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Administrators' Perceptions of Their Roles and Challenges in Building a Positive School Culture in Title I Schools

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Yvonne T. Browder

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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2023

Abstract

Administrators' Perceptions of Their Roles and Challenges in Building a Positive
School Culture in Title I Schools

by

Yvonne T. Browder

MS, Nova Southeastern University, 2004

BA, Hampton University, 1990

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Educational Administration and Leadership

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

Elementary school principals in this study struggled to implement and maintain a positive school culture. School culture plays an essential role in schools, and school principals play a significant part in developing that culture. Positive school culture is vital in all schools, especially in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. This basic qualitative study involved understanding school principals' challenges in developing and maintaining a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. The transformational leadership theory was the framework for this study. Research questions were developed to understand what elementary principals of high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools consider to be barriers to creating the right culture. Five school principals with three or more years of administrative experience in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools in the southeastern region of the United States participated in semi structured interviews. Data were analyzed and coded using thematic analysis for emergent themes. The themes that emerged from this study were leading by example, relationships, and school and community. The study also identified that servant leadership and transformational leadership played a part in developing and maintaining positive school cultures. This study will lead to social change by providing school principals with methods, best practices, and skills to create a healthy school culture that allows students to learn in a place where nurturing relationships foster student growth and development.

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Culture in Title I Schools

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Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this study to God, who, when I got weary, gave me the strength to finish. I also dedicate this study to my parents and my husband; your support was unmeasurable. My children, sister, Uncle Myron K. Terry, and cousin Dr. Angela Stephens kept me focused through this journey. Family over everything!

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Special thanks to my chair, Dr. Mary Hallums, and second chair, Dr. Jerry Collins, for your unwavering guidance and support. I appreciate all the conversations and encouragement throughout this journey. Thank you so much to the principals who gave their time and shared their experiences. Thank you to my squad for your prayers and support. Thank you to anyone who has given me a word of encouragement and those who have spoken this to me for years. I did it!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School culture refers to norms, behaviors, services, images, and stories that make a school different from others (Asante & Ayikue, 2022). Atasoy (2020) defined school culture as the school's character in terms of how it reflects values, beliefs, and traditions that develop over time. School leadership significantly influences school culture and principals' roles are essential to the success of schools. It is up to school principals to build and set expectations for supportive school cultures. Without positive school cultures, morale drops, student and teacher absences are high, and student achievement is reduced.

According to Meyers and Darwin (2017), high poverty and low-performing schools can be very resistant to change, and students who attend these schools tend to be caught in cycles of hardship and deprivation. Harris et al. (2018) argued one of the challenges for school leaders in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools is prioritizing in the face of many challenges and competing demands involving student behavior, attendance, teacher morale, and student achievement. School principals are faced with expectations, establishing a clear vision and mission for schools, growing positive school cultures, coaching faculty and staff, leading change efforts, communicating with the leadership team, and inspiring entire learning communities to commit to excellence in terms of teaching and learning (Abbamont, 2020).

Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2018) explained quality principals are essential to the success of any school and are needed more in chronically high poverty and low-

performing schools. School principals find it challenging to enter low-performing schools and focus on building positive school cultures.

This study may assist school principals in terms of changing behaviors and practices and influencing school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. School principals will improve skills to identify, shape, and support positive school cultures. This research is important to new and current principals because it will address practices and provide them with alternative strategies to lead change efforts in their schools. This is important because every child, teacher, and parent deserves to be a part of a positive school community. Ultimately the study may contribute to helping students have better lives.

Chapter 1 includes the background to the problem, problem statement, and purpose of the study. The nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope, and delimitations are also addressed. Finally, I address the significance of this study.

Background

School leaders influence teacher practices, student behavior, and achievement. (Schreiber, 2019) argued “school leadership influences school culture” (p. 19). Baptiste (2019) found school leadership has been significantly connected to teacher job satisfaction, work performance, and student performance. School leadership plays a significant role in determining experiences of teachers, students, and the overall school climate (Baptiste, 2019). According to Baptiste, behaviors of school leaders profoundly influence experiences of teachers and overall performance of the school. Schools need so much; it can be challenging for leaders to develop positive cultures in schools with high

poverty and turnover as well as low-performing students. Schreiber (2019) stated “school culture is difficult to influence and requires strong leadership to effect meaningful change” (p. 19). Kelly (2020) argued school principals are responsible for creating a positive school culture to support all children academically, yet there is limited knowledge regarding how principals create such a culture.

Further studies investigating school culture and leadership practices are needed. Ghanad and Hussin (2019) examined and analyzed the patterns, differences, and relationships between instructional leadership and the school culture of some high and low-performing schools and found high performing schools were markedly different from low-performing schools. High performing schools have healthy school cultures. The schools have high expectations for all stakeholders. In addition, the environment is stimulating, and the staff, parents and students show a connection and are dedicated to the school’s goals.

Problem Statement

Elementary school principals in the southeastern region of the U.S. are challenged to develop and maintain positive school cultures in high poverty and low performing Title I schools. In a school district located in a metro area in the southeast region of the U.S., 49, 994 students are enrolled in public schools. Students are enrolled in high poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools where 74.6% are African American, 14.5% are White, 2.3% are multiracial, 7.2% are Hispanic, and 1.3% are other. It is up to school principals to develop ways to involve staff in creating positive cultures for schools. Principals establish expectations for all employees in schools. In elementary

schools located in this region, teachers do not feel they are a part of the decision-making process, especially when cultural goals and school-wide decisions are made. This local problem is an example of a larger problem and is evident in school districts in this region. According to Ghanad and Hussin (2019), school principals' attitude and aptitude are the most important factors that powerfully shape school cultures.

School principals influence teacher practices, student behaviors, and achievement. Effective school principals significantly influence student learning by shaping school cultures and creating a shared vision (Chaka, 2018). Villavicencio (2017) stated effective leaders are intentional and strategic in terms of setting schoolwide goals that can inspire a common vision among teachers, students, and the wider community. According to Shapaka (2020):

Leadership is one of the main challenges in bringing positive change in the school. If there is no leadership in the school, the school will not be able to change amicably in the direction that everyone desires, and everyone could experience negative change instead.” (p. 48)

There are many challenges principals may face in terms of creating an environment that allows students and teachers to thrive. Acton (2018) said, “most urban public schools are in a state of emergency. They are plagued by inefficiency, disorganization, and ineffectiveness— making them unhealthy places for students to learn and adults to work” (p.306). When high-poverty and low-performing schools hire high-quality teachers, they leave due to poor culture and conditions (Robinson, 2020). This local school district reported an increase in the number of teachers leaving from 334

to 391. Additionally, teachers are critical to school success. Holmes et al. (2019) identified that teacher retention is a challenge in high poverty, low performing Title I elementary schools that are hard to staff. It is difficult when there is a lack of resources, discipline problems and high turnover year after year. In addition, Holmes et al. (2019) surveyed teachers and discovered school principal leadership was important in maintaining a positive school environment. Rather than leave bad schools, teachers leave bad principals (Holmes et al., 2019, p. 2). Teachers leave not because of schools but because of rebellious teachers, poor leadership, disgruntled parents, poor conditions, lack of achievement, and severe discipline issues that are challenges in terms of developing a positive school culture.

Student performance continues to be a concern in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. Additionally, in this high-poverty local school district, 41% of poor students continue to perform at the beginning achievement level compared to other subgroups. Adillo and Netshitangani (2019) found educational quality attributed to principals' failure to practice transformational leadership roles in transforming school culture. It is recommended that school district leadership should equip school principals with knowledge about transformational leadership and its implementation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore obstacles school principals face in terms of building a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I elementary schools. This study helps to address the gap in practice that school principals are not able to create positive school cultures. The school principal's

role in building positive school cultures is essential in any school, but vital to high-poverty low-performing Title I schools. Findings from this research will better inform school principals' practices and behaviors, which will change school cultures in high-poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools.

I used interpretivist paradigm to explore subjective experiences and interpretations of people in their natural settings. To collect data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with school principals in high poverty and low performing Title I schools. Littlejohn (2021) claimed, "A positive school culture places emphasis on improving teaching and building relationships to have the largest impact on student motivation, engagement and achievement" (p. 15). Culture impacts all aspects of the school: teachers' instruction, student learning, staff performance, and collective and individual attitudes of students, and staff (Matari & Ali, 2019, p. 27). Non-Title I schools demonstrated positive school cultures while Title I schools across the metro area are challenged to create positive school cultures. School principals will become better principals and influence teacher morale, performance, and student achievement.

Research Questions

Two research questions were developed to understand school principals' challenges in terms of promoting positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. Research questions were created and used to identify gaps in practice.

