

2020

## Perceptions of Transformational Leadership in Northern Great Plains Reservation Turnaround Schools

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Lynn Lawson

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Perceptions of Transformational Leadership in Northern Great Plains Reservation

Turnaround Schools

by

Lynn Lawson

MEd, The College of New Jersey, 1997

BS, Moorhead State University, 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2020

## Abstract

American Indian/Alaska Natives have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment and the lowest rates of graduation in the United States. Leadership and classroom instruction influence academic achievement. Little is known about leadership methods for turnaround efforts in American Indian schools. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore administrators' and teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership in 2 American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Burns' transformational leadership theory guided this study. Two K-8 administrators and 6 K-8 teachers, who were state certified and served at least 1 year at their school site, volunteered to participate in this study. Data from semistructured interviews were analyzed using Yin's 5-cycle recursive analysis with open and pattern coding strategies. Participants perceived that school leaders should build relationships that feature students' academic and social-emotional progress, support teachers to foster a culture of learning for staff and students, build a collegial team to include the school community's cultural values in the school's mission, and support collaborative communication among educators to work toward a common goal are necessary to improve academic achievement. It is recommended that tribal leaders, who influence school decisions, are presented with these results. This endeavor could contribute to positive social change when school administrators adopt transformational leadership strategies and approaches that incorporate cultural values to improve classroom instruction and student learning and increase higher graduation rates.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late husband, Steven ‘Gus’ Carl Lawson. Gus was the brilliant, curious, and very naughty boy who was often in trouble. He grew up to be a world traveler, adventurer, and educator who loved to work with the hardest-to-reach students. His dedication to quality education for *all* students remains and continues to be a positive presence and influence in my life as well as the many lives of those Gus worked with during his time with us. I do believe he would be proud of my exploratory efforts with this particular study.

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Profound appreciation goes to my family, friends, and, particularly, my three daughters, Emily, Claire, and Abby. They understood the toil and awesomeness of in-depth learning in an area of passion. Without the support of my family and circle of friends, this dissertation could not have become a reality, and the degree would have remained an adventure of a pipedream. Thank you for helping me make it real.

Deeply sincere thanks go to the tribal URR for allowing me to conduct this study and answer soul-tugging questions. I hope that the findings of this study contribute to the well-being and bright future of children from Northern Great Plains Indian reservations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of this study was administrator and teacher perceptions of transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. The research was necessary to discern strategies and appreciate the significance of transformational leadership in turnaround schools to improve academic outcomes. Potential positive social change from the study may include a more in-depth understanding that could lead to increased leadership capacity and ability to educate American Indian students to an academic level that empowers them to lead successful lives. The results of this study may benefit not only American Indian children, their families, and communities, but also neighboring regional communities and stakeholders at state and national levels, such as business leaders and policymakers committed to schools that seek improvement. In Chapter 1, I present the contextual background, conceptual framework, problem, and purpose of the study. The research questions, definitions, assumptions, limitations and scope, and delimitations are discussed. Finally, a summary concludes this chapter.

### **Background**

There are 567 federally recognized American Indian tribes in the United States (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, n.d.a) with an estimated 5.2 million American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), representing hundreds of tribal languages and traditions living on and off reservations. The AI/AN population represents 1.5% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, n.d.a). These groups experience the highest rate of unemployment at 9.9%

compared to 5.3% for all people in the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016) and the highest rate of poverty at 28.3% compared to 12.7% for all people in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

After passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) of 1975, federally recognized tribes were to contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for the operation of Bureau-funded schools and determine education programs suitable for their children. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) manages 183 elementary and secondary schools, some of which are operated directly by the BIE and others by the tribes, referred to as tribal grant schools (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, n.d.b). Students of BIE schools consistently perform below American Indian students in both high and low-density public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Of all ethnic groups in the United States, AI/AN students have the lowest graduation rates, ranging from 45% to 89% depending on each state, with an overall national graduation rate of 72% (McFarland et al., 2017).

To meet the academic needs of American Indian students, tribal and state collaboration was sanctioned through the ratification of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). School officials have disparate abilities from state to state in recruiting and retaining adequate staff to support school turnaround efforts that improve academic achievement (Tanenbaum et al., 2015). Many policymakers lack insight or understanding of turnaround schools, especially those in rural areas (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Turnaround schools are low performing schools in which policies and procedures are implemented to develop leadership capabilities of

staff and increase the academic achievement of students (ESSA, 2015). Teachers have the most in-school influence on student results, yet non-white students who live below the poverty line have less qualified and less effective teachers (Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017; Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Sun & Ni, 2016). Although principals have the second most powerful influence on student outcomes in a school environment, the most highly qualified and competent administrators are not placed equitably in high-needs schools and this, in turn, leads to a higher teacher and principal turnover that negatively affects change efforts (Fuller et al., 2017).

Increased leadership capacity through professional development is critical for successful school turnaround (Kemp-Graham, 2015; Ylimaki, Brunderman, Bennett, & Dugan, 2014). There are strategies and practices leaders may learn to employ to increase academic achievement at high-poverty low-performing turnaround schools (Brown & Green, 2014; Buckmiller, 2015; MacDonald, 2015; Mette, 2013, 2014; Woods & Martin, 2016). Principals and school leaders must also learn to use their influence to build a responsive system and go beyond the school borders as they advocate for students in mitigating the effects of poverty on learning and student achievement (McMahon, Peters, & Schumacher, 2014; Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman, 2014). Devos, Tuytens, and Hulpia (2014) stated that shared organizational commitment via distributive leadership is related closely to the efficient functioning of an organization and the achievement of its goals. Stone-Johnson (2014) found that leaders must foster relationships and share leadership with stakeholders to perform collectively beyond expectations to raise and sustain improved student achievement. James and Figaro-Henry (2017) noted that

effective interactions took place within groups that collaborated and shared knowledge. The collaboration resulted in increased individual and collective leadership. An increase in leadership capacity was realized, from new insights that established and strengthened relationships and mutual understandings.

For collaboration to be effective, leaders must be particularly knowledgeable, skilled, and culturally prepared to work in American Indian schools (Buckmiller, 2015; Mette & Stanoch, 2016). DeMatthews, Mungal, and Carrola (2015) offered five recommendations to leaders for collaborative decision making in keeping with the notion of social justice: focus on community and personal values, continuously consider ethical principles, use soft skills for decision analysis, critically reflect for group discernment, and incrementally make decisions. Henderson, Carjuzaa, and Ruff (2015) stated that professional preparation for principals who wish to work in Indian education needs to be culturally responsive and include the importance of relationships focused on a willingness to share information and understandings. Non-American Indian educational leaders need to work toward reconciling Westernized leadership practices with American Indian traditional mores (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015).

This study was needed to reduce the gap in research and learn more about the practice concerning transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. This study may raise awareness to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of transformational leadership as effective leadership. A command of effective leadership is necessary for fitting practices to address unique needs relevant to American Indian settings and cultures.



Judicious decisions may be enacted to improve the state of American Indian education and improve the academic achievement of students through operational understandings translated into action.

### **Problem Statement**

Little is known about transformational leadership approaches or strategies for turnaround efforts in American Indian schools (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015; Mette, 2013; Mette & Stanoch, 2016), especially schools in rural locations (Johnson, & Howley, 2015; Mette, 2014). An important factor in successful schools is strong leadership (Bass, 2008; Brown & Green, 2014; Buckmiller, 2015; McMahon et al., 2014; Woods & Martin, 2016). Stone-Johnson (2014) stated that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its influence on student achievement, yet Buckmiller (2015) shared that principals conventionally trained in traditional university preparation programs may not have the capacity or appropriate preparation to be a leader in American Indian education. The lack of training may necessitate learning how to reconcile westernized educational thinking with cultural clashes to lead their schools successfully (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015). Intrinsic characteristics of Western bureaucratic organizations are many times in direct conflict with values of indigenous societies, whose organizational leaders take a more holistic approach to leadership, necessitating that education play a key role in responding and educating others to reach an equilibrium in organizations (Barnhardt, 2015).

The focus of this study was on kindergarten through Grade 8 (K-8) administrators and teachers on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great

Plains that experience low student achievement and a high-level of administrative turnover. Investigation of the perceptions of transformational leadership styles may provide results original to the gap in research about practice concerning competent leadership skills in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. Additionally, these findings may provide evidence for the successful education of American Indian students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to explore the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. There are difficulties in transforming underperforming schools; hence, Brown and Green (2014) counseled the importance of analyzing leaders' practices as major contributing factors. Procedures of leaders in environments where poverty affects most students must be flexible and lead to creative solutions that foster responsive systems that advocate for all students (Brown & Green, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Stone-Johnson, 2014). Qualitative data collection and analysis may lead to themes regarding perceptions of effective transformational leadership.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study on the perceptions of teachers and administrators concerning transformational leadership.

RQ 1: What are K-8 administrators' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

RQ 2: What are K-8 teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Burns's seminal transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Burns (1978) studied historical philosophers and leaders in addition to modern leaders and their followers to gain essential theoretical and practical knowledge for the implementation of contemporary leadership. Burns considered leadership relational and a process through which leaders make a measurable change by developing trust, loyalty, respect, and shared goals to engage and motivate followers to raise the performance of an organization collectively.

A wide variety of educational contexts has applied the transformational leadership theory. Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) stated that transformational leadership practices are influential in the complex undertaking of restructuring schools. Cohen (2009) found that transformational leadership practices encourage reorganization in essential areas of climate such as relationships, teaching and learning, safety, and environment. Mette and Scribner (2014) affirmed that technical and cultural improvements were named in school turnaround policy for almost a decade and asserted that ethical leaders need to apply transformational practices in democratic decision-making practices to meet policy expectations. Research from Niessen, Mädera, Stride, and Jimmieson (2017) indicated that transformational leadership that aims to improve classroom learning conditions through tasks such as goal setting and curriculum planning builds educators' capacities

that relate positively to school outcomes. Woods and Martin (2016) stated that effective change leaders were transformational when they raised the number of positive interactions amongst leaders, teachers, students, and the community, which created a learning environment where all students could be successful.

Liu (2015) found that transformational leaders perform well in individualist cultural contexts and moderately well when motivating followers in school change processes in collective, hierarchical cultures with greater power distances. For successful adoption of a transformational approach, individual consideration of leaders' personality traits and the organizational contextual factors need to be understood (Arnold, Loughlin, & Walsh, 2016; Eberly, Bluhm, Guarana, Avolio, & Hannah, 2017; Phaneuf, Boudrias, Rousseau, & Brunelle, 2016). Transformational leadership may be particularly appropriate because the conceptual framework for this study of K-8 turnaround schools on American Indian reservations aligns with cultural values such as the collective engagement of others through care, respect, inclusivity, transparency, and honesty.

A qualitative, responsive interview approach for learning perceptions of transformational strategies as effective leadership fits with the findings of Woods and Martin (2016) in that an increased number of positive interactions between stakeholders transformed the learning environment for success. Additionally, a conceptual framework based on transformational leadership theory in tandem with discovering themes found from analysis of responsive interview results align with Arnold et al. (2016), Eberly et al. (2017), and Phaneuf et al. (2016), who found importance in considering individual personality traits of leaders as well as organizations' contextual factors.

Bass (2008) stated that a transformational leader embodies the characteristics of optimism and open-mindedness, which the conceptual framework supported in this study. The research questions were based on the transformational leadership framework, which was conducive to facilitating the understanding of how administrators and teachers perceive effective leadership because it assumes complexity and encompasses multiple and related philosophies of leadership in search of knowledge (see Bass, 2008). The interview questions aligned with Bass's paradigm to collect data concerning transformational leadership as a reciprocal process that uses values in a collective purpose to realize mutual goals (Burns, 1978). A more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework with analysis as derived from the literature is shared in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is discovery-oriented research that takes place in a real-world setting where the phenomenon studied, many times a social and complex phenomenon, occurs naturally and the goal is to uncover and interpret meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). A postmodern position was taken within a case study design because truths regarding this phenomenon are multiple, not singular, and seek descriptive, individually interpreted small-scale narratives gathered in a bounded system (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

An exploratory case study design was the most appropriate approach to learn about administrator and teacher perceptions of transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. A qualitative, exploratory case study aligns with a transformational leadership framework to support

responsive, inclusive inquiry (Ylimaki et al., 2014) for an in-depth, real-world perspective of managerial processes (Yin, 2018) that promoted the emergence of meaning through patterns (Saldaña, 2016) and themes brought forth from data. Data for this study were collected from a representative group of two administrators and six teachers. The case study design allowed the gathering of data in a natural, non-threatening environment and used an investigative strategy to yield rich description. Information was collected cooperatively and respectfully (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012), as appropriate for transformational practices. Semistructured responsive interviews were the method of data collection because the format was flexible to the replies of the participant and the situation as views emerged while gleaning an authentic understanding of the participant (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Responsive interviewing dovetails with an adaptable, adjustable approach taken to glean a deep understanding of a phenomenon. A responsive interview structure fit well with a transformational framework because of its egalitarian, respectful tack that as Bass (2008) credited, is likely to be flexible and open to others' viewpoints. I analyzed the data, using pattern matching inductive logic (Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2016, 2018). Through the use of coding to reveal patterns, I identified repetitive categories that formed themes aligned to the transformational paradigm of the conceptual framework to answer the research questions of this study. A purposeful sampling of K-8 administrators and teachers led to a unified description through coding of the data. Coding revealed categories, patterns, and themes that conceptualized the data and help uncover meaning (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2016) cautioned that qualitative research is

vulnerable to selectivity and bias. I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of responses and findings of this study with the participants for internal validity and to prevent misinterpretation of replies (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Definitions**

Terms unique to this study are defined as follows:

*Indigenous educational leadership:* Leadership practices in American Indian educational settings are distinctive qualities that exemplify the indigenous culture.

According to Faircloth (2017), these behaviors require a leader to:

- exhibit values that focus on principles of the culture,
- engage skills in a contextually driven manner,
- develop and use new knowledge and ways of accomplishing them appropriately within a native community,
- understand and respond to the symbolic dimensions of political organizations,
- extend care, talents, and time generously, and
- reflect in making wise judgments and precipitate an ability to lead and follow.

*Success:* The correct or desired result of an attempt (Merriam-Webster, n. d.).

*Traditional Native values:* General standards of most indigenous cultures in North America that affect behaviors are observable in the Native environment. These principles may include respect for personal differences, quietness, patience, modesty, indirect criticism, harmony with nature, preference for observing and listening, group emphasis, respect for age, a flexible time orientation, an orientation to the present, practicality, a

holistic orientation, spirituality, and a propensity for caution (Tippeconnic & Tippeconnic Fox, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are aspects of a study that are presumed true, but not substantiated or demonstrated that may weaken or influence the research; faulty assumptions may lead to faulty interpretations (Kothari, 2004). Assumptions made in this study were that volunteer participants understood the questions and answered in a forthright and honest manner while sharing perceptions of transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. It was also assumed that the interview protocol was consistent and elicited reliable responses. Acknowledgment of these assumptions was important because they affected the inferences drawn from the study and helped to ensure the results obtained from this study were complete and trustworthy representations (see Walters, 2001).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Scope and delimitations are boundaries placed on the scale and progression of the study that relates to elements such as characteristics and focus of the population examined. I invited a representative sample of K-8 educators comprised of two administrators and six teachers to be participants of this study based on two American Indian reservation turnaround schools located in the Northern Great Plains. The schools serve a community population that experiences a 30.7% poverty rate, 75.8% of whom are American Indian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The focus of the study centered on teachers' and administrators' perceptions of transformational leadership. Perceptions of



transformational leadership from other school staff such as paraprofessionals and secretaries were not considered. Additionally, I did not address attributes such as educational qualifications, professional proficiency, or job satisfaction. The single-case study approach used a small sample size in a narrow population that may limit transferability and possibly necessitate more study using a larger sample population or multiple-case studies. Findings from this study may serve as a working hypothesis for new studies in similar contexts. Identifying and considering rival explanations may strengthen the transferability of findings (Yin, 2016).

### **Limitations**

Limitations relate to methodology and possible weaknesses that could affect the results of a qualitative case study. Limitations in this study included researcher bias, small sample size, and assurance of confidentiality for vulnerable participants included in this research. These potential design and methodological weaknesses were considered and I included measures to reasonably address these limitations.

As the researcher and interviewer, I was present throughout the interview process and I was consciously aware of my own subjectivity during this qualitative research process. I worked as a leader in a turnaround school located on an American Indian reservation with similar demographics. Possible bias may be related to my assumptions regarding beliefs and professional abilities and opinions of staff serving Northern Great Plains reservation turnaround schools. It was important for me to consider that I may harbor subtle racism and be unaware of the power of my perspective or worldview.

To address issues of bias, I interviewed K-8 administrators and teachers that I do not supervise with at least 1 year of experience at their school site. I used a bracketing process (see Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004) to check any biases that may have occurred during the interview process. The bracketing process assisted in detaching my biases as I documented and examined the experience. There was not a set procedure or system for bracketing; instead, it was a mental orientation that opened perspectives and considered outlooks that had been taken for granted (Wall et al., 2004). To further check any bias I may have brought to this study, I used a reflective journal to guide reflective bracketing and assist critical analysis. First, I used a framework to support mental preparation in considering beliefs that might interfere with the clarity of communication and transfer of data before an interview took place. Second, I identified new learnings in the journal. Finally, I documented how the new learnings might be transferred to use (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wall et al., 2004). One final check on bias for this study included member checking to strengthen the certainty of results and ensure that I reported responses in detail accurately and interpreted data in a trustworthy manner (see Yin, 2016).

A second limitation of case studies is that few participants are involved in qualitative research providing subjective data. In this study, the ratio of inexperienced and uncertified teachers to experienced and certified teachers in the participant pool was a limitation. Teachers and administrators tend to be novice educators and stay fewer years in settings of rural poverty (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015), such as those of American Indian schools on reservations. There is a loss of human capital and disparity in turnover

patterns in schools for low-income students and students of color (Holme, Jabbar, Germain, & Dinning, 2018). To address this limitation, the interview protocol explored the depth of information with each participant rather than address the breadth of the problem.

A third limitation of this study involved possible participants' concern of a breach of confidentiality resulting in retaliation, which could limit communication. Reasonable measures were undertaken to reduce possible weaknesses in the study that included a review of the volunteer applicant pool to ensure a sample as representative as possible and reassurance to the participants that strict confidentiality and protocols of the tribe and university would be consistently followed.

### **Significance**

Poverty-stricken schools that fail academically present a national problem (Brown & Green, 2014). American Indian and Alaskan Native student populations exhibit this problem with a 72% adjusted cohort graduation rate that indicates 28% of American Indian and Alaskan Native students do not graduate from high school, which is the lowest rate of all ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). Principal turnover affects academic achievement; students obtain lower performance scores on standardized tests in the first year of a new principal's tenure, and even smaller achievement gains are realized with a novice principal (Rangel, 2018). Identifying and employing transformational leadership practices for elementary turnaround schools on American Indian reservations may assist educators in their efforts to build leadership capacity and successfully mitigate the effects of poverty and educate American Indian

students. The results of this study may be informative to American Indian students, their families, and communities, as well as stakeholders at the state and national levels, such as business leaders and policymakers committed to schools that seek improvement.

Examination of leadership practices may lead to increased student achievement and higher school success because the effects of school leadership closely follow classroom instruction in importance to student learning (Stone-Johnson, 2014). Brown and Green (2014) and Miller et al. (2014) stated that there is a critical need to identify successful procedures and practices in high-poverty, low-performing schools because leadership practices are a significant factor in transforming an educational organization. Obtaining a greater understanding of transformational leadership styles in elementary turnaround schools on American Indian reservations may help those schools educate students to a higher academic level. A more in-depth understanding of transformational leadership, in turn, may lead to positive social change via greater societal stability for the local community as well as neighboring, regional communities.

### **Summary**

The goals of this study were (a) to reduce the gap in research regarding transformational leadership approaches for turnaround efforts in K-8 American Indian schools located on reservations and (b) increase educators' abilities to discern strategies to improve students' academic outcomes. American Indians have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment and the lowest high school graduation rate of all the ethnic groups in the United States. Despite the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015), schools that the BIE manage suffer high teacher and principal

turnover and consistently underperform public schools. It is crucial to retain teachers and principals because classroom educators have the most influence on students' academic outcomes in school followed closely by principals' effective leadership skills (Fuller et al., 2017; Stone-Johnson, 2014).

A qualitative case study design using semistructured responsive interviews was used to investigate K-8 administrators' and teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership styles as effective leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. A conceptual framework based on transformational leadership that places value on the collective engagement of others through care, respect, inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, transparency, and honesty was applied.

Potential positive social change from the study may be a more in-depth understanding of effective leadership strategies and practices that lead to improved leadership capacity and educational outcomes for American Indian students. The results of this study may benefit not only American Indian children, their families, and communities, but also other stakeholders in our society committed to educational improvement. In Chapter 2, I provide the literature review regarding the challenges of leadership in an organization that must attain higher levels of achievement and implement theory in practice and context.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

An organization's future is influenced and primarily decided by the actions of its leaders; yet, there is no unified theory of leadership because leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes numerous competing, contextual variables (Bass, 2008; Dinh et al., 2014). Brown and Green (2014), Buckmiller (2015), McMahon et al. (2014), and Woods and Martin (2016) stated that strong leadership is essential for schools to be successful. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. There are limited data regarding leadership for turnaround schools, especially those in rural areas (Johnson & Howley, 2015; Mette, 2014), and particularly those schools comprised of an American Indian majority on reservations (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015; Mette, 2013; Mette & Stanoch, 2016). It is crucial to understand leadership behavior and practices in turnaround schools, specifically those on American Indian reservations. An exploration of current and related literature that I reviewed indicated indigenous leaders typically take a holistic position that may conflict with mindsets of conventionally trained school leaders (Christensen, 2015; Stewart, Verbos, Birmingham, Black, & Gladstone, 2017; Tippeconnic Fox, Luna-Firebaugh, & Williams, 2015). Conventionally trained school leaders may not be prepared to lead American Indian schools (Buckmiller, 2015). Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) reported that leadership is a persuasive process through which people consent to be led by the leader. Followers' positive perceptions of leaders are important to leaders' effectiveness and critical to leaders' success (Green, 2013;

Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Inspection of studies involving leadership styles, distinctive elements of American Indian leadership, unique characteristics of American Indian schools, and leadership preparation is vital to the academic success of American Indian turnaround schools.

In the first section of Chapter 2, I present the literature search strategy, followed by the conceptual framework and the benefits of using a transformational framework for this study. A literature review related to key concepts includes an explanation of the study's fundamental constructs of leadership and leadership styles as they pertain to transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools, cultural perceptions, and the challenges leaders face. Finally, I discuss strategies for leadership preparation and capacity building.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Research studies and professional literature for this review were found in Walden University Library research databases that included Education Source, Sage Journals, Emerald Management Journals, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar. Professional websites such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and government sites including the U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of Education and their subsidiaries such as the National Center for Education Statistics and the Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance were accessed. Relevant research articles and books found via references, citations, bibliographies, or referred by fellow professionals were part of the review. I purchased books from reputable authors in the fields of education

and leadership. Key terms and phrases used for this literature review search included: *American Indian leadership, American Indian values, authentic leadership, charismatic, churn, cultural competency, culturally responsive leadership, distributed leadership, education reform, equity, indigenous leadership, indigenous values, leadership development, leadership types, principal preparation, rural, school improvement strategies, school leadership, social justice, teacher perceptions, transformational leadership, transformative leadership, turnaround, and school turnover.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Burn's (1978) paradigm of transformational leadership. A transformational framework aligns with the investigation of perceptions of leadership in K-8 turnaround schools on American Indian reservations because of its consideration of complexity and context when striving to understand a phenomenon (Bass, 2008). A transformational framework also acknowledges the importance of respectful integration of leadership skills with existing tenets of the organization in need of change to reach mutually agreed-upon goals (Burns, 1978).

Leadership is one of the least understood and most scrutinized phenomena (Burns, 1978). Leadership is a primary concern for most organizations, and there is a view that society should identify and agree on a correct theory (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). However, an extensive qualitative review of literature in leadership theory that spanned nearly 25 years by Dinh et al. (2014) revealed leadership as a complex phenomenon that occurs over considerable time, involves numerous factors, and operates across various levels of analysis. Leadership emerges via social systems through



interactions of people and their environment because it is relational and has profound yet often indirect effects on an organization (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Day et al., 2014; Green, 2013).

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership with specific relevance to dynamic, complex, changing environments where intellectually stimulating leaders motivate followers to a higher purpose by using morals and values, challenging expectations, and creating shared visions to reach common goals (Bass, 2008). Congruence of values is fundamental in the transformational leadership process because leaders convey values to their followers and inspire followers as influence spreads through the development of a collective vision for the advancement of the organization (Groves, 2014). Burns (1978) stated that transformational leadership occurred when an attuned leader comprehended the needs of followers to activate and channel momentum that mobilized the followers with new aspirations to form a united base for further action. Transformational leaders motivate through inspiration and propose challenges that advocate followers' development (Esmi, Piran, & Hayat, 2017). This type of leadership collaboratively raises followers in the pursuit of higher goals through moral, collective purpose with end-values such as justice and equality (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013). The leader and follower may come together for different reasons, but the leader engages the follower. Motives merge as the two entities satisfy their needs and move toward higher achievement (Steinwart & Ziegler, 2014) in this cyclical process.

When comparing leadership styles, perceptions of followers indicated transformational leaders led more highly functioning organizations, were flexible, open to

new experiences, and open to others' points of view (Bass, 2008). Organizational commitment, motivation, and performance are linked to transformational leadership (Imran, Ilyas, Aslam, & Ubaid-Ur-Rahman, 2016). Organizations that endorse proactive, risk-taking, and innovative behaviors enjoy higher performance than those that do not support those behaviors (Moriano, Molero, Topa, & Lévy Mangin, 2014). Transformational leadership links to proactive, risk-taking, creative, and innovative practices as well as organizational citizenship that connects self-concept to the interests, successes, and failures of organizations both in and outside of educational settings (Moriano et al., 2014).

There is a definite correlation between transformational leadership and creativity (Imran et al., 2016) because employees in an empowered and supportive climate are encouraged to take different points of view and try new, collaborative approaches to their work (Henker, Sonnentag, & Unger, 2015). There is an association between transformational leadership and a positive organizational culture where employees collaborate to achieve tasks, achieve adequate performance, and elevate the organization (Esmi et al., 2017). Transformational leaders emphasize teamwork and the attainment of shared goals that are also values of collectivist cultures (Newman & Butler, 2014). Transformational leaders are intellectually stimulating and create images of possibilities as part of a creative process for followers to look at problems in innovative and more creative ways (Bass, 2008). Leaders must strive for a collaborative, reciprocal relationship where leaders' and followers' contributions and loyalty are multidimensional (Bass, 2008).

Transformational leadership is present when the relations and interactions among members of a group improve the expectations and competencies of the group so that problems are solved or goals reached (Bass, 2008). Without consensual followers, there would be no leaders (Warner, 2015). It is through complex relationships that leaders influence their followers (Bass, 2008; Warner, 2015) as they guide behavior in a top-down direction that ethically aligns with societal, occupational, and organizational values to enforce codes of conduct (Dinh et al., 2014). Followers also influence leaders and the achievement of outcomes in a bottom-up direction. There is a complex context through which the leader and the led must function (O'Connell, 2014), and through which social networks dynamically develop as members interact over time so that multiple participants influence organizational behavior bidirectionally (Burns, 1978; Day et al., 2014; Dinh et al., 2014).

In summary, there is productive transformational leadership when an attuned leader comprehends the needs of followers to activate and channel momentum that mobilizes followers with new aspirations to form a united base for action (Burns, 1978). This type of leadership collaboratively raises followers in the pursuit of higher goals through moral, collective purpose with end-values such as justice and equality and is open to others' points of view and cultural values (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013). This study benefitted from a transformational framework that arose from commonalities of various leadership concepts such as the importance of relationships and reciprocal interactions through collective, collaborative dialogue (Christensen, 2015; Faircloth, 2017; Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015; Jackson, 2017) that motivates and

builds commitment to a shared vision and mission (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). A framework based upon transformational leadership may assist schools in their endeavor to develop policies, procedures, and leadership capabilities that rapidly increase academic achievement (ESSA, 2015) and reach common goals (Bass, 2008). The elements of a transformational framework are detailed within the literature review.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

The primary leadership practice for this study's literature review was transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is the most widely studied and influential style of leadership theory (Berkovich, 2016; Dinh et al., 2014; Dionne et al., 2014; Guerrero, Fenwick, & Kong, 2017), and encompasses many styles of leadership based on contextual needs. Edwards' (2015) review of anthropological field studies of indigenous communities revealed leadership as being pluralistic with environmentally based interactions within a context. Choosing the appropriate style of leadership for specific situations and individuals is fundamental for success because leaders must know their followers' needs, values, and capacities (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; DeMatthews et al., 2015; Gipp, 2015; Green 2103). Understanding and discernment of leadership approaches are required when navigating change through a variety of situations using the unique capacities of followers, sometimes rapidly, in an authentic and appropriately charismatic manner.

The first section of the literature review relates to the key concepts of this study and addresses the various leadership styles within the context of a transformational framework. Next, I review transformational leadership within the context of American

Indian reservation turnaround schools, including cultural perceptions and implications and professional preparation for transformation leadership practices on American Indian reservations. In the final section of this literature review, I discuss peer-reviewed literature related to the case study methodology of this study.

### **Leadership Styles Within Context and a Transformational Framework**

In a qualitative review of published research of leadership, Dionne et al. (2014) found that an overlap of leadership styles exists due to the complexity of multi-level theories and models. No matter the depth of understanding or the form applied, leaders strive to influence others' thinking, behavior, and performance to guide followers to the desired result of improved achievement. A perceptive leader understands that multiple followers affect organizational behavior and achievement bidirectionally within complex contexts, and each unique circumstance adds to the challenges of leadership (Day et al., 2014; Dinh et al., 2014; O'Connell, 2014).

Green (2013) stated two essential elements involving effective leadership were a concern for people and a concern for task completion. The leader must decide the manner of leadership contingent upon the expertise of the members of the group to make contributions toward completing tasks and finding solutions to a problem and determine whether it concerns the followers or if they are affected by the process or outcome (Bass, 2008; Green, 2013). If the final product of a task is practical, more directive supervision is in order, but if the outcome is theoretical, participation is more useful. Bass (2008) posited, "Unwilling and unable subordinates should be told what to do; willing but unable subordinates should be sold; unwilling but able subordinates should participate; willing

and able subordinates should be delegated assignments” (Bass, 2008, p. 517). Bass further revealed a hierarchy of effectiveness determined through research over time that designated the most effective leadership approach as transformational, which tends to be more democratic, followed by transactional leadership skills that lend itself to an authoritarian exchange relationship, and finally, laissez-faire leadership behaviors that are least effective and least structured.

To the most significant extent possible, leaders and followers must strive to understand leadership styles to use facets of numerous techniques to work toward mutual goals (Day et al., 2014; Dinh et al., 2014; O’Connell, 2014). Leadership structure may fluctuate and take a variety of configurations with multiple approaches, and styles of leadership that may coalesce within a transformational framework (Bass, 2008; Green, 2013). Transformational leadership is holistic, so it is visionary, reflective, inspirational, respectful, values- and change-oriented, collaborative, optimistic in nature, and points to mutual interests to energize and engage followers without using power (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013; Mette & Schribner, 2014). However, Berkovich (2016) found shortcomings of the transformational paradigm and suggested improvement through forming precise definitions of the theory's dimensions. Transformational leadership theory builds upon transactional leadership theory with components of other management styles such as authentic, charismatic, distributive, situational, social justice, and transformative practices that may be interwoven as necessary.

**Transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership closely resembles the traditional definition of management due to its exchange relationship between leader and

followers (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013; Mette & Schribner, 2014). The aim of this leadership skill seeks to satisfy self-interest contingents using rewards and manages followers by exception and compliance to perform tasks and fulfill responsibilities. Bass (2008) stated transformational and transactional are not opposite behaviors, but rather that transactional strategies are multidimensional techniques that may be best used in times of crises or when rapid turnaround, short-term leadership could be most useful.

**Situational leadership.** Situational leadership refers to a flexible style of leadership dependent on the developmental level of employees (Thompson & Glasø, 2015; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Situational leadership requires that leaders know their followers' capacities to relate to them. Four fundamental leadership behaviors may match to specific situations when using situational leadership behaviors: (a) directing (high directive and low supportive), (b) coaching (high directive and high supportive), (c) supporting (low directive and high supportive), and (d) delegating (low directive and low supportive; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017).

The situational leadership paradigm stems from the concept that leadership will be successful if the approach a leader implements in certain situations can change in others. Followers' capacities develop at different rates and to different levels requiring leaders to adapt and work within unique contexts. Thompson and Glasø's (2015) quantitative study examined the variables of leader directiveness, support, job level, and employee readiness/developmental levels of 80 supervisors and 357 followers. The findings indicated leaders and followers ought to share a common understanding of competence and commitment for the leader to provide the necessary support. Zigarmi and

Roberts (2017) upheld similar findings in a quantitative study of leadership style “fit” from the perspective of employees and leaders across various industries. Findings suggested the fit between followers’ needs and received leadership style was essential for successful performance. Vandayani, Kartini, Hilmiana, and Asis (2015) conducted a theoretical review of a previous study and determined national culture influences the effectiveness of situational leadership. The review confirmed that leaders must know their followers and be flexible in accordant leadership approaches because one style is not suitable for every situation or context.

**Authentic leadership.** Authentic leaders tend to be self-aware and reflective as they consider multiple perspectives on an issue in a balanced manner. Professional experience and life events over a career develop leaders’ skills into one of the highest levels of leadership. Alexander and Lopez (2018, p. 38) used thematic analysis in their qualitative study to analyze in-depth, semistructured interviews of 17 experienced nurse executives to investigate four aspects of authentic leaders essential for success: self-awareness (private and professional), balanced processing (open-hearted), transparency, and moral leadership. Followers are influenced through positive modeling, as the authentic leader transparently communicates and acts on their values and internalized moral perspectives to engender well-being (Day et al., 2014; Dionne et al., 2014; O’Connell, 2014; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Levy-Gazenfrantz, 2015). Shapira-Lishchinsky and Levy-Gazenfrantz (2015) used semistructured interviews in a qualitative study of 60 teacher mentees and found influential mentors were perceived to be authentic leaders. Through a series of qualitative interviews of American Indian business leaders, Stewart et



al. (2017) concluded that authentic leadership could not be separate from the embedded collective, cultural, and organizational contexts. Authentic leadership may blend with all leadership styles because it reflects a leader's sense of self, stable management, openness in relationships, and ethical perspectives.

**Charismatic leadership.** Charismatic leadership originated from the works of Max Weber who explored the power of personality (Owen, 2014). Charismatic leaders are self-confident and emotionally expressive to generate respect, loyalty, and remarkable performance in followers (Bass, 2008; Dionne et al., 2014). In a review of the literature regarding charismatic leadership, Grabo, Spisak, and Vugt (2017) found psychological prompts signal context-dependent personal leadership qualities. Grabo et al. (2017) further stated the goal for a charismatic leader is to persuade supporters to cooperate with the leader to meet a challenge or solve a problem. An essential aspect of charismatic leadership is a behavior called frame alignment that requires the leader to build trust and appeal to others' sense of identity to transform or win followers over to support the leader's ideas and goals (Owen, 2014). Charismatic leadership and inspirational leadership are significant components of transformational leadership, yet a leader may be transformational and not possess both elements (Bass, 2008). Parco-Tropicales and de Guzman (2014) conducted a quantitative study of 320 secondary school principals that investigated types of school leadership found charismatic leadership enhanced influence, increased the ability to lead, and improved capacity for wise leadership.

**Distributive leadership.** Distributive leadership includes collaborative sharing of tasks and responsibilities that inspire participants to meet the needs of the organization

(Green, 2013) through sharing their skills and talents. Distributed leadership is an interactive influence process among individuals where there is an aggregation of leadership throughout levels of an organization using planful alignment that considers which functions are best carried out by which sources for higher achievement (Devos et al., 2014; Hutton, 2016). Devos et al.'s (2014) quantitative study of 46 secondary schools examined leadership function, cooperation, and participative decision making of teachers, in addition to organizational commitment and found that academic capacity is directly affected, and student achievement indirectly affected by distributed leadership approaches. Liu, Bellibas, and Printy (2018) examined factors related to the extent of distributive utilization and found lower levels of principal authority predict more involvement by stakeholders in decision-making.

**Social justice leadership.** Social justice leadership is dependent upon unique, social, political, organizational, and individual variables. It is mainly about identifying, understanding, and then acting to address inequities that persist in schools (DeMatthews, 2015; Kemp-Graham, 2015). Three facets of justice focus on the distributive, cultural, and associational aspects of a school. Leaders examine the policies and procedures that shape schools and perpetuate social inequalities due to race, class, gender, and marginalizing factors complicated by cultural, societal, organizational, and personal dimensions of society, community, school, and leader (DeMatthews et al., 2015). The qualitative case study conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2015) investigated a principal using social justice leadership practices in a high-poverty school and found that even though a more inclusive school was realized, a social justice orientation, alone, was not

sufficient to sustain long-term change. Kemp-Graham's (2015) non-experimental quantitative survey of 106 recent graduates of a principal preparation program revealed that there is not a clear understanding of the diversity and oppression of marginalized groups to address social inequities in schools. Results from Santamaria's (2014) qualitative analysis of culturally responsive practices recommended that leaders use alternative models of leadership in a culturally diverse setting and use a critical race theory to practice leadership to provide social justice and equity in schools.

**Transformative leadership.** Transformative leadership focuses on the exercise of power and authority as it relates to issues of justice, democracy, and tension between individual accountability and social responsibility (Weiner, 2014). One of the first and foremost responsibilities of a transformative leader's authority and power in a school is to democratize power by creating varied forms of participation. Transformative leadership attempts to close the gap between the leaders and those being led in that the leaders learn from those they lead, and in a similar manner, those who are led may teach others and be leaders (Freire, 2016). A transformative leadership style supports building personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacity and aligns with educational issues concerning equity in a culturally responsive and inclusive manner (Ylimaki et al., 2014).

Xu, Caldwell, Glasper, and Guevara's (2015) quantitative study based on surveys from 399 university faculty, students, and staff members suggested that there are significant links between conceptions of transformative leadership and functions of management. Leaders must honor their responsibilities to employees while striving for excellence, create personal connections, act as principle-centered servant leaders, perform

as responsible role models for teachers, and support human potential. These transformative leadership behaviors influence the roles of leadership that must correlate with the perspectives of those members they seek to lead. Leadership skills require leaders to model transformative principles that inspire a shared vision, challenge processes, enable others to act, and encourage others to be their best to stimulate higher performance.

**Turnaround leadership.** Turnaround leadership originated from the business world where strategies were used to turn a declining, imperiled business into a profitable one (Reyes-Guerra, Pisapia, & Mick, 2016). In the realm of education, turnaround schools are the lowest academic-performing campuses that function at the bottom 5% of schools, which have not met average yearly progress in student achievement scores and needed improvement (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2016). Policies and procedures are implemented to develop leadership capabilities to increase academic achievement (ESSA, 2015). Stabilization of the declining school must occur through building professional capacity and establishing an environment of productivity. Turnaround leaders may initially need to use a directive style of leadership because unpopular decisions must be made in crisis situations to prevent an organization from collapsing (Bass, 2008; Ylimaki et al., 2014), or for rapid turn around of an organization that has already failed.

Leaders who have adequate knowledge of the demands of their subordinates' tasks may vary the amount, type, and timing of structure because some tasks require more structure in certain stages such as the goal-setting stage, whereas other situations need

more clarification and feedback on performance (Bass, 2008). Hitt and Meyers (2018) stated there are limited data and little is known about effective transformational leadership strategies that provide evidence of the ability to turn around and sustain improvement in failing schools. To help fill a gap in this area of study, Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) carried out an in-depth single-case qualitative study that explored the characteristics of a successful turnaround school leader. The researchers found successful strategies to turn around a failing school were to (a) use personal connections to focus on a joint mission; (b) set high expectations with reciprocal, high levels of trust and respect; (c) exhibit a robust principal presence as well as appropriate staff presence; and (d) use skills and abilities to disrupt complacency without harming continuity. Hitt and Meyers's (2018) synthesis of literature regarding leadership in turnaround schools found that collaboration, motivation, commitment to a shared mission, and vision are essential elements of transformation that parallel turnaround practices and reflect research in business and other organizational practices. These strategies also exemplify various aspects inherent in transformational leadership.

### **Transformational Leadership Within the Context of American Indian Reservation Turnaround Schools**

Although leadership changes with time in history and from one culture to another, there are commonalities based on function and context within three broad categories of leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Bass, 2008). Provided in this section are explanations of leadership essential to understand the perceptions of effective administrative leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. To

operationalize the fundamental constructs of leadership, I presented indigenous leadership and American Indian leadership practices and included cultural perceptions of these leadership skills.

**Indigenous leadership.** Indigenous leadership places emphasis on the importance of relationships among people, ancestors, future generations, nature, and land (Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015). Reciprocal interactions through collaborative dialogical practices engage a community for collective empowerment (Jackson, 2017). Constituents select a leader and are concerned with the measure of character in that leader, who is expected to set an example for others to follow. Indigenous leadership may be collective or distributed because situations change over time and contextual demands may vary (Edwards, 2015). Edwards (2015) found through a critique of contemporary leadership theory that indigenous leadership was pluralistic because the sense of self is nested in the community. Indigenous leadership tends toward collective decisions, extended kinship structures, a recognized authority in elders, flexible ideas of time, and informality in daily affairs (Barnhardt, 2015).

**American Indian leadership.** American Indian leadership is holistic in nature and has its base in indigenous leadership beliefs with tribes sharing similarities, yet also experiencing differences in practice. American Indian leadership assumes the native values of respect, reciprocity, relationship, and responsibility (Christensen, 2015; Faircloth, 2017; Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015). Western styles of leadership tend to position leaders as more influential than those they lead, and feature specialization, standardization, and compartmentalization based on goals of efficiency and effectiveness

rather than native models of leadership grounded in generosity, respect, and wisdom (Crazy Bull, 2015).

**Cultural perceptions.** Leadership is a social construct regulated by social forces with the success of a leadership style primarily viewed through the followers' perceptions (Bass, 2008). Cultural perceptions include the way culture shapes and influences how one views and functions in the world. Leadership must be considered and understood within a cultural context and be responsive to influences on cultural perceptions (Edwards, 2015). Cultural sensitivities of power and authority, as well as the traditional settings that influence cultural responsiveness, are important to consider within the context of American Indian reservation turnaround schools. Each of these cultural perceptions is discussed in the following section.

**Power and authority.** Authority and power are components of leading that demand careful consideration. Throughout history, authority was typically one-sided power bestowed through tradition, religious sanction, or rights of succession, not by permission of the people (Burns, 1978). Burns described leadership as the act of leaders convincing followers to behave in ways that embody the values, aspirations, wants, needs, and expectations of both parties to meet specific goals. In any society, a leader leans upon a group of followers for authority, and when the leader is absent its cohesion tends to disintegrate, and the group becomes a collection of smaller groups.

Power is relational and involves the intention of a holder and a recipient, so it is collective, not merely one individual's behavior (Burns, 1978). Brayboy (2006) shared an emerging tribal critical race theory partly based on the premise that among indigenous

people, power cannot be given or accepted because it is not a property or a trait, although there is a connection between experiential knowledge and power. Power may stem from an expert, referent, reward, coercive, or legitimate base and link as mutual support for a common purpose (Bass, 2008). In Euro-centric models of leadership, leaders use their position to work closely with their followers to raise them to an equivalent standard of moral maturity. Burns (1978) and Day et al. (2014) stated that power coerces, but leadership mobilizes and operates through dynamic, cooperative interactions between people and environments that persist over time and emerge through social systems. Traditional American Indian leadership is collaborative and distributive without power enacted upon others. Leadership is dependent upon the community's support and accessible for anyone who has the experience and ability to persuade (Jackson, 2017).

Modern American Indian leaders in positions of authority must be cautious with the use or abuse of power (Horse, 2015). The U.S. National Institute of Justice (n.d.) reported that there have not been specific representative studies carried out on reservations, but statistics cited from surveys outside Indian Country (considered reservations, tribal communities, and trust land) suggest criminal offense rates much higher than those of the general population. Hurtado (2015) communicated that power and greed had become a trap for some indigenous tribal leaders as the oppressed have become the oppressors with nepotistic leaders helping their friends and relatives, not all their people. Hurtado (2015) also shared that indigenous leaders in possession of power should not use this authority to exploit resources. Instead, power should be considered an opportunity to be helpful to others.



Indigenous and traditional American Indian social systems traditionally had no concept of authority, yet there was no lack of leadership (Marshall, 2012). Leadership style depended on the local context, the action considered, and the specific individual concerned with meeting the needs of the situation (Tippeconnic, 2015). Rather than using power and authority, indigenous leaders were situationally chosen from among the people to lead using skills that they excelled in, which required them to model behavior by example and assist others (Tippeconnic Fox et al., 2015). Such practices are akin to planful alignment in distributed leadership (Devos et al., 2014; Edwards, 2015) also incorporated into transformational practices. In modern organizations such as turnaround schools on American Indian reservations, this cultural and historical outlook has implications for perceptions of transformational leadership.

In a seminal review of postmodern perspectives of power Sackney, Walker, and Mitchell (1999) concluded that the postmodern world consists of dynamic, interactive relationships and connections that cannot be contained or limited and recommended a transformative form of educational leadership that supports a collective learning community. Mifsud (2015) examined the hierarchal power structure of a modern school system and found power struggles; mid-level leaders had ample opportunity to share thoughts with their leader yet little occasion to negotiate. Mifsud (2015) advocated leaders reconsider power relations within schools for productive leadership practices. Higham and Booth (2018) explored values-led school improvement and recommended a shift to shared leadership as a collective process preferred to the directive, authoritarian leadership considered as top-down authority.

Until 2015, the federal government primarily regulated decision-making power in American Indian turnaround schools. In an analysis of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), Mackey (2017) deliberated the effects of the federal government shifting authority to the states in a return of power to ensure educational equity for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. The results of the analysis revealed ESSA encouraged tribal members to take greater control of their schools and collaborate with state leaders to improve their community's educational system. Higham and Booth (2018) found that leaders realized school improvement, which conformed to government requirements, occurred when leaders and their staff were granted authority to state a school's shared, inclusive values. Lumby and Foskett (2011) warned that a dominant culture's power may be a barrier to learning. Leaders, who traditionally hold a place of authority, must reflect on their practices and beliefs and consider how culture may influence achievement (Lumby & Foskett, 2011).

*Cultural responsiveness.* Culture has a significant influence on leadership, so it is essential to study the culture and setting of a location to learn reasons and methods of leaders' practices (Christensen, 2015; Edwards, 2015; Gipp, 2015; Vandayani et al., 2015). Tippeconnic Fox et al. (2015) conducted a two-part qualitative investigation into the effects of ethnicity and culture in leadership. The results of the study confirmed the findings from other similar studies (Henderson, Carjuzza, & Ruff, 2015; Santamaria, 2014; Stewart et al., 2017) that found ethnicity and culture directly influence leadership behaviors.

Freire (2016) emphasized the importance of culturally responsive actions and asserted that leaders must come to know their people through dialogue to understand their perceptions of themselves. Freire further stated that consistency between words and actions, boldness to confront risk, radicalization to act, the courage to love, and faith in people are essential elements of an authentic, transforming leader. Christensen (2015) maintained the importance that modern leaders learn from past indigenous leaders and listen for patterns to find underlying problems that must be addressed to build critical trust and connections. Through a critique of anthropological accounts, Edwards (2015) evidenced the need to view leadership in context based on time, place, and space because of its pluralistic and complex nature.

Followers' perceptions are vital to the success of a leader (Burns, 1978; Green, 2013). Burns (1978) asserted that socioeconomic status influences perceptions; persons of lower status were politicized less frequently than upper-economic status. Miller and Martin's (2015) data from a qualitative multi-case study indicated that social class influences perceptions of opportunities viewed as realistic, and people from a lower socioeconomic level were more deferential toward leaders in that they were less likely to dialogue or question and more likely to accept their leader as trustworthy. However, lack of dialogue conflicts with indigenous notions of leadership. Culturally responsive behaviors where leaders thoughtfully listened to concerns raised by their followers and used sustained two-way dialogue that resulted in the form of advice, not a directive or an order as an integral part of understanding are practices best used in American Indian cultures (Brayboy, 2006; Freire, 2016; Marshall, 2012). People in indigenous cultures

prefer an integrated perspective of the past and present using their cultural heritage, experience, and accumulated knowledge from family to make decisions. Culturally responsive systems use reciprocal dialogue and participatory engagement to reach conclusions and set goals using relationships and interpersonal skills to benefit the community and its connectedness (Gay, 2010).

Gipp (2015), Freire (2016), and Weiner (2014) communicated that in the beliefs of indigenous and transformative leadership those who teach learn in the act of teaching and those who learn teach in the act of learning. Leading and teaching is a reciprocal process; not a process imposed on one individual by another. Leaders, teachers, and learners are jointly responsible for growing. Burns (1978) affirmed that authentic leaders are those who teach and are taught by their followers and gain skills in everyday experiences dealing with other leaders and followers. Leaders become responsive as they learn from their environment and comprehend the needs of followers. Leaders who identify with followers' points of view are transforming and far more effective than manipulators. With this logic, followers do not need to attain the leader's level of moral development; it is cultural invasion for a leader from one cultural context to impose thinking on followers of another, no matter the intentions, because it insinuates inferiority (Freire, 2016).

Culture is at the heart of everything educators do in schooling and has a profound effect on what is considered the normal and right way to do things because it refers to cognitive codes, worldviews, and values (Gay, 2010). Culture affects the perception of leadership and how it is enacted in organizations because leadership is understood

through a cultural filter (Santamaria, 2014; Truong & Hallinger, 2017). Santamaria's (2014) study examined leaders' use of their own cultural identities to respond to issues of social justice and equitable education. Overlap was found between transformative leadership, critical multiculturalism, and critical race theory, to suggest the concepts complement and work to form a framework from which to take culturally responsive leadership actions.

Education is not a neutral process (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Freire, 2016). Truong and Hallinger (2017) led a qualitative multi-site case study from three state-run high schools in Vietnam and found that successful school leadership responded to cultural context and confirmed transformational leadership functioned well in both hierarchical (higher power distance) and collective cultures. Leadership theories and processes that work in one culture may not work in another, yet as Bass (2008) pointed out, transformational leadership behaviors are considered cross-culturally effective. Guerrero et al.'s (2017) quantitative study using multi-level data from 427 employees in 112 health service programs, revealed transformational leadership useful to build relationships and influence others in a cascading manner to ensure a climate aligned with an organization's ability to implement culturally competent services for racial and ethnic minority clients.

Leadership must understand, respect, and appropriately work within cultural contexts to be successful. Reciprocal, informal interactions through collaborative practices that honor elders' authority and build relationships are elements of indigenous leadership (Barnhardt, 2015; Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015; Jackson, 2017). American Indian leadership share characteristics and build upon indigenous leadership

with holistic approaches that assume values of respect, reciprocity, relationship, and responsibility grounded in generosity and wisdom in a responsible manner (Christensen, 2015; Faircloth, 2017; Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015). These leadership styles may contrast with Western styles of leadership, which consider leaders more influential than followers and are based on specialized, standardized goals of efficiency and effectiveness (Crazy Bull, 2015). The cultural contrasts lead to differences in perceptions of the use of power and authority. Leaders must understand their followers' culture because ethnicity and culture have substantial influence on perceptions of effective leadership; followers' perceptions are imperative to a leaders' success (Burns, 1978; Christensen, 2015; Edwards, 2015; Gipp, 2015; Green, 2013; Henderson, Carjuzza, & Ruff, 2015; Santamaria, 2014; Stewart et al., 2017; Tippeconnic Fox et al., 2015; Vandayani et al., 2015).

## **Transformational Leadership Implications for American Indian Reservation**

### **Turnaround Schools**

Leaders require skills in cultural literacy to develop a broad representation of overall characteristics, categories, and groups of people with which they work (Lumby & Foskett, 2011). Ylimaki et al. (2014) found relationships with culturally diverse community members essential for leaders in turnaround schools. The following investigation of demographics was meant to assist leaders in appreciating the situation of American Indian students in an endeavor to improve instruction and academic achievement. In this section, I presented demographic statistics, staff turnover data, transformational practices, and professional preparation endorsements for leaders in American Indian reservation turnaround schools.

**Demographics.** Poverty, violence, historical trauma, and high staff turnover pose challenges to reservation schools and their leadership who endeavor to know their followers and constituents and lead a transformative turnaround school. Suitts (2016) stated that low-income students are the majority enrollment in 21 states, and in 19 other states between 40% and 49% of the public-school enrollment are children from low-income families. More than 51% of public-school students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, indicating that most students in the United States live in poverty (Budge & Parrett, 2018). Among the 1.7% of the U.S. population who identify as AI/AN, 33% live on reservations or tribal lands (Krogstads, 2014). In some AI/AN reservation schools, 100% of the students come from low-income families, with unemployment rates of as high as 70%, and poverty rates of 42% (Dorgan et al., 2014).

Exposure to violence affects nearly two in three children nationwide and American Indian children are 2.5 times more likely to experience trauma compared to non-Native children (Dorgan et al., 2014). AI/AN juveniles suffer posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at a rate of 22%, triple that of the general population and the same rate as veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan (Dorgan et al., 2014). The effects of government policies and practices such as the removal of tribes to reservations from their ancestral lands, the forced boarding school experiences and the accompanying effects of forced assimilation, relocation to major cities, and the diminishment of criminal jurisdiction remain deep-seated (Dorgan et al., 2014). Dorgan et al. (2014) further stated that AI/AN children suffer exposure to violence and historical trauma that must be understood for treatment of AI/AN populations. Trauma is a deleterious effect on learning but provided with the proper environmental conditions and interventions success in school may be achieved (Salvatore & de Galarce, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016; Zacarian, Alvarez-Ortiz, & Haynes, 2017).

It is imperative for transformational leaders to understand the demographics that establish the habits, customs, and lifestyles of the community they serve. Guerrero et al. (2017) reported that transformational leaders promote a shared vision and influence expectations of cultural competence and responsiveness evidenced through knowledge, services, and personnel practices. Newman and Butler's (2014) findings stated that it was vital to recognize within-country cultural differences to use transformational leadership skills effectively. Stewart's et al. (2017) findings from a qualitative multiple-case study indicated that leaders gain and assimilate knowledge from external sources and must be



adaptable and flexible with the application of acquired knowledge in their leadership. Phaneuf et al. (2016) and Esmi et al. (2017) concluded that for success in transforming organizations, relationship-oriented leaders that provide intimate, supportive interactions are desirable because such behaviors yield healthy, successful organizational behaviors with high productivity. Knowledge of a community's demographics and unique needs may lead to more culturally responsive, leadership that renders holistic services sensitive to the individual and, ultimately, beneficial to the greater community.

**Staff turnover.** High turnover is a problem in struggling turnaround schools that may take years to improve. Persons trained in alternative preparation programs frequently have a high record of turnover that negatively affects school climate and academic achievement (DeMatthews, 2015). School districts must be cautious when recruiting, selecting, and training teachers and principals. Stronge and Xu (2017) reported that the teacher turnover in high-poverty schools is approximately 20%, which is 50% higher than the turnover rate at affluent schools. Indian country suffers an exceptionally high turnover of school staff that reflects the needs and disparities of isolated rural communities on or near reservations (Goldhaber et al., 2015; Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015). Devos' et al. (2014) quantitative study stated that organizational commitment is predicated on leadership. Commitment to a school relates closely to effectiveness. However, half of the new principals leave their school by the third year, and more than 70% of principals possess fewer than 5 years of experience at their present school (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Doyle & Locke, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2017c).

Miller (2013) reviewed 12 years of data and Boyce, and Bowers (2016) conducted a literature review to examine the relationship between principal turnover and student achievement and found a decline in student performance after a principal leaves persisting for 2 years. Rangel (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 empirical studies that revealed principal turnover associates with higher teacher turnover and lower student achievement, which affects school improvement efforts that may take 5-7 years to realize. The studies examined did not take into account the type of turnovers but suggested placing effective principals in the lowest-performing schools for a positive effect on student academic achievement. Individual principals affect student mathematics and reading achievement and can boost performance by 0.289 to 0.408 standard deviations (Dhuey & Smith, 2014). An average student may increase academic achievement 2 to 7 months in one school year through the efforts of an effective principal, or lower academic achievement by a similar magnitude through an ineffective principal (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Additionally, there is a financial cost to replace principals conservatively estimated at \$75,000 (Boyce & Bowers, 2016).

The United States ranked 36th in the provision of equal access to qualified mathematics teachers for students from high- and low-socioeconomic levels that equaled an opportunity gap of 14.4% (Stronge & Xu, 2017). There is a teacher quality gap with inequitable distribution of teachers to schools, with disadvantaged students disposed to be instructed by inexperienced educators (Engel & Cannata, 2015; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Rangel, 2018; Sun & Ni, 2016). Through a review of literature, Fuller et al. (2017) discovered inequitable distribution of principals and teachers with higher concentrations

of non-white students who live in poverty dealing with less qualified and experienced teachers and leaders. Staff turnover is exacerbated on American Indian reservations. Preliminary results from a three-phase BIE report of American Indian schools revealed the Bureau of Indian Education's mid-high poverty level schools have 37.2% inexperienced teachers with less than 3 years teaching and 7.07% unqualified teachers in low-mid level poverty schools (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2016).

**Transformational practices.** Transformational efforts in American Indian reservation turnaround schools involve two main components: technical and cultural; however, even with significant amounts of grant monies directed to the schools most initiatives fail (Kemp-Graham, 2015; Mette & Schribner, 2014; Reitzug & Hewitt, 2017).

**Technical.** The managerial style of the rapid turnaround movement places pressure on schools to comply in a transactional manner that focuses on controlling students, teachers, and their environment. The style of management is technical in that strict adherence to policies is many times associated with special Federal funding. Mette (2013) and Reyes-Guerra et al. (2016) shared results of their studies that reinforce the concept that turnaround tactics foster sanctions and rewards that assume efforts and test scores be treated as a commodity by monitoring for weakness and rewarding for compliance. Fuller and Hollingworth (2014) examined 10 different strategies for the evaluation of principals using student test scores and concluded that these statistical estimates are not the best strategy for leadership evaluation. Although there is considerable reliance on using standardized test scores to substantiate statistically increased achievement, top assessment researchers' findings articulated grave concerns

about the appropriateness to evaluate educators in this manner (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2014).

Mette and Schribner's (2014) case study revealed a form of cultural invasion regarding ethical dilemmas in school reform. The study involved a turnaround consultant who trained staff on instructional issues, assessment of student data, assessment practices, and development of student lessons aligned closely to state objectives and then advised the purchase of predictive evaluations written by the corporation that wrote a large part of the state assessment. The findings from Mette and Schribner (2014) suggested emphasis was placed on technical aspects and transactional methods rather than on cultural elements to improve academic achievement. A transactional approach does not address cultural components of deep-rooted issues of race, SES, and segregation; instead, it creates a culture of subordination. However, Mette and Schribner (2014) stated that transformational leadership drove genuine change and addressed the cultural component of a turnaround movement.

Meyers and Hitt's (2017) review of literature resulted in the realization that successful turnaround principals may differ from other principals in public education. The findings were that turnaround principals may be different than other principals, yet Meyers and Hitt reported that there was no accepted framework for principals to turn to for guidance when attempting to turn a school around. The researchers categorized traits and perspectives into 12 domains in the three categories labeled as (a) utilizing vision and strategic leadership, (b) building capacity with support and accountability, and (c) shaping culture (Meyers & Hitt, 2017, p. 46). These are areas that research suggests all

turnaround principals should excel (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Mette's (2014) re-analysis of a previous study's data set that investigated the function and alteration of turnaround schools revealed that collaborative, highly interpersonal leaders were able to change school culture through identification and knowledge of their staff's strengths to provide professional development and promote shared leadership and accountability. Reitzug and Hewitt's (2017) qualitative case study focused on the successful turnaround leadership of one principal and concluded that the essential practice for success is creating an ongoing dynamic that disrupts complacency yet keeps a balance that increases capacities using competencies to the maximum.

***Cultural.*** A primary challenge for leadership in turnaround schools, where failure on multiple levels is imminent or already a reality in a culturally sensitive setting such as turnaround schools on American Indian reservations, is to implement rapid change without invading or imposing cultural views. The imposition of values and ways of thinking is morally suspect and educationally unsound (Gay, 2010). Leaders who use supportive, personable, and flexible yet rigorous and demanding standards that consider cultural heritages and background experiences for effective teaching and learning with uniqueness respected are best practices of transformational leadership practices (Gay, 2010).

Leaders need to consider the motives, values, expectations, basic needs, and goals of the people they serve when attempting institutional change (Burns, 1978). The ability to be transformational and unite all ethnic cultures of the school to participate in a joint vision and mission is an essential part of successful leadership on American Indian

campuses, as well as all schools. Leaders should observe, listen, and be sensitive to the needs and desires of the cultures they serve (Bordeaux, 2015). Leaders should not ingenuously respond to popular attitudes and beliefs in the change process (Burns, 1978), rather leaders should think and act in accord with their people. Leaders should not be the only thinkers who formulate plans and followers merely the doers who blindly carry out their leaders' wishes in a situation where transformation is required (Freire, 2016). Findings from Ylimaki's et al. (2014) mixed-methods study that included 45 Tier III schools (schools that perform academically in the lowest 5% and require intervention) throughout the state of Arizona recommended that a transformative leadership framework that supports building culturally responsive, collaborative, asset-based respectful learning environments might help all learners succeed.

Tippeconnic (2015) stated in Indian education that the individual, the environment, and the specific action instruct the practice of leadership; understanding local context is crucial. Tribally controlled educational institutions integrate traditional values into their educational systems in teaching, learning, and governance with reliance on tribal identity to inform operations and affect behavior (Huffman, 2016; Tippeconnic & Tippeconnic Fox, 2012). Trust and respect are a result of transformational leadership practices (Dionne et al., 2014) that are cornerstones of indigenous values along with reciprocity, relationship, and responsibility (Christensen, 2015; Faircloth, 2017).

The findings from Henderson, Ruff, and Carjuzza (2015) indicated that principals in-training should understand the American Indian self-determination policy and appreciate the contradictions of American schooling that would remove American Indian

culture and replace it with the dominant society's culture educational environment. Principals need to reconcile school routines, cultural identity, and assimilation pressures and develop outlooks and skills to enhance the identity and achievement of all students. DeMatthews (2015), Liu (2015), and Santamaria (2014) found that transformational leadership might not be adequate because it lacks the required degree of attention to diversity in organizations and leadership sources in a system of discrimination. School leaders and educators who recognize and understand the inequities must assist educational outcomes through actions such as identifying the unique perspectives of individuals, learning how to question deficit perspectives and restructuring school resources (Budge & Parrett, 2018; DeMatthews, 2015).

**Professional preparation.** All students deserve to be educated by committed, talented, well-trained leaders who can handle the stress of school administration to develop and facilitate high-performing schools (DeMatthews, 2015). Approximately 80% of all principals are Caucasian, come from a middle-class setting, although most students in the United States are diverse, impoverished, and 48% minority (Kemp-Graham, 2015). There is a shortage of highly qualified American Indian educators with the number declining since the late 1980s. Less than 1% of public-school teachers were American Indian in 2011-2012 according to the latest available government data (NCES, 2017d).

Strategic thinking skills that demand cognitive complexity in systems thinking, reframing, reflection, and agility are necessary for principals' success in turnaround school situations (Reyes-Guerra et al., 2016). However, schools that prepare future leaders do not sufficiently teach the strategic thinking skills needed that enable leaders to

become cognitively flexible (Reyes-Guerra et al., 2016). Schools with leadership training tend to focus on traditional roles and practices used in traditional settings (Kemp-Graham, 2015). Best practice in a typical public school may not be successful in a low-performing, turnaround school (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Henderson, Ruff, and Carjuzza (2015) supported the idea that turnaround schools, especially those in American Indian communities, demand different practices for success than typical public schools. Reyes-Guerra et al. (2016) found strategic thinking skills that require cognitive complexity in systems thinking, reframing, reflection, and agility are necessary for principals' success in turnaround school situations.

Reyes-Guerra et al. (2016) recommended turnaround principal training programs be developed to address new ways to ask questions and address problems that improve students' academic achievement. Required leadership skills and practices differ with context, such as skills and practices needed to improve a high-performing school, open a new school, or turn around a failing school. Hence, experiences such as internships and apprenticeships that focus on specialized skills for school contexts should be part of preparation programs (Lochmiller & Chestnut, 2016). There are few studies regarding turnaround leadership preparation; however, a qualitative descriptive case study of a principal preparation apprenticeship conducted by Lochmiller and Chestnut (2016) found three design features that support turnaround leadership. The design included establishing the apprenticeship in a turnaround setting, working within the guidelines of the district's current improvement process, and focusing on district structure and procedures. Kemp-Graham's (2015) nonexperimental quantitative study of recent graduates discovered that



traditionally trained principals did not sufficiently comprehend or have an appropriate consideration for diversity and oppression of various excluded populations in the United States. Findings from Santamaria's (2014) qualitative case study further suggested that alternative models of leadership are needed to connect multicultural education and leadership response to diversity in schools. Recommendations presented after analysis of an exploratory qualitative study and subsequent quantitative research by Reichard et al. (2015) suggested a decrease in ethnocentrism and an increase in cultural intelligence after domestic, experiential, and cross-training of employees in a program focused on the development of cultural understanding.

Additionally, Oskineegish's (2015) qualitative study of indigenous students' perceptions of what non-Native teachers should know to enhance their teaching suggested reflection, constructive community interactions, and optimistic, flexible attitude in the effort to become more culturally responsive and improve achievement. Weiner and Burton (2016) conducted a 3-year longitudinal study of a principal preparation program and found that leadership is still considered a male undertaking, yet effective turnaround leadership described in feminine, cooperative behaviors such as supportive, nurturing, and collaborative. Transformational leaders are change-oriented, give individual consideration, and delegate authority as they build a supportive environment. Followers of transformational leaders are generally motivated and feel safe voicing new ideas and opinions as they collaboratively work toward common goals (Wang, Zheng, & Zhu, 2018).

### **Literature Related to Case Study Methodology**

There is little research regarding effective transformational leadership with strategies for turnaround efforts in American Indian reservation schools, and few school leaders have been able to successfully turn around such schools (Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015). However, there is limited literature providing evidence through qualitative methods regarding related topics such as successful school turnaround strategies and approaches in rural areas and transformational leadership in rural and public-school settings.

Weiner (2016) conducted a qualitative exploratory case study of newly recruited school leaders who were trained to cultivate high-performing turnaround leadership teams to improve schools quickly. Throughout a year, four interviews were performed with the trainees. Following each interview, data were analyzed thematically through inductive coding. The case study approach conducted over a 1-year period was appropriate and illustrated how participants changed critical viewpoints from the beginning of training to the end, shifting blame for poor school performance from individual principals and teachers to viewing the issues as more societal and systemic with inequity as an underlying cause.

The leaders in training (Weiner, 2016) agreed that effective leadership in turnaround schools included abilities to set direction, develop people, change school structure to support positive organizational culture, expand professional learning communities, and focus on instructional programs. There was confirmation of the principals' role in school improvement to change from top-down to bottom-up in

distributing leadership, building and sharing capacity, and empowering others for greater instructional effectiveness, higher student performance, and more effective results for improved school culture. Meyers and Hitt's (2017) meta-analysis of 18 empirical studies related to successful turnaround strategies confirmed vision, building capacity, and shaping culture as integral approaches for turnaround. Neither of these studies focused on transformative practices in American Indian turnaround schools on reservations, however, practices aligned with components of transformational leadership were shared: reducing societal inequalities for increased opportunities and success, improving teacher and school climate, incorporating collaborative decision-making processes, and implementing stronger principal supports such as coaching for enhancing professional capacities.

Mette (2013) completed a qualitative case study of a turnaround school reform project that successfully operated in two rural regions in the Midwest. Success was due to public support by the superintendents and school boards, shared leadership and accountability, and open communication and collaboration with stakeholders and teachers to improve instructional practices, create buy-in, and involve communities. Examination of multiple levels of the implementation strategy was through observational data collected over time and from leader-participant information, and analysis of field notes, as well as federal and state documents regarding turnaround policies. Data were analyzed through axial coding using inductive logic to identify and organize themes from multiple perspectives that were undertaken for the study. In Mette's (2014) reanalysis of the 2013 research elements of transformative leadership essential to the successful turnaround in

the rural communities were found to be open communication, community involvement, shared leadership, and accountability in a purpose-driven and collaborative culture.

Henderson, Ruff, and Carjuzaa (2015) ascertained the merit of addressing culture in the handful of American Indian turnaround schools that have experienced success. The importance of understanding cultural differences and social justice issues, the role of leaders, and the power of tacit assumptions were delineated. The descriptive account shared the evolution of a model K-12 school leaders' preparation program, Indian Leadership Education and Development project in the state of Montana.

Qualitative research methodology was useful in the studies detailed in this section because the approach used value-free measures to observe individuals in context and found evidence of effective relationships through an inductive process to understand others' points of view through rich description, observations, and questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth information in real-life contexts where manipulation of behaviors did not occur (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018) and the objective was to generate knowledge of the phenomenon (Yin, 2016) was possible.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Transformational leadership is a respectful, collaborative, and reciprocal process that uses an organization's contextual factors and congruent values (Burns, 1978) to challenge expectations and create shared visions that help achieve common goals (Bass, 2008). Moriano et al. (2014) found transformational leadership supported creativity through the advocacy of risk-taking and innovative behaviors that lead to improved performance. Mette and Schribner (2014) suggested transformational leadership

behaviors for turnaround school initiatives. Little is known about effective leadership for turnaround efforts in American Indian schools (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015; Mette, 2013; Mette & Stanoch, 2016), but success with transformational leadership has been found in both individualist and collective, hierarchical national and organizational cultures (Arnold et al., 2016; Liu, 2015; Phaneuf et al., 2016). Transformational leadership in schools aims to improve classroom learning conditions through goal setting and curriculum planning that builds professional capacities and improves outcomes (Niessen et al., 2017) in part to the upsurge in number of positive interactions amongst leaders, teachers, students, and the community (Woods & Martin, 2016). The intention of this proposed study was to supplement the limited body of existing literature by revealing perceptions of transformational leadership in contexts such as American Indian turnaround schools located on reservations. The results may inform school policymakers and stakeholders in similar settings who are striving to transform their schools for improved student achievement.

This study's research methodology was a qualitative case study that aligns with a transformational framework to support responsive and inclusive inquiry (Ylimaki et al., 2014). Most of the literature reviewed for this study was based on qualitative case study methodology regarding transformational leadership, data linked to turnaround schools' demographics and challenges, cultural implications, and suggested leadership styles that affect change for higher achievement. A benefit of qualitative case study design is a detailed description and observations that yield a deep understanding of the phenomenon

of study. A description of the design and procedures of the study is presented in Chapter

3.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. It is imperative to analyze leaders' practices as major contributing factors to transforming underperforming schools (Brown & Green, 2014). In educational environments where poverty affects most students, leaders must be flexible and creative in their practices and procedures to advocate for all students (Brown & Green, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Stone-Johnson, 2014). Qualitative data collection and analysis may lead to themes regarding perceptions of transformational leadership for American Indian reservation turnaround schools. A qualitative case study design positions the researcher in a natural environment that enables a realistic perspective and comprehensive understanding of a complex phenomenon (Yin, 2016).

In the first section of Chapter 3, I address the qualitative case study design chosen for this study along with a rationale for its use, followed by a discussion of the role of the researcher. Next, there is an explanation of the methodology of the research through examination of participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan. Finally, I provide a rationalization of this study's trustworthiness and ethical methods.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following questions guided this research on the perceptions of teachers and administrators concerning transformational leadership.

RQ 1: What are K-8 administrators' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

RQ 2: What are K-8 teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

The central concept of this study was Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership accepts a range of philosophies of leadership in search of knowledge (Bass, 2008). Transformational leadership uses values to reach common goals (Burns, 1978). The practices of transformational leadership are consequential in restructuring schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Cohen (2009) realized that transformational practices prompted restructuring in areas of organizational climate vital for success. Mette and Scribner (2014) affirmed that leaders need to apply transformational methods in decision-making practices. Transformational leadership builds capacities that correspond positively to school outcomes (Niessen et al., 2017). Transformational leadership may be the most appropriate conceptual framework for this study because it is supportive of cultural values including those of K-8 turnaround schools on American Indian reservations.

Research may involve qualitative or quantitative methods to investigate a phenomenon depending on the purpose and goals of the study (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research methodology uses value-free measures to observe individuals in context to find relationships through an inductive process to understand others' points of view through



rich description, observations and questioning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers tend to explore with a relativist, naturalistic perspective that accepts multiple realities (Yin, 2016) and to report study results in a narrative format.

Quantitative research is used to investigate a context-specific topic. A quantitative approach is advantageous for quantification or counting something using precise, standardized techniques for measuring and then statistically analyzing the results usually reported in numerical form (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative research may use a positivist or realist view that reflects a search for objective, universal truth, rule, or explanation (Yin, 2016). It may be assumed that the critical problem and answer categories of a quantitative study are known before research commences, so it may not be as useful of a method to explore a new phenomenon or create a new theory (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2016).

A qualitative single-case study approach was used for this study of perceptions of effective administrative leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. The objective of a qualitative case study is to generate knowledge of a phenomenon (Yin, 2016). An empirical inquiry in a real-life context, where the border between context and phenomenon is unclear or inseparable demands a case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2018) stated that a qualitative case study puts the researcher in a natural environment to study one case in-depth to gain a real-world perspective and then explain links and describe the context in complex interventions, illustrate topics, or enlighten situations with no clear outcome. A case study approach allows for a holistic view of studying organizational and managerial processes (Yin, 2018). An exploratory qualitative

case study was chosen to construct an in-depth description within a real-life context where manipulation of behaviors does not occur (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Some “what” questions are exploratory and, therefore, useful for developing hypotheses and proposals for additional inquiry (Yin, 2018). A qualitative exploratory case study may facilitate the identification of perceptions that lead to a greater understanding and implementation of transformational leadership approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools.

Case study interviews are primary sources of evidence that help fill a gap for understanding complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018). What is known and what is not known about the perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches to effective leadership was scrutinized by suggestions, explanations, and insights reflected in participants’ feedback. A responsive interview format was used with a small, purposeful sample in a natural environment for this study. The structure was decided to elicit a natural flow of communication in a comfortable environment. A responsive interview design allowed time for reflection to yield a deeper understanding of perceptions. An intense effort to listen and understand what the participants were sharing was necessary for comprehension (see Yin, 2016).

Qualitative research methods share elements such as using an inductive strategy in the search for meaning, using the researcher for data collection and analysis, and the aim for a product comprised of rich description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A range of qualitative designs was considered to explore perceptions of leadership for this study. The other techniques included action research, critical theory, ethnography,

ethnomethodology, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Yin, 2016). Although these designs are standard, they did not provide the parameters I needed to fit the timeline for this study or produce the type of data required to answer the research questions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Through qualitative methodology, a researcher elicits and analyzes themes, images, and words rather than statistical data. Yin (2016) stated that real-world phenomena must be revealed by talking with people and observed, not measured by external instruments. In this study, my role as an observer was to gather information and through close interaction with participants document aspects of communication beyond spoken words such as tone, inflection, pauses, and mannerisms. My role as the researcher in conducting responsive interviews in a qualitative exploratory case study was as an observer to collect data in a systematic manner that described and re-created processes or events that are recognizable by participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). There were at least five practices of data collection at which I had to be adept: (a) listening actively, (b) asking questions, (c) monitoring time, (d) distinguishing evidence, and (e) triangulating evidence (see Yin, 2016). In case information was given by an interviewee that stimulated additional data, the formation of non-leading questions was necessary to gain greater understanding based on the perspectives and experiences of the interviewee. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and assessment of bias (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Possible weaknesses of using a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative methodology for studies included investigator bias. Complex human behavior mixed with

preconceived ideas could yield research findings considered untrustworthy (Yin, 2016). I was a principal for 4 years in a turnaround school on an American Indian reservation with similar demographics to the school community in this study. In this study, I collected data from a representative group of seven to 10 K-8 administrators and teachers that I have no previous professional or personal association. My former administrative experience did not interfere with the integrity or trustworthiness of the investigation because I strove to develop a professional relationship with each participant to mitigate potential bias. A relationship commenced through the initial electronic informational letter sent to staff. Following preliminary contact, I sought to present this study in a faculty meeting with potential participants to share information about the proposed research, address specific concerns, and secure participants' written consent.

In my role as the researcher, I used bracketing before, during, and after-action (see Wall, et al., 2004) to assist in setting aside suppositions and partialities (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bracketing facilitated self-examination and reflection of pre-conceived attitudes through all phases of the qualitative research process. Additionally, I used reflective journaling to record my thoughts in a memo format to assist me in the contemplative process. My journaling began before the interviews took place. In the journal, I bracketed my prior experiences related to administrating a school with similar demographics. If an unexpected or new issue arose during the interviews, I used the 'in'-action bracketing approach. After the interviews, I read the transcripts and appraised my mindset towards the process and recollected the progression of each interview. Finally, I asked each of the participants to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts and

provided input on the summary of the findings for the study to diminish any further bias I may have exhibited in the research process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. An exploratory case study approach was conducted to find K-8 administrators' and teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and practices considered effective leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. I analyzed replies from responsive interviews to find shared perceptions and draw inferences for purposes of implementation in leadership and future study.

### **Participant Selection**

I selected participants by means of a purposeful sampling method. I chose participants who helped me obtain information-rich data to collect relevant and plentiful data to maximize the information range and perspective of this study (see Yin, 2016). The size of a purposeful sample should be determined flexibly by the appropriateness or relevance of the sample and informational needs of the study to provide meaning, rather than simply documenting real-life occurrences (Guetterman, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). Consideration of the how and why of the study was imperative when selecting participants (see Guetterman, 2015). Instead of subscribing to a formula for finding a precise number of participants, I focused on the complexity of the study and data collection with the purpose of a depth of understanding for this study (see Yin, 2016). It was not possible to determine a sample size that saturated the concept because the correct number of participants depends on the analytic objective and data source (see

Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Data obtained from few participants was sufficient to uncover the phenomenon's essence.

Through purposeful sampling, I invited one to two certified K-8 administrators and six to eight certified K-8 teacher participants from two American Indian reservation turnaround schools. The schools are among the lowest 5% academic-performing level in the nation and have not consistently met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Because of the high rate of teacher and administrator turnover and difficulty hiring educators for American Indian turnaround schools, many of the staff do not have multiple years of experience or numerous years of experience at one reservation school. For this study, it was acceptable for each certified participant's professional experience at the research school site to equal at least 1 school year.

To gain access to the participants for this study, I obtained permission from two local school districts. The superintendent of each school district signed a letter of cooperation. Additionally, I received approval to conduct this study from the tribal college Institutional Review Board (IRB) After I received approval for this study from Walden University's IRB (01-11-19-455527), I invited participants to be part of this study. No data collection began prior to the final approval from the university.

I sent all prospective participants an email invitation to participate to garner interest for participation in the study. I gave each participant 7 days to respond via reply email to the invitation. I then established a mutual interview date and time with potential participants via email. After an interview date and time had been agreed upon, I sent an email 5 days prior to the established time for the interview to confirm arrangements. The

described process followed a qualitative approach that implemented an exploratory, case study design to obtain data via responsive interviews and gather information on perceptions of effective transformational leadership.

### **Instrumentation**

Research was conducted to fulfill the purpose of the study to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Data collection was vital to the investigation and strategic management of a responsive, semistructured qualitative interview guided by an interview protocol. The interview questions (see Appendices A and B) focused on perceptions of effective administrative leadership and transformational leadership concepts from the conceptual framework of Burns (1978) and Bass (2008). I developed the interview protocol with the intention that the interview questions would lead to answers to the research questions. Literature from Burns (1978) and Bass (2008) as well as other current articles on transformational practices (see Kouzes & Posner, 2013) guided the development of questions. I obtained the agreement of three degreed educators to review the interview protocol before use. The educators have experience in American Indian reservation turnaround schools of comparable demographics to the site of this study. The protocol was examined to ensure clarity and content validity of the instrument's fundamental questions.

The interview process included an open-ended response structure to connect pertinent issues with responses that functioned as evidence provided by the participants in this case study (see Yin, 2016). For rich dialogue that yielded sufficient evidence, I asked

clarifying, probing questions during data collection for further substantiation (see Yin, 2018). The structure for interview responses in the protocol contained prompts that acted as a set of reminders to guide conversation (see Yin, 2016). Simultaneous, ongoing data collection and analysis was needed throughout the interviews that helped answer the research questions of this study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). Part of this process included taking field notes to document contextual information as I used the prompts to elicit further responses to questions.

As the interviewer, researcher, and creator of the document, I rephrased and asked probing questions from the protocol during the interview based on the responses to the questions during the conversation (see Klenke, Martin, & Wallace, 2016). A chain of specific evidence such as prompts and field notes linked to the original questions in the interview protocol addressed issues of validity (see Yin, 2018). Researchers' findings indicated that detailed insight and a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied were realized when qualitative interview participants were asked to elaborate on their perceptions (see Blome, von Usslar, & Augustin, 2016). Using probing questions and rephrasing during the interview assisted me to find answers to the research questions. Follow-up questions were used for clarification when warranted.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Social scientists conduct qualitative research to learn about people through systematic observations and interview procedures (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers should recruit participants who possess diverse demographic characteristics and represent the relevant population of study (Kelly, Margolis, McCormack, LeBaron, & Chowdhury,



2017). Participation must be voluntary and freely exercised in all phases for the researcher to be able to make meaning of a complex concept in an unbiased manner. In the following sections, I describe the step-by-step process by which I obtained the participants for this study, how I handled all actions with the participants, and how I collected the data.

**Recruitment and participation steps.** Recruitment of participants included certified administrative and K-8 teaching staff of two American Indian reservation turnaround schools located in the Northern Great Plains. Due to small school sizes, participants were accepted from two school districts located on one American Indian reservation. The following list is provided to explain and ethically justify each component of the recruitment process prior to data collection.

1. Secured a letter of cooperation from the first district superintendent.
2. Secured a letter of cooperation from the second district superintendent.
3. Obtained provisional Walden University IRB approval.
4. Obtained tribal college IRB approval.
5. Obtained final Walden University IRB approval.
6. Acquired names of potential participants for this study from the human resources department at the turnaround school sites.
7. Recruited certified administrative and K-8 teacher participants via an electronic informational invitation to participate.
8. Acquired written informed consent and made a copy for each participant at each school site.

9. Scheduled interviews to be conducted at the school site.
10. Reminded administrative and K-8 teacher participants of their interview via a confirmation email a week prior to their scheduled date and time.

I obtained letters of cooperation from the superintendent of each research site.

Provisional Walden University IRB approval and tribal IRB approval, due to American Indian educational research sites, were sought to conduct this study. Next, I submitted a final application to Walden University for permission to conduct this study. IRB approvals were necessary to confirm the protection rights of the participants in this study. Prior to completing the application, I completed the National Institute of Health's course: Protecting Human Research Participants.

After letters of cooperation from the schools were received and IRB approvals granted, I emailed the Human Resources department at each research site to acquire the professional email addresses of all certified K-8 administrators and teachers who had at least 1 year of experience working at the school. Participants who met the study's criteria were extended an electronic invitation to participate in the proposed research. The invitation included the study's purpose, examples of questions, and a possible interview timeline. My intention was to obtain at least one to two administrators and six to eight representative teachers distributed across Grades K-8 to participate in the study. Participants came from certified administrative and teaching staff at the two schools, but participants included only those certified staff who had worked at the current school site for a least 1 year.

I wanted to make certain each participant understood the nature of the study, any possible risks that may have been incurred, as well as potential benefits of participation. I assured them that answers they provided would be kept confidential and that should an occasion arise they may withdraw at any time and for any reason without question. I assured confidentiality and explained Walden University's requirements for data storage on the written consent form.

The consent form included the study's purpose, data to be collected, and several sample questions. The timeline for gaining signed consent and completion of the interviews was anticipated to be 1 month. Due to severe winter weather, the timeline was expanded to 3 months. Because these persons were voluntary participants, they were informed that they could leave the study at any time. If a participant had decided to exit before the interview, during an interview, or after the study was concluded their appeal would have been honored. I would have requested to talk with that participant either in person or by a phone conversation to assure them that their initial decision to participate was voluntary and thank them for their consideration of participation in the study. I would have documented the conversation and reported any incidents in Chapter 4 in the data collection report.

I sent an electronic interview reminder to participants before their scheduled interview. I informed all potential participants that data would be stored for at least 5 years beyond completion of the study and assured them of complete confidentiality. Kelly et al. (2017) found that a monetary incentive positively influenced participation rates in qualitative research. In deference to cultural mores and geographic location of

this study, each participant was given a monetary \$30.00 gift certificate to a local grocery store in respect for their time and participation in this study.

**Data collection procedures.** The steps for data collection included the following process:

1. Conducted responsive, in-person interviews.
2. Transcribed interviews.
3. Organized and analyzed data.
4. Sent findings to participants.
5. Emailed, or called participants if necessary, to discuss findings to ensure accuracy of data.
6. Wrote the findings and recommendations from the study.

Data collection occurred through a responsive interview. The goal of a responsive interview is to use the interviewees' experiences and perspectives to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the topic (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I conducted the interviews for this study in person on the school site for the convenience of the participants. These interviews were performed during a non-instructional time so that classroom instruction was not interrupted for students. Do not disturb signs were posted in the hallway and on the interview room's door so the interviews were private and free of interruptions. I audiotaped and took field notes of the interviews that consisted of open-ended questions. The interviews lasted just under 30 minutes to nearly 3 hours.

I conducted all interviews, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and made transcripts for analysis. Written permission to audiotape in addition to confidentiality

protocols, and approval for member checking was agreeable to all participants. I reminded participants that details would not be used for any purpose beyond this research project that might identify participants such as the location of the study. I used password protection to keep data safe, used codes instead of names, stored names separately from data, and discarded names when possible. Data are kept in a locked file cabinet at my home for at least 5 years beyond completion of the study as required by Walden University. Then I will ensure the destruction of data in the form of audiotapes, universal serial bus (USB) drive, notes, memos, and protocols. I will shred paper documents and remove all data from technological drives.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Qualitative data analysis relies on the researcher's empirical thinking in combination with ample evidence and contemplation of alternative explanations (Yin, 2018). Multiple sources of data lead to multiple realities. The goal of data analysis is to make sense of the collected data through a process that answers the research questions of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There should be an initial analysis of data during the collection process in a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), followed by an in-depth examination of the information to organize and refine the data into tentative themes ready for further investigation before writing the study's findings (Yin, 2016).

I sent each participant the findings of the analysis. This member check allowed each participant to check their data and make comments concerning the findings of the study. I also invited participants to schedule a follow-up phone call to last approximately

15 minutes to clarify any questions the participant might have had and confirm the accuracy of the data.

I analyzed the data in this study grounding the process in the conceptual framework of Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory. I used constructs based on Burns's paradigm, recorded my thoughts in a journal to analyze the data, and answered the research questions of this study. Yin (2016) advocated a recursive five-phase data analysis cycle: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble to find emerging patterns, (d) interpret, and (e) conclude.

**Compile.** The first phase of data analysis is compiling. Before I began the first phase of the data analysis cycle, I collected all the data transcripts, memos, and fieldnotes. