision of success for their students. Principals created teams to work on the school vision and gathered the input of school staff. Collective efficacy is also reflected in Theme 1 and is a construct of school climate that is operationalized through the belief that goals can be accomplished through teamwork (Dewitt, 2018). By listening to the voices of all stakeholders in a school and engaging in collaborative inquiry, principals will support efforts to develop a compelling vision for their schools.

Theme 2: Promotes Positive Relationships for Building Capacity

Principals who promote positive relationships and invest in the professional growth of staff, lead by example, create a welcoming and inclusive school environment, and support the SEL needs of students and staff increase capacity.

Leads by example. All participants reported that they strive to lead by example and be role models for their staff and communities. P1 noted that importance of modeling conversations "with students, parents, the secretaries and the whole school." P1 emphasized the importance of deescalating situations to maintain a calm learning environment. All participants believed that leading by example begins with the administration. P3 stated, "I'm going to treat you with respect no matter how you treat me, and that's what I kind of hope to create, be a model here." P2 explained, "I feel that it starts at the administrative level by leading by example. I believe that the way I speak, the way I interact, the way I listen is what I would expect the same of my staff." P8 described that is vital to model the behaviors "from the administration all the way down. As we see staff members that are very strong with positive interactions, we have them work with some of the younger staff members to establish that as well."

Several participants discussed how they set expectations for the way others are treated in all areas of the school environment. P4 emphasized that they set norms at the beginning of the year to have high expectations about professional learning communities. P5 explained, "We started a process of setting expectations on how to provide a dignified response to all people."

P5 solicited feedback from the community and learned that may parents did not feel welcome in the school. Using this information, P5 “changed the way we invited people in and interacted with them in the building.” P6 shared the significance of setting high expectations for all staff in how they interact with students and parents. P6, P7, and P8 reiterated the importance of the principal modeling professional communication to staff.

All principals emphasized how they begin each year reviewing appropriate communication between teachers and students. They provide opportunities for staff to share communication strategies that worked with students and parents. P7 shared, “We revisit the expectation in our parent handbook every year.” P8 stressed, “How we interact with the students shows them in a caring manner that we genuinely care.” Similarly, P8 noted “I believe if you model how you communicate with teachers, that should be reciprocated to the children. It’s relationships first, because when you have the relationships, students are less likely to treat you in a disrespectful manner.”

Appreciates others. All eight participants were passionate about encouraging the heart and showing deep appreciation and care to students and staff. Most believed that by appreciating staff for their efforts and accomplishments with students, that this will be transferred to students to improve school climate and the sense of belonging. P1 explained, “At the end of the year, I have my own awards assembly for my staff, and I give certificates to people who are caught doing certain things to support student learning in the building.” All participates revealed that they appreciate their staff and recognize

their efforts. P4 stated that “the more I do to recognize and acknowledge teachers’ hard work, the better they do.”

Several participants had creative school climate practices to recognize staff and reinforce them supporting one another and working as a team. P4 shared “When I’m in the classrooms giving them a high five, and saying, wow, that objective is on point and letting them know that I know that they’re doing the hard work that I’m asking them to do.” P7 surveys teachers at the beginning of the year and asks them to share their desire for opportunities to grow and to be leaders. P5 explained how they use gratitude journals to start each professional development meeting. “Teachers are encouraged to reflect on something they are grateful for.” P5 added, “Typically, when we’re thinking about the accomplishments together, we try to highlight the everyday things that sometimes, in the rush of things, go unnoticed.”

Several participants used the weekly staff newsletter to highlight and recognize staff that impact teaching and learning. P2 stated “I do a weekly staff newsletter and I put those accomplishments in writing.” P6 said “The newsletter is everything for me. It takes time, but I feel like it’s effective in terms of recognizing teachers for their hard work. P8 explained “Every week we have a newsletter that goes out. Staff members recognize each other, and the instructional leadership team also recognizes staff members. Everyone has opportunities to share because I don’t see everything, and all contributions are valuable.”

Positive relationships. All eight participants discussed the importance of building positive relationships with staff and students as an important factor for leadership and school climate. P1 mentioned that their school vision focuses on positive relationships

between all school partners, and that they have “created clubs in school so teachers could build relationships with students.” P3 reflected that as a teacher, the positive feedback from the principal was valuable. P3 noted that, “My principal would come up to me and say, I loved how you did whatever it was, and it just really made me feel like she gets it. I think just being present in the classrooms is important.” P2 explained the importance of engaging with students each day and learning their names. P2 noted that it is important to for all people to have a sense of belonging and “building relationships with staff is important and “they know I value their ideas and am open to thinking outside of the box.”

P4 shared a practice of bringing staff together to build relationships, trust, and teamwork outside of school. P5 recognized the importance of positive interactions between individuals in a school and discussed the importance of having courageous conversations as needed when a staff member may not be demonstrating positive interactions. P5 stated that sometimes it is important to have private conversations with people if an undesirable behavior toward a student is observed. P5 stated that “We’re trying to set the environment to be safe and positive and conducive to learning for everybody.”

Several participants discussed the processes they have in place to support positive relationships and trust between and among staff and students. P5 stated that they have a schoolwide process for positive reinforcement and “teachers are providing a positive reinforcement daily.” P6 noted that sometimes a visual of positive reinforcement is important for teachers to see. P6 created a staff celebration board outside the faculty room so teachers can recognize each other and “write positive comments about their

peers and post them." P7 empowers staff to greet students each day and stated that staff is encouraged to engage in this practice. P7 noted that "Every child is greeted every day, and that this has been a good practice this year. We have relationships of trust, between me, the kids, teachers, and many of the parents." P8 believes that positive relationships between students and teachers have resulted in few out of school suspensions and explained, "This year my suspension data is a third of what it has been. I really think that it's the relationships."

Participants emphasized their commitment to focusing on success stories with students. P4 discussed a process for focusing on positivity with the staff. P4 noted that at each meeting they asked teachers to share "one success story that they had that week and there is always something that we can identify as a success that we had with a student."

In like manner, P5 shared that positive school climate is enhanced when each person takes responsibility and provides positive feedback to others. P5 added, "I think the positivity just really spreads. When one person sends that compliment more people respond with another one." To support a sense of belonging for students, P1 described their school's emphasis on creating afterschool clubs designed for teachers to build relationships with students. P1 communicated, "teachers could see children outside of the classroom and see them in a different light."

Supporting social emotional needs. All participants shared several perspectives on their practices for supporting the social emotional needs of students and building the collective efficacy of key staff members, such as the school counselor and social worker. P1 shared a plan in partnership with the school counselor to create a space "that is a room

that I'll be able to have staff utilize as well as maybe bring students that may have to calm down."

P2 explained that it is "important to get to know our students and to be aware of the things that may trigger them to make poor choices with how they respond to different situations or to different students." P2 added that addressing the SEL needs of students is urgent, and the school counselors can "help assess student's needs and provide additional supports through guidance lessons, social skills groups, and behavior charts."

P3 described the importance of developing a collaborative team to provide support to students, and stated,

> We have a response team. That team consists of myself, assistant principals, social emotional learning teacher, counselor, instructional support teacher, a social worker. We look at behavior data and social, emotional data, really any support calls from week to week. We have a soar mentoring program. I have a resource team that really does love our kids.

P7 and P8 emphasized the importance of the resources and partnerships to support students. P8 emphasized the importance of working in partnership with all mental health providers both within the school and in the greater community. P8 noted that they work closely with the school counselor and social worker, and often has "confidential conversations with staff members and just letting them know what resources are available, and to also let them know that we have partnerships available for support."

All participants were passionate about supporting the social emotional needs of staff as well. P3 noted that being in the classroom to notice teachers is important. P4

described how teachers support each other at the school. P6 explained that an open-door policy is in place and teachers trust the principal and share their feelings with the principal. P6 noted, “I have to be flexible to ensure that students are being treated well.” P1 added that it is equally important for school leaders to address the needs of staff and stated,

> My teachers, when they are dealing with social emotional things, go home and take a day off. I don’t give them a hard time about that because if you need that day, you need that day. I’d rather you do that, then to be here, stressed out and then your reactions come forward and your feelings come out on the kids.

The construct of school climate from the conceptual framework for the study was emphasized by all eight principals in the way they communicated their support for students and staff. The concepts of self-efficacy and collective efficacy were manifested through the theme of positive school climate by building on individual and collective beliefs in their own confidence to achieve a goal (DeWitt, 2018). Kouzes and Posner’s (2017) leadership practices of Model the Way, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart are operationalized through Theme 2 in positive school climate. The concepts of modeling expected behaviors, building trust, focusing on relationships, strengthening others, and recognizing their contributions are integrated throughout the theme of positive school climate (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Theme 3: Practices Adaptive Leadership

Principals that practice adaptive leadership embrace challenges with urgency and responsiveness, while creating capacity for learning and equity to close achievement gaps for underserved students.

Professional development on equity. All principals believed that addressing the needs of marginalized students is a priority and begins with examining the beliefs of adults working with students. P1 commented that teachers become "more empathetic and compassionate when we have conversations about what's going on in students' lives." In addition, P1 stated that many teachers still have "old mindsets in regard to what their beliefs are and what we are seeing with our students." P2 stated that it is important to "post beliefs in the hallway" as strategy to let all stakeholders know the beliefs of adults around educating all student. P3 and P7 noted that there are staff who may not share the belief that all children can learn. P7 explained, "If you're not doing this for the right reason, you might as well just not do it." P4 asks teachers to occasionally write down the vision and beliefs for students and then compare their understanding to the actual school vision. According to P4, this strategy assists school leadership to provide clarity around the vision and examine misperceptions of staff.

Two participants discussed their professional development goals around equity and access for all students by facilitating a book study with their staff. P1 revealed that they have a goal of improving culturally responsive instruction because most teachers are white, and the student population is African American. P1 noted, "I felt like that book was really great in bringing to light some of our own cultural differences that we may

have and helping us to look at things that we may perceive as inappropriate or disrespectful." Similarly, P4 shared a book study about how poverty affects the brain and provided staff with strategies that they can put in place to help students that are living in poverty thrive. P4 noted, "That was also a really good way to start the conversation because we started with poverty, then went to race, and then to special education. We also have the leadership team reading articles and having some frank conversations."

Analyzes data with teachers. Several participants focused on student data and how they work collaboratively with their teachers to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity to determine instructional practices to support the needs of all student groups. P2, P5, P7 and P8 examined data closely as the first step in addressing underserved students in their buildings. P2 revealed "If we can plan and implement strong instruction each day, we will be able to address the needs of our students because we will be focused on good instructional practices in addressing the needs of our diverse learners." P8 explained that they review data together with teachers and provide time for teams to "determine the positives, areas of concern, and plan of action." P6 communicated that teachers must understand the importance of culture, responsiveness, and appropriate instructional strategies to "help students access the curriculum in the classroom while keeping the rigor and still being supportive to students. All of these things are shifts for them because the school was typically primarily white, and now we have a shift."

Two participants shared challenges with supporting marginalized students who are new to this country and whose families struggle with a language barrier and poverty. P5 stated, "We face challenges such as our families do not have transportation and have

to have three bus changes to even get to the school." P3 focused on engaging with greater intensity into equity conversation with staff and emphasized, "We've got to do something because this kid deserves to come to our school and to make progress. And we owe it to this child, to this child's family, to our community."

All eight participants expressed passion around examining beliefs and have a sense of urgency and innovation around challenging existing practices that marginalize underserved students in their school. The transformational leadership practice of challenge the process involves taking risks, being creative and focusing on daily improvement (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). This leadership practice was exemplified in the responses of participants as they shared their perspectives on supporting marginalized students. Many participants shared the importance of building their own self efficacy to have courageous conversations with their staff around equity and access for all student groups. Developing collective efficacy for their teams was important to several participants as they facilitated professional development around equity for staff. The leadership practice of challenge the process, along with the school climate practices of building self-efficacy and collective efficacy are integrated in Theme 3 of adaptive leadership (DeWitt, 2018).

Theme 4: Fosters Collaborative Actions Focused on Improvement

Principals who create structures for collaboration understand the importance of teamwork, consistency, instructional planning time, and norms for teachers to engage in dialogue about teaching and learning.

Teamwork. Principals believed that practices that support collaboration among staff are important. P1 stated, “I solicit the input of staff before I make decisions.” P2 shared, “It has been powerful for me to watch my teachers develop as leaders and to allow them some latitude to make decisions based on what they think is best for their students.” P3 expressed, “I believe in our team. I believe in my teachers and I think that it comes through. I work really hard and everybody sees it so then they are willing to work hard too.” P5 noted “We have a really strong climate team, and that has developed over time.” P6 stated “I have a stellar leadership team and I believe that is what really helps us because they can support everyone else, and together we have a shared vision of what we expect.” P3 shared that,

> We have structured norms that we review before every one of our professional development meetings. I feel very strongly that the climate of the school, the structures, and expectations for how meetings are run are a direct reflection of me and my leadership style.

Instructional focus. All participants emphasized the importance of providing structured planning opportunities for grade level teams to examine student data, plan units and lessons, and discuss instructional practices. Participants all believed in building the capacity of their teachers. P2 commented “We have built in collaborative planning for grade levels weekly through our master schedule by adding an additional planning period.” P3 emphasized “We have PLC’s every single Monday afternoon and we rotate the grade levels.” P4 explained “Every other week we have collaborative planning where the whole grade level team comes together. We use data protocol and do data analysis

and plan next steps, or we are collaboratively planning lessons." P8 stated "We have common planning time every day for all grade levels and there is one day per week that the special area person also meets with a grade level team to be a part of the process.

P6 has adjusted planning meetings after getting input from teachers. P6 reported, "We've changed our schedule this year to focus more on English Language Arts because teachers didn't feel like they could apply or revisit what they had learned."

Participants consistently used protocol for meetings to keep the group focused and use teachers' planning time efficiently and effectively. P1 stated, "We've asked each grade level to give us one day out of the week where they are meeting collaboratively. Each grade level is together and doing collaborative things, whether it's looking at data, planning lessons or units."

Participants also agreed that it is difficult to secure substitutes for Title 1 schools and they have worked to be creative in building in time in the master schedule. Some participants worked to include special area teachers and special education resource personnel in the grade level planning meetings. All participants attended most planning meetings with teachers and learned with them. P7 revealed "I think what really turned the corner for me was I was present at every single collaborative opportunity." P2 explained that their meetings alternate between reading, math, and climate. Furthermore, they focus on looking at data and examining student work. P2 expressed, "The meetings allow us to be responsive to the needs of students, instead of being reactive, when it may be too late to adjustment instruction."

The findings in Theme 4 are aligned with the school climate practices informed by collective efficacy and self-efficacy. Principals support teachers in building collective efficacy and self-efficacy by listening to the voices of teachers, engaging teachers in professional learning communities, focusing on positive practices that are occurring in the classroom, and designing meetings with time to collaborate. Enable Others to Act is also reflected in the comments of participants. Fostering teamwork, involving others, and building their capacity are characteristics presented in the findings for Theme 4 and are aligned to the transformational leadership practice of Enable Others to Act (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Table 6 provides a crosswalk between the themes that emerged from the data and the constructs of the conceptual framework for the study. The conceptual framework for the study is the transformational leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) combined with the construct of school climate proposed by Dewitt (2018).

Table 6
Themes in Relationship to Transformational Leadership and School Climate Practices

Leadership practices in conceptual framework	Actualizes a compelling vision	Promotes positive relationships for building capacity	Practices adaptive leadership	Fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement
Model the way – TL		X		
Inspire a shared Vision-TL	X			
Challenge the process-TL			X	
Enable others to act-TL	X	X		X
Encourage the heart-TL		X		
Self-efficacy- SC	X	X	X	X
Collective efficacy-SC	X	X	X	X
Social emotional learning-SC		X		

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility involves the researcher's strict adherence to the research design while focusing on the method for data collection and analysis while attending to the nuances of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To gather the perspectives of transformational and school climate practices from principals leading successful Title 1 schools, I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with principals that met the criteria for the study. Next, I sent all participants their transcripts for review to complete the process of member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The next step was to triangulate the data by combining the eight participants' responses with my field notes and observations to develop codes for each section of the interview transcripts. I analyzed the data by identifying patterns and themes across the data and sent participants the results of the data analysis for member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Moreover, I consulted with three qualified colleagues who possessed doctorate degrees to review my analysis of the data through peer review (Burkholder 2016). Based on the professional guidance from these colleagues, I made adjustments to improve alignment to themes from the data.

Transferability was established through a detailed description of setting, context, and research design to enable the reader to apply findings of the study to broader contexts while having a clear understanding of the context of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The eight participants of the study were selected based on purposeful sampling and included a diverse group of principals who provided in-depth responses. The participants

provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences and perspectives that support transferability of the findings of the study.

Dependability was addressed through adhering to a solid research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using a qualitative case study design, I followed a process for collecting data that aligned with answering the research questions for the study. Member checking was applied at two different points throughout the study. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant to ensure accuracy. Upon completion of the data analysis, I sent the themes that emerged to the participants for their review and input (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability was achieved by acknowledging and reflecting on my own personal beliefs and bias connected to the topic of my study and how these beliefs and biases could impact my interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a principal supervisor I needed to ensure that my own biases about leadership practices did not impact interpretation of the data. In order to maintain neutrality and minimize personal bias, I adhered to a process of using an interview guide with follow up prompts for each interview. Upon completion of each interview, I reviewed the transcripts to ensure that consistency was maintained for each interview conducted. After soliciting the input of qualified peers through peer debriefing, I was able to ascertain that a degree of objectivity to my interpretation of data was maintained (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. Upon thorough

analysis of the data, four themes emerged that may have influenced the academic growth of students in Title 1 elementary schools. These themes support the conceptual framework for the study and serve to answer the research questions for the study. The themes are (a) actualizes a compelling vision, (b) promotes positive relationships for building capacity, (c) practices adaptive leadership, and (d) fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement.

In Chapter 5 I will present a discussion of the findings and implications of the study. In addition, I will discuss the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for further research on the topic of the study. In conclusion, I will describe potential impact for positive social change as a result of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Previous researchers have shown that transformational leadership is linked to building the capacity of teachers, which positively influences student achievement. More recently, researchers have indicated a positive correlation between school climate and positive academic outcomes for students. The research problem I addressed in this study was the gap in practice supported by research that explores and describes effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in the context of Title 1 elementary schools where students demonstrated academic growth. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of principals' perspectives on their leadership and school climate practices that may contribute to students' academic growth in Title 1 elementary schools. I used a qualitative case study design that was appropriate to answer the research questions for the study. Qualitative research supports the involvement of the researcher in understanding, describing, and interpreting a participant's experience with a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Stake, 1995). The two research questions for the study were:

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Data for this qualitative case study were collected through in-person, in-depth interviews to answer the two research questions. As a result of the data analysis from the interviews, I identified four leadership themes that emerged. These leadership themes

were used to answer the research questions for the study. RQ1 was answered through Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4, and RQ2 was answered through Theme 4. The following four themes were identified:

Theme 1: Actualizes a compelling vision. Principals create a vision for the future by collaborating with others around shared beliefs and creating conditions for the vision to be operationalized.

Theme 2: Promotes positive relationships for building capacity. Principals who promote positive relationships and invest in the professional growth of staff, lead by example, create a welcoming and inclusive school environment, and support the SEL needs of students and staff increase capacity.

Theme 3: Practices adaptive leadership. Principals who practice adaptive leadership embrace challenges with urgency and responsiveness, while creating capacity for learning and equity to close achievement gaps for underserved students.

Theme 4: Fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. Principals who create structures for collaboration understand the importance of teamwork, consistency, instructional planning time, and norms for teachers to engage in dialogue about teaching and learning.

For this study's conceptual framework, I incorporated Kouzes and Posner's (2017) transformational leadership model with constructs of school climate from Dewitt (2017). The five practices from Kouzes and Posner's (2017) leadership model are (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. School climate constructs posited by Dewitt (2017) are

(a) self-efficacy, (b) collective efficacy, and (c) SEL. The five leadership practices combined with the three constructs of school climate grounded my study and were reflected in the four leadership themes or practices that emerged from the data analysis.

Participants for my study were selected from a population of over 100 elementary school principals from a school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The criteria for participant selection consisted of principals (a) leading schools designated as Title 1, (b) leading schools that have demonstrated a 3-year pattern of growth in reading based on a district-wide assessment, (c) who have served in their current assignment for at least 3years, and (d) who I do not currently supervise.

The findings of my study support and enhance existing research on the importance of effective school leadership and school climate on student achievement. As a result of my study and from the lens of a practitioner researcher, I have developed a deeper understanding of the leadership and school climate practices of effective elementary principals in my school district leading Title 1 schools. The data analysis, grounded by the constructs of the conceptual framework and informed by the four themes that emerged from the study, provided answers to the research questions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The literature reviewed for this study indicated that effective principal leadership has the most influence on student achievement, second only to the teacher (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Prothero, 2015). The findings of my study will contribute to the existing body of research on effective principal leadership and the importance of a positive school climate (Baptiste, 2019; Smith & Shouppe, 2018;

Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Furthermore, my findings support research asserting that positive school climate is related to improved academic outcomes for students, especially for students from traditionally marginalized student groups (McCarley et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018; Woods & Martin, 2016). Identifying effective leadership practices and school climate practices for principals in the context of leading Title 1 schools where students have demonstrated academic growth is of great importance to improving students' lives.

The principals I interviewed provided examples of leadership practices that were both transformational and that focused on school climate. The themes that emerged are (a) actualizes a compelling vision, (b) promotes positive relationships for building capacity, (c) practices adaptive leadership, and (d) fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. For clarity, the interpretations of the findings were organized by research questions followed by the corresponding theme and supported by accompanying literature.

Findings of RQ1

RQ1: What are principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Theme 1: Actualizes a compelling vision. As the results presented in Chapter 4 indicate, I found that principals create a vision for the future by collaborating with others around shared beliefs and creating conditions for the vision to be operationalized. Effective transformational leadership practices aligned with Theme 1 are Kouzes and Posner's (2017) leadership practices of inspiring a shared vision and enabling others to

act. Inspiring a shared vision consists of having a passion for engaging others in making the school vision a reality (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Kouzes and Posner's leadership practice of enabling others to act consists of fostering collaboration and empowering others and was identified as a practice used by all principals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

A transformational leader intentionally focuses on collaborating with teachers to operationalize the vision of improving teaching and learning for all student groups (DeWitt, 2018; Hooper & Bernhard, 2016; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Furthermore, the practices of inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process were suggested to have the biggest influence on student achievement (Quin et al., 2015). As described in Hooper and Bernhard (2016), transformational leadership builds the capacity of the school community to work together for a common vision. Studies have shown that the principal has the most influence over the school and is most instrumental in creating a shared vision that focuses on a positive school climate (Kempa et al., 2017; McCarley et al., 2016). Lastly, research indicates that effective principals create a positive school climate through a shared vision that sets direction for people and builds their capacity (Garza et al., 2014; Goodwin, 2015; Urick & Bowers, 2014).

Theme 2: Promotes positive relationships for building capacity. As the results from Chapter 4 indicated, I found that principals who promoted positive relationships and invested in the professional growth of staff, led by example, created a welcoming and inclusive school environment, and supported the SEL needs of students and staff. Effective transformational leadership practices aligned with Theme 2 are Kouzes and Posner's (2017) leadership practices of model the way, enable others to act and

encourage the heart. The leadership practice of model the way emphasizes the importance of modeling desired behaviors and setting examples through words and actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Encouraging the heart is a leadership practice that involves recognizing contributions of others and celebrating their accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Wood (2016) suggested that relationships and trust between individuals in a school are important for student success along with having high expectations. Moreover, effective principals demonstrated the capacity to build trusting and collaborative relationships with teachers and the community, created a positive school climate, maintained the focus on instruction, developed teachers, and lead by example (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Versland & Erickson, 2017). Sun and Leithwood (2015b) posited that teachers' trust in others had a significant effect on student learning, while Sopko and LaRocco (2016) suggested that the behavior of the principal is the foundation for trust in a school. Lastly, Eliophotou-Menon and Ioannou (2016) noted the importance of a leader in creating trust and collaboration for continuous improvement efforts in a school.

Theme 3: Practices adaptive leadership. As the results from chapter four indicated, I found that principals who practiced adaptive leadership embraced challenges with urgency and responsiveness, while creating capacity for learning and equity to close achievement gaps for underserved students. An effective transformational leadership practice aligned with Theme 3 is Kouzes and Posner's (2017) leadership practice of challenging the process. This leadership practices consists of being is creative, innovative, and focusing on improvement.

Leppard (2018) suggested that schools are complex and need adaptive leaders who understand how to address the needs of our changing student demographics and build capacity around learning and equity. Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) argued that leaders focused on instruction need to emphasize equity and student engagement in the learning process. Green (2017) emphasized the importance of building trust among students and families who have been traditionally marginalized by race and poverty. Capper (2015) proffered that it is critical for educational leaders to engage staff in courageous conversations about race, especially when school issues occur that are influenced by race. Khalifa (2016) posited that culturally responsive school leaders prioritize professional development focused on improving outcomes for traditionally marginalized student groups. Furthermore, Khalifa (2016) noted that school leaders need to maintain a presence in their communities and be adaptive to the changing demographic their student population.

Theme 4: Fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. As the results from chapter four indicated, I found that principals who created structures for collaboration understand the importance of teamwork, consistency, instructional planning time, and norms for teachers to engage in dialogue about teaching and learning. Kouzes and Posner's (2017) transformational leadership practice of enabling others to act is operationalized through this theme. Kouali (2017) noted that transformational leaders emphasize a climate of high expectations that prioritizes the development and motivation of the staff. Moreover, Day et al. (2016) emphasized that student achievement, motivation and engagement is positively influenced when principals build positive

collaborative learning structures for teachers. The transformational leadership construct of inspiration motivation as developed by Bass and Riggio (2006) characterizes a leader who encourages teamwork and collaboration.

Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) explained that a transformational leader in the context of education promotes and models a collaborative culture for students and staff with structures in place for teacher collaboration about student data. In addition, Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) noted the importance of valuing individual's cultural experiences that contribute to the overall school culture. Sanders et al. (2018) discussed the importance of opportunities for student voice. Lastly, Huggins et al. (2017) posited that effective principals focused on developing leadership capacity through distributed leadership efforts.

Instructional leadership is the topic of many research studies and is argued to have the greatest influence on academic outcomes for students (Hattie, 2015; Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Principals who practiced instructional leadership had collaborative structures in place for instructional planning, and to inform staff on research based instructional strategies to improve teaching and learning (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017).

Findings of RQ 2

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on effective school climate practices that may contribute to academic growth of students in Title 1 schools?

Theme 4: Fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. As the results from chapter four indicated, I found that principals who understand the

importance of nurturing the self-efficacy and collective efficacy of individuals build collaborative teams to address complex issues and accomplish goals with confidence. Effective school climate practices include self-efficacy and collective efficacy. As proposed by DeWitt (2018) principals build the efficacy of individuals and teams by providing positive feedback, facilitating professional development to build capacity, providing time for individual and collaborative planning, and encouraging teachers to participate and learn from each other. DeWitt (2018) explained that successful collaboration involves participants listening and engaging in other's thinking while not dismissing or ignoring another person's contributions.

McCarley et al. (2016) noted that school improvement requires a principal who can foster the belief in others that change is possible. More importantly, the principal must belief in their own ability to lead change. Hitt et al. (2018) discussed three capabilities of effective principals as optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. However, Hitt et al. (2018) posited that these capabilities may be difficult to develop in people and should be present in principal candidates at some level. Brown (2016) argued that principals who protect teachers' planning time and show support to teachers build the efficacy of teachers to increase their ability to meet the needs of their students.

Principals demonstrated an understanding of the power of building self-efficacy in themselves and their teachers by recognizing teachers' efforts and providing them with specific feedback on their instructional practices. Collective efficacy and self-efficacy are embedded in school climate efforts because they are centered on the belief that all teachers and staff in a school have the confidence that they can make a difference in the

educational experiences for all students both collectively and individually (Dewitt 2018; Sun & Leithwood, 2015b). Moreover, as argued in research, the principals were keenly aware of the importance of motivating teachers, building their instructional capacity and effectiveness so they in turn could positively impact students (Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016; Kouali, 2017; Leithwood, 2017).

Along with the four themes from the data, I found that three constructs from the conceptual framework resonated throughout the data. The constructs of collective efficacy, self-efficacy, and enabling others to act most frequently intersected with the four themes. Principals emphasized the power of collective efficacy by building teams and providing professional development to build capacity to solve problems around a shared vision.

I found that all principals emphasized the systems and structures they have in place in their schools to empower teachers to collaboratively plan together to improve instructional practices. Equally important, the principals recognized the importance of having norms for professional dialogue and agendas to focus the work around improving teaching and learning. In all cases, principals discussed the power of building on the strengths of each person along with providing meaningful professional development.

All principals reported that they had structures for collaborative planning to discuss teaching and learning as aligned with instructional leadership practices. All but one of the principals reported that they were present at most planning sessions to discuss data and to inform instructional practices. In addition, all principals discussed how they

worked to be visible in classrooms to observe instruction and recognize teachers and students.

The themes that emerged from the findings in this study centered on transformational leadership and the importance of building the capacity of teachers to positively impact students. Similarly, school climate practices focused on ensuring that the SEL needs of both students and teachers were a priority. However, distributive and instructional leadership practices also emerged from the data and are operationalized through collaborative structures for instructional planning and being visible in classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

My study was limited by a small sample size of eight interviews of principals from one school district of over 100,000 students in the mid-Atlantic states. The responses gathered through this qualitative case study design provided in-depth information on principals' perspectives on leadership practices they use to improve student outcomes in schools that are Title 1. However, the responses may not reflect principals' actual leadership practices that occur in their buildings.

Another limitation of this qualitative case study is that only elementary principals from one district were selected, and therefore the results may not be transferable to middle and high school principals. In addition, only elementary principals that I do not supervise were selected. Consequently, the different perspective of principals leading other Title 1 elementary schools in this district were not included.

One criterion for selection of participants for the study included student growth measures over a three-year period on a district wide assessment in reading. Since math growth measures were not included, a limitation of the study may be that the findings may only apply to growth in reading. Another criterion for participation in the study was that participants needed to be principals in their schools for three consecutive years. This did not allow for veteran principals who had just transferred into a school to be considered for participation in the study.

Recommendations

This research study contributes to the existing body of research on principal leadership in the context of leading Title 1 schools. My study presents four overarching themes found in the data that propose transformational and school climate practices for principals leading Title 1 elementary schools where students have demonstrated academic growth. The results of my research study may support leadership development for principals at Title 1 schools throughout this district to improve academic outcomes for students. I recommend that professional development include the four themes identified in this study that are (a) actualizes a compelling vision, (b) promotes positive relationships for building capacity, (c) practices adaptive leadership, and (d) fosters collaborative actions focused on improvement. Further recommendations are to apply the findings to support interventions for principals leading Title 1 elementary schools where students are not demonstrating academic growth. In addition, results of this study may be useful in the selection process for hiring principals to lead schools identified as Title 1 by

selecting candidates that have demonstrated the leadership and school climate practices identified and described in this study.

Recommendations for further research studies on this topic are

- increasing the number of participants in the study to gather additional perspectives on transformational and school climate practices in other Title 1 elementary schools in other school district;
- expanding data sources to include teacher perspectives on the leadership practices of their principal that are transformational and inform school climate in their schools;
- including parents' perspectives on school climate in their schools;
- focusing on the academic growth of marginalized student groups such as black and brown students and students with special needs, in order to identify and describe leadership and school climate practices that result in improved educational outcomes for these groups.

Implications

There are implications for positive social change that my study presents that may influence the educational outcomes for students attending Title 1 elementary schools. Students who attend Title 1 schools continue to underperform academically as compared to their more advantaged peers (Hirn et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2017). Research has consistently shown that effective school leadership influences academic outcomes for students and better prepares them for their future (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). I present leadership

practices in this study that may be applied in Title 1 schools to improve academic outcomes for students and contribute to positive social change.

Furthermore, positive school climate is believed to contribute to the emotional connection that a student has with their overall school experience (DeWitt, 2018). Likewise, school climate is suggested to improve student achievement and contribute to positive relationships between teachers and students (McCarley et al., 2016). I present school climate practices in this study that may increase the sense of belonging for students in the context of attending a Title 1 school. By creating a positive school environment, parents may feel more welcomed and engaged in the schooling process with their child. Understanding principals' perspectives on leadership and school climate practices that may have contributed to academic growth of students may inform other school leaders operating in similar contexts.

Conclusion

In this qualitative case study, I present data on principals' leadership and school climate practices that may influence students' academic growth in Title 1 schools. The influence of a principal's leadership on student achievement is second only to the teacher, however, researchers have shown that a principal's leadership is a powerful and necessary component for improving educational outcomes for students in Title 1 schools (Bae, 2018; Dewitt, 2018; Herman et al., 2016; Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Therefore, a sense of urgency exists to improve leadership practices in Title 1 schools since these practices may have a greater effect on students who are economically disadvantaged (DeWitt,

2018; Hewitt & Reitzug, 2015; Hitt et al., 2018; Louis et al, 2016; Ross & Cozzens, 2016).

Schools are complex systems and leaders need to be able to build teams, promote welcoming and caring school environments, be adaptive to solving problems, and promote learning and equity. Transformational leadership and school climate practices that I have identified in this study consist of building collective efficacy with teams to create and actualize a compelling vision guided by beliefs. Secondly, the leadership of the principal must promote positive relationships with teachers while building their capacity to improve instruction. Furthermore, principals should embrace change and challenges with an adaptive leadership mindset. Lastly, principals need to facilitate collaborative actions that are focused on continuous improvement. The leadership and school climate practices that I presented in this study may be useful for professional development for principals and to inform hiring practices to ensure that all Title 1 schools have effective principal leadership.

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Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Question Guide

Date:

Time:

Interviewee Code #

Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions
Introduction (The research questions were designed to explore and describe principals' perspectives on effective transformational leadership and school climate practices in Title 1 schools where students demonstrated academic growth.)	Hi, my name is Heidi Miller. Thank you very much for taking time to participate in my qualitative study. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to gather your perspectives on Leadership and School Climate Practices in your school that you believe may have contributed to students' academic growth. This interview should last about 45 min. After the interview, I will send you a transcript of our conversation so you can review it for accuracy before I examine your answers for data analysis purposes. However, I will not identify you in my documents and no one will be able to identify you based on your responses. You have the right to end this

	interview at any time. I need to let you know that I will be recording this interview on my phone for efficient transcribing. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Question 1: (Inspire a Shared Vision, Collective efficacy)	How did you establish a shared vision at your school? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 2: (Enable Others to Act & Collective efficacy)	What processes are in place for collaborative teacher planning and teamwork? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that…

	You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 3: (Model the way, self-efficacy, collective efficacy)	In what ways do you establish and model norms about how people should be treated in your school? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 4: (Encourage the Heart, self-efficacy)	How to you encourage and recognize the contributions and accomplishments of your staff? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?

Question 5: (Challenge the Process)	What creative or innovative practices have you implemented in your school to improve student achievement? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 6: (Social emotional learning)	How do you determine and support the social emotional needs of your staff and students? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 7:	What personal leadership characteristics do you believe supports the

	success of your school? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?
Question 8:	Is there anything else you would like to share about your leadership or climate practices? Follow up prompts: How did you do that? Can you give a specific example of how you did that? Tell me more about that… You mentioned_____. Can you explain how you did that?