RQ1: How do elementary school principals develop and maintain a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

RQ2: What obstacles do school principals face in terms of building a positive school culture in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the transformational leadership theory established by Kouzes and Posner and constructs of school culture based on Schein's framework of culture. I explored the relationship between transformational leadership and school culture to understand school principals' challenges in terms of building positive school cultures. Transformational leadership can be thought of as a caterpillar evolving into a butterfly. Leadership is the process whereby one individual influences other group members toward the attainment of defined organizational goals (Yukl et al., 2019).

Kouzes and Posner (2017) defined a leader as someone whose direction is willingly followed. They discovered good leadership is an understandable and universal process that involves five practices, which are: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Modeling the way involves emphasizing the importance of modeling behaviors for others, setting examples, effectively communicating beliefs and values, and developing a clear vision. Leaders inspire shared visions by generating enthusiasm and excitement through genuineness, positive language, and personal energy. The third exemplary practice is challenging the process. This involves leaders having the courage to accept challenges and encourage creativity and risk-taking for all. Enabling others to act involves leaders collaborating and creating environments that are trusting to all. A key

component to enabling others to act, is listening attentively. The last practice is encouraging the heart. Leaders must be visible, provide feedback, and recognize others' achievements.

Edgar Schein's framework of culture has three levels that help in understanding school culture: basic underlying assumptions, exposed values, and artifacts. Exposed values are standards, values, and codes of conduct of organizations. Artifacts are the noticeable items that are part of the organization, such as logos, symbols, and colors. These are items that external and internal partners can identify. Assumptions are self-evident and unconscious behaviors.

Nature of the Study

I used basic qualitative research methodology. The basic qualitative design is used by researchers to address how people interpret their experiences and construct their worlds, as well as what meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2018). The phenomenon in this study was that there are non-Title I schools that have positive school cultures, while high poverty and low-performing Title I schools struggle to create positive school cultures. Qualitative research involves understanding ways that individuals experience and approach the world to make meaning of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I used a purposeful selection of five to seven school principals with 3 or more years of administrative experience in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools who worked in several different metro schools in the southeastern region of the U.S. Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from participants who possessed knowledge and experiences related to the phenomenon of interest and were

willing to participate in the study. Semi structured interviews are common in qualitative research and serve to guide interviews with specific questions, as well as allow for follow up questions based on participants' responses and probing to gather additional information (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Each interview lasted up to an hour. Data were analyzed and coded using thematic analysis for emergent themes.

Definitions

For this study, the following definitions of terms were used:

Charismatic leadership: Leadership that invites innovation and creativity and is considered motivational for employees (Al Khajeh, 2018).

High poverty schools: Schools with 76 to 100% of students who receive free or reduced-priced meals (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020).

Inspirational motivation: Motivating workers to commit to their employers' vision and support team spirit in terms of achieving goals (Andriani et al., 2018).

Intellectual stimulation: Fostering creativity and innovation by developing critical thinking and problem solving (Andriani et al., 2018).

Individualized consideration: The extent to which leaders attend to each follower's needs and act as mentors, coaches, or guides to followers (Andriani et al., 2018).

Low performing schools: Schools in the bottom 10% of performance in their state that have significant achievement gaps based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by assessments required by the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act and graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

School culture: Beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence school functions (Karadag et al., 2020).

School Leadership: Create the structures that impact teachers' working conditions and ability to successfully teach students (Chen, 2020).

Title I Schools: Schools where children from low-income families make up at least 40% of enrollment. These schools can use Title I funds to operate schoolwide programs that serve all children to raise the achievement of lowest-achieving student groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Transformational leadership: Leadership that involves forming relationships with staff, collectively achieving goals by encouraging group members within their surroundings and being purposeful in terms of plans and practices conducted within organizations. Transformational leaders can change expectations and aspirations of their followers because they can redesign their followers' perceptions and values (Burns, 1978).

Assumptions

Assumptions are positions that are taken for granted and viewed as reasonable and widely accepted (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p. 6). In this study, several assumptions were made. I assumed participants were transparent and authentic and included a representative group of principals who were essential in terms of building positive cultures within their schools. In addition, my research was accurate in terms of

addressing what is happening in schools and will inform school principals about behaviors and practices used to develop and maintain positive school cultures.

Scope and Delimitations

Allibang (2020) defined scope as coverage or boundaries of a study in terms of locality and subjects, population covered during the study period, nature of variables, their number, treatments they received, and instruments or research designs that were used. The research approach was selected to understand the role of school principals in terms of developing and maintaining school cultures, specifically in high-poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools. School culture influences the success of schools.

This study involved five school principals who work in high poverty, low performing Title I elementary schools in a metro area city in the southeastern region of the U.S. Delimitations are limitations consciously set by researchers (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Only high poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools were selected. Principals of these schools have been serving in the school for a minimum of 3 years. The sample size may not be transferable because of the sample size and because principals come from different districts.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p. 2). This research was limited to only elementary school principals. All the participants were African American women.

It was necessary to use Zoom and Google Meet to have access to participants. Limitations to virtual interviews include the possibility of technical issues. Data were not

used from the school where I serve as an assistant principal. Information gained from the study may be transferable to similar settings.

Significance

The research problem that I addressed was obstacles and challenges elementary school principals had in terms of developing and maintaining positive school cultures in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools. This study may provide administrators with leadership tools to create positive school cultures. In addition, it may lead to nurturing relationships which foster student growth and development. Results of this study could assist in hiring principals for high poverty and low-performing Title I schools who have the skill sets to build positive school cultures.

School principals must cultivate a culture of trust; trust is essential in building a healthy relationship between staff and students. School principals play an important role within school settings. School principals create effective cultures and manage their effectiveness (Guy, 2020). Leaders set the tone of how the school will run, as well as the instructional framework and teachers' performance.

This research may give school administrators resources regarding practices and behaviors that will promote positive school cultures, which influences staff morale, parental involvement, and student achievement, adding benefits to poor communities and people. It is important because students, teachers, and parents should be able to be part of positive school cultures. In addition, it is vital because new and innovative ways are needed to support principals in changing school systems. This study

will be important to all principals because it will allow them to reflect on their practices and develop strategies leading to change.

Principals have a major role in terms of shaping school-based cultures and policies to realize school goals effectively. Good principal leadership behavior influences the formation of good school culture (Mutohar & Trisnantari, 2021, p. 6). The behavior of principals can be an example for teachers, staff, and students. Effective leadership is essential to positive social change. School culture helps to build capacity, train leaders, and support and motivate staff and teachers (Phillips, 2019).

Summary

This basic qualitative study involved understanding what school principals of high poverty, low performing Title I elementary schools consider as affecting their inability to create the right school culture. This study will assist school principals in terms of changing behaviors and practices, which will influence school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. School principals will improve skills needed to identify, shape, and support a positive school culture.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review with an overview of the history of school culture as well as the needs of Title I elementary schools. This is followed by a review of qualitative studies that helped identify and describe transformational leadership and school culture as related to the context of leadership in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. Chapter 2 includes a critical review of current literature as well as the transformational leadership theory.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem in this study is in the southeastern U.S., elementary school principals are challenged to develop and maintain positive school cultures in high poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools. According to Ghanad and Hussin (2019), school principals' attitudes and aptitudes are the most important factor that strongly shapes school culture. However, there has been little research on school principals developing and maintaining positive school cultures in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. This study involved exploring school principals' leadership behaviors and practices in terms of creating positive school cultures.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore obstacles school principals face building positive school cultures in high-poverty low-performing Title I schools. Research is needed to determine effective transformational leadership and school culture practices that contribute to the success of high-poverty, low-performing Title 1 elementary schools.

I explored and described transformational leadership and school culture in this basic qualitative study. Chapter 2 begins with an explanation of literature search strategies followed by an explanation of the conceptual framework and a literature review related to key concepts and variables. These key concepts are high poverty schools, school culture, school leadership, and transformational leadership. This chapter includes information about the importance of establishing and building positive school cultures in high-poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools as well as the role of school principals.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature that was reviewed for this study was obtained through eight primary databases that were accessed using the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. I used the following databases: Education Source, Emerald Management, Education Database, ERIC, EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and Taylor and Francis Online. The following key terms were used: *transformational leadership*, *high poverty schools*, *Title I*, *school culture*, and *school leadership*. Sources were based on the problem, purpose, and two research questions, along with the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the transformational leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner combined with constructs of Edgar Schein's framework of culture. This helped identify leadership behaviors and attitudes that will build positive school cultures.

The transformational leadership theory created by Kouzes and Posner is the result of decades of evidence-based research on effective leadership practices across the world. Kouzes and Posner (2017) identified five exemplary leadership practices: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Transformational leaders model the way by clarifying values and setting clear examples, (Caza et al., 2021). Leaders are expected to have strong and apparent convictions that others see them living and championing each day (Watters, 2019).

Leadership is not about who you are; it is about what you do (Posner, 2017). Leaders must know themselves before they can lead.

Transformational leaders help their followers to see that they are part of something meaningful that can only be accomplished by working together. Leaders need to work collaboratively to build a shared vision and inspire stakeholders to work toward achieving the vision (Petrich, 2019).

Thirdly, transformational leaders always want to get better results through innovative activities by recognizing the aspirations of their followers. Leaders are willing to acknowledge and encourage new thinking while acknowledging new achievements and regularities (Sulpakar et al., 2022).

Fourth, transformational leaders enable others to act. By believing in others and their potential, leaders allow them to take the initiative and lead. A climate of trust and openness allows flexibility to allow others to lead.

Finally, transformational leaders encourage the heart through positive reinforcement. They create communities by recognizing both group accomplishments and individual contributions to the team's success (Caza et al., 2021). Examples of this include recognizing staff for their work and celebrating staff with certificates.

Figure 1

Kouzes and Posner's Five Leadership Practices



Miller (2018) suggested school leadership has four dimensions: social, personal, environmental, and relational. These dimensions all play a role in shifting and creating positive school cultures in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools. Bush (2017) defined transformational leadership as the influence leaders have on their staff and stakeholders to commit to goals. The NCES (2020) defined high-poverty schools as those where more than 75.0% of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. In 2017, in the U.S. the percentage of students attending high-poverty schools (25%) surpassed those attending low-poverty schools (21 %; NCES, 2020).

The second component of the conceptual framework is Edgar Schein's culture framework. Schein's school culture framework is an essential factor that determines the perception of the school and the behavior patterns of all partners, especially teachers and students, in which the shared leadership style comes into play (Kalkan et al, 2020). Edgar Schein draws on the role the leaders play, so that the leaders can successfully apply principles needed to achieve organizational goals (Abdullah, 2019). In doing so, Schein advocates that the appropriate way to study and understand culture is on three separate levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions (Thompson, 2021). Schein's theory presents three levels of culture, which are necessary to understand for effective leadership (Abdullah, 2019).

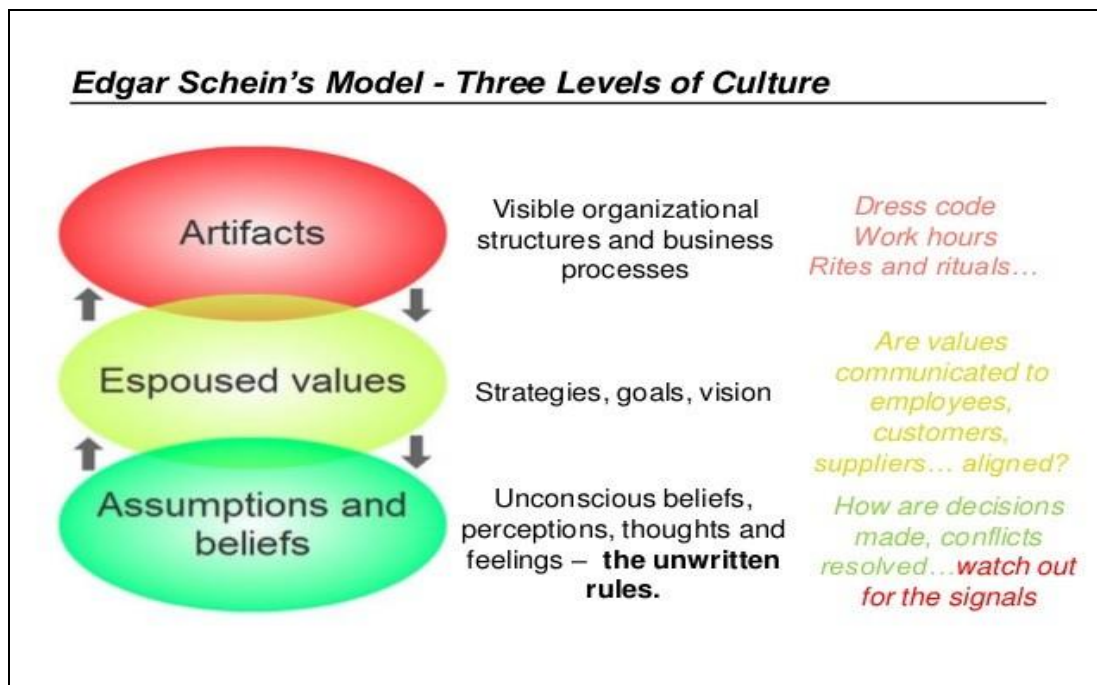
Artifacts is the first level of Schein's framework. Artifacts are those things that can be observed. Some examples of artifacts are the layout of an office, work attire, company rituals and ceremonies, the way people address each other, and its products and technology are examples of artifacts and creations (Thompson, 2021). Artifacts also include what can be seen, heard, and felt when entering an organization. Thompson (2021) agreed with Schein, that the most important point to keep in mind when observing culture at this level is that artifacts are easy to observe but very difficult to decipher.

The next level of Schein's framework is espoused values and beliefs. Shanaflet et al. (2019) identified espoused values as what we claim our values and priorities to be, as manifested in mission statements, the communications shared across the organization or profession, publicly stated values, and even advertising and promotional messaging.

In many cases, however, what an organization espouses as its culture can be incongruent with the true culture of the organization, i.e., the espoused values reflect the desired behavior of the organization but do not reflect the observed behavior (Thompson, 2021).

The final level is basic underlying assumptions. These are values that have been proven to work and are considered by the organization the correct way to do something. These values are identified as the correct way of doing something and eventually become taken for granted. The organization begins to do them without thinking about them. Assumptions are the underlying things we truly believe and value, that is, the unwritten rule that drives our daily behavior. In this context, it should be emphasized that the term artifacts refer to tangible characteristics of the culture (Shanaflet et al., 2019). Culture at this level informs members of the organization who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel good about themselves (Thompson, 2021).

This framework encompasses a process that allows cultural interventions for leaders to use when new challenges arise as well as a solid approach to a positive work culture (Abdullah, 2019). Understanding this model will show that a cultural change is a process and behavior should be unlearned before new behavior can replace the old behavior (Schein, 2017).

Figure 2*Schein's Culture Framework*

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The conceptual framework for this research study focused on four key components. They are: (a) school culture, (b) school leadership, (c) high poverty schools, and (d) transformational leadership.

School Culture

Culture can be defined as the level of collaboration among staff in a school, and it is a major determinant of whether the culture of that school is positive or negative (Dinsdale, 2017). School culture is a phenomenon that affects the quality of human relationships in educational organizations and is also affected by the quality of these

relationships (Kalkan et al., 2020). The creation of culture is ultimately a process of shared group learning (Thompson, 2021).

Schools that have a positive culture tend to have positive outcomes, and those schools with negative cultures are more likely to have negative outcomes among their students and staff (Clark, 2019). Culture may even be invisible, “it serves as the glue that binds and builds a sense of cohesion within school” (Teasley, 2017 p. 3). The greatest tests to this invisible culture are changes in leadership and change in general. In those moments, the invisible culture will likely emerge (Teasley, 2017). These changes are evident and happen quite often in high-poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools, specifically when there is high turnover and new administration.

The culture of any organization sets the tone for how the mission and vision of that organization will be accomplished. Davis (2018) provided another definition of organizational culture as what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the languages and symbols, the procedures and routines, and the definitions of success that make an organization unique.

Organizational culture can often be ignored in organizations that are comfortable with the status quo, and this is quite typical in schools. Schools tend to become like traditional factories and may not be aware of innovations that can help them develop much stronger outcomes. Many people are not aware of the culture within their organization until it is challenged or threatened (Davis, 2018).

School culture has been called a powerful force that can support or block school change efforts (Redding & Corbett, 2018). When a school culture is negative, the best

interest of the students is compromised (Howe et al., 2018). When a school has a wholesome culture, the students, teachers, and staff all benefit (Champion, 2022). High poverty, low-performing Title I schools tend to suffer as a result. Kor (1998) stated a negative culture smothers low-achieving schools as an atmosphere of neglect, dysfunction, and disappointment that takes the oxygen from efforts to improve. Howe et al. (2018) argued that when school cultures are positive, the prospects for disadvantaged children are greatly enhanced.

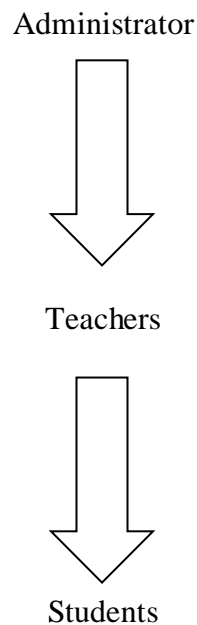
When a positive school culture is in place, schools thrive and succeed. It is important for staff and students to feel that they belong to the school, and it is essential in high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools. At any school, a positive environment of respect and trust is key to enabling the teamwork needed to solve problems and meet challenges (Redding & Corbett, 2018). Positive school culture is imperative in high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools. Shifts will take place in a school when developing a positive school culture. Culture is much more difficult to change because of the numerous elements involved. Positive school cultures provide a safe, supportive, encouraging, inviting, and challenging environment for students and staff, which in turn allows students' academic achievement to evolve (Confeld, 2019). Understanding school culture is an important key for school principals to improve their schools' quality (Redding & Corbett, 2018). Establishing and nurturing a positive school culture and building relationships are at the core of the leadership challenge. With such a school culture in place, the opportunities for change and reform will be more viable (Abbamont, 2020).

School Leadership

A large amount of responsibility is placed upon the principal or head of school with smaller amounts of responsibility placed upon the teachers and other staff members. Most schools resemble this type of structure that places most of the decision-making process in the hands of the administrator. Eckert (2018) argued that most school administrators are overwhelmed by the volume of their workload and work in isolation, as there may be no one else in their organization who can relate to their needs and problems.

Figure 3

Typical School Structure/Hierarchy



One of the most challenging tasks faced by an educational leader is to change the existing culture of a school. Principals play a vital role in determining school culture

(Dinsdale, 2017). School principals are important in shaping and setting the tone of their school buildings. Stergios et al., (2017) reported that leadership affects the smooth and efficient functioning of the school and may contribute to the school running as an effective school. A principal's perception of school culture is important in understanding how the school functions, and equally important to the culture of the school are the perceptions of other stakeholders, including teachers (Holby, 2020). School principals are not alone in creating a positive school culture. All stakeholders have a role in ensuring students have a positive learning environment.

A good and quality school must have positive habits that must be developed by a principal. The principal is the most responsible and influential person in determining all the activities and policies that all school citizens must undertake. As leaders of educational institutions, school administrators have the most significant potential and play a key role in shaping and developing a strong school culture (Ridho et al., 2017). School leadership, especially administrative leadership, consistently rises to the top of the list of factors that significantly influence school culture (Schreiber, 2019). A principal's vision and the actions a principal takes to build and sustain that vision can have an impact on the life of a school (Holby, 2020).

The principal's leadership plays an important role in cultivating a school culture. It is necessary that school principals are aware of the importance of instructional leadership and positive, cooperative school culture is structured and developed at schools to ensure the effectiveness of schools and student success (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018).

A school needs a principal who understands developing school culture so that it can lead to the establishment of positive school culture. School administrators, principals, and assistant principals set the tone and expectations in a school. The school's principals, including those leading the culture shift, need to embody, model, and overtly talk about the values driving the enterprise and keep everyone focused on the pivotal urgency of improving student learning (Redding & Corbett, 2018).

There are many responsibilities and roles school principals have in leading a school but creating a positive school culture is one of the most important roles. Among the myriad tasks for which school principals are responsible, changing the way things are done is one of the most challenging (Rosby, 2020). Lites (2020) found that school principals have surpassed their managerial role in school operations but serve more as change agents and the primary source of vision-building in their schools. School principals hold the key to the success of positive school culture.

High poverty, low performing Title I elementary school principals should know the population they serve and manage the challenges at the same time create a positive culture. Successful school principals must lead while being mindful of the contexts within which they work (Okilwa & Barnett, 2018). High poverty schools require a school principal to be culturally sensitive to diverse students' backgrounds (Rosby, 2020).

High Poverty Schools

Poverty has a tremendous impact on how students come to school prepared to learn; their ability to learn; and how they learn. Principals and teachers may not fully

understand the intricate aspects for those students who live in poverty and may need to grow in their practices to support these students (Smyth et al. 2018).

Poverty impacts individuals and communities differently. It even looks different in every community. In rural communities where agriculture was their strong economic base, the population is predominantly white. The suburbs look different as they are made up of the working class and a place where those in poverty may come to relocate. In the urban areas where jobs are a challenge to secure, the population is racially diverse (Parrett & Budge, 2020). The common denominator is these communities are the children. High poverty-schools struggle to get the leadership they need to be successful and have communities that do not see the value of education (Champion, 2022).

Students in Title I schools are more likely than those in other locations to have characteristics such as poverty, difficulty speaking English, and numerous health and safety risks that present more significant challenges to them and their educators (Okilwa & Barnett, 2018). Kuiper (2022) wrote that students enter the school systems with a variety of needs and experiences, each unique to themselves. Many students and their families experience the effects of poverty, and these circumstances shape those school students' unique needs. The location and income level of a community should not impact the success of students, teachers, and administration in a school (Champion, 2022).

Title I schools in the United States are generally viewed as having greater challenges than their (non-Title I) suburban and rural counterparts (Miranda et al., 2018). Many students attending schools eligible for Title I funds are from families in poverty and at risk for negative outcomes (Hirn et al. 2018). Attendance, behavior, and parental

involvement are just some challenges high poverty, low-performing Title I schools face. The challenges facing high-poverty, Title I schools are well documented. These include students with health issues or poor diets, lack of parental involvement, limited English proficiency, disruptive student behavior, and inadequate funding (Dolph, 2017).

Smyth et al. (2018) argued high-poverty schools need the expertise of successful principals who are aware of and acknowledge the impact of poverty on student learning; and can assist teachers to not only understand the impact poverty has on students' social and academic learning but to provide supports to help students become successful learners. The environment that a student grows up in can positively or negatively affect their abilities to be successful (Champion, 2022). When students have been exposed to adversity, especially those in poverty, many students do not have the resiliency resources needed to be successful and end up in situations that threaten their health (Nurius et al., 2019).

Transformational Leadership

School leadership styles work to shape school culture. There are three styles of leadership that help create a positive school culture: transformational leadership, appreciative leadership, and strengths-based leadership. This study focused on transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership involves leaders who work with subordinates to identify needed changes and create a vision to guide change through inspiration, as well as execute the change in unison with committed members of a group (Anderson, 2017; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership is a model of leadership that embraces the

importance of inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision along with emphasizing the importance of relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

In 1978, Burns developed the transformational leadership theory as a process where leaders and followers work together to advance motivation and morale. Burns (1978) later theorized that transformational leadership strives for cultural change in the organization and community. Bass extended Burns' transformational leadership theory in 1985 by further developing four concepts: charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This extended transformation leadership theory was used to understand and explain administrators' perceptions about their role and the challenges when building a positive school climate.

The logical connections between the framework presented in this study will assist in understanding how school administrators build a positive school culture in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Bolthouse (2013) indicated transformational theories provided a framework from which to investigate the influence of administrative leadership on culture creation through three categories of "I's": inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Yuya, 2020). A principal's behavior and attitudes help shape the school culture. The school community observes and interprets the school leader's actions. Leaders must lead by example and be a part of the team.

Transformational leadership is a leader's ability to influence their staff members to be innovative and improve their craft, along with creating an atmosphere where their staff feels valued, nurtured, and supported (Doria, 2022). The transformational leadership

framework will help identify leadership behaviors and attitudes that will build positive school cultures in high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools. School culture influences all other aspects of the school. Transformational leaders' behaviors inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their work (Ismail, 2018). The leader shows a commitment and vested interest in the school. This framework supports research problems and research questions.

Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a method of empowering followers to reflect on their ideals and imagine a clear future for them. Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Anderson (2017) identified the transformational leadership style as a viable choice for educational leaders seeking to transform schools into systems capable of meeting stakeholder demands (i.e., the students, local community, state, and federal).

The transformational leadership style of leadership involves change (Money, 2017). Change can be challenging for people, and change happens in and through people and not places. For change to occur, school principals must be able to lead effectively, and the school leader must be able to motivate and empower. Adillo and Netshitangani (2019) revealed that problems in education quality are attributed to principals' failure to practice transformational leadership roles in transforming school culture.

Burns (1978) defined the ways leaders influence and improve employee performance and introduced the concept of transformational leadership, which moved away from the traditional male-dominated, autocratic style to a more collaborative model

with an enhanced focus on relationships. Bass' four domains of transformational leadership are key concepts that aid in creating a positive school culture.

Money (2017) explained Bass's domain as the idealized influence of a transformational leader serves as a role model for followers, and because followers trust and respect the leader, they emulate this individual and internalize their ideas. He further explained the intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership is exhibited through recognition of followers' motivation, creativity, and innovation, while under individual consideration, the leader provides a supportive climate in which they listen carefully to the individual needs of the followers.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I reviewed literature to support how important school culture is and what role school principals have in terms of developing and maintaining their culture. I researched the transformational leadership theory by Kouzes and Posner and Edgar Schein's school culture framework. In addition, school culture and school leadership were defined and discussed.

Chapter 3 includes the methodology and the research design that I used. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the methodology, research design, and population that was studied. Chapter 3 also includes information on sample selection and the sources of data for study, how trustworthiness was addressed, and how data were analyzed. Chapter 3 includes information about pertinent ethical considerations that were applied to protect participants and support the integrity of research. Finally, I present limitations of the study and summarize main points of the chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand what elementary school principals attribute to their inability to create the right culture. Calder (2019) stated when students come from high-poverty communities, educators need to be responsible for creating a sense of a positive community within schools, which may lead to a higher potential for success. To support students and families living in poverty, school principals could encourage positive teaching cultures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design guided data collection and analysis.

These research questions were designed to understand challenges elementary school principals face in building positive school cultures in high-poverty, low-performing elementary Title I schools:

RQ1: How do elementary school principals develop and maintain a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

RQ2: What obstacles do elementary school principals face in terms of building a positive school culture in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

There are research design approaches for qualitative research. The design approach is contingent upon the type of research. According to Korstjens and Moser (2017), ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory are examples of different designs and represent the big three approaches.

Ethnography involves understanding meanings and behaviors associated with groups and teams (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). This involves studying social interactions

and behaviors and gathering data from interviews and observations. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and involves understanding the meanings of people's lived experiences. Phenomenology involves exploring what people experience or focus on in terms of their experiences with phenomena. Researchers can adopt interviews, observations, and discussions as data collection strategies using the phenomenological method of inquiry (Qutoshi, 2018).

Chun Tie et al. (2019) defined grounded theory as a study design that involves discovering or constructing a theory from data and analyzing through comparative analysis. Grounded theory is grounded in data. The theory comes from the data collected (White & Cooper, 2022).

I used a basic qualitative design to interpret elementary school principals' experiences into data. The basic qualitative design is used by researchers to interpret experiences, how participants construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Kamal, 2019). Qualitative research involves collection and analysis of narratives and/or open-ended observations through interviews, focus groups, and ethnographies (Ahmad et al., 2019). The purpose of quantitative research is to generate knowledge and create an understanding of the social world. Qualitative research is an approach to discovery, understanding, and production of evidence that serves as a reasonable basis for the arrangement and conduct of educational practices (Kozleski, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the human instrument in this study. I took on the observer role in this study and worked primarily on data collection and analysis. I coded data for thematic content analysis. I maintained trustworthiness of research using credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable data. I followed Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to ensure that school principals were recruited and treated fairly during research. In addition, I used pseudonyms, and data was kept confidential to protect participants in the study. Reflexivity was used to address and guard against bias. I used member checking as a strategy to review each response with participants to address answers that required more clarification.

I had no personal relationship or supervisory responsibility with any participant. Participants were colleagues from other school districts who lead high poverty and low performing Title I elementary schools in a southeastern state.

Methodology

This research was intended to address challenges school principals in high poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools face in terms of building positive school cultures. In this section, I explain the design of this basic qualitative study. I used semi structured interviews with five participants with 3 or more years of experience at the same campus in high-poverty, low-performing Title I elementary schools.

This study was exploratory and not intended to measure variables. Qualitative research is not linear and is subject to participants' interpretations of experiences and

events (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Participation selection, data collection, and data analysis methods were elaborated on in the following subsections.

Participant Selection

There was a purposeful selection of five school principals with 3 or more years of administrative experience from elementary high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools from several metro school districts in the southeastern region of the U.S. Participants were solicited from colleagues who work in metro areas in the southeastern region of the U.S. Introduction letters were emailed, and participants agreed via email.

Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from participants who possessed knowledge and experiences related to the phenomenon of interest and were willing to participate in the study. Participants were identified as having a minimum of 3 years of experience in a school principal at the same elementary high-poverty low-performing Title I school. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour.

Instrumentation

I served as the primary research instrument for this study using a researcher-produced interview guide containing opening comments, interview questions, and closing comments for each interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for later coding and reference. I used Zoom and Google Meet for recording. Data was captured and organized via Zoom and Google Meet and software programs designed for qualitative research. Recordings and notes were used for points of reference and to support the coding process.

The research instrument was validated by experts in the field for clarity and content. Their feedback ensured research and content validity. In addition, participants were referred to by pseudonyms to keep their information confidential.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participation in this study was voluntary. The recruitment of participants for this study was accomplished through email to those who met the criteria mentioned earlier. School names and participants' names were not used in the data collection. My role as the researcher and the instrument for collecting the data will be explained. The email and all communication came from my Walden University email. Information on the dissertation will be available.

Recruitment

Participants were all school principals working at elementary high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools in a metro area in a Southeastern state. Participants had a minimum of three or more years in an administrative role on the same campus. Participants were contacted and recruited via email to meet and discuss the case study.

Participation

The initial meeting will involve sharing and explaining the purpose of the study and participants' rights as study participants. Consent will be obtained from each participant via email to acknowledge understanding of the process and rights. I will confirm the criteria of participants to participate by confirming principals' tenure and school placement. Participants will be considered if they have served as a principal for at least three full school years at the same campus in high poverty and low-performing Title

I schools. I will ask questions about the study and their participation. Their agreement to participate will be confirmed via email, which I will keep in my records. Interview dates will be scheduled virtually based on an agreed date and time.

Data Collection

Semi structured interviews were used to collect the data from these school principals who possess knowledge and experiences related to the phenomenon of interest and are willing to participate in the study. The data collection used an electronic platform such as Zoom, Google Meets, etc. The video conference interviews were video recorded and then transcribed. Each interview lasted no longer than an hour.

A thematic analysis was used to organize and examine the information. The rights of participants were protected by using pseudonyms with no identifiers beyond the number of years leading a school. The school principals had the opportunity to share their personal experiences in an interview to help me understand the phenomenon in their natural setting school to be interpreted.

The interview transcripts were sent to the participants within a week to verify their accuracy before the data collected is analyzed. If a participant elected to add or modify their responses after the transcript review, they had the opportunity to do so in writing via email. After the transcript review, participants had the opportunity to ask the researcher any additional questions that they may think of. Finally, the participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to exit the study by having their responses excluded from the study. Data were not used from the school where I serve as an assistant principal.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan I used the research questions as a guide. The sources that I used were interviews and reflections. Data was analyzed and coded using thematic analysis for emergent themes. Coding is the process of assigning meaning to data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Coding in qualitative research comprises processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning (Elliott, 2018). Open coding was used to identify categories and themes. Thematic analysis is the most common in analyzing qualitative data (El Said, 2017).

Interviews were conducted at the interviewee's availability via an online digital software program with the capacity to record. An observation sheet was used to take anecdotal notes during the interview, and transcription software was used to transcribe the recordings. The data was analyzed and stored with secure access.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is the first step in fostering trustworthiness in research. Qualitative studies require that the research study's findings be credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable to be considered trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017). I created an interview protocol to ensure interview questions are appropriate and are aligned to the research. The research guidelines of Walden University will be utilized to include consent forms for the study. Consent forms will be sent via email detailing the study and informing the

participants of their rights. It will be expected that each participant will sign and submit the consent form before participating in the study.

Transferability

Transferability of the research is possible when the research is transparent with the protocols and procedures of the research. Pipit (2020) describes transferability as how to apply or transfer a comprehensive context while maintaining its richness of the context from the participant's response. Ravitch and Carl (2019) described the ability to apply a study to a broader context as transferability. Readers of this study, such as administrators of high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools, will be able to apply the findings in practice and behaviors in building positive school culture at their schools. In this case, the purposeful sampling will be a rich participant group. Participants will be invited based on their tenure and school status.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the strength and of the data collected. To have dependability, the data collected must show consistency in describing the experiences lived by participants. (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I recorded the data to ensure the results were consistent. The participants reviewed data to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Participants had the opportunity to edit their responses upon review. Qualitative research can achieve dependability by ensuring consistency within the subject regardless of existing variables, conditions of the interview location, or timeframe (Pitpit, 2020). Finally, I used trusted experts to review the process and findings and other measures to evaluate the results to ensure it aligned to the data.

Confirmability

Confirmability allows researchers to explore their biases and prejudices that may affect the interpretation of the data. As the researcher, I reflected on my role in the study and its effect on the interpretation of data. With this process, researchers reflect on how their role in the study and their background, culture, and experiences could shape their interpretation of themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278). I relied on the data to identify themes. Allowing participants to review the data collected helps to develop the confirmability of the study.

I kept a reflexive journal to interpret data and note my reflections regarding the data collection. As an educator who is knowledgeable of school culture, I worked to recognize my personal bias, assumptions, and beliefs.

Ethical Procedures

Before beginning data collection, permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board was obtained at the proposal stage. IRB approval number is 05-12-23-0746584. Guidelines from the IRB are inclusive of four major procedures that must be addressed: (a) obtaining voluntary informed consent from participants, (b) considering the harms and risks and minimizing any threat of harm, (c) choosing participants equitably, and (d) assuring confidentiality about the identity of participants (Gregory, 2021). Gaining written consent from all participants permitting the use of their responses was collected before conducting any interviews. All questions were specifically related to the focus of the study and not require any information of a personal

nature. Questions were provided to participants in advance, providing an opportunity for review and refusal. No participants were coerced or compensated for participating.

Interviews will be recorded with the participant's permission, and transcripts will be shared with participants for review. Data was securely stored by the researcher and destroyed after the completion of the research.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology I used to conduct research on how elementary school principals create positive school cultures for students in high poverty, low performing Title I elementary schools. In this chapter, I explained the research design, my role as the researcher, instrumentation, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I also addressed how I established trustworthiness through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical practices and processes used throughout research, data collection, data analysis, and interpretations were also described. In Chapter 4, I describe the setting of the study, data collection, data analysis, results of the study, and evidence of trustworthiness. In addition, I explain results of the study based on research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore obstacles school principals face when building positive school cultures in elementary high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. This study helps to address the gap in practice that school principals in elementary high poverty low performing Title I schools are not able to create positive school cultures. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do elementary school principals develop and maintain a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

RQ2: What obstacles do school principals face in terms of building a positive school culture in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

In Chapter 4, I presented the setting of the study, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results.

Setting

There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants at the time of this study, my interpretation of results did not negatively affect the results of this study.

All participants were employed at high-poverty low-performing Title I public elementary schools from several different metro school districts in the southeastern region of the U.S. All participants in this study were African American women. All schools serve high poverty and low-performing students. Participant work experience ranged from 6 to 9 years. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier to protect their identity. Identifiers ranged from P1 to P5 (see Table 1).

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

| Participants | Years as Principal | Gender |
|--------------|--------------------|--------|
| P1 | 7 yrs | Female |
| P2 | 7 yrs | Female |
| P3 | 6 yrs | Female |
| P4 | 9 yrs | Female |
| P5 | 7 yrs | Female |

Data Collection

In this basic qualitative study, I began the data collection process by emailing five participants. Participants agreed and consented to interviews. Participation in semi structured interviews was strictly voluntary and participants could back out at any time. Before starting each interview, I stated the purpose of the interview and informed each participant they would be asked questions about school culture and their role. Interviews took place from June 15 to 26, 2023 on days and times that convenient for participants. Four participant interviews were conducted via Zoom and one on or Google Meet. Both platforms include security features that helped to ensure confidentiality and participants' privacy. Participants were sent unique links to access Zoom or Google Meet meetings, along with unique passwords to gain entry. I was in my school or home office, and participants were in their school office or home. Verbal consent was obtained from each participant at the beginning of the virtual interview. Each interview lasted no longer than

1 hour and consisted of nine open-ended questions. I asked all five participants the same nine questions during interview sessions and collected data to address the phenomenon and research questions. I concluded each interview session by thanking participants for volunteering to participate in the study. The interview protocol was followed.

Data from Zoom and Google Meet interviews were the primary source for learning more about school culture and participants' roles. Audio and video recordings as well as transcriptions were recorded, collected, and stored for each interview. The researcher used a transcription service called Transcribe.com to obtain transcripts of recorded interviews with participants. Transcripts were reviewed carefully by the researcher to ensure they were complete and accurate. There were no unusual circumstances.

Table 2

Virtual Interviews via Google Meet and Zoom

| Participant | Date and Time of Interview | Location | Web-based Platform |
|-------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| P1 | 6.15.23 10:41 am | School office | Google Meet |
| P2 | 6.23.23 10:00 am | Home | Zoom |
| P3 | 6.25.23 1:00 pm | Home | Zoom |
| P4 | 6.26.23 5:00 pm | School office | Zoom |
| P5 | 6.26.23 6:00 pm | Home | Zoom |

Data Analysis

After each interview on Zoom or Google Meet, a digital file was created using Transcribe.com for transcription. I compared each transcription to audio recordings to ensure accuracy and clean up any errors. After all interviews were completed and transcripts were saved, I created a Microsoft Word document. That document listed each

interview question, and under each question, I inserted responses of participants.

Participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5. I then created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to complete open coding and axial coding. The excel spreadsheet had nine sheets. Each sheet represented a question and participants' responses. This made it easier to look at and access data. Each sheet had four to five columns that contained participant codes, research questions, codes, categories, and themes.

Open coding was used to identify codes. All interview questions were used, and information was taken from collected data and used to determine codes. Axial coding via Microsoft Excel was used to recognize patterns and organize concepts. In addition, the researcher identified challenges and obstacles that school administrators faced. There were three themes that emerged from research: leading by example, relationships, and school and community.

Table 3*Codes, Categories, and Themes Used in Data Analysis*

| Codes | Categories | Themes |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Servant leader | Leadership style | Lead by example |
| Transformational leader | Leadership role | |
| Transactional | Leader behavior | |
| My job | | |
| Set expectations | | |
| Support | | |
| Accountability | | |
| Love | Characteristics of positive school culture | Relationships matter |
| Motivational music | | |
| Communication | | |
| The leader | | |
| Support | | |
| Everyone involved | | |
| Staff | | |
| Uniform vision | | |
| Collaboration | | |
| Staff (toxic) | Community | Community and school partnerships |
| Retention of teachers | | |
| District mandates | | |
| Transient students | | |
| Community involvement/support | | |

Theme 1

School principals must set the tone of their schools. P2 stated that “I believe that it is my job to create a culture of joy.” The leader must model the way as Edgar Schein (2017) outlines in his framework of culture. School principals can shift the trajectory of their schools by modeling expectations and monitoring the expectations. School

administrators have the power to inspire and motivate their staff. The buy-in by staff makes it easier to make the change. The various leadership styles are represented by the leaders interviewed; transformational, transactional, and servant leadership.

Theme 2

Relationships make a difference. By setting an example and creating relationships with the staff and teachers, school principals can begin to create a positive school culture. They can then build relationships with their students. As leaders develop relationships, it helps to build capacity and encourages teachers and staff to want to be at work and give their best. Relationships help with retention and accountability. When teachers and staff know school principals support them and care about them accountability is easier. P3 believes their(staff) must know their leader cares about them first. And then of course accountability piece is easier to follow when they know that you care about them. Buy in is easier. P5 agrees that relationships matter the school leader says, “doing check-in and seeing how you're doing, goes to building relationships.” P5 believes knowing her staff professionally and personally benefits the school and students. Developing relationships of support, accountability, trust, and team is important for positive school culture.

Theme 3

Leaders are responsible along with staff to develop an environment that is safe. This environment must be a place where teachers and students want to come every day. P1 shared when the students arrive, they are greeted when they walk in and on every hallway, cafeteria, the staff is greeting them giving them hugs. They create an environment where love dwells. Involving the community in helping parents become

stable is another issue that came up. Pre pandemic P1 developed relationships with their apartments to assist their families to be able to stay the entire year. This gives students stability and establishes relationships with their peers and teachers. P4 shared a previous group of dads that would come to the school and participate with their children. This is something as well as other activities to bring parents back into the school and create the village. Establishing partnerships with the community and parents will assist in creating a culture that supports students and the school.

Table 4*Theme Alignment with Research and Conceptual Framework*

| Research Questions | Sub Questions | Themes | Transformational Leadership Theory |
|---|--|----------------------|--|
| RQ1: How do elementary school principals develop and maintain a positive school culture in high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools? | What do you believe makes a positive school culture? Why? | Relationships matter | Enable others to act Encourage the Heart |
| | As a school principal, what do you believe is your role in developing a positive school culture? | Lead by example | Model the way Encourage the Heart Enable others to act |
| | How do you assess your school culture? | School and community | Challenge the Process |
| | Which leadership style best describes your leadership? | Lead by example | Inspire a shared vision |
| RQ2: What are the challenges school administrators face in building a positive school culture in high poverty, low-performing, Title I schools? | Why are you facing challenges? | School and Community | Challenge the process |
| | What are the challenges/obstacles you face? | School and community | Challenge the process |
| | What do you believe is needed to improve things? | Lead by example | Inspire a shared vision Enable others to act Model the way |

Results

This basic qualitative study focused on two research questions. To research these questions, the following 9 questions were asked. Each principal provided a wealth of information. The results from the 5 interviews are summarized below. The results are organized by research questions and explained in detail through quotes and data tables.

The interview questions for this research were:

Tell me a little bit about your school.

What do you believe makes a positive school culture? Why?

As a school principal, what do you believe is your role in developing a positive school culture?

Why are you facing challenges?

What are the challenges/obstacles you face?

What do you believe is needed to improve things?

How do you assess your school culture?

Which leadership style best describes your leadership?

Is there anything else you feel you would like to say that will help me understand your leadership and your school culture?

RQ1

Principals identified what they thought was their role in developing and maintaining a positive school culture in high poverty, low performing Title I schools. Several principals believed that they are responsible for developing the culture. They set the tone. P3 believed a principal's role is one of "support and accountability, they have to know as a leader, you care about them first. And then of course the account accountability piece is easier to follow when I know that you care about them." P5 added that building relationships should be a part of it. "My role in health and whole is doing check-in and seeing how you're doing, but that also goes to building relationships also." P5 goes on to say "it is going into not just knowing you as the teacher in my building, but

knowing you as a person, knowing what's going on. I may not know everything that's going on in your life, but I need to know what's significantly happening in your life.”

Building capacity is also a part of what principals should do according to P4.

Leadership styles play an important role in developing and maintaining a positive school culture (see Table 5).

Table 5

Participant Leadership Styles

| Participants | Leadership styles |
|--------------|---|
| P1 | “Circumstances require you to have a different type of leadership. When we were going through the pandemic and people was trying to survive servant leadership, was required in a school environment like this where you have kids who are living in high poverty, transiency and dealing with a lot of traumas, “Transformational leadership is something that's required as well because, um, with all the changes that's taken place in the education. |
| P2 | “I would say number one, I'm honest and I'm transparent. I'm very honest and I'm very transparent. I think I'm a personable leader. I think strategic is not my top five. |
| P3 | “Transformational, uh, I would say, you know, like 98% of the time it may become more dictatorship. If the buildings on fire, I'm gonna start barking off orders. Right. But just transformational is, uh, definitely my leadership style.” |
| P4 | “Servant. Yes. Um, but I'll also say, um, transformational because I've been in the school improvement process for so long mm-hmm...um, you have no choice but to transform. |
| P5 | “I think that I'm a servant leader and that there's nothing in my building that I can't do. So, if I ask you to do it, I do it or I do it with you. Um, I always want the best for you. So, I get in there with you, |

Once school principals have developed positive school cultures, the question then becomes how you assess it, to maintain it. What steps do school leaders take to assess the culture in their schools.

Data is what emerges from this question. All types of data help to assess the culture of a school. When students and teachers have great attendance, they come to school. Retaining teachers speaks to the leadership of the building. Teachers want to work for supportive school principals. Creating an environment that is warm, inviting and makes staff and students feel they want to come to learn and work.

RQ2

The next set of data relates to this research question. All participants identified their schools as Title I, poverty or free and reduced breakfast and lunch schools. The data in Table 6 shows the participants' responses when asked to share information about their school. The details provided categorized these schools as high poverty, low performing schools. Four of the 5 principals shared their schools are Title I and the other principal shared characteristics of Title I schools, free and/or reduced breakfast and lunch. Several of the schools serve students who live in apartment complexes. One school serves students who live in the poorest zip code in the state. The trajectory of students at this school is high for the pipeline to prison.

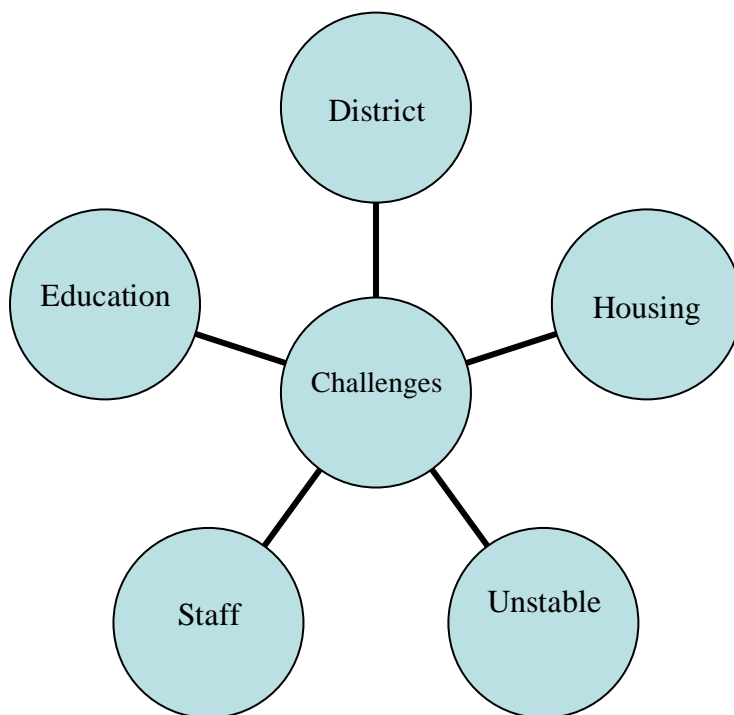
The students served in these schools are mostly African American or Hispanic. Some of these students qualify for EIP, the Early Intervention Program. EIP is developed to provide support to students who are at risk of not reaching or maintaining their grade level on state assessments (State Department of Education, 2023).

Principals at four of the schools shared that their schools did not make adequate progress and were put on state list. There are several list schools are listed. These schools were put on the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) list, Promise list or Tier 4 list. A school on the CSI is the lowest 10% of schools (State Department of Education 2021). A CSI Promise school is a school ranked higher than the lowest 5 to 10%. Tier 4 schools are the 10 lowest schools who perform in the bottom 5% of Title I schools. All these schools have content mastery, as determined by the State Department of Education, that is under 50. That means less than half of their students in grade 3rd, 4th and 5th have not mastered the standards for their grade level. These characteristics play a part in developing and maintaining or preventing a positive school culture.

Table 6*Participant Schools*

| Participants | School Demographics/Characteristics |
|--------------|--|
| P1 | "Our school is a Title I school. Um, it's 100 percent free and reduced lunch school, and all of our students are identified as poor." |
| P2 | "However, as soon as we serve, in one of the poorest areas in the city and in the state. 100% of our students are free and reduced lunch, free lunch, not even reduced." I serve a population of a hundred percent African American as well. Um, so the trajectory for our students and the pipeline to prison is very high. |
| P3 | "It's a very, uh, small school. We top off out at about 515, um, students. Uh, it is, um, uh, 100%, uh, uh, free reduced lunch. We are a Title I school. Um, we have, uh, most of our students are African American and Hispanic. |
| P4 | We are 100%, uh, free for lunch and breakfast. Also, we have the most hotels in our region. You know, we are a tier four school. |
| P5 | Well, my school is a Title 1 school, but my district is also a Title! district. So, the demographics of my school is, we have on average, uh, post pandemic around 670 kids pre pandemic. We had around 1000 kids because we had a mobility rate of about 45%. So, um, we're primarily African American, about 56%, and then roughly, uh, 30 some odd percent or Hispanic. We serve a lot of hotels as well as homeless shelters. Um, we have a lot of doubling up what parents have to have affidavits to come to our school. Um, our staff is primarily female, African American." |

School administrators are challenged in developing positive school culture in high poverty, low performing Title I schools for several reasons.

Figure 4*Challenges of Developing a Positive School Culture*

School administrators identified why they are facing the challenges and what they are in developing in maintain positive school culture. School principals were then asked what they believed is needed to improve these challenges. Below are their responses to the question. A variety of answers emerged, however connecting to community, and building relationships were themes that stood out. Prior to the pandemic P1 worked with the community and apartment complexes to support parents in being able to find stability in their apartments which in turn stabilized the school community. Building relationships

with staff is important as well. Retaining staff locks in the culture of your school. New hires require them to learn.

Table 7*How to Improve Positive School Culture*

| Participant | Response |
|-------------|--|
| P1 | Going back to apartment assignment where we meet yearly with our local apartment complex managers to discuss, um, stabilizing rent rates, um, so that they can thereby stabilize their housing communities and we can help stabilize our school community. We did a very good job that prior to the pandemic and was one of the only schools in the state of Georgia that was able to, um, reduce the transiency rate, |
| P2 | And so, we have a community circle activity once a month. The last Wednesday of the month is dedicated to community circle activities. It is non-negotiable. You must attend everybody, but it is a time we're not talking about work. So, we have done paint and chip, we have done a silent music party, we have done dodge ball, we have done walks like, you know, physical exercise. |
| P3 | It comes down to again, that leader creating whether the adults in the building who are responsible for educating the kids. They're the ones that you must make feel that they are valuable, needed, supported. And you know, of course you, you have accountability, |
| P4 | have a new leadership team as far as teachers The people that I've chosen, everybody is new to the school except for two of the teachers. Because the buy-in is there, they're going to do what they need to do. |
| P5 | team building. It starts with us(staff), allowing them to lead it within themselves. I always say that people say culture and climate starts with the, the head, the principal. But in actuality, culture and climate is within the building because it's more of them than it is of you. I do things from the top down, but I also encourage them to do things within their own grade level or their own departments. The other thing is, celebrating wins. Empowering people, making them feel good, celebrating their victories, shouting out their birthdays. Focus on the positive. |

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used an interview protocol to ensure interview questions were appropriate and were aligned to the research. The research guidelines of Walden University were used to include consent forms for the study. Consent forms were sent via email detailing the study and informing the participants of their rights. Participants consented to participation in the study and the recording of the interview prior to the interview starting and consented again once the recording started.

Transferability

Ravitch and Carl (2019) described the ability to apply a study to a broader context as transferability. A reader of this study, such as administrators of high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools, will be able to apply the findings in practice and behaviors in building positive school culture at their schools, Title I or non-Title I. Participants were invited based on their tenure and school status. All participants had 3 or more years as school administrators and their schools are considered high poverty, low performing Title I schools.

Dependability

Transcripts were reviewed by the researcher and participant to ensure that the interview data was accurate. The participants were emailed the transcripts from the interview. This gave them the opportunity to review the data to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Participants had the opportunity to edit their responses upon review. Qualitative research can achieve dependability by ensuring consistency within the subject

regardless of existing variables, conditions of the interview location, or timeframe (Pitpit, 2020).

Confirmability

As the researcher, I reflected on my role in the study and its effect on the interpretation of data. Researchers reflect on how their role in the study and their background, culture, and experiences could shape their interpretation of themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 278). I relied on the data to identify themes.

Allowing participants to review the data collected helped to develop the confirmability of the study.

I kept a journal and notes to assist in interpreting the data and interpreting data my reflections. As an educator, I worked to identify any personal bias, assumptions, and beliefs. None was discovered.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore obstacles school principals face building a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. Results of this qualitative study were represented in terms of themes to answer the two research questions.

Chapter 5 includes a comprehensive explanation of this basic qualitative study. Included in this chapter is a summary of findings along with details and conclusions. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore obstacles school principals face building a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools. In this basic qualitative study, I used semi-structured interviews. Research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do elementary school principals develop and maintain a positive school culture in high-poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

RQ2: What obstacles do school principals face in terms of building a positive school culture in high poverty and low-performing Title I schools?

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings of this study show how school principals at high poverty and low-performing Title I schools develop and maintain a positive school culture. All five participants believed school culture is very important. They also believed it was their responsibility to develop that culture. Themes that emerged from the research were: leading by example, relationships, and school and community. Participants believed that Kouzes and Posner's five practices of the transformational leadership theory are used to change and maintain their school culture. The practices are model the way, inspire the heart, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart.

School Leadership

Data from the study suggested transformational and servant leadership styles were effective and desirable. Transformational leadership was the main leadership style that most participants claimed to be their style when asked.

Transformational leadership includes five components: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Participants confirmed that as leaders they had to create and model the expectations. P2 said, “I believe that it is my job to create a culture of joy.” Other staff members and staff are influence by their buy-in. P4 agreed and believed her school culture will change, “because the buy in is there, they're going to do what they need to do.”

Transformational leadership is necessary when developing a positive school culture. School principals must incorporate innovative activities and encourage taking risks when making changes. P2 created community circles among her staff. She took a risk in designating the last Wednesday of the month to community circle activities. These circles and the activities are non-negotiable.

Servant leadership is leadership that concentrates on needs of staff. Both servant leadership and transformational leadership play a role in developing positive school culture. Canavesi and Minelli (2022) defined servant leadership as when leaders focus on their followers or staff and their personal growth and development by treating them ethically.

All participants believed their leadership style changed based on the situation, but overall, transformational leadership was their style. Three of the five participants used transformational leadership, and one principal identified with servant leadership. Two of the three participants who identified with transformational leadership also used the servant leadership styles. During the pandemic, P1 said she was a servant leader. She

made sure her staff and students were okay, and they had what they needed to live. As they came back to the building, her leadership style became a combination of both servant and transformational leadership styles.

P1 shared how her staff was intentional about greeting students as they came to school in the morning. P1 shared what happens at her school:

When our kids come to school in the morning, they're greeted. Good morning, how are you? How was your afternoon? We have our assistant principals, academic coaches, PE coaches, and me outside greeting kids when they show up to school in the morning. When they get into the building, we have another team of people, our paraprofessionals and teachers greeting them along the way to get their breakfast and to go to class in the morning. When they arrive to school in the morning, they hear motivational music telling them how beautiful and gifted and talented and wonderful they are, so love starts from the beginning.

P2 uses community circles among the staff. This gives her staff an opportunity to connect, and it's not work related. P2 said, "we have a community circle activity once a month. The last Wednesday of the month is dedicated to community circle activities."

P5 focused on her staff and students being healthy and whole:

So, a lot of our culture is built on social-emotional learning, making sure that we know everybody's okay and not just students because teachers can't pour from an empty cup either. So, we must know that the teachers are healthy and whole for the students to be healthy and whole, which in turns make the environment and the culture healthy and whole.

P5 also said:

I said earlier, it's celebrating the wins. Empowering people, making them feel good, celebrating their victories, shouting out their birthdays. We did what was called uh, um, a compliment box where you would write a compliment about each other and put it in a box. And then I read it every Friday on the news so people could hear from their own peers what they have said about um, them.

Participants understood that relationships are important to develop and maintain a positive school culture.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations in this basic qualitative study. Limitations are potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p. 2). This study used on elementary African American women. The principals had 3 or more years of experience on their campuses. All schools were elementary high poverty and low performing Title I schools. Only two video conferencing platforms were used, Zoom and Google Meet. A change in video conferencing platforms took place during the second interview. The change in web-based platforms did not cause any limitations in the research.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are to include other middle and high school principals. This study was comprised of only females, further research should include male principals. In addition, a sample of 5 school administrators were used, a larger study sample should be used in future studies. This study solicited school

principals from several metro schools in the Southeastern Region of the United States; future research may include school principals from rural areas. Future research could include climate and its relationship to culture as well as academic data.

Implications

In this study, I explored the obstacles school administrators face in developing and maintaining positive school culture in high poverty, low performing Title I schools. Some of the obstacles were out of the control of the school administrator. Support for the obstacles could be found, but the only thing that is in the control of the leaders is what's inside their building. Developing partnerships, engaging community members, and teaming up with parents are necessary for a positive school culture to flourish. Implications from the study show that leadership styles do influence a school's culture. P5 argues that she is a servant leader. "I'm a servant leader and that there's nothing in my building that I can't do. So, if I ask you to do it, I do it or I do it with you." School principals who are hands on, servant leaders are doers. A principal's influence on school culture is seen in creating a warm and inviting environment and risk free, behavioral culture. As well as leading by example and setting the tone.

This study's implications for positive social change and practice provide administrators with opportunities and ideas to develop and maintain a positive school culture in high poverty, low performing Title I schools. Maintaining a positive school culture in high poverty low performing Title I schools involves a combination of servant leadership and transformational leadership. These implications will allow students to learn in a place where nurturing relationships foster student growth and development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore the obstacles school principals face building a positive school culture in high-poverty, low-performing Title I schools. Through the research, I discovered leadership behaviors that contribute to positive school culture. To collect data, five elementary school principals were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. I analyzed the data provided by coding. I manually coded the interview transcripts using open coding and then classified the coded data to find growing themes.

Many school administrators have developed and maintained positive school cultures by developing relationships and having years of experience as leaders. Relationships matter connected with students and staff make a difference. Experience also matters. It is challenging for any new school leader, specifically in a high poverty, low performing Title I school to establish and maintain a positive school culture. School administrators have so much to manage and to be accountable for along with the challenges that come with a school. However, it is evident from the research, a positive school culture makes all things work together. It impacts attendance, behavior, and student growth.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Interview Questions

Tell me a little bit about your school.

What do you believe makes a positive school culture? Why?

As school principal, what do you believe is your role in developing a positive school culture?

Why are you facing challenges?

What are the challenges/obstacles you face?

What do you believe is needed to improve things?

How do you assess your school culture?

Which leadership style best describes your leadership?

Is there anything else you feel you would like to say that will help me understand your leadership and your school culture?

Appendix B: Virtual Interview Protocol

I will greet and identify myself as Yvonne Browder, a doctoral student from Walden University, conducting a study focused on building positive school cultures in Title I schools.

The participant will be thanked for taking the time to participate in the study and to share his/her experiences.

The participant will be asked to verbally consent to the interview and the recording for further analysis.

The recording will be turned on and I will note the date and time of the interview.

I will ask the participant several questions. The questions are a guide for the interview.

Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences. I will follow up with probing and clarifying questions to assist with the research.

After posing a question, I will wait and allow participants to fully express their thoughts and views.

At the end of the interview, the participant will be thanked for his/her times. The participant will be asked if they would like a summary of the research findings, and the recording will be stopped.

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Email Letter

Dear _____

I am a doctoral student at Walden University, working towards a Doctor of Education with a concentration in Educational Administration and Leadership. I am contacting you because I know you work in a metro area Title I and believe you might be able to participate in a research study I am conducting. As part of my final dissertation research, I am conducting case study research seeking to explore the challenges of school principals building positive school cultures.

I am inviting you to participate, which will involve on virtual interview lasting between 30 – 45 minutes and answering follow-up questions through email. Follow-up email questions will require a total of 45 – 60 minutes maximum of your time and will take place over the course of a couple of weeks. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Your responses to the interview and follow-up email questions will be used to develop new approaches and strategies to assist principals in Title I schools to develop and maintain a positive school culture. Your responses will be confidential. The results may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used. I will use study codes to represent your name in the study.

The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you can also change your mind after the

interview starts, just let me know. All recordings will be retained at my private home office for at least three years and will be destroyed immediately thereafter.

Please sign and return the attached consent form to me as an indication of your willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. If you have any questions, please contact me at or send me an email to yvonne.browder@waldenu.edu.

Thank you,

Yvonne Browder