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Principals' Perceptions of Fostering a School Culture for Elementary Trauma-Exposed Students

Laura Ann Kelly
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Laura Ann Kelly

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee
Dr. Kathryn Swetnam, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Hallums, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Christina Dawson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

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Students

by

Laura Ann Kelly

MA, Goucher College, 2009

BS, Salisbury University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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November 2020

Abstract

Experiencing trauma can affect children's ability to achieve academically. School

principals are responsible for creating a positive school culture to support all children

academically, yet there is limited knowledge of how principals create such a culture for

children exposed to trauma. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand

the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy

school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced

trauma. Maslow's conceptual framework of human motivation informed this study, and

research questions centered on how elementary principals perceive practices necessary to

create and maintain a school culture that supports students exposed to trauma.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 8 purposely-selected principals, who had

served at least 2 years in their schools in a mid-Atlantic school district in the United

States. Content analysis using a priori and open coding was used to identify categories

and themes. Study results indicated that to foster a school culture for elementary students

exposed to trauma, school administrators must provide teachers with professional

development, prioritize relationship building with students and adults, acquire and

allocate human resources, and hold staff accountable. Participants described how they

interview potential personnel, create and foster a team approach, and provide professional

development to support and retain staff. Recommendations for practice are relevant to

principals, to those who prepare them, and to those who hire and mentor them. Positive

social change can occur if elementary school principals and school staff mitigate the

negative effects of trauma and allow children the opportunity to thrive physically,

socially, emotionally, and academically.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Madison. Ever since she was born, Madison has been my inspiration and motivation to be the best person I can be. As her mother, I have enjoyed watching her learn, grow, and become the young lady she is today. I am proud of her. I hope that she looks back on my journey to complete this dissertation and is motivated to accomplish her goals and dreams.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr. Kathryn Swetnam, my committee chair, for her countless hours of support during this process. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Mary Hallums, second member, and Dr. Christina Dawson, URR, for their guidance, encouragement, and feedback. I appreciate their support throughout this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Thriving in school, after a student has been exposed to trauma, can be challenging. Researchers have found that appropriate responses by school principals include a focus that extends beyond school walls (Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman, 2014). Research has indicated that effective leaders in educational settings respond to diverse in- and out-of-school issues (Miller et al., 2014). Creating and maintaining a school culture is one way school administrators can support students exposed to trauma.

In this study I focused on two classifications of trauma: acute trauma and chronic trauma. Acute trauma may result from a single devastating event whereas chronic trauma is a repeated experience that occurs over a sustained period (Bell, Limberg, & Robinson, 2013). Exposure to trauma affects students not only at home but in school. Students exposed to trauma have complex needs that school staff may not be prepared to meet. They are more likely than others to be suspended or expelled, fail a grade, have lower achievement scores on assessments, have language delays, and be referred to special education (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015).

Researchers of students exposed to trauma have discussed the influence of school climate, school culture, and school environment on students' behavior and academic progress (Argon, 2015; Cavanaugh, 2016; McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015). Although the terms *school climate*, *school culture*, and *school environment* are often used as synonyms, they are not always similar in definition. School climate can be defined as the beliefs or feelings school stakeholders have about the school (McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016). School culture, however, is based on the norms, values, and expectations

of a school; school culture can arise naturally or be purposefully created (White & Kern, 2018). School environment includes the facilities, classrooms, supports, and discipline policies and practices of a school; these factors affect students (American Institutes for Research, 2019). In this study, I use the term *school culture* as part of my investigation of principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining schools that encourage academic progress for elementary school students. The use of these terms is further elaborated on in Chapter 2.

Trauma-informed school administrators understand that exposure to deeply disturbing experiences affects students in complex ways (Carello & Butler, 2015). Carello and Butler (2015) identified five principles to meeting the needs of individuals exposed to trauma: ensuring safety, establishing trustworthiness, maximizing choice, maximizing collaboration, and prioritizing empowerment. Students exposed to acute or chronic trauma struggle with behavioral compliance, creation of positive relationships, and academic success (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016a). The school culture should thus support the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students exposed to trauma.

Yet, educational policy and practices are typically not set up to address the problem of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the conventional school setting (Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016). Federal guidelines and legislation focus on student discipline; however, the process of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) places students' emotional and behavioral needs above academic needs (Plumb et al., 2016). This emphasis is because if students' social-emotional needs are not met, students have difficulty learning (Plumb et al., 2016). Other multitiered systems of supports

(MTSS) provide tiered interventions to meet the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of students (Plumb et al., 2016). In the United States, 90% of children attend public school (Plumb et al., 2016). Therefore, public schools are an ideal place to intervene using trauma-informed practices (Plumb et al., 2016). School-based trauma-intervention systems are a promising way to improve the underaddressed issue of childhood exposure to trauma (McConnico, Boynton-Jarrett, & Bailey, 2016).

In this basic qualitative exploratory study, I focused on the administrator's role in creating and maintaining a school culture supportive of elementary students exposed to trauma. I interviewed principals to determine administrator perceptions of creating trauma-sensitive schools. The results from this study may inform administrators of effective practices to create a school culture that supports students' basic physical, security, social, and educational needs. The study findings may also inform future research focused on supporting schools, administrators, teachers, and students exposed to trauma.

The results of this study may also inform professional practice. In addressing the gap in knowledge about practice, the study may provide strategies that school administrators can use in creating a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. By highlighting ways administrators create and maintain a school culture for elementary trauma students, this study may lead to changes in administrator practices. In this chapter, I present background information on trauma, the problem and purpose of the study, the research questions, and an overview of the conceptual framework. I explain the

nature of the study, provide definitions important to this study, and summarize the literature to be elaborated on in Chapter 2.

Background

In this study, I addressed the gap in practice-related research on administrator perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. In the United States, one half to two thirds of children experience trauma (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Experiencing childhood trauma directly affects a child's brain development, social functioning, and ability to learn. Despite its documented impacts on a child's health, social, emotional, and cognitive development (McConnico et al., 2016), leaders in the education system largely have ignored effects of childhood trauma (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Because students exposed to trauma have experienced threats to their safety, a safe school is crucial (Cavanaugh, 2016). A school's principal is the catalyst for creating a school culture that is positive and conducive for learning; the principal can set the tone, model appropriate behaviors, and lead a transformational school culture (McKinney et al., 2015). Argon (2015) conducted a qualitative study and concluded that school principals are responsible for creating a positive school culture by providing school staff the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive and then holding the school staff accountable.

Some state departments of education, including those in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin, have developed policies for schools to address the effects of childhood trauma. In Massachusetts, for example, school

administrators are mandated to incorporate trauma-sensitive environments via (a) strategic planning, (b) assessing staff needs, (c) providing staff training, (d) developing school discipline policies that reflect an understanding of the role of trauma in students' behavior, (e) creating community partnerships, and (f) continually evaluating efforts to refine practices (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). In Washington, department of education staff created a handbook to guide school administrators in creating a trauma-informed school. The handbook focused on seven principles to create trauma-informed schools: (a) always empower, (b) provide unconditional positive regard, (c) maintain high expectations, (d) check assumptions, (e) observe and question, (f) be a relationship coach, and (g) provide guided opportunities for helpful participation (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Unfortunately, not all state personnel have taken the initiative to create policies to address the needs of students exposed to trauma. This study addressed the gap in practice-related research on administrator perceptions of creating a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Problem Statement

Understanding is lacking on how elementary school administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district can develop and maintain a school culture for children of trauma to thrive and achieve academically. Children exposed to trauma tend to show deficits in attention, abstract reasoning, and long-term memory; decreased intelligence scores, and reading ability; increased absenteeism; and increased dropout rates (Simonich et al., 2015). Additionally, children exposed to trauma have an increased likelihood of unemployment and may become involved with the court system (Simonich et al., 2015).

School administrators should be trauma informed to support trauma-exposed students (Simonich et al., 2015).

Although school personnel are often the primary providers for mental health services for children, trauma-informed practices in U.S. schools are not common (Cavanaugh, 2016). School administrators in conventional systems of education have not structured the academic culture to address the needs of children exposed to trauma despite the increasing number of initiatives to implement programs that address the social, emotional, and psychological needs of students (McConnico et al., 2016). According to some experts, administrator support and authorization are necessary to create and secure trauma-informed education and trauma-sensitive schools (Crosby, 2015). Anderson, Blitz, and Saastamoinen (2015) found that administrators who use shared leadership can create a caring and collaborative school culture that includes trauma-informed practices to meet the social-emotional needs of trauma-exposed students. School-wide trauma-informed approaches need to be embedded in the professional development of administrators and staff working in the school with students exposed to trauma (Anderson et al., 2015). Currently, implementation of evidence-based practices to meet the needs of students exposed to trauma is insufficient (Scott & Burt, 2018).

Furthermore, research is limited on how administrators create a trauma-sensitive school focused on implementing trauma-informed practices. In a quantitative study, Baker, Brown, Wilcox, Overstreet, and Arora (2015) determined that assessing trauma-informed practices is a difficult process. Despite growing interest in the creation of

trauma-informed schools, few researchers have investigated the implementation of trauma interventions in U.S. schools (Hoover et al., 2018). To meet the academic and emotional needs of students exposed to trauma, school administrators should create a safe and trustworthy school culture (Carello & Butler, 2015). I conducted this study to further understand how administrators can create and maintain a school culture for elementary children with traumatic life experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. In this study, I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with eight elementary school principals to understand how administrators create and sustain an educational culture to support students exposed to trauma. Recommendations from this study inform future researchers and administrators regarding strategies for developing a safe and trusting school culture for elementary students who have experienced trauma.

Research Questions

As building leaders, elementary administrators are responsible for creating and maintaining a school that is safe, orderly, and conducive to learning (McCarley et al., 2016). In this study I investigated administrator perceptions regarding practices to meet the needs of students exposed to trauma as well as to maintain a school culture for all students to thrive and achieve academically. The research questions in this study align to the conceptual framework of Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Human

needs are organized in a hierarchy, and only when a particular need is met will higher needs emerge (Maslow, 1943). Until lower needs are met, an individual cannot focus on fulfilling higher needs. I focused on the first three levels of Maslow's hierarchy of need: physical, security, and social needs. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the physical needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

2. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the security needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

3. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the social needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

Conceptual Framework

I based the conceptual framework for this study on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, which includes a hierarchy of five basic types of need:

1. Physical needs include health, food, water, air, and rest.

2. Security needs include safety, shelter, and stability.

3. Social needs include feelings of love, care, and belonging.

4. Esteem includes self-esteem, achievement, and recognition.

5. Self-actualization involves development and creativity.

According to Maslow's theory of human motivation, if a basic need is not fulfilled, that need will monopolize the consciousness of the individual and the higher needs will be forgotten or denied. I used Maslow's model because children affected by trauma often do not have essential basic needs met (Cavanaugh, 2016). If the first three levels of physical, security, and social needs are not met, students cannot build self-esteem and progress in the higher human developmental stages as suggested by Maslow. Essentially students are stunted at the lower levels of the hierarchy (see Figure).

The school culture must allow children of trauma to feel warm, safe, and cared for to perform to their greatest potential and achieve academically. Based on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, students must have their physical, security, and social needs met before they can focus on and demonstrate growth in self-esteem and self-actualization. To effectively meet the needs of students exposed to trauma, the principal and school staff must ensure student safety and establish trustworthiness (Carello & Butler, 2015). Trauma-informed practices include a safe culture; a consistently applied, structured system; culturally responsive interactions; and an academic program built on students' strengths (Cavanaugh, 2016). These practices align with the hierarchy of need as outlined by Maslow.
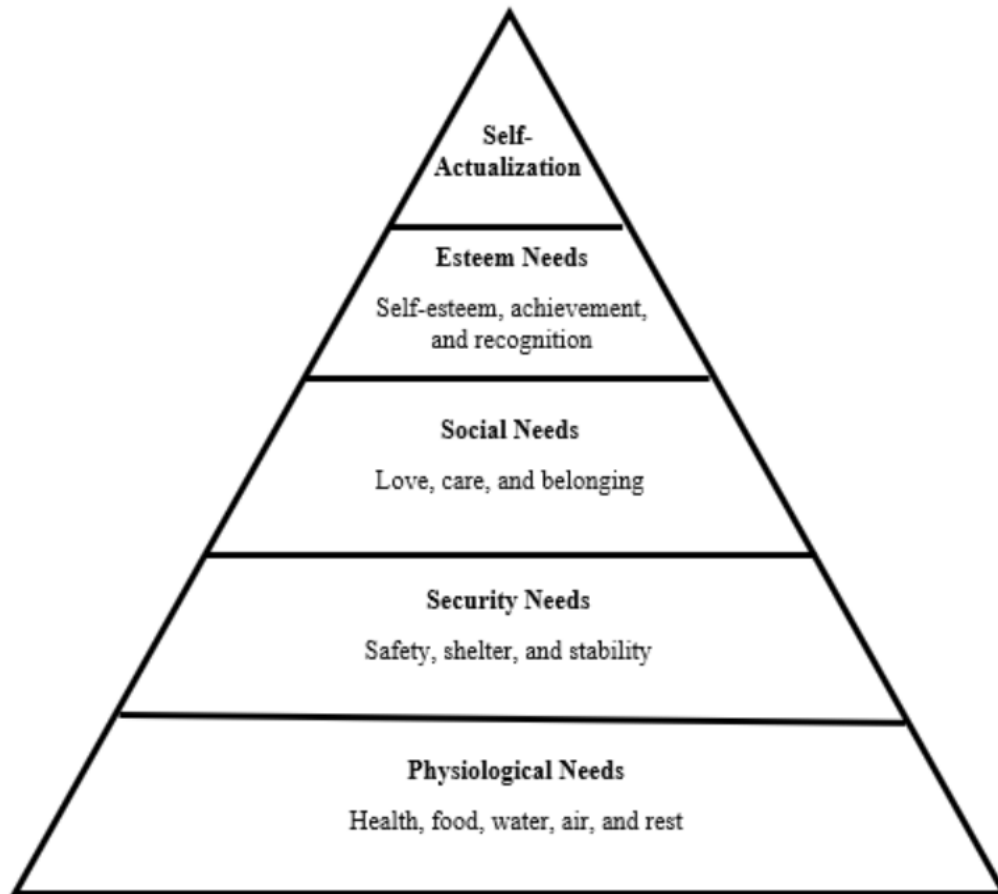
Figure. Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid. Based on "A Theory of Human Motivation," by A. H. Maslow, 1943, *Psychological Review*, *50*, 370-396.

Maslow's (1943) theory was the foundation for my examination of school leaders' creation of a school culture that is safe and fulfills the basic physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma. My specific focus was on the current practices of elementary school administrators intended to create and maintain a safe and trustworthy school culture in a mid-Atlantic school district. The research questions were aligned with Maslow's paradigm to determine administrator perceptions about practices to create a school culture that fulfills students' physical, security, and social needs. The

interview protocol was determined by the conceptual framework. I categorized the data using a priori codes and open coding to identify patterns in participant practices to meet physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

Nature of the Study

This research was a basic qualitative exploratory study. A qualitative approach aligns to the epistemological assumption that the subjective experiences of participants working in the field of education may provide knowledge based on their perceptions to solve a practical problem (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I purposively selected eight elementary school principals to participate in this study. I used interviews as the data collection method to investigate the perceptions of administrators regarding creating a positive school culture that addresses the needs of students exposed to trauma. These face-to-face interviews were conducted in the natural environment of the school campus where these principals work.

I audio recorded the interviews, with each participant's permission, and personally transcribed each interview into a word processing document. I analyzed the data using a priori codes based on the conceptual theory of this study and open codes. Open coding allowed me to observe patterns and commonalities and for themes to emerge. After I completed the data analysis, I invited each participant to review the findings of the study. During this process, also known as a member check (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016), I solicited each participant's insights on the analysis of the data to ensure the accuracy of the findings. During the final analysis stage of the data, I summarized the major findings and compared my findings to existing research. The

results of this study may inform current practices in creating and maintaining a school culture in a mid-Atlantic school district to increase academic achievement for students exposed to trauma and create positive social change.

Definitions

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Students who have experienced trauma may have sustained psychological, physical, or sexual abuse; emotional or physical neglect; family dysfunction, including alcohol or drug abuse in the home; divorce or loss of a biological parent; depression or mental illness in the home; a mother being treated violently; or a household member being in prison (Felitti et al., 1998). Exposure to trauma can range from parental divorce to maltreatment, natural disaster, war, and witness to a violent act. Because *trauma* is an overarching term, this study focused on students who experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect and/or witnessed violence in the home or community.

School culture: School culture includes the norms, values, and expectations of a school (White & Kern, 2018). For this study, school culture includes the school climate, or feelings school stakeholders have about the school (McCarley et al., 2016), as well as school environment, or the facilities, classrooms, supports, and discipline policies and practices of a school (American Institutes for Research, 2019).

Trauma-informed: To be trauma-informed means to understand the ways that violence, victimization, and traumatic experiences influence individuals and to respond to those exposed to trauma in a way that accommodates and considers their needs to heal and recover (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Trauma-sensitive schools: Responsive school cultures for children exposed to trauma to promote (a) feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students; (b) a shared understanding among staff about the effects of trauma and adversity on students; (c) positive culturally responsive discipline policies and practices; (d) access to comprehensive school mental health and behavioral services; and (e) effective community collaboration (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions in a scholarly study are believed to be true but are unable to be verified (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Recognizing assumptions in a basic study is important to establish the authenticity of the data collection process as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data (Walters, 2001). Assumptions for this study included the following:

- Participants would enter the study willingly, would not have a conflict of interest, and would not gain personally or professionally by participating in this study.

- Participants would answer interview questions honestly. Therefore, the data collected were assumed to be accurate reflections of the participants' perceptions.

- The selected participants were current elementary school principals and therefore had the necessary knowledge and expertise to respond to interview questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included elementary school principals in a mid-Atlantic school district. Participants of this study included certified principals with at least 2 years of experience at their school. The selection of principals included principals from across the district in schools with a high rate of students exposed to trauma as well as schools that might not have a high rate of students exposed to trauma. Selecting principals from various schools allowed me to compare principals' perceptions and practices.

This study was delimited to elementary principals from a mid-Atlantic school district. I did not include high school or middle school principals because the organization of the school schedule, instructional day, and classes differ from elementary school. Also, practices that are developmentally appropriate for elementary-aged students may not be appropriate for older students. Including only elementary school principals allowed for specific themes and patterns to emerge for the elementary level. The participants were from the same school district; therefore, their training and knowledge of trauma-informed practices might have been similar based on school district professional development and policy. The findings of this study may not be applicable to secondary school principals or principals working in a different school district. To address this delimitation, during data analysis I looked for themes that might be transferable to different populations of students. I also suggest how the results of my study may inform future research.

Limitations

The limitations in this study are a result of the methodological approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Limitations of this study may affect the transferability the findings. This study had three limitations: (a) transferability, (b) a small purposive sample, and (c) the potential for researcher bias.

1. In qualitative research the data gathered are subjective, requiring a researcher to provide detailed information that a reader may use to transfer findings to other locations and situations (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). The participants in this study were certified elementary school principals in one mid-Atlantic school district. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to secondary school principals or elementary principals in other geographic locations. To assist with the transferability of this study and allow other researchers to decide whether the findings of the study are applicable to their setting, the data were described in detail. As a result, a reader or fellow researcher can make comparisons to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

2. Qualitative studies include purposefully chosen participants who are able to answer the research questions of the study (Yin, 2016). A small number of participants, eight elementary principals, were interviewed in this basic study. This small-scale purposive sample may create limitations to the transferability of the findings to a large scale. The interview protocol was comprised of open-ended questions based on the conceptual framework of this study and designed to elicit in-depth answers. Follow-up questions allowed probing for

information. A basic qualitative study should explore the depth of the problem rather than the breadth of an issue to develop categories and themes from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

3. Personal bias might have created credibility limitations in this study. I am an elementary school principal who is passionate about mitigating the effects of trauma for young students. I conducted the study in a school district in which I currently work. To address my personal bias, I created an interview script to ensure all the questions were asked uniformly. I transcribed the interviewees' responses from audio recordings to ensure exactly what the participants shared was used in the data collection and that my bias did not influence the interpretation of what the interviewee said. I incorporated member checking to ensure credibility in the findings. I also continuously reassessed my positionality and subjectivity through collaboration with the interviewees to ensure reflexivity (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Significance

This study was designed to address the gap in knowledge about practice regarding the principal's role in creating a safe school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. Principals have the unique responsibility to create a school culture based on mutual respect and trust (Green, 2018; McCarley et al., 2016). The results of this study provide elementary administrators with data and information to create a safe school culture so students exposed to trauma can succeed academically and flourish as young citizens. The recommendations of this study provide strategies for principals to create and

sustain such a school culture. The results also indicate any gaps in practice so principals can provide teachers and staff with the necessary professional development to effectively implement trauma-informed practices in the school setting.

Positive social change may be realized by the findings of this study as administrators learn to create a school culture that supports the basic physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma to help increase academic achievement. Trauma negatively affects students' attention, abstract reasoning, memory, reading ability, and intelligence and increases the students' risk of dropping out of school, being unemployed, and becoming involved with the court system (Simonich et al., 2015). If principals, teachers, and school staff can mitigate the negative effects of trauma, children may have the opportunity to thrive and achieve academically and become effective members of society.

Summary

In this chapter, I identified the problem of a lack of understanding of how elementary school administrators develop a school culture necessary for children exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically. I connected the problem to the conceptual framework based on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. This study is significant because a gap remains in the research about the implementation of trauma-informed practices in the traditional school setting. Findings from the study may contribute to positive social change by providing strategies for administrators to create and sustain safe school cultures for students exposed to trauma. In Chapter 2, I provide an

in-depth review of the conceptual framework and delve into the scholarly literature of

trauma-based practices in the elementary school setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss the current literature available on the topic of this qualitative study. The literature supports the problem of practice, a lack of understanding of how elementary school administrators create and maintain a school culture necessary for children exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. In the literature review, I provide background information on types of trauma, address how trauma affects students in school, examine students' needs to achieve academically, and discuss principals' role in creating and maintaining a school culture to support students who have experienced trauma. Chapter 2 also includes information regarding the search terms and strategies used to locate current research; an in-depth explanation of the conceptual framework, Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation; and a summary of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

I used multiple databases to search for literature related to the topic. These included Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search through the Walden University Library. I used the following keywords and Boolean phrases as search terms: *trauma*, *childhood trauma*, *trauma-informed*, *trauma-informed schools*, *trauma-sensitive*, *school administrator*, *school leader*, *school principal*, *adverse childhood experiences*, *school culture/climate/environment*, and

Maslow's theory of human motivation. To find the most relevant information, I combined search terms in several different ways. In some searches I used only *effects of trauma* or *trauma-sensitive* and *school leader/principal/administrator*; in other searches I used keywords such as *school principal* and *culture/climate*. However, when I included all three terms--*trauma*, *school leader/principal/administrator*, and *school climate/culture/environment*--together the searches yielded no current relevant journal articles on the topic. This lack of peer-reviewed articles provided evidence of a gap in the literature on the topic of how elementary school administrators create and maintain a school culture necessary for children exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically. In the searches, I targeted peer-reviewed journal articles; however, seminal articles, government websites, and reputable websites that dealt with public education and children exposed to trauma were also included in the search.

The research results from combining the terms *school leadership* and *trauma* were limited. Therefore, I completed separate searches to augment this study, focusing on how principals create and maintain a school culture addressing the needs of students exposed to trauma. I then synthesized the articles on these topics to determine how principals create and maintain a school culture that supports students exposed to trauma. Because of the nature of the topic, research and journal articles from psychological and social work journals were included in the literature review. In journal articles outside the education discipline, authors used the terms *environment* and *climate* synonymously to refer to school culture. For this study, the term *culture* is used to include the environment and climate of a public school setting. To reach saturation, I continued to search for

literature, read the literature, and synthesize the material until I determined the findings and implications of this study.

Conceptual Framework

I based the conceptual framework for this study on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, in which human needs are based on a hierarchy. An individual's basic or lower level needs are unconscious needs such as hunger and other physiological needs, which must be met for the higher level needs to arise. According to Maslow, human behavior is organized by unsatisfied needs, and humans are motivated to fulfill the next level (hierarchy) of need. Humans are motivated by gratification or deprivation (Maslow, 1943). The gratification of one need in the hierarchy allows for the next need to be addressed.

Once the basic needs of health, food, water, air, and rest are met, the human is motivated to seek safety (Maslow, 1943). In Maslow's theory of human motivation, security needs include safety, shelter, and stability. Maslow (1943) stated, "Practically everything looks less important than safety" (p. 376). Students exposed to trauma are often hypervigilant; they feel that everything is a threat to their safety, and they are unable to trust their environment and the people they encounter in that environment (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Maslow stated that a child needs a structured world that is safe and organized, with an undisrupted, reliable routine without dangerous events. Once physical and security needs are met, the social needs of a human arise (Maslow, 1943). Trauma-informed practices include a safe and predictable school culture that is responsive to students' needs (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Researchers' findings in the peer-reviewed literature concerned the effects of trauma and creating trauma-sensitive schools focused on the basic needs and emotional states of students. Previous researchers addressing students exposed to trauma often did not reference Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation directly but discussed the basic psychological, social, and emotional needs of students exposed to trauma. The researchers' results supported the understanding that one's basic needs must be met in a hierarchy, consistent with Maslow's theory of human motivation. Educators can support students who have experienced trauma by building relationships based on trust and safety; social and emotional learning must occur prior to cognitive learning (Morgan, Pendergast, Brown, & Heck, 2015). Schools can serve as a protective factor for students exposed to trauma and help students move through Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Tichy, 2017). This study extends the knowledge of this paradigm; Maslow's theory of human motivation provides a framework for the principal's role in creating and maintaining a school culture supportive of students exposed to trauma.

Creating a school culture that is safe and trustworthy and that fulfills the basic physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma directly aligns to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) stated that when young people are secure and strong during their early years, they tend to remain that way later in life, even when a crisis occurs. Therefore, the school culture in elementary school should meet the needs of trauma-exposed students to help them feel secure and strong so they can learn and thrive academically.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

The comprehensive literature review includes current research, journal articles, information from relevant websites, and seminal work related to the purpose of this study to understand how elementary school administrators foster a school culture necessary for children exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically. The literature review includes background information on the types of trauma, how trauma affects students in school, how educators can address student needs in school, and the principal's role in creating and maintaining a school culture supportive of students exposed to trauma. With the literature review, I connect previous research to the current study.

Background Information

Traumatic experiences in the lives of young children are at epidemic levels (Baker et al., 2015). In the United States, 45% of students have suffered trauma, and 10% of children have faced three or more traumatic experiences in their life (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). The data also showed a disparity based on race among children who experienced ACEs. Nationally, 61% of African American or Black children, 40% of European American or White children, and 23% of Asian American children have experienced an ACE (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Additionally, children who live in poverty experience trauma at a higher rate compared to children who live above the poverty line (Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen, 2016). Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, and Hamby (2015) found that 37.7% of youth had experienced physical assault, 9.3% had an assault-related injury, 15.2% experienced maltreatment by a caregiver during the year of study, 38.1% experienced maltreatment by a caregiver over their lifetime, and 60.8% of the children

surveyed had at least one form of direct exposure to trauma over the year. Gonzalez, Monzon, Solis, Jaycox, and Langley (2016) used a self-report instrument and found that 34% of children in their study experienced at least one traumatic event, and 75.4% exhibited moderate to high posttraumatic stress symptoms. The data showed that almost half of the children in the United States have been exposed to trauma.

This study narrowed the research to include traumatic experiences prevalent in one mid-Atlantic state in the United States. Data from this state revealed that, during 2017, over 53,000 referrals were made to the child welfare agency (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). About 40% of the referrals met the criteria for an investigation, and over 7,500 children were identified as victims of maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). The child welfare data for this state showed a disparity based on racial subgroups; about 50% of these victims of maltreatment were African American or Black, 36% were European American or White, 9% were Hispanic or Latino, and 3% were multiple races (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). Of the over 7,500 victims of maltreatment, 60% endured neglect, 23% experienced sexual abuse, and 22% were physically abused (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). These data also indicated that 2,648 children in this mid-Atlantic state experienced domestic violence in 2017 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). Limiting the types of traumatic experiences to children suffering neglect, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and physical abuse allowed me to narrow the focus of the research and literature to include types of trauma prevalent in the mid-Atlantic school district where the study took place.

Types and Effects of Trauma

Trauma is defined as an emotional response to a terrible event or exposure to trauma that may cause emotional and physical symptoms (American Psychological Association, 2019). The four types of trauma are acute trauma, chronic trauma, complex trauma, and vicarious trauma (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d.). Acute trauma is a single event, such as a car accident, death of a loved one, terrorist attack, or accident (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d.). Chronic trauma lasts over time, such as long-term abuse, living with a parent who has an addiction, neglect, and domestic violence (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d.). Complex trauma occurs when an individual suffers repeated or prolonged traumatic experiences (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Vicarious trauma also can be called compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, or secondary victimization and occurs in adults who interact with traumatized children and experience suffering through the child's ACEs (Cavanaugh, 2016). Understanding the types of trauma and how trauma affects students and caregivers is important for administrators, teachers, and support staff.

In 1998, a large seminal study concerning trauma revealed a relationship of ACEs to family dysfunction and implications for long-term adult health diseases and disorders (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE study informed and promoted additional studies on the topic of childhood trauma. Recent studies identified traumatic experiences to include maltreatment, violence, disaster, war, illness, accidents and injury, animal attacks, bullying, relational aggression, and traumatic loss; however, the most common occurrences of violence in children ages 6–12 include media or entertainment violence,

witnessed violence outside of the family, and separation or loss in the family (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Early traumatic experiences affect a child's psychological development and cause terror, helplessness, stress, learning difficulties, and anxiety (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017).

Trauma also can affect brain function, brain development, and emotional regulation as well as lead to mental health concerns, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, social isolation, formation of maladaptive schemas, and pervasive relational-attachment disruptions (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Experiencing ACEs can cause long-lasting effects on the brain and body (Baker et al., 2015). Children exposed to trauma may be unable to self-regulate emotions and sustain healthy relationships (Brunzell et al., 2015); exhibit social, emotional, and behavioral issues; and display problems with executive functioning, low self-esteem, low impulse control, and cognitive impairments (Baker et al., 2015). In situations that a child may not know how to handle, complex trauma is correlated to flight, fight, or freeze instincts (Sapers, 2015). The effects of trauma carry over and continue to influence children in school.

Effects of Trauma on Students at School

A students' social emotional well-being is directly linked to academic achievement (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). The effects of trauma may manifest in the classroom as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiance disorder, reactive attachment, disinhibited social engagement, or acute stress disorders (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018;

Brunzell et al., 2015). Children exposed to trauma have trouble in school not only in

academic performance but also with mental well-being. Academic performance

challenges may include identification for special education, grade retention, below grade-

level achievement, cognitive and language development, deficit performance on

standardized tests, minimal grade point averages, and frequent absenteeism (Blodgett &

Lanigan, 2018; Brunzell et al., 2015; Cavanaugh, 2016; Hoover et al., 2018). Long-term

effects of academic difficulties may lead to dropping out of school, involvement in

criminal activity, incarceration, dependency on welfare programs, and homelessness

(McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, and Frechette (2015)

found that children exposed to trauma exhibited impaired mental well-being, such as

emotional and behavioral difficulties, anxiety, low mood, aggression, poor interpersonal

and social skills, attachment issues, low emotional regulation, shutting down, and

difficulty developing and maintaining relationships with peers and adults.

One quarter of youths aged 10–17 have witnessed violence either in the home or

in the community, and 18.4% of youths have experienced assault in their community

(National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018). Children exposed to violence are more

likely than their peers to have difficulty in school, drop out of school, experience

depression and anxiety, as well as abuse drugs and alcohol (Brunzell et al., 2015).

Findings from studies on trauma indicated that students exposed to traumatic experiences

may display explosive misbehavior triggered by a minor incident, receive lower grades,

exhibit an increased likelihood to be identified for special education, and be retained in a

grade (Perfect, Turley, Carlson, Yohanna, & Pfenninger Saint Gilles, 2016; Sapers, 2015;

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). The traditional

school setting is not set up to support students exposed to trauma.

Supporting Children Exposed to Trauma at School

Administrators and teachers must understand the effects of trauma on students'

social, emotional, and academical growth (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos,

2016; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). In the life of a child who has experienced trauma,

schools are often the one place that is not chaotic (O'Grady, 2017). Because of the

growing needs of children in public education, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)

recommended schools use a trauma-informed approach to meet the academic and

emotional requirements of students.

Administrators, teachers, and support staff can support students exposed to

trauma. Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, and Halfon (2014) found that mindfulness training

for students mediates the effects of trauma exposure. Mindfulness training helps to build

resilience in children, reduces the chances the student will repeat a grade, and increases

student engagement in school (Bethell et al., 2014). Shamblin, Graham, and Bianco

(2016) found classroom supports were effective for students exposed to trauma, including

having de-escalation corners, coaching affect regulation, instigating consistent schedules,

using class meetings, enculturating predictable well-planned transitions, and labeling and

identifying feelings. Effective ways to support children who have been exposed to

traumatic experiences are using PBIS, including mindfulness training for children;

incorporating school-based mental health services in the school culture; building

relationships with children exposed to trauma; integrating restorative justice; and providing professional development for teachers (Shamblin et al., 2016).

      School-based mental health services. Researchers have reported benefits of school-based mental health services. Delivering mental health services in schools removes barriers related to transportation, stigma, required parental commitment, and consistency for students exposed to trauma (Langley, Gonzalez, Sugar, Solis, & Jaycox, 2015). Langley et al. (2015) found elementary students exposed to trauma had a reduced rate of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms when they participated in school-based mental health services. Dorado, Martinez, McArthur, and Leibovitz (2016) found students participating in school-based mental health therapy demonstrated a decrease in trauma-related symptoms. Results showed significant improvements in the areas of (a) adjustment to trauma, (b) affect regulation, (c) intrusions, (d) attachment, and (e) dissociation (Dorado et al., 2016). Students exposed to trauma receiving school-based mental health services had a significant decrease in posttraumatic stress and anxiety symptoms (Langley et al., 2015). Researchers' findings showed that school-based mental health referrals are more successful than referrals for services in the community (Chafouleas et al., 2016). DeMatthews and Brown (2019) found that having school-based mental health providers in the building helps to create a comprehensive program to support students and families. Furthermore, having such services set up prior to a crisis helps students feel supported, rather than feeling distrust for outsiders coming in after a crisis, because the service providers already have become a part of the school community (DeMatthews & Brown, 2019).

Powell and Davis (2019) found students receiving a stand-alone after-school intervention focused on social-emotional learning skills had a reduction in conduct problems, aggressive behaviors, and hyperactivity; students showed an increase in prosocial behaviors. After 6 months of the completion of the after-school intervention, student data returned to the baseline level, indicating intervention programs must be ongoing to increase sustainability (Powell & Davis, 2019). The researchers also recommended more research regarding pairing the stand-alone program with parent and teacher training (Powell & Davis, 2019). Findings from the study by Hoover et al. (2018) supported the need for school-based mental health and trauma services paired with trauma-informed discipline policies and professional development on the effects of trauma.

Staff professional development. Professional development creates expertise within the school environment allowing a culture change by building the capacity of teachers, administrators, and support staff (Perry & Daniels, 2016). Perry and Daniels (2016) provided school staff professional development that included an overview on trauma, the effects of trauma on learning, and strategies to interact with students exposed to trauma. The results from their study indicated 94% of the school staff felt the training was useful and 91% of the faculty believed they increased their knowledge about trauma and how to interact with students in their classroom who had experienced trauma (Perry & Daniels, 2016). Dorado et al. (2016) determined that teachers receiving trauma training significantly increased their understanding of trauma and how to use trauma-sensitive practices. Holmes, Levy, Smith, Pinne, and Neese (2015) found staff training paired with

classroom consultation and peer mentoring provided teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement a trauma-focused intervention. When they receive professional development about ACEs, classroom instructors and support staff are in a unique position to teach coping skills, build resilience, model an appropriate emotional response, help problem solve, and provide in-class interventions for students (Blitz et al., 2016). Shamblin et al. (2016) found that providing teachers and staff with training to meet the needs of students exposed to trauma paired with school-based mental health services by mental health professionals reduced the effects of trauma and increased resiliency for trauma-affected students.

MTSS. Another support system for students is MTSS, a school-wide PBIS system that uses a three-tiered system to align the level of support to the students' needs. Forty states and the District of Columbia have polices that either encourage or require schools to use MTSS (Chriqui et al., 2019). MTSS includes many of the principles needed for schools to be considered trauma-informed environments (Cavanaugh, 2016). Tier 1 interventions are universal interactive strategies of decorum offered to all students. Tier 2 interventions are provided to a select group of students based on behavior data and teach procedures to assist with transitions in a school environment, offer social-emotional learning groups to develop self-regulation skills, train mindfulness techniques, include de-escalation strategies for students, and offer mentoring services (Cavanaugh, 2016). Tier 3 interventions are intensive programs for individual students based on need as designated by behavior assessment testing.

Use of MTSS can support the social, emotional, and behavior challenges of students exposed to trauma (Cavanaugh, 2016). Dorado et al. (2016) used an MTSS model and provided tiered supports for students and staff. The training for teachers focused on crisis interventions and supports. The targeted students were in individual, group, and family therapy and often referred for an Individualized Education Program. Results from the study indicated teachers and staff increased their understanding of trauma and trauma-sensitive practices, student attendance and academic achievement increased, office and behavioral referrals decreased, and students exposed to trauma showed a decrease in trauma-related symptoms (Dorado et al., 2016). Implementing trauma-informed practices with a response-to-intervention multitiered framework creates a school culture that is safe, supportive, and trauma informed (Dorado et al., 2016). Trauma-informed interventions need to be tiered and include universal design for all students (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016). Tier 3 interventions may prevent a cycle of behavior and exclusionary discipline practices.

Restorative justice. Prevention and early intervention are additional ways to support students exposed to trauma. However, after harm has occurred, restorative justice provides an alternative to exclusionary discipline (Hughes, Fenning, Crepeau-Hobson, & Reddy, 2017). The cycle of harm rather than healthy relationships occurs through punitive discipline practice; children who are emotionally scarred by trauma reciprocate with similar negative behavior traits, and the damaging cycle continues (Hostetler Mullet, 2014). Restorative justice operates on the concept that children must be taught to respond appropriately to behavior and actions to support and encourage future constructive

choices (Hostetler Mullet, 2014). A restorative justice approach includes (a) giving a voice to those who were harmed, (b) providing opportunities to heal or repair the relationship after the harm, (c) encouraging accountability, (d) reintegrating the student who did the harm, and (e) creating a caring culture (Hostetler Mullet, 2014). Restorative justice can help students build trusting and caring relationships with teachers, administrators, other students, and support staff in the school.

Students in schools that use restorative justice practices such as circles, mediations, and conferences have shown reduced discipline referrals (Anyon et al., 2016). Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) found teachers who implemented restorative practices in their classroom used less exclusionary discipline and had an increase in positive teacher–student relationships built on mutual respect. Kataoka et al. (2018) found that schools using a trauma lens and restorative justice were able to reduce suspension rates. However, Cavanagh, Vigil, and Garcia (2014) found teachers need professional development and training to effectively use restorative justice in the classrooms to build relationships and respond to conflict.

Building relationships with students exposed to trauma. Educators can support students exposed to trauma by building relationships based on trust and safety; social and emotional learning must occur prior to cognitive learning (Morgan et al., 2015). When educators do not understand the effects of trauma on students, they may view students' behavior as purposeful disobedience, defiance, or inattention and use punitive discipline as the response to the perceived misbehavior (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Relational pedagogy is an authentic relationship between children and adults, not based on authority

or power (Morgan et al., 2015). Compassionate teacher relationships have increased resilience in students exposed to trauma (Shamblin et al., 2016). Relationship strategies, paired with trauma-informed practice, have kept students affected by trauma engaged in their education and allowed students to build a strong sense of self-identity (Morgan et al., 2015). Having positive relationships with teachers and school staff increased students' academic performance and school engagement as well as reduced aggressive behavior and suspension rates (Henderson, DeCuir-Gunby, & Gill, 2016). Strong and nurturing student–teacher relationships allow educators to help students exposed to trauma repair their regulatory abilities and restore disrupted attachment capacities (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016b). Perry and Daniels (2016) found that building relationships between students and administrators, teachers, and support staff is a priority when working to become a trauma-informed school.

School Practices and Policies Affecting Children Exposed to Trauma

Trauma-informed practices and policies are essential to supporting students exposed to trauma. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) recommended that school systems have and implement trauma-informed practices to meet students' social-emotional learning needs. Fifteen states have mandated social-emotional learning programs in schools, and 40 states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring school-wide behavior interventions such as PBIS or another MTSS intervention model (Chriqui et al., 2019). Policies at the national and state levels emphasize that administrators, teachers, and support staff must consider the social-emotional learning needs of students, especially those exposed to trauma.

Trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices are needed in schools (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). North Dakota and Wisconsin are the only two states with policies focused on trauma-informed practices in schools; nine other states encourage schools to have policies encouraging the use of trauma-informed practices (Chriqui et al., 2019). Trauma-informed education practices reduce the stress of students and staff as well as decrease the need for special education referrals, suspension, and expulsion from school (Crosby, 2015). Administrators, teachers, and support staff need to be knowledgeable about the core features of trauma, how trauma affects student development, and how trauma impacts children's ability to function in school (Chafouleas et al., 2016). To be trauma informed, school staff must (a) realize the effects of trauma, (b) recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, (c) respond to the trauma, and (d) resist retraumatization (Zakszeski, Ventresco, & Jaffe, 2017). Trauma-informed education models include healing the unregulated stress response and addressing the attachment capacity (Brunzell et al., 2016a).

Trauma-informed practices focus on creating environments that prioritize safety, choice, control, and student empowerment. Such practices include self-regulation strategies that may include rhythmic or patterned activities such as songs, circle games, drumming, mindful breathing visualizations, yoga, tai chi adaptations, or music-based activities (Brunzell et al., 2015). Intermittent use of brain-based activities built into transition time in a daily school schedule provides a rejuvenation that assists students to physically regulate their thoughts and bodies (Brunzell et al., 2015). Teachers can help students with emotional regulation by identifying and acknowledging the feelings

children with trauma experience. Students can be taught de-escalation strategies to manage emotions and return to a calm state (Brunzell et al., 2015). Trauma-informed practices advocate for system-wide safety, support, and wellness and emphasize the importance of educating and empowering students, families, and school personnel. Such practices mitigate the effects of trauma regarding social-emotional development, well-being, and overall educational success (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Implementing trauma-informed practices includes training teachers to incorporate designated spaces in a classroom to encourage self-regulation; provide tangible stimulation tools to distract a distressed child; use a common language for students and all staff to communicate effectively; and create schedules that support students' needs with cohesive transactions, snack breaks, and a clearly established agenda to enable students to experience regulation within their school day routines (Dorado et al., 2016). Findings from Dorado et al.'s (2016) study indicated outcomes of reduced behavior referrals, decreased student aggression, and a decline in out-of-school suspensions. Important systematic trauma-informed practices include the school environment, school-related trauma triggers, and the training of school staff.

Discipline and behavior policies affecting students exposed to trauma. The epidemiology of children exposed to trauma is a part of national and international public policy discussions (Finkelhor et al., 2015). In the United States, 30 states and the District of Columbia have state statutes and policies that either encourage or require social-emotional learning or character education programs in schools; 15 states mandate social-emotional learning programs in schools (Chriqui et al., 2019). Thirty-one states have laws

that limit suspension or expulsion of students in certain conditions (such as age), and 27 states monitor suspension rates for race and special education status (Chriqui et al., 2019). These laws and policies are designed to support students' social-emotional learning and hold administrators, teachers, and support accountable.

Conversely, zero-tolerance discipline policies began with the Gun-Free School Zones Act (1994), which required school administrators to expel students who brought a firearm to school. Over time, the application of the zero-tolerance policies shifted to include weapons other than firearms, look-alike weapons, defiant behaviors, and other undesirable behaviors (Hughes et al., 2017). Administrators can reevaluate zero-tolerance discipline policies to change the way they respond to disruptive students and work to teach the student the appropriate behavior through preventative measures (Stewart Kline, 2016). Traditional approaches to addressing challenging behavior do not create effective long-term solutions for students exposed to trauma (Dorado et al., 2016). National policies now require school systems and administrators to have crisis intervention plans, which include hiring resource staff such as school psychologists, school counselors, and school resource officers and training teachers and support staff in crisis prevention and intervention (Hughes et al., 2017). Untreated trauma negatively affects students' academic and social-emotional growth.

Support for Administrators, Teachers, and Staff in Creating a Trauma-Informed School Culture

Going to school can be the most consistent part of a child's life; therefore, creating a trauma-sensitive school culture is important. Researchers found that school

culture plays a key role for students exposed to trauma (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Schools can provide a structure that offers stability and adults to serve as role models and mitigate the effects of trauma. Research-based interventions that include a supportive physical and emotional environment can reduce the symptoms of trauma (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Students who have experienced trauma require a supportive, respectful, and caring school culture; a sense of connectedness to the school; and trauma-informed teachers. A trauma-informed approach has six principles: (a) safety; (b) trustworthiness and transparency; (c) peer support; (d) collaboration and mutuality; (e) empowerment, voice, and choice; and (f) sensitivity to cultural, historical, and gender issues (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Positive school culture can promote resiliency in children and reduce the effects of trauma.

For school staff to address the effects of trauma, the staff must (a) be trained and provided the resources to handle trauma, (b) help children manage and regulate emotions, (c) create and consistently implement routines and procedures, and (d) implement rules that are fair and consider the effects of trauma (Romano et al., 2015). Traumatic experiences can undermine students' cognitive, emotional, and social development. In the United States, 11 states have policies mandating that teachers receive professional development on trauma (Chriqui et al., 2019). The adults working with students exposed to trauma may take on the emotional stress of their students, leaving them to feel overwhelmed and hopeless (Blitz et al., 2016). Administrators, teachers, and support staff require emotional support from other adults to manage the possible effects of secondary trauma from working with students exposed to traumatic experiences. Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2018) found teachers who worked with students exposed to trauma often

experienced teacher burnout and left the teaching profession. Teachers need to work in a school culture that is supportive of the teachers' needs related to secondary trauma exposure and mitigates the effects of working with students exposed to trauma (Brunzell et al., 2018).

Administrators' Role in Creating a School Culture for Students Exposed to Trauma

Creating a school culture is the responsibility of the principal; the principal's leadership style has a direct influence on the school culture and ultimately affects student performance (McCarley et al., 2016). Perry and Daniels (2016) found three parts to implementing trauma-informed practices and creating a school culture supportive of students exposed to trauma: (a) professional development, (b) care coordination, and (c) clinical services. Professional development is paramount to creating cultural change and building the capacity of staff to become trauma informed and able to respond to students exposed to trauma. In Finnish schools, the three guiding principles of trust, collaboration, and well-being are the core components of school culture to ensure children can learn in the academic setting (Kelly, Merry, & Gonzalez, 2018). Changing the organizational culture of a school is challenging (Middleton, Harvey, & Esaki, 2015). Administrators must be involved to provide a trauma-sensitive school for young learners. Principals must believe that social-emotional learning and addressing trauma have a positive effect on academic achievement to lead the work (Dorado et al., 2016).

Administrator's role in staff training. School administrators examine and determine specific professional development for the faculty and staff of their campus (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Staff training may be presented in various forms including

preservice, in-service, or continuing education opportunities focused on how to support the emotional and academic needs of students exposed to trauma. Educators need not only to understand what is considered exposure to trauma, but also to recognize the effects of trauma and how the current practices in their school and classrooms support trauma-exposed students. As the leaders of the school, administrators must help teachers understand their roles and responsibilities (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017).

Baweja's et al. (2016) qualitative study found administrators should preplan and set aside dates and times for teacher in-service training to recognize the effects of trauma and provide evidence-based practices to address the needs of students exposed to trauma. To support students who have experienced trauma, all school staff and employees need to be trained, have a common language, and be trauma sensitive to ensure noninstructional times during the school day do not provoke students to have an emotional outburst (Sapers, 2015). Administrators, teachers, and support staff need to take care of the emotional needs of students and each other for the school culture to be trauma informed (Blitz et al., 2016).

Anderson et al.'s (2015) qualitative study revealed the importance of including all school staff members, including paraeducators and classroom assistants, in professional development addressing trauma education to ensure all educators and instructors are informed to serve and teach students who have suffered ACEs. Administrators can begin meeting the needs of students exposed to trauma by sharing information in staff meetings and incorporating individual conversations with teachers concerning the effects of trauma on children's brains (O'Grady, 2017). Administrators can create trauma-informed schools

by planning staff training, providing direct intervention strategies, and building

knowledge about trauma in the school community to create a school culture that supports

students exposed to trauma, their peers, and staff (National Child Traumatic Stress

Network, 2018).

Administrator's role with sustainability. The sustainability of school-wide

behavior-management programs requires administrator support and ongoing professional

development opportunities because the school administrator makes daily decisions

(Yeung et al., 2015). School administrators create a school culture to support and sustain

interventions by prioritizing the initiative and coordinating funding, resources, release

time for teachers, time for professional development, time for data analysis, and planning

time (Yeung et al., 2015). Seashore Louis and Murphy (2017) showed principals need to

be emotionally supportive of teacher and student needs to create and sustain a school

culture based on trust and respect.

Leadership styles and creating school culture. A principal's leadership style is

an important factor in creating and maintaining a school culture. Transformational

leadership has been found successful in changing the culture in a school. A

transformational leader can alter the culture of a school by motivating teachers to change

and work together to meet the mission and vision of the school (Wahab, Fuad, Ismail, &

Majid, 2014). The four dimensions of transformational leadership are (a) an idealized

influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual

attention to subordinates (Wahab et al., 2014). A transformational leader provides the

resources, time, and logistics for teachers to work collaboratively (Hoff Minckler, 2014).

Principals' behaviors are important to creating a school culture; transformational leaders create a sense of community in their schools, empower teachers to take risks, and encourage independence (Sagnak, Kuruoz, Polat, & Soylu, 2015). A transformational leader has the qualities necessary to create and maintain a school culture for students exposed to trauma.

Other leadership styles are also beneficial when creating and maintaining a school culture for students exposed to trauma. Caring school leadership creates a positive adult culture and indirectly increases student learning (DeMatthews & Brown, 2019; Seashore Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016). Through caring leadership, principals can instill caring practices in adults to support all students, not just those students who come to school prepared and available for learning (Seashore Louis et al., 2016). Wang (2018) determined that principals who use social justice leadership engage stakeholders and use them as a catalyst to change the school culture. Social justice leadership, like transformational leadership, results in principals who build meaningful relationships, so stakeholders become leaders (Wang, 2018).

Principal leadership and creating a culture are positively associated with organizational learning (Seashore Louis & Lee, 2016). Organizational learning is important to sustain change and improvement (Seashore Louis & Lee, 2016). Leaders' actions must align consistently to the shared mission, vision, and norms to create and sustain a positive school culture (Hoff Minckler, 2014). Hayet, Woods, and Martin (2016) found principals who believed in educating the whole child, built positive relationships with students and staff, and had high expectations were able to increase and

sustain student academic achievement. Relationships, shared vision and mission, as well as building stakeholder leadership work together to create a school culture that is supportive to students exposed to trauma.

Challenges to Implementing Trauma-Informed Practices

Administrators, teachers, and support staff face challenges when working with students exposed to trauma. One qualitative study indicated teachers had competing priorities and struggled to balance academic needs with the social and emotional needs of students in the classroom (Baweja et al., 2016). Academic achievement often overshadows the capacity of teachers and administrators to support students and families exposed to trauma (Perry & Daniels, 2016).

Students exposed to trauma come to school with grief over loss due to violence, incarceration, death, abandonment, and instability. In a mixed-methods study, Blitz et al. (2016) found teachers reported feeling ill equipped to respond to the many needs of students who have experienced trauma. Many teachers reported a lack of knowledge related to trauma-informed practices (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017).

Another difficulty is identifying the children who need specific help. Assessing children who have experienced trauma is challenging because no universal screening tool exists to assess student exposure to trauma in a consistent manner. However, Gonzalez et al. (2016) found success in screening elementary school students for exposure to trauma using self-reporting measures and modifying screening instruments. The researchers determined the results with student reporting and age-appropriate modifications were both valid and reliable (Gonzalez et al., 2016).

However, administrators face the difficulty of acquiring competent staffing to conduct the screening, providing current appropriate tools to accurately access children exposed to trauma, locating enough funding, and supplying school staff to assist and counsel trauma-exposed students once they are identified (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Often, a gap exists between the resources needed and the resources available to implement trauma-informed practices consistently. Empirical studies are lacking to identify successful implementation of school-wide trauma-informed approaches (Chafouleas, Koriakin, Roundfield, & Overstreet, 2018). Finally, a lack of fidelity in implementation of standard measures to evaluate the implementation of trauma-informed practices decreases sustainability of provided a safe academic culture for children suffering from trauma and ACEs (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Maslow's theory of human motivation places human needs in a hierarchy. Students exposed to trauma need their basic physiological, security, and social needs met before they can work on the higher needs of esteem and self-actualization. Researchers indicated that between one half and two thirds of children suffer from traumatic experiences (Baker et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2016; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Since 90% of children in the United States attend public school, schools are an appropriate place to mitigate the effects of trauma (Plumb et al., 2016). Trauma affects students' ability to be successful in school. Student well-being is an essential component in creating a trusting school culture; students' basic needs must be met, and schools require resources to meet the needs of

students (Kelly et al., 2018). However, education policies in most states have not yet addressed the need for trauma-informed practices in school (Chriqui et al., 2019).

A school culture that is safe, supportive, and trustworthy can mitigate the effects of trauma. Administrators are responsible for creating and maintaining the school culture. Successful administrators confront challenges to creating and sustaining educational cultures at school for children who have experienced trauma. Administrators, teachers, and staff must be informed of the needs of students exposed to trauma (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). To build this school culture, administrators need to set up school-based mental health services and provide staff with the professional development and time to build an awareness of the effects of trauma, trauma-informed practices, MTSS, and how to build positive relationships with students. Administrators also should adjust discipline and behavior polices as well as provide the time and resources to teachers and support staff to increase sustainability. Using a multitiered framework for creating and maintaining a school culture responsive to the physical, emotional, and academic needs of students exposed to trauma will benefit such students as well as staff (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

This study examined principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. Limited research is available on the administrator's role in creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary school students who have experienced trauma. Research and literature on creating trauma-sensitive educational settings are limited; very few controlled evaluations exist (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). This study adds to the research of how administrators create a school

culture supportive for students exposed to trauma. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology

for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. In Chapter 3, I explain the research design, rationale for this design, and role of the researcher. In the methodology section, I describe the purposeful selection of participants; instrumentation; and the procedures used for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The methodology section also includes an explanation of the development of the interview protocol. I also provide details on the plan for analyzing the data and establishing trustworthiness in this study. At the end of this chapter, I explain ethical issues applicable to this study before summarizing the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer three research questions in this study:

1. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the physical needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

2. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the security needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

3. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive

practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the

social needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

I employed a basic qualitative approach in this study. Qualitative research is

commonly used in social science disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, political

science, and psychology, or in professions such as education, management, marketing,

nursing, urban planning, social work, communications, and program evaluations (Yin,

2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined qualitative research as "the methodological

pursuit of understanding the ways that people see, view, approach, and experience the

world and make meaning of their experiences as well as specific phenomena within it"

(p. 6). A basic qualitative study was most suitable for this study because (a) I could not

establish experimental research conditions, (b) insufficient data were available, (c)

gathering participants for survey data would be difficult, and (d) the study focused on

ongoing events (see Yin, 2016).

Qualitative research begins with an interest, problem, or question that the

researcher hopes to answer (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I chose a basic qualitative approach

for this study because qualitative research allows the researcher to understand how people

cope in real-life situations (Yin, 2016). In this study, I wanted to understand how

elementary school administrators create and maintain a school culture for elementary

students exposed to trauma. I conducted semistructured interviews with elementary

school principals working in the mid-Atlantic school district. The findings from this

study represent the views and perceptions of the participants and are directly related to

the role of a principal (see Yin, 2016). The research questions for this study focused on *how* questions. According to Yin (2018), qualitative case studies should be used when the researcher is attempting to answer *how* or *why* questions. Another reason a qualitative study was chosen is that the issue is a contemporary educational issue of practice (see Yin, 2018). Limited research exists on how administrators create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the interviewer and observer for this qualitative study, I was responsible for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I conducted the interviews; during the interviews, I took notes as well as used an audio-recording device. After the interviews, I transcribed interview responses and analyzed the data using coding to determine categories and themes.

My experience as a principal in the district allowed me to establish a rapport with the participants at the beginning of the interview. I am currently an elementary school principal working in the school district where the study took place and have been an elementary school principal for the past 5 years. Prior to my assignment to the role of a principal, I was an assistant principal in the district in three different schools for a total of 5 years. I also served as a classroom teacher, resource teacher, and Title I instructional coach in this mid-Atlantic school district. Although all participants in this study were colleagues, none of the participants were under my supervision. Because I had worked for 15 years in the school district where the study took place, I took specific measures to

reduce any bias. My role as the researcher and interviewer was clearly explained to the

participants. Throughout the research process, I did not share details about other

participants with the interviewees.

To address bias during the interview process, I used procedures such as

bracketing and indicated in my notes when a personal opinion arose in my mind to

participants' responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I reduced bias by allowing the

participants to review the findings from the interviews. Member checking increased the

credibility of this study and ensured that I appropriately captured the participants' views

from the interview process (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Finally, I sought

to diminish bias by using self-reflection throughout the research process (see Ravitch &

Carl, 2016).

Conducting qualitative research studies where the participants work is important

(Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, when possible, interviews took place

at the participant's school. Because I work for the same school system as the participants,

two principals meeting on school premises would not be unusual; further, the school staff

were not informed of the purpose of the meeting. If necessary, or if the principal wished

to not meet on campus, a neutral location would be established.

Methodology

In this section, I explain the design of this basic qualitative study. The study

consisted of semistructured interviews with purposefully selected participants,

elementary school principals in a mid-Atlantic school district, to understand the current

practices of elementary school administrators regarding creating and maintaining a safe

and trustworthy school culture for students exposed to trauma to achieve academically. Participant selection, data collection, and the data analysis method are elaborated on in the following subsections.

Participant Selection

In a qualitative study, such as this one, the participants are viewed as experts of their own experiences (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used purposeful sampling to select participants in this study (see Creswell, 2014). The participants in this study were elementary school principals in a mid-Atlantic school district. Participant selection was limited to elementary school principals because the structure of the elementary school day differs from that of secondary schools. Furthermore, practices that are developmentally appropriate for elementary-aged students might not be appropriate for adolescent students. Including only elementary school principals allowed for patterns and themes to emerge from the data to understand the current practices of administrators to create and maintain a safe and trustworthy school culture for elementary students who have experienced trauma.

I obtained approval from the school district through a partner organization agreement document to conduct research in the district. To obtain final approval from the school district, I provided the school district with (a) a complete proposal with methods and study timeline; (b) research recruitment and consent documents; and (c) research materials, such as interview protocols and questions. As a Walden University Advanced Educational Administration and Leadership student, I received preapproval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a case study. Once I submitted

my written proposal and orally defended my proposal to the dissertation committee, I completed Walden University's web-based IRB form to begin the ethics approval process. I received the official e-mail confirming formal ethics approval (no. 11-20-19-0752536) before starting to collect data.

The school district's public website contains the names of all school principals and their e-mail addresses. I used the school district's e-mail distribution list to contact all elementary school principals in the school district who were potential participants for this study. I e-mailed the principals and included the criteria for participating in the research study and inserted the Leader Interview Consent Form into the body of the e-mail. To be considered for this study, the participants must have held an Administrator I and II certificate, been a current elementary school principal in the mid-Atlantic school district, and had at least 2 years of experience in their current school. A 2-year requirement for participants was important because participating principals needed to have enough experience to be able to provide data for me to answer the research questions of this study. To verify that the participating principals had been working in their school for at least 2 school years, I used the annual district principal directory to verify the number of years each principal had been at the campus. These criteria allowed participating principals to respond to the interview questions based on current practices at their campus rather than providing responses that might reflect presumptions about former administrators' actions. Because of current practices in this mid-Atlantic school district of transferring administrators from one school to another for promotions, resignations, and retirements, setting the criteria for participants to have a minimum of 2 years of

experience in their current school was appropriate. Limiting the participant selection to principals who had more than 2 years of experience in the same school would have reduced the number of available participants for the study.

After possible participants responded to the initial e-mail consenting to participate in the study, by stating "I consent," I purposefully selected eight elementary school principals as participants. Because the goal of a qualitative study is to have a deep understanding of the research topic, in-depth interviews with smaller sample sizes are appropriate, especially when participants are homogeneous (Boddy, 2016). The participants in this study worked in the same school district, attended the similar district professional development and trainings, and followed uniform policies and protocols; therefore, interviewing eight elementary school principals from this district was sufficient to establish patterns and themes with which to answer the research questions.

The school district encompasses three zones. I selected the first three participants who responded to the invitational e-mail from each of the three geographical zones on a first-come, first-served basis. This process created a purposeful random sampling of eight participants (see Creswell, 2014) and allowed me to ensure that all geographical regions of the school district were represented. The school system website provides a district map listing the zones and all schools that I would use to ensure each geographical region was represented by a participant in the study. The enrollment demographics in each elementary school vary and are diverse based on the individual school. Selecting principals from across the geographical zones of the school district allowed me to

compare elementary principals' perceptions and practices to answer the research questions of this study.

After interested participants responded and were selected to participate in the study, I sent a second e-mail to schedule the date and time for the interview. I informed participants that at any time they could withdraw from the study. A participant could withdraw from the study by sending me an e-mail stating that he or she no longer wished to participate in the study. If a withdrawal occurred and other principals were available who previously responded to be part of this study, I would select another participant. Every effort would be made to replace the principal leaving the study with another participant from the same geographic region. All documents from the participant who withdrew from the study would be stored and remain confidential for 5 years but would not be used in the study. In the next section, I address details concerning how the study was conducted and the instrumentation.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument in this qualitative study (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Use of an interview protocol allowed for rich data collection while also narrowing the focus of the information (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2016). I created an interview protocol (see Appendix) for this study after a review of current literature focused on administrators' role in creating and maintaining a positive school culture for students exposed to trauma. Researchers have stated social and emotional learning must occur prior to academic learning (Morgan et al., 2015). In the theory of human motivation, Maslow (1943) postulated needs are met in a hierarchy, and

until basic physical, security, and social needs are satisfied, the other needs cannot be considered or addressed. Therefore, I designed the research and interview questions to align with Maslow's theory of human motivation. The questions were developed seeking to understand how elementary school administrators create and maintain a school culture that supports the basic needs of students exposed to trauma. To build content validity and to gather information relevant to the purpose of this study, each interview question was aligned to the research questions of this study. The interview protocol for this study served as an outline for how the semistructured interviews were conducted and was used to ensure I conducted interviews in a consistent manner across participants.

Three educational specialists in the school district, who were not participants in the study, reviewed the interview questions and offered suggestions. I provided these experts with the research questions for the study as well as the interview questions. The principals served as content experts to review the interview questions to ensure that the interview questions were sufficient to answer the research questions for the study. These principals have extensive experience as administrators. The first principal had 10 years' experience as an administrator, the second had 15 years of leadership experience, and the third specialist had been an administrator for 14.5 years. I made changes to my initial interview questions based on their recommendations. Expert feedback helped to ensure content validity with the interview questions (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I conducted semistructured interviews as a means of data collection to understand the current practices of elementary school administrators regarding creating and maintaining a safe and trustworthy school culture for students exposed to trauma to

achieve academically in a mid-Atlantic school district. The interviews were audio

recorded. I asked open-ended questions, which allowed me to gather authentic responses

from the interviewee. As the interviewer, I might ask probing questions from the

interview protocol to help guide the conversation during the interview. As the researcher,

I recorded when I used the prompts and created field notes that represented the flow of

the conversation linked to the original question asked during the interview. Asking

probing questions and using prompts during the interview allowed me to gather data to

address the research questions in this study. The interview questions were sufficient for

gathering the necessary data because they were open ended, which allowed for the

participants to extend on their answers (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin,

2016).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In qualitative research, participant selection can be strategic and purposeful

(Boddy, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers need to understand the goals of the

research and research questions when selecting participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In

the following subsections, I describe the steps I took to recruit participants for this study,

how I worked with the participants in this study, and how I collected and analyzed the

data.

      Recruitment and participation. Recruitment of participants for this study

included elementary school principals who held an Administrator I and II certificate with

at least 2 years of experience in their current school. All participants worked at the same

mid-Atlantic school district and voluntarily participated in the study. I took the following

steps to obtain permission from the cooperating school district and Walden University to recruit participants for the study.

1. I obtained a Partner Organization Agreement from the school district.

2. I obtained Walden University IRB ethics preapproval.

3. I obtained Walden University IRB final approval.

4. I obtained official approval from the school district.

5. I recruited participants by sending an e-mail to all the elementary school principals in the school district with the requirements to participate, a brief summary of the purpose of the study, and the consent form.

6. I obtained written consent from participants.

I obtained a letter of cooperation from the school district stating the school district intended to allow me to complete this study in the district. Prior to the recruitment of participants, I applied to Walden University for permission to complete this study. To meet the criteria for the Advanced Educational Administrative Leadership Doctoral Program, the study must focus on leadership; therefore, I invited principals to be the participants. Walden University (n.d.) defined a leader as "supervisors, board members, PTA [Parent Teacher Association] leaders, community partners, state department personnel, and similar decision-makers" (p. 3). After receiving final approval from both the Walden University IRB and the school district, I began to recruit participants for the study.

I used the district's website to identify all elementary school principals in the district. I sent an e-mail to each elementary school principal outlining the purpose of the

study and requirements for participation; I attached the consent form. Participants who were interested in the study and met the study requirements were selected to participate. The first interested participants from each geographic region in the school district were selected to participate in the study. The district encompasses three geographic regions, so ideally principals would be selected from each region for a total of 15 participants. If I did not receive sufficient responses, I would send a follow-up e-mail to garner further interest. If I received more than 15 interested participants, after each geographic area was represented, I would select participants on a first-come, first-served basis. I would place all other potential participants on a list based on when they responded as a participant pool to be chosen as needed. The participants placed in the participant pool would receive a thank you e-mail stating that they were on a wait list and would receive an e-mail if they were needed to participate in the study at a later date. Selected participants received a follow-up e-mail stating they were chosen to be part of the study and requesting them to select a date and time to be interviewed.

Data collection procedures. The data collection process had three steps: (a) establish the time of the interviews and location; (b) conduct the semistructured, in-person interviews; and (c) transcribe the interviews. One interview was required for each participant in this study; the expected length for each interview was 45–60 minutes. Therefore, when scheduling the interview, I asked the participant to reserve an hour to allow ample time to conduct the interview.

Unless the principal preferred to meet at an off-site location, I met with the participant before or after school hours in his or her office. Meeting before or after the

school day helped to prevent interruptions during the interview and avoid disruption to the principal's school day responsibilities. Once the participants chose a date and time to be interviewed, I sent a calendar invitation with a 1-day reminder for the interview time.

The second step of the data collection process was to conduct the semistructured interview with each participant. Semistructured interviews occurred in a face-to-face setting. All participation in this study was voluntary, and participants received no remuneration of any kind. During the interview, I took field notes and audio-recorded the session to ensure accuracy and understanding of the phenomenon; as needed, I recorded reflective notes to reduce any personal bias (see Yin, 2016).

At the beginning of the interview, I provided each participant a copy of the informed consent form that was used in the initial e-mail for participant recruitment. I reviewed the informed consent form and the voluntary nature of participation and allowed time for each participant to ask questions. Before beginning the interview, I discussed the confidential nature of this study with each participant and explained they would be assigned a number rather than using their name in the study. No names would appear on the interview transcriptions or data analysis pages. I described Walden University's requirements for data retention and that data would be stored off site, at my home, in a locked security box. All electronic data would be stored on a password-protected USB drive and would be destroyed after 5 years as required by Walden University's IRB. Because participation in this study was completely voluntary, before the interview, I also explained that at any time during the study if the participants wished to remove their responses to the interview questions, they could do so by verbal

communication during the interview process or by e-mailing me at a later time stating they no longer wished to be included as a participant. The interview ended with an opportunity for the participants to ask questions for clarification.

After the interview, I transcribed the audiotapes and kept all transcriptions on a password-protected USB drive. Participant names did not appear in the transcriptions. The audiotapes, transcriptions, and field notes are stored in a locked security box at my house. Data from the study will be stored for 5 years to meet the requirements of Walden University. After the 5 years, I personally will destroy all data from the study. The hard copies of memos, field notes, and reflective journals will be shredded, and USB drives of saved electronic communications and documents will be destroyed.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collection and data analysis should be seen as one phase in the qualitative research process because they are iterative processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). As the researcher, I was responsible for interpreting the data collected to answer the research questions of the study. As previously stated, after each interview I transcribed the interview to begin the data analysis. After analyzing each interview, I used member checking of the findings to ensure that I had appropriately captured the perceptions of each elementary school principal and to confirm accuracy of the data.

I used a five-phase cycle analyzing the data for this qualitative study: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding (Yin, 2016). During this process, I checked and rechecked the data, made sure the analysis was thorough, and continually acknowledged and assessed biases that arose (see Yin, 2016). I

used the conceptual framework to ground the data analysis of this study using a priori

codes based on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation to begin developing and

identifying patterns and themes. While analyzing the data, I used a constant comparative

method to discover patterns, identify constructs, group the findings into themes, look for

similarities and differences, and identify discrepant case evidence (see Baskarada, 2014).

The patterns and themes then were used to answer the research questions for this study.

Compiling. After I collected the data from the interviews, I compiled the data

into a useful order (see Yin, 2016). While transcribing the interviews, I was informally

analyzing and organizing the data in my mind. However, after all interviews were

completed, I formally organized all interview materials, such as the field notes and

transcriptions, manually using computer documents and spreadsheets.

During the compiling phase, I reread the field notes and transcriptions to

refamiliarize myself with the responses from the participants. This practice allowed me to

begin reflecting on word uses of the interviewee and focus on consistent vocabulary. I

created a glossary for terms as a part of organizing and compiling the data (see Yin,

2016). The glossary was created in a Word document using a table, which allowed me to

list words as well as synonyms that other interviewees used for similar terms. The

glossary allowed me to keep track of my deliberations as I aligned similar terms used by

the participants (see Yin, 2016). While reviewing the data for compiling purposes, I was

reflective and asked questions such as these:

- "Are there distinct features of my data?"

- "How does my data relate to the research questions?"

- "Have new insights emerged?" (Yin, 2016, p. 191)

While asking myself questions during this a priori phase, I looked for connections to the conceptual framework based on Maslow's theory of human motivation. Organizing and compiling the data helped me to construct meaning of the data later during analysis.

Disassembling. The second phase of Yin's (2016) five-phase system is disassembling. In this phase, I broke down the organized data into smaller pieces and assigned labels or codes. This process was repeated until I could refine the labels and codes for the data. During this phase, I started with open codes and continued to sort and organize until categories became apparent. I created a spreadsheet with three labeled columns: original field notes, initial code, and category code. This spreadsheet assisted me to see initial themes as they emerged and link like themes together (see Yin, 2016).

Reassembling. The third phase of Yin's (2016) five-phase system is reassembling. During this phase, as I reassembled the data, I searched for patterns (Yin, 2016). I reorganized and combined the data pieces that were disassembled and looked for patterns and categories from the data to group alike, emerging themes together (see Clark & Vealé, 2018). During this process, I created a spreadsheet to help me identify Level 1 and 2 codes (see Yin, 2016). The thematical groups, Level 3 and 4 codes, aligned to the conceptual framework of Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and answered the research questions for this study.

According to Yin (2016), the disassembling and reassembling phases may go back and forth and occur in a cyclical nature as patterns and themes emerge. Throughout the reassembling phase, I made judgments about the data I collected. This process could

be vulnerable to bias; therefore, I applied methodological procedures to limit bias. To

limit any bias in the data analysis procedure, I used a reflective process to make constant

comparisons looking for similarities and dissimilarities in the data, watched for possible

negative cases, determined what responses seemed similar, looked for outliers from the

data, and engaged in critical thinking processes to consider contending explanations to

my initial observations (see Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2016). This step of reassembling

prepared me for the next phase of the cycle and allowed me to interpret the data with

more accuracy.

 Interpreting. During the fourth stage of the data analysis process, I described the

data findings using the reassembled data. In the description, I interpreted the data by

explaining patterns and themes as they related to the research questions. To ensure a

comprehensive interpretation of the data, I considered the following: (a) completeness,

having a beginning, middle, and end; (b) fairness, ensuring that others looking at the

same data would have the same interpretation; (c) empirical accuracy, the interpretation

fairly representing the data; (d) value added, the interpretation bringing new information

to the study and not simply repeating the literature; and (e) credibility, how other

researchers would critique and accept the interpretations (see Yin, 2016). Because the

data analysis phase was an iterative process, I might need to recompile the data or

disassemble the data in a different manner from the initial compiling, disassembling, and

reassembling stages to create accurate meaning from the data (see Yin, 2016). To

organize the data, I might need to create a matrix, flowchart, diagram, hierarchical array,

or outline to determine the themes related to answering the research questions (see Yin,

2016). Finally, I used a descriptive narrative to interpret the data and also created summary charts to display the findings in a visual manner for the reader.

Concluding. The fifth stage of the data analysis process was the concluding phase. During this phase, I took the patterns and themes that I established during the interpreting phase to draw conclusions, make overarching statements, and determine inferences from the research (see Yin, 2016). During this phase, I discussed the significance of the study and was careful not to restate the findings (see Yin, 2016). I might conclude by (a) calling for more research, (b) challenging conventional stereotypes, (c) stating new concepts or theories, (d) generalizing, or (e) calling for action (see Yin, 2016). My conclusion was written in a narrative format explaining the findings of the study and my conclusions.

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness

</div>

In qualitative studies, the terms *validity* and *trustworthiness* are often used interchangeably; the terms refer to the ways a researcher ensures that findings are true to the participants' experiences and aligned to the purpose of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is established through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through the design of the study, I worked to establish credibility.

Credibility

The credibility of a study ensures that the data were properly collected and that the interpretations and conclusions from the data represent what was studied (Yin, 2016). For this study, I created an interview protocol to ensure interview questions were

appropriate and aligned to the research questions. Prior to implementing the protocol, I

asked three experts to review the interview protocol along with the research questions to

ensure alignment. Based on these experts' feedback, I adjusted the interview protocol to

include their input and recommendations. To ensure authenticity and credibility in the

study, participants' personal information was kept confidential to allow them to speak

freely about their experiences and accurately represent themselves (see Yin, 2016).

The credibility of this study was also enhanced because the methodology of the

study was explained in detail regarding the purposeful selection of participants;

instrumentation; and the procedures used for recruitment, participation, and data

collection. Yin (2016) stated that clearly explaining all steps taken in a study helps to

establish credibility and build trustworthiness. I also increased the credibility of the study

through member checking (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Each participant was provided

the opportunity to review the findings from the study to ensure that I appropriately

analyzed their responses. I e-mailed the findings from the study to each participant and

followed up via phone if necessary. This process ensured accuracy of the findings and

helped to create credibility for this study.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability provides readers and other researchers the

opportunity to connect the findings from the study to a larger context by linking the

research with theory (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I made relevant interpretations connected to

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation so that the reader can apply the findings to

other relevant situations (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The reader must consider the setting,

limitations, and the findings of the study to avoid overgeneralizations (see Abdalla,

Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2017). In this study, I used thick descriptions of the data

so readers can make comparisons to other contexts (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012;

Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I described the research setting, participants, participants'

experiences, and interpretations of the findings (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012;

Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Detailed descriptions of the data and findings increased the

trustworthiness of the data and might increase the transferability and application of the

findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to stability of the data over time; having a solid research

design is important to achieving dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). To establish dependability, I ensured that the data answered the research

questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, the participants in this study were

provided with the findings and interpretations after their interview and given the

opportunity to confirm or question the findings (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I also

used reflective journals to document my process and thinking during the data collection

and analysis development (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These processes revealed my

thinking and rationale to the reader and other researchers.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability means that the findings from the study can

be confirmed by others and that the researcher has acknowledged and explored personal

bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish confirmability, I

systematically assessed my positionality and subjectivities throughout the research

process (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used memos throughout

the data collection and data analysis portion of the study. The memos, also known as

bracketing, were included in the data collection process and used to capture my thoughts

over time and document challenges that arose (see Ahern, 1999). This process assisted

me with recognizing and minimizing bias as well as increased the confirmability of this

study.

Ethical Procedures

In qualitative research, the researcher may make various discretionary choices;

therefore, the researcher must follow ethical procedures (Yin, 2016). To ensure I was

aware of the ethical procedures required to work with human subjects, I successfully

completed the National Institutes of Health human subjects protection training in

September 2018. While designing the study and creating the interview protocol, I was

reflective and planned for ethical issues that might arise; therefore, throughout the study I

employed practices to ensure ethical practices were implemented and followed.

I did not contact any participants or discuss this study with any of the potential

participants prior to approval by the Walden University IRB and the school district. Once

I received approval from Walden University IRB and the cooperating school district, I

obtained informed consent from the participants via e-mail. In the initial e-mail

requesting participation in the study, I explained the purpose of the study, the participant

commitment, procedures, and potential risks and benefits for participation. I outlined the

procedures to maintain confidentiality and to protect the data. Each potential participant

had the opportunity to ask questions prior to participating in the interview process and was informed of how to exit the study if desired after consenting.

Participation in my study was voluntary. I am currently an elementary school principal in the school district where the study took place. Although I do not supervise any of the potential participants and do not have any authority over them, I maintain a professional relationship with them. Therefore, I worked to build trust with the participants by ensuring confidentiality. I used the interview protocol to ensure that all interviews occurred in a consistent, valid, and reliable manner. Interviews took place in the participants' office at their schools, unless they requested to conduct the interview at another location. Because I am a principal who works for the school district, two principals meeting was not unusual.

Confidentiality is important when conducting qualitative research. Prior to the interview, each participant received an e-mail explaining how confidentiality would be maintained in the study. Each participant received numerical codes to protect his or her identity, and identifiable information shared in the interviews was not communicated in the data analysis and findings. All electronic documents are stored on a password-protected USB drive, and hard copies of documents are secured in a locked safe with the USB drive. The materials will be saved for 5 years according to Walden University policy. After the 5-year requirement, hard copies of data will be shredded and USB drives destroyed.

I employed ethical practices to protect the collection and analysis of the data. Qualitative research relies on a trusting relationship between the researcher and the

interviewer (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). To build a trusting relationship, I clearly

outlined the ethical procedures used to collect and analyze the data. I reassured the

participants that I would maintain confidentiality, and I remained objective throughout

the interview and in follow-up correspondence with the participants.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology that I used to conduct the research on

the current practices of elementary school administrators regarding creating and

maintaining a safe and trustworthy school culture for students exposed to trauma to

achieve academically in a mid-Atlantic school district. In this chapter, I explained the

research design, my role as the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation,

participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I also addressed how I

established trustworthiness through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability. The ethical practices and processes employed throughout the

research, data collection, data analysis, and interpretations were also described. I obtained

Walden University IRB approval, district approval, and participant informed consent

prior to collecting data for this study. In Chapter 4, I explain the results of the study based

on the research. Chapter 4 includes a description of the setting of the study, data

collection, data analysis, the results of the study, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. Using semistructured one-on-one interviews, I collected data from eight elementary school principals. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. This research focused on the first three levels of Maslow's hierarchy of need: physical, security, and social needs. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the physical needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

2. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the security needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

3. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the social needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

In Chapter 4, I describe the setting, data collection, and data analysis for this study. I also explain the results in relation to the research questions, explain the strategies I used to establish trustworthiness, and provide a summary.

Setting

I conducted the study in a large, mid-Atlantic public school district. All participants were certified elementary school principals who had at least 2 years of experience as a principal in their current school. I conducted one-on-one, face-to-face, semistructured interviews in the principal's office before or after school for the three initial interviews. At the time of this study, because of an unanticipated global health occurrence resulting in school closures across the state, I interviewed the next five participants via one-on-one video conference calls.

The district has 107 elementary schools; however, because of the district's practices for hiring and transferring administrators, 87 principals met the criteria of leadership in their building for at least 2 years. Twenty elementary principals in the district were in their first year as principal as their campuses and did not meet the criteria to be considered for this study. Of the 87 principals who met the criteria for the study, 12 responded to the invitational e-mail and gave consent to participate in this study. However, because of state-wide school closures as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in increased leadership responsibilities at the time of this study, only eight of the 12 respondents participated in the interview process.

The school district is divided into three geographical regions. The regions are overseen by different executive staff in the school system; the executive staff supervise

the school principals. Additionally, these three areas of the district represent diverse

socioeconomic populations, which I believed would be important to have represented in

this study. Participants included three principals of schools from the west side, four

administrators at schools from the east side, and one principal of a school located in the

central area of the school district.

Demographics

Eight participants volunteered to participate in this study. Four of the participants

worked in Title I schools that receive federal funding because of the large numbers of

students from low-income families. The remaining four participants were principals at

schools that did not qualify for federal funding to supplement educational opportunities

for children at their campuses. None of the participants stated that they had a formal

system in place to identify students exposed to trauma. When asked to estimate the

number of students identified as exposed to trauma, the answers varied greatly.

All participants were administrators in their current school for at least 2 school

years. These educational administrators had 2–8 years of experience at their current

location. Their tenure in administrative roles as principal ranged from 2 to 14 years. Five

of the participants were female, and three were male. I assigned each participant a code to

maintain confidentiality. Table 1 displays the background information obtained during

this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant code	Gender	Years in current school	Total years as a principal	Current school Title I
Participant 1	Female	3	11	Yes
Participant 2	Female	2	14	Yes
Participant 3	Female	2	8	No
Participant 4	Male	3	3	No
Participant 5	Male	3	3	No
Participant 6	Female	6	6	Yes
Participant 7	Female	8	8	Yes
Participant 8	Male	2	2	No

Data Collection

As the researcher for this study, I was the primary instrument. I created and used an interview protocol (see Appendix) during each of the eight interviews. The interview protocol allowed me to collect rich data that aligned with the conceptual framework (see Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2016). Three educational experts from the school system who were not participants of the study reviewed the research questions and interview questions to confirm alignment prior to the use of the interview protocol. The process of having experts review the alignment of the research and interview questions helped to ensure content validity (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interview Process

I conducted three of the semistructured interviews in person at the participant's school during noninstructional times. Five of the semistructured interviews were conducted using an online video conferencing tool. Each of the eight participants was

interviewed once. The interview times varied based on the experiences of the participant.

I anticipated the interviews to last 45–60 minutes; however, interview times ranged from

17 minutes to 43 minutes. I asked each of the interviewees all six questions from the

interview protocol. During the interviews, I prompted participants to expand on their

responses and asked follow-up questions based on the participants' answers as necessary.

Each participant was provided opportunities to elaborate on responses to questions and to

add comments at the end of the interview. Table 2 displays the location, frequency, and

duration of each participant interview.

Table 2

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Each Participant Interview

Participant code	Location	Duration
Participant 1	Principal's office	17 minutes
Participant 2	Conference room	33 minutes
Participant 3	Principal's office	43 minutes
Participant 4	Video conference	21 minutes
Participant 5	Video conference	32 minutes
Participant 6	Video conference	34 minutes
Participant 7	Video conference	30 minutes
Participant 8	Video conference	38 minutes

Methods to Record Interview Data

I recorded all eight interviews using a digital device. During each interview, I

took anecdotal notes on the interview protocol that allowed me to keep track of what the

participant was saying to ask follow-up and clarification questions. I also used the

interview protocol to record any thoughts and reactions I had to participant responses. This practice allowed me to use reflexive bracketing and reduce bias (see Ahern, 1999).

After the interview, I saved the audio recordings on a password-protected USB drive. I personally transcribed each audio recording verbatim. As I transcribed each interview, I was able to think about nuances from the discussion, begin the analysis process, and observe patterns emerging from the data. To maintain confidentiality, I used only the participant code to title each transcription and added the transcriptions to the same password-protected USB drive containing the audio recordings. Data will remain in a fire-safe locked box in my home for 5 years in compliance with Walden University IRB requirements. After 5 years, I will personally destroy all electronic and paper copies of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is iterative and recursive (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used content analysis (see Bengtsson, 2016) to analyze the data, employing Yin's (2016) five-phase process of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. I moved back and forth between phases to elicit meaning from the data. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested that data analysis should include a variety of strategies to make sense of the data, construct themes, and turn themes into findings. Content analysis allowed me to isolate and review the raw data, create codes, observe categories, and identify emerging themes.

Coding Strategy

Compiling data. To compile the data, first, I refamiliarized myself with the responses from the participants by reading through the transcripts to make sense of the data as a whole (see Bengtsson, 2016). As I read the transcriptions, I highlighted words and phrases that answered the research and interview questions. Creswell (2014) called this stage of analysis becoming familiar with the data. I cut and pasted the participants' responses from the transcripts into a spreadsheet and color coded data on the spreadsheet that answered the research questions. The cutting and pasting process allowed me to sort the data as well as view the raw data in an objective manner. During this phase, I also created a glossary of terms as a part of organizing and compiling the data (see Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2016). Refamiliarizing myself with the transcriptions allowed me to make connections in the data and led to the second phase of the data analysis, decontextualization, where I disassembled the data.

Disassembling. The second phase of Yin's (2016) five-phase systems is disassembling or decontextualizing the data (see Bengtsson, 2016) to inductively break the data into smaller pieces and begin to assign codes. First, I looked for connections to the conceptual framework based on Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and assigned a priori codes based on this paradigm. The a priori codes aligned to the conceptual framework of Maslow's theory of human motivation were (a) physical needs of health, food, water, air, and rest; (b) security needs of safety, shelter, and stability; and (c) social needs of love, care, and belonging. The data displayed in Table 3 show how I determined a priori codes based on the transcriptions from the interviews.

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Table 3

Sample a Priori Coding

Participant	Interview text excerpt	a priori code
Participant 6	We have universal in-class breakfast, and really everybody, if you roll in late, like a lot of our kids do, we still make sure you get breakfast. And lunch.	Physical needs
Participant 8	The [food pantry] was set up through our school social worker. This year, we have staff who donated, families who donated as well. Our school social worker monitors the stock.	Physical needs
Participant 5	We have the safe places, brain start smart. We are doing the class meetings in the mornings . . . different breathing techniques. It's changed our vocabulary and how we do things in our school.	Security needs
Participant 8	Our trauma team includes the social worker, guidance counselor, psychologist, our IEP [Individualized Education Program] chair, and then me as the principal.	Security needs
Participant 3	I think just having morning meetings, we started that last year, and that was something that I said first quarter last year, it needed to be three times a week for the first quarter, and by second quarter it needs to be five times a week.	Social needs
Participant 7	I have a pretty large Social Emotional Learning team. I have two guidance counselors right now, I have a full-time social worker, I have a Social Emotional Learning teacher, and I have a crisis assistant.	Social needs

After identifying a priori codes based on Maslow's (1943) conceptual framework, I continued to iteratively disassemble the data and used open coding to further analyze the data inductively. Using the spreadsheet to assist in coding the data, I created filters to organize and identify similar codes to decontextualize the raw data. I filtered the data by each of the a priori codes, which allowed me to observe the raw data and a priori codes together to make meaning of the data in smaller units and assign an open code (see

Bengtsson, 2016). Table 4 displays how I used the a priori codes to determine open codes.

Table 4

Sample Showing Use of a Priori Codes in Open Coding

a priori code	Open code
Physical needs	Community partners
	Human resources
	Meet basic needs: clothing, school supplies
	Meet basic needs: food
	Multitiered systems of support
	Resources
	Team approach
Security needs	Brave circles
	Care room
	Check-in check-out
	Community partners
	Conflict resolution
	Conscious Discipline
	Child Protective Services
	Don't suspend
	Human resources
	Monitoring students
	Proactive approach
	Professional development
	Safe place
	Team approach
Social needs	Accountability
	After-school programs
	Brave circles
	Building positive relationships
	Check-in check-out
	Collaboration
	Communication
	Community partners
	Conscious Discipline
	Human resources
	Outside mental health providers
	Mentoring
	Monitoring students
	Multitiered systems of support
	Positive behavior interventions and supports
	Professional development
	Restorative practices
	Sense of belonging
	Team approach

Reassembling. Next, I reviewed the data to determine whether I had accounted for all relevant data. As the researcher, I needed to decide if any noncoded data could be aligned to answer the research questions (see Bengtsson, 2016). This led to the next phase, the reassembling phase (Yin, 2016). During this process, I recontextualized and compared the data searching for further or novel codes. The functions of the spreadsheet allowed me to group the data so that I could see commonalities in the data that I could condense into meaningful units. While organizing the data, I observed that the codes of accountability, human resources, and professional development were heavily represented and repeated throughout the data, which lead me to the categorization phase of content analysis.

Interpreting. Yin (2016) stated the next stage of analysis is to interpret the data. In this phase I began to make groups or categories of data (see Clark & Vealé, 2018). Bengtsson (2016) commented that while examining the codes, a researcher should reduce the amount of words without losing the meaning of the data. While examining the codes and extracting text segments related to the research questions, I discerned emerging categories that emphasized school leadership practices and responsibilities to create and maintain a school culture for children who were exposed to trauma in elementary schools. At this point of the analysis process, I began to make judgments about the data I collected and the categories I created. To limit bias, I used a reflective process to make comparisons. I looked for similarities and dissimilarities in the data, determined which responses seemed similar, looked for outliers in the data, and engaged in critical thinking

to consider contending explanations to the observations (see Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2016). Table 5 provides an example of this process.

Table 5

Sample of Open Codes Assigned to Categories

Open code	Category
Committee meetings Faculty meetings Grade-level meeting Professional development Summer planning Teacher training	Principals must provide professional development opportunities to school staff.
Building positive relationships Check-in check-out Conflict resolution Mentoring Open communication Sense of belonging	Principals must prioritize relationship building.
Collaboration Community partners Human resources Outside mental health providers Staffing/hiring Team approach	Principals must allocate human resources.
Accountability Administrator visibility Core beliefs Data monitoring Formal/informal observations Modeling	Principals must hold staff accountable.

Concluding. Once I delineated the categories, I was able to observe emerging themes that answered the research questions of this study. To organize the data, I created a hierarchical array and pivot tables in the spreadsheet to see what reoccurred most

frequently in the data (see Yin, 2016). The pivot tables allowed me to determine and

confirm themes from the data that reoccurred based on relationship among the codes.

Table 6 provides an example of this process.

Table 6

Categories Developed Into Themes

Category	Theme
Principals must provide professional development opportunities to school staff.	Administrators are responsible to provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.
Principals must prioritize relationship building.	Administrators are responsible to prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.
Principals must allocate human resources.	Administrators are responsible to provide necessary human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.
Principals must hold staff accountable.	Administrators are responsible to hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Themes

To analyze the data for this study, I used an iterative process. I used content

analysis (see Bengtsson, 2016) and dissembled and reassembled the data to create

meaning and to determine emergent themes (see Yin, 2016). I analyzed and interpreted

the data to determine principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture

for elementary trauma-exposed students. Four themes emerged from the data:

1. Administrators are responsible to provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

2. Administrators are responsible to prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

3. Administrators are responsible to provide human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

4. Administrators are responsible to hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Discrepant Data

I analyzed the data and looked for similarities, differences, and rival explanations (see Baskarada, 2014). Yin (2016) referred to discrepant data as rival thinking and stated that when reassembling the data, researchers should make constant comparisons, look for negative instances, and engage in rival thinking. After reassembling the data and following the process outlined by Yin, I noticed that some participants appeared to lack sufficient rich information that other participants shared to answer the research questions; however, no rival responses from the data emerged to conflict with the themes.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

I designed this basic qualitative study to understand the perceptions of elementary school administrators regarding creating and maintaining a safe and trustworthy school culture for students exposed to trauma to achieve academically in a mid-Atlantic school district. The three research questions for this study were the following:

1. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the physical needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

2. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the security needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

3. How do elementary administrators in a mid-Atlantic school district perceive practices necessary to develop and maintain a school culture that supports the social needs of students exposed to trauma to thrive and achieve academically?

Six interview questions were asked of each participant to guide the conversation to answer the research questions (see Appendix). Data collected in this study were grounded in Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Interview questions were aligned to the research questions. The results of this study revealed themes that answered the three research questions addressing principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma exposed students. Results are presented by theme. After analyzing the raw data, four themes emerged:

1. Administrators are responsible to provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

2. Administrators are responsible to prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

3. Administrators are responsible to provide human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

4. Administrators are responsible to hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Theme 1: Professional Development

Theme 1 is that school administrators must provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. Findings from this study indicated that teachers and staff must have appropriate training to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma (relating to Research Questions 1–3). The participants in this study emphasized the need for ongoing professional development for teachers and staff to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

Seven of the eight principals discussed the need for professional development and ways they provided training for the teachers and staff at their school. When asked, "What do you do at school to make your students feel safe?" Participant 7 discussed the approach used at her school to provide professional development to staff. Participant 7 has a team of staff who work together to plan, implement, and follow up on the professional development plans at the school. Participant 7 explained,

We do a lot of professional development, and have done a lot of professional development, over the past 5 years. And that again comes out of the Social

Emotional Learning team. They do faculty meetings once a month, they do grade-

level meetings once a month, and so they talk to teachers about trauma and the

impact on the brain. It's a lot of professional development about what trauma

looks like, how it impacts learning, and we are constantly having conversations.

So, they [teachers] really can't get around not having the conversation once a

month, and so, when we have the conversation with them, it creates the culture.

Participant 8 also described a tiered approach to providing professional

development to teachers by creating a collaborative committee to be the lead learners.

Lead learners are staff who learn the new information ahead of the rest of the staff and

then present their learning to the staff. Participant 8 stated,

Our assistant principal takes a lot of the Conscious Discipline responsibilities and

we have committee meetings that work on putting the PD [professional

development] together. The committee [made up of teachers] are the kind of

people that are most interested in Conscious Discipline and kind of our advocates

and were more willing to put time in.

Participant 8 also discussed reaching out to experts in the field to train a small

group of teachers in the building who then provided the professional development to the

staff at the school.

She came out and helped us with the planning part. . . . She provided us with the

skeleton of what the PD [professional development] would look like. Then, the

teachers on the Conscious Discipline committee worked together to plan the

professional development.

I asked how administrators set up practices for the implementation of a new programs. Participant 4 shared, "We have a committee of teachers, and this is our 1st year of rolling it [Conscious Discipline] out." Participant 4 described how the committee functioned: "At the beginning of the year, we laid the foundation. . . . They [the committee] meet once every 4 weeks, and they are preparing the PD [professional development] for the faculty. . . . That is the ongoing piece." Participant 3 also referenced professional development at the beginning of the year and explained how they used the teacher preservice week for professional development. Participant 3 shared, "They [teachers] left preservice week with their own 'wish you well' board; we [administrators] bought everything for them so they could do the make-n-take." The "wish you well" board is a specific practice in Conscious Discipline. "Make-n-take" is a term used in the district for professional development in which teachers create something concrete in the training that they can take back and use in the classroom.

When asked to explain practices that the participant used to support the physical needs of the students at their school, Participant 3 shared that an outside mental health community partner provided professional development opportunities for the staff at the school. This mental health partner delivered "two sessions with the staff about ACEs. They did [training] at a faculty meeting, and we are going to continue to do that." Participant 3 believed that professional development is a recursive process, and although the mental health community partner had provided a foundational base of preparation with the teachers on campus, ongoing training was required to meet the challenges of helping students who experience trauma.

Participant 5 offered this statement about teacher training and professional development:

I don't think that as educators we have the proper training all the time, but what's really important is that we be transparent: This is where we are, this is what we have in place, and this is what we need to do.

The participants of this study attributed the successful implementation of programs of providing support to students exposed to trauma to the provision of effective professional development.

Theme 2: Relationship Building

Theme 2 is that administrators must prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. Findings from this study indicated that administrators must prioritize relationship building to meet the physical, security, and social needs and to create and maintain a safe and supportive school culture for trauma-exposed students (relating to Research Questions 1–3). The participants in this study referenced ways that they and their staff focus on relationship building to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

All eight of the principals discussed the need to build relationships with both students and adults. When asked about principal and staff practices to meet the social needs of students exposed to trauma, Participant 1 spoke about extracurricular activities and mentoring programs. Participant 1 stated that the programs "promote socialization that promotes positive relationships with the students and adults." Participant 2 discussed how relationship building helped to decrease the suspension rate and assisted students to

work productively with each other. Participant 2 shared, "We do a lot of mediation around relationships." According to Participant 2, after students are involved in a fight, teachers have conversations with the students and work on "interpersonal relationships, how do we get along with our friends, because a lot of fights are around friends [and groups]." Developing relationships provided opportunities for staff to teach children to problem solve conflict.

Participant 3 emphasized that relationships with the families of students are important to support students exposed to trauma. "The majority of my teachers have built strong relationships with parents, and the parents will reach out to them." Participant 4 also discussed the need to develop relationships and engage parents. When talking about problem solving with students, Participant 4 explained, "We do a lot to get parents engaged in that as well. It's not something that I believe we should handle in isolation if we have parents that are willing to be engaged" in problem solving. Participant 5 echoed the importance of building parent relationships and being proactive. This principal highlighted the important of being visible during arrival and dismissal: "Parents are coming in [the building]. They rarely go to the office because we are right there." In addition, Participant 7 shared that related to meeting the physical needs of students, "we talk to parents; parents seem pretty free to talk to us."

During each interview, I asked participants to explain how they established practices to support students exposed to trauma. Participant 3 explained, "This year was a lot easier for me for summer planning. . . . Just having the background and having built the relationships with a lot of the families, they felt like they could come to me." When

asked how the school staff supported the security needs of students, Participant 8 responded, "A lot of relationship building." Participant 8 described that school staff help students build positive relationships by offering peer mentors and fifth-grade buddies and using a check-in check-out program.

Participant 4 stated the staff identified "having solid relationships with kids" as a contributing factor to be a successful teacher. Participant 6 shared,

My teachers do an amazing job making connections with kids, all of them, all of the staff. Everybody makes connections with kids, and the kids feel it. They feel warm and supported and loved there. You just feel it in the building.

When I asked what the principal attributed the peaceful school environment, Participant 6 responded, "The kids all have someone that they can count on in the building." Participant 8 shared, "Some of our teachers have really great connections with kids and do a really great job of using language associated with Conscious Discipline."

Theme 3: Human Resources

Theme 3 is that administrators must have and allocate human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. Findings from this study indicated that administrators must have and allocate human resources to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma (relating to Research Questions 1–3). Participant 1 stated, "My philosophy is a position is only as good as the person who's in it." Participant 7 described interviewing new candidates:

We are very honest when we interview. Kids show up [to our school] with a lot on them, and they will throw furniture, and they will hit and kick and spit and bite

and all that, and the question is, "How do you respond to that?" So really making

sure our questions are tailored around how the work shows up for us in this

building. "How would you respond to that?" So, we interview hard through that

lens.

Principals in this study met the physical, security, and social needs of students by

using a team approach to allocate the necessary human resources. Participant 8 stated,

"Our trauma team includes a social worker, guidance counselor, psychologist, our IEP

[Individualized Education Program] chair, and then me as the principal." Participant 7

said,

The first thing I did was structure a time for us [the Social Emotional Learning

team] to meet on a monthly basis. We meet once a month to talk about needs of

kids. Sometimes it is physical needs, sometimes it might be behavior needs and

supports that are needed. So, we meet once a month, and that's how we talk about

kids and identify what things need to be done.

Participant 5 has a leadership team and stated, "I started to get people on my

leadership team that have my heart, not even like, my vision, but [people] who truly have

my heart." The participant then shared the roles of the members of the leadership team.

"On my leadership team I have two assistant principals, a staff development teacher, the

math resource/IEP [Individualized Education Program] chair, a reading specialist, and the

literacy coach."

Participant 2 discussed using a team approach to allocate human resources in the

building through a tiered support system for teachers who require assistance with a

student who had experienced trauma. The MTSS resource teacher, staff development

teacher, administrators, and other team members address student misbehavior or

outbursts, rather than expecting the teacher to handle behavior alone. Participant 2 also

shared they explain to the children who have experienced trauma "that they have a team,

that they have people that answer to them." The team at this school emphasized the

importance that students realize people cared for them and would protect them in their

emotional vulnerability. Participant 2 elaborated, "We say to them, first the teacher, then

the CARE team, then the guidance counselor, then the assistant principal, then the

principal, then their parent." The CARE team is the name the school staff gave the team

who responds to social-emotional and behavioral issues with students.

Another way the principals in this study obtained additional human resources is

through community partners. Principals discussed community partners as being integral

in meeting the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

Participant 8 shared "Our guidance counselor has developed a lot of different

partnerships." Participant 8 named community partners such as local business, churches,

and the PTA.

> These partners will just donate money, and then we can purchase items, stock
>
> clothing, stock school supplies. . . . They [PTA] do a lot of fundraising. They are
>
> always willing to use the money to donate to buy school supplies and clothing,
>
> you know. They play a really active role in stocking our food pantry.

Participant 7 named churches, hospitals, and the PTA as community partners. Participant

6 also noted a partnership with a local branch of the Hunger Project: "On Fridays, [the

Hunger Project members] bring us 20 weekend packets for families that we have identified."

Five of the 8 principals shared that they used outside mental health providers to meet the social needs of students in their school. Participant 8 said, "We do have a couple mental health partnerships, and that's been really helpful. Most of our families have been really, really, involved. But I've found that having a therapist makes a big difference." Participant 1 shared, "We have three in-house therapy providers here at our school that see the children." Participants 2, 4, and 5 also shared that they acquired additional human resources to support the students in their school by using outside mental health partnerships. School administrators must prioritize, locate, and allocate human resources to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

Theme 4: Accountability

Theme 4 is that administrators must hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. Findings from this study indicated that administrators must hold staff accountable to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma (relating to Research Questions 1–3). Seven of the 8 principals discussed holding staff accountable during their interviews. The participants in this study used terms such as *administrator expectations*, *conversations with staff*, *formal observations*, *holding teachers accountable*, *informal observations, checklists*, *nonnegotiables*, and *observation tools* when responding to questions about establishing practices to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students in their school buildings.

When asked about the practices in place to support the needs of students exposed to trauma, Participant 7 talked about the programs implemented on the school campus.

I think the most important thing is that I made it a priority—I made Maslow a priority for everybody, and so, we have the tough conversations [with teachers] around how kids show up [for school] and that they are kids. My expectation for how we [adults] show up [attitudes towards students and the work], and if that's not what you want to do or be, then you don't want to be here.

Participant 5 discussed accountability based on the school progress plan; follow-up procedures occur consistently in various forms because of the monitoring of the school progress plan. "Because it is a part of our school progress plan, we have learning walk tools during our collaborative professional learning time. . . . Teachers are actually going out into other classrooms and looking and getting ideas." Participant 4 spoke about district accountability forms available and how the leadership team tailored the forms for use at their school. Participant 4 stated, "What we did was chose different 'look fors' and did walk throughs . . . and we turned it into a data point that we could share" with staff.

Participant 7 stated, "We set up a gradual release professional development for the whole year, and then the 'look fors' [informal observation tool] are around the professional development." Participant 7 described a tiered approach to holding staff accountable. "There was a checklist. . . . The Social Emotional Learning team goes in and gives some feedback [to teachers]. Then, the assistant principal and I start looking for implementation for evaluative purposes." Participant 7 offered, "It's a nonnegotiable for

teachers to implement a school-wide program [initiative], and we hold teachers accountable for that." Participant 8 shared,

> When we [administrators] are doing informal observations throughout the building, one of the things we are looking for are different practices that are being implemented. So, we try to highlight the positives within the building and have those teachers present a topic that might be relevant but also appropriate to that time.

Participant 6 described occasions when things do not work, and teachers become frustrated with student behavior. Participant 6 stated teachers may question procedures that challenge classroom instructors, which requires administrative leadership to encourage change to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma. "I just don't give them [teachers] the option. The option is always, 'We are going to do something.'" Supportive administrative practices are required to hold staff accountable when working with children who have suffered ACEs.

Participant 3 focused on being visible in the day-to-day operations of the school. "We would just go into classrooms and make sure that morning meetings were happening, and 'brain start smarts' were happening." Frequent classroom observations helped establish campus programs to support behavioral programs.

> We have an informal observation tool that my assistant principal and I use just to give feedback. At the beginning of the year, myself, my staff development teacher, my assistant principal, and my school counselor, we took a grade level each a week, for the first couple of weeks.

Participant 6 spoke about teacher accountability occurring though daily informal interactions. Participant 6 explained, "I am going to stop and ask teachers about their kids. I'm going to stop and talk to kids. . . . That's been the expectation. I am really visible in the building. I expect people to treat kids well."

Summary

In summary, when I analyzed the data from the semistructured interviews to determine principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma exposed students, four themes emerged. These themes together answered the three research questions related to a school culture supporting physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma. I observed that building relationships was referenced most often by the participants. Professional development, human resources, and accountability also occurred frequently in the data. Four themes emerged:

1. Administrators are responsible to provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

2. Administrators are responsible to prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

3. Administrators are responsible to provide human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

4. Administrators are responsible to hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the researcher must interpret the data to draw conclusions and determine findings (Bengtsson, 2016). Therefore, I employed practices to minimize bias and ensure trustworthiness. One way I worked to ensure trustworthiness was to explain the research process explicitly (see Yin, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility assures that data are properly collected, analyzed, and interpreted in a way that accurately represents the study and its findings (Yin, 2016). The interview protocol (see Appendix) ensured that all participants were asked the same questions and that the interview questions were aligned to the research questions. The interview protocol was also reviewed by three experts to ensure content validity. Another way I increased the credibility of the study was to use participant codes to keep participants' personal information confidential, which allowed them to speak freely and represent their experiences accurately (see Yin, 2016). On several occasions during the interview, participants paused or said, "I'm not sure if I should say this" or, "I'm not sure I should admit this when being recorded." In these instances, I reminded them that the participant information would remain confidential. After the reminder, all participants then continued to express their thoughts. The detailed explanation of recruitment, participant selection, and data collection helped to establish credibility and build trustworthiness (see Yin, 2016). I e-mailed the findings of the study to each participant, in a practice known as member checking (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018), which increased the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree that findings of the study can be generalized and applied to other settings (Bengtsson, 2016). Readers need to have enough information to be able to determine if they can connect the findings from this study to a larger context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, to increase transferability, I thoroughly explained the sample size, limitations, and used thick descriptions of the data (see Abdalla et al., 2017). My explanation of the data aligned to the conceptual framework, Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, which allows readers to determine if they can generalize the finding of this study to additional situations.

Dependability

Dependability is achieved by having a solid research design and through the researcher's explanation of the analysis and how the data change over time (see Bengtsson, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used reflective journaling during the data analysis process to document my thinking while assigning codes and relabeling data (see Bengtsson, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I established dependability by ensuring the data answered the research questions and were aligned to the conceptual framework, Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were provided the findings of the study and the opportunity to confirm or question the findings (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, data were collected from principals from each geographic area in the school district, and the data led to similar findings (see Yin, 2016). My explanation of thinking and rationale to the reader and other researchers helped to establish dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability means that the data are shared in manner that is neutral, is objective, and could be confirmed by others (Bengtsson, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish confirmability, I used thick descriptions, which would enable other researchers to recreate the study in a similar context (see Abdalla et al., 2017). To ensure the accuracy of the findings, participants had the opportunity to review the research findings, as explained. This process is known as member checking (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition, I used bracketing and reflective journaling to limit personal bias (see Ahern, 1999; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interview, I bracketed my personal thoughts when they arose (see Ahern, 1999), as well as during the data analysis process. I revisited the interview protocol, which included reviewing my bracketed thoughts. I documented my thinking during the data analysis while assigning codes and relabeling the data (see Bengtsson, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

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Summary

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In Chapter 4, I presented the findings from the research questions of the study. I explained how I analyzed the data to explain principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. Four themes emerged from the data. To create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma, school administrators must (a) provide teachers with professional development, (b) prioritize relationship building, (c) have and allocate human resources, and (d) hold staff accountable. In Chapter 5, I explain the interpretations of the findings,

state the limitations of the study, present recommendations, provide implications, and

draw conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. A basic qualitative study was appropriate because it allows the researcher to understand how people address a problem in real-life (Yin, 2016). The subjective experiences of participants working in the field of education provided knowledge based on their perceptions to solve a practical problem (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative design allowed me to answer *how* and *why* questions concerning the issue of contemporary educational practice (see Yin, 2018). The research questions were aligned to Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation to determine principals' perceptions about practices to create a school culture that supports students' physical, security, and social needs. The review of the literature along with findings from the analysis of data revealed how elementary school principals create and maintain a school culture that is supportive of trauma-exposed students.

Findings from this study showed that to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma, school administrators must (a) provide teachers with professional development, (b) prioritize relationship building, (c) acquire and allocate human resources, and (d) hold staff accountable. Carello and Butler (2015) found that school administrators should create a safe and trustworthy school culture to meet the academic and emotional needs of trauma-exposed students. When school principals offer appropriate training for staff; foster a collaborative and trusting environment to build

relationships; recruit teachers, counselors, and outside providers; and hold staff accountable to provide support for children who have experienced trauma, the collective staff are able to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

Interpretation of the Findings

I conducted this basic qualitative exploratory study to investigate elementary school principals' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. The literature review for this study included an explanation of Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and how school staff can create a school culture that meets the needs of students exposed to trauma. Maslow's theory of human motivation states that if the first three levels of physical, security, and social needs are not met, students cannot progress to the higher stages of development.

The principal is the facilitator of the school's culture by setting the tone, modeling, and leading a transformational culture. Administrators need to create a school environment that is positive and conducive for learning (McKinney et al., 2015). The themes revealed in this study do not represent phenomena that occur in a linear manner; the themes are intertwined and recursive in illustrating the creation of a school culture that supports elementary trauma-exposed students. In the following sections, I present and explain the four themes that emerged from this study.

Professional Development

Theme 1 was the following: School administrators must provide teachers with professional development to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students

exposed to trauma. Perry and Daniels (2016) found professional development to be a fundamental component of implementing trauma-informed practices and creating a school culture that is supportive of children exposed to trauma. Anderson et al. (2015) found that trauma-informed approaches need to be embedded in professional development for staff working with students exposed to trauma. However, Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017) indicated that teachers lack knowledge related to trauma-informed practices. The findings of this study indicated that principals realized that professional development for staff was an integral component to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma. One participant (Participant 7) referred to Maslow (1943) throughout the interview and stated that their school developed the social emotional learning program anchored in Maslow's theory of human motivation, provided staff trainings on Maslow, and continuously talked about their core beliefs as it related to Maslow. Participants shared various formats by which professional development was delivered to staff.

As the leader of the school, the school principal is responsible for evaluating and determining the need for professional development in the school. Yeung et al. (2015) stated that sustainability of school-wide programs requires administrators to (a) prioritize the initiative, (b) coordinate funding, (c) provide resources, (d) allow release time for teachers, (e) offer time for professional development, (f) perform data analysis, (g) ensure sufficient planning time, and (h) support ongoing professional development opportunities. In addition, administrators should share information at staff meetings and hold individual conversations with teachers regarding the effects of trauma on students'

brains (O'Grady, 2017). Findings from this study indicated that the principal must not only determine *what* professional development to deliver to staff, but also *how* the training is delivered. School principals must allocate resources including time, money, and staff, to create and present the professional development.

According to the participants, professional development must occur consistently throughout the year and be offered in multiple forms. For example, participants spoke about large staff meetings to train teachers, followed by smaller grade-level or content-specific groups to follow up with whole-group meetings. This practice allows for all staff to receive a baseline training and then to build skills through customized small-group follow-up sessions. The participants spoke about allocating monthly staff meeting time for after-school professional development as well as allocating in-school time that included grade level meetings and live coaching or modeling opportunities in the classroom for staff as ways to provide professional development.

Creating a trained group of experts in the building was essential to provide stakeholder acceptance. Participants spoke of having committees that planned, created, and delivered the professional development. This group of trained and invested staff learned the information first and then developed professional development customized to meet the needs of their school and staff. This effective practice resulted in the creation of a team of experts in the building who were able to support the students and staff through authentic modeling.

An additional effective professional training practice was to present experts from outside of the school to train staff. Participants referred to obtaining consultants from

professional development organizations, mental health organizations, or community partners to conduct the professional development for staff. These experts start the training and lay the initial groundwork for the professional development that provides the school staff with techniques to successfully implement and sustain skills after the professional development. Professional development for staff is a recursive process and essential to creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. Findings from this study also indicated that school principals need to prioritize relationship building.

Relationship Building

Theme 2 was the following: School administrators must prioritize relationship building to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. All participants agreed that teachers and staff must build relationships with students and families to meet the needs of students exposed to trauma. School principals should emphasize the importance of relationships and collaborate to work with staff to create such relationships in their school. Researchers' findings corroborate the conclusion that students need an adult in whom they can place confidence at school. Brunzell et al. (2015) stated that trauma-exposed students are often unable to self-regulate and sustain healthy relationships. This emotional deficit necessitates developing trusting collaborative relationships between administrators and faculty as well as teachers with students. Brunzell et al. (2016b) found that teachers and staff can help students exposed to trauma repair their regulatory abilities and attachment capacities through building strong and nurturing relationships with students. Morgan et al. (2015) also found that

school staff can support students exposed to trauma by building positive relationships built on safety and trust.

Participants in this study identified formal and informal processes that they used in their school to foster positive relationships. Informal processes involved mentor programs, check-in check-out systems, peer mediation, and after-school activities to promote socialization and positive relationships. Formal programs included PBIS, Conscious Discipline, and restorative practices. Participants in the study emphasized social emotional learning in their school buildings. Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation stated that human needs are based on a hierarchy. The fulfillment of one need in the hierarch allows for the next need to be addressed; therefore, students' social and emotional needs must be met before learning can occur (Morgan et al., 2015).

The administrators stated that being visible throughout the school, knowing children by name, and communicating with families on a personal level were ways to mitigate the effects of trauma and build relationships. Participants in this study indicated the need to provide staff with professional development on programs and school-wide initiatives such as Conscious Discipline, restorative practices, and PBIS, as well as the importance of relationship building when working with trauma-exposed students. However, the principal must obtain and distribute personnel to build relationships with students and families.

Human Resources

Theme 3 revealed by the data was the following: Administrators must have and allocate human resources to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students

exposed to trauma. Principals are responsible for the hiring, allocating, and evaluating of school personnel. Findings from this study indicated that principals must hire and retain staff who are dedicated to the students in their school. Principals must develop interviewing and hiring practices to recruit appropriate candidates to facilitate supportive roles in the educational setting to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Participants described how they interview new candidates, create and foster a team approach, and provide professional development to support and retain staff to meet the needs of trauma-exposed students. Participants explained that during the interview process when hiring new teachers and staff, they described the challenges in their school with students who have experienced trauma. Occasionally an administrator provided a scenario to the candidate and then asked, "How would you handle this situation?" Participant 1 stated, "The position is only as good as the person in it," and Participant 7 said, "We interview hard."

Participants emphasized the need for a team approach and a collective responsibility among the staff to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Anderson et al. (2015) found that shared leadership can create a caring and collaborative culture that meets the physical, social, and emotional needs of students exposed to trauma. Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) stated that administrators face difficulty in acquiring and funding school staff to counsel trauma-exposed students. Teachers who work with students exposed to trauma often experience teacher burnout and leave the profession; therefore, administrators must create a school culture that is supportive of the teachers to mitigate the demanding effects of working with students

exposed to trauma (Brunzell et al., 2018). Additionally, providing professional development is important for new staff and retaining staff, as I have explained.

Principals also must acquire additional human resources through community partnerships to assist with school initiatives to provide trauma-sensitive school environments. Participants made statements about relationships with outside organizations that provide supplies for the physical needs of students. Community partners provided resources that included food, clothing, toiletries, school supplies, laundry supplies, shelter, funding for bills, and mental health care to the students and families, which helped financial challenges of the school and families.

Participants in the study also shared about developing community partnerships with outside mental health agencies to support the security and social needs of students in the school. Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation supports that students must feel safe physically and emotionally to learn. With the provision of mental health experts and counselors in the building, administrators are able to deliver human resources that directly support students and families as well as indirectly support professional development to staff. Providing mental health services within the school removed barriers such as scheduling appointments that required additional transportation and supplying providing direct follow-up services for the family. This finding supports previous research. Langley et al. (2015) found delivering mental health assistance at school removes barriers such as transportation, stigma, and required parental commitment and provides consistency for students exposed to trauma.

Accountability

Theme 4 from the data was the following: Administrators must hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary students exposed to trauma. The principals in this study stated the importance of providing an accountability structure to create a school culture that supports elementary trauma-exposed students. Accountability, among other factors, is crucial to the sustainability of school-wide programs (Argon, 2015; Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crowe, & Saka, 2009; Hayet et al., 2016; Taylor-Greene & Kartub, 2000). Argon (2015) found that school principals are responsible for creating the school culture by providing staff the knowledge and skills that are needed and then holding the school staff accountable. Hayet et al. (2016) stated school leaders should have high expectations for staff and increase staff accountability. Participants shared various ways they maintained standards of instituted programs within the school culture.

One way principals hold staff accountable is to communicate the administration's expectations and priorities to the staff. Clearly explaining the desired outcomes of programs used at the school allows the staff to work to meet the expectations outlined by the school administration. The priorities of the principal are reflected in the professional development offered to staff, informal conversations, and feedback, as well as the allocation of time, money, and human resources. Participants in this study created teams of staff who worked to hold one another accountable through the use of informal observation tools and checklists. The participants spoke about using the team to model,

coach, and support teachers in implementing the practices acquired from professional development opportunities.

To formally hold staff accountable, administrators used school progress plans, provided specific behavioral initiatives, and established strategic goals for the school year. Principals also used school progress plans as an evaluation tool. Because the school progress plans state school-wide goals, initiatives, programs, training, and measures to evaluate the progress toward the goals, principals used the plans as a tool to hold staff accountable to use school-wide initiatives. Participants used formal teacher and staff evaluation tools to hold staff accountable for consistently implementing practices to support students exposed to trauma.

Limitations of the Study

The methodological approach of this basic study resulted in limitations of the study's findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study had three limitations: (a) the protentional for researcher bias, (b) a small purposive sample, and (c) transferability. To limit researcher bias, I used bracketing, reflective journaling, and member checking (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interview process, I bracketed my personal opinion and thoughts as they arose on the interview protocol (see Appendix). While collecting and reviewing my data, I used reflective journaling to document my thinking process and analysis (see Creswell, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After the data analysis, I used member checking of the findings to ensure that I captured the perceptions of the interviewees (see Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I sent each participant the findings of the study and the transcript from the

participant's interview. None of the participants replied that they disagreed with the findings or that they had any additions, questions, or suggested changes.

Eight principals participated in this study. Although the sample size was small, I purposefully selected candidates who had diverse experiences in the school district (see Yin, 2016). Participants were administrators for at least 2 years and included principals from Title I and non-Title I schools. I ensured that each geographical region of the school district was represented by participants. Principals' experience varied based on the range in the number of years they were an administrator in their current school as well as total number of years of experience as principal and years in education. The participants included both male and female principals.

In qualitative research, a researcher typically purposively selects a small sample of participants who are experts in their field (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). The findings of this study may be transferable to school systems with a similar setting and student population. I used thick descriptions when analyzing the data so readers could determine if the findings of this study are transferable (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I described the research setting, participants, and interpretations of the findings. I also used detailed descriptions of the data and findings to increase the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings.

Recommendations

This study added to the research about practice concerning how school administrators create and maintain a school culture that supports trauma-exposed students. Limited research has been available on the administrator's role in creating and

maintaining a school culture for elementary school students who have experienced trauma. Based on the findings of this basic qualitative study, I recommend further research to determine how school principals create and maintain a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students.

Research at the elementary level is needed on formal processes and assessments to identify students who have been exposed to trauma. None of the eight participants had a formalized process for identifying students as trauma exposed. Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) indicated literature on creating trauma-sensitive schools is limited, and few standardized evaluations are available to assess trauma in elementary-aged students. Public schools are the ideal place to intervene and implement trauma-informed practices (Plumb et al., 2016). However, current implementations of trauma-informed practices to meet the needs of students are insufficient (Scott & Burt, 2018). Therefore, more research is needed on how school administrators and staff identify students exposed to trauma and how school administrators create and maintain a school culture to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma. Additional research is needed on principal preparation programs to provide future principals with the appropriate training to create and maintain a school culture that supports trauma-exposed students.

Because the sample size of this study was small and focused on one school district, further qualitative research in additional districts is needed. I recommend additional qualitative studies to determine administrators' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. Specifically, additional studies are needed grounded in the work of Maslow's (1943) theory of human

motivation and emphasizing the role of school administrators. Another recommendation is to conduct a case study with a larger participant size to gather additional perceptions.

Quantitative research should be conducted. One quantitative study could include an elementary screening tool to appropriately identify students as trauma exposed. Currently, little data are available regarding screening and identification of students in school. Furthermore, the study could monitor the effects of school-based interventions as well as systems and structures in place to mitigate the effect of trauma on students at school. Successful interventions could be determined based on data tracking trauma-exposed students, including identification for special education, grade retention, below grade-level achievement, cognitive and language development, performance on standardized tests, grade point averages, and absenteeism (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Brunzell et al., 2015; Cavanaugh, 2016; Hoover et al., 2018). Longitudinal studies could focus on dropout rates, involvement in criminal activity, incarceration, dependency on welfare systems, and homelessness (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Mixed methods studies would allow for data to be gathered through interviews to gain perceptions of administrators paired with data points to determine the number of students identified as trauma exposed and the effectiveness of the programs as measured by student achievement. Student surveys could include a feeling of belongingness, security, relationships with school staff, and relationships with other students. A mixed methods study could provide insight on how school principals create and maintain a school culture to support trauma-exposed students.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the practices of elementary school administrators in fostering a safe and trustworthy school culture that supports academic achievement for students who have experienced trauma. This study helped to address the gap in research about practice. School staff must work to meet the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma in the school setting. Tichy (2017) found that schools can serve as a protective factor and help students exposed to trauma move through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Findings from this study support the research that schools are an appropriate place to mitigate the effects of trauma on students (Plumb et al., 2016).

Themes from this study indicate that administrators can create and maintain a school culture that supports students exposed to trauma. School principals are responsible for fostering the culture of their school (Sagnak et al., 2015). Carello and Butler (2015) stated that school administrators should create a safe and trustworthy school culture that meets the emotional and academic needs of students exposed to trauma. School principals must provide staff with professional development, focus on the importance of relationship building, allocate human resources, and hold staff accountable to create and maintain a school culture for elementary trauma-exposed students. A broader implication of this study indicates that school principals should receive professional development to learn how to support the students and staff in their school building. Positive social change can occur at elementary schools if administrators and school staff mitigate the negative effects of trauma on students and allow children the opportunity to thrive physically,

socially, emotionally, and academically to become effective members of society. If administrators create and maintain a school culture that supports elementary trauma-exposed students, these children can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

Conclusion

This study extends the knowledge of Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and provides a framework for the elementary school principal's role in creating and maintaining a school culture that is supportive of trauma-exposed students. Findings from this study indicate principals must deliberately create and maintain a school culture that meets the physical, security, and social needs of students exposed to trauma.

In the United States, between one half and two thirds of children suffer from traumatic experiences (Baker et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2016; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Ninety percent of children attend public school, making schools a viable environment to mitigate the effects of trauma (Plumb et al., 2016). A student's physical, social, and emotional well-being is directly linked to academic achievement (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Although researchers' findings have shown that experiencing childhood trauma affects a child's brain development, social functioning, and ability to learn, educational leaders often have ignored the effects of childhood trauma (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma-exposed students' physical, security, and social needs must be met at school. Elementary school principals should create and maintain a school culture that supports elementary trauma-exposed students to increase academic learning.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview date: _____

Interview start time: _____

Interviewee code: _____

Interview Outline	Observations/Notes
I. Introduction and Greeting Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I appreciate the time you've carved out of your busy schedule. My study focuses on administrators' perceptions of creating and maintaining a school culture for elementary students who have experienced trauma. As a Walden University candidate, I am eager to begin this interview and gather data for this research. Throughout the interview I will ask questions to guide us through a conversation to gain information and insight on your perceptions. All the interview questions are aligned to the research questions in my study.	
II. Review Consent Form Before I begin the interview, I would like to review the consent form.	
III. Obtain Background Information 1. Name: _____ 2. Male: ___ Female: ___ 3. Years as a principal in your current school: _____ 4. Total years as a principal: _____ 5. Is your school a Title I school (Y/N)? 6. Total years of experience in Title I? _____	

7. Do you have a system in place at your school to identify students as students who have been exposed to trauma? 8. How many students who have experienced trauma are identified in your school? _____	

IV. Interview Questions
 	
1. What practices do you and your staff have in place to support the **physical needs** of students exposed to trauma?
   • Tell me more about…
   • Can you elaborate on…
   • What did you mean by…?
 	
2. How did you set up and establish practices to support the physical needs of students exposed to trauma?
   • Tell me more about how they are maintained.
   • Can you elaborate on…
   • What did you mean by…?
 	
3. What practices do you and your staff have in place to support the **security needs** of students exposed to trauma?
   • Tell me more about…
   • Can you elaborate on…
   • What did you mean by…?
 	
4. How did you set up and establish practices to support the security needs of students exposed to trauma?
   • Tell me more about how they are maintained?
   • Can you elaborate on…
   • What did you mean by…?
 	
5. What practices do you and your staff have in place to support the **social needs** of students exposed to trauma?
   • Tell me more about…	

• Can you elaborate on…
 • What did you mean by…?
 	
 6. How did you set up and establish practices support the social needs of students exposed to trauma?
      • Tell me more about how those are maintained?
      • Can you elaborate on…
      • What did you mean by…?
 	
 7. Is there anything further you want to add?	

V. Close of Interview Thank you for taking the time to participate in the research for my study. Your unique experiences and perceptions on creating and maintaining a school culture for students exposed to trauma will be included in my data analysis. Once I have completed transcribing, coding, and looking for themes from our interview, I will provide you with a draft of my findings. After you receive the findings, if you disagree, want to add additional information, or have questions, please e-mail me so that we can set up a time to discuss the findings. Do you have any questions for me before we stop the audio recording? **Turn off recording**	
VI. End of Interview Interview end time: _____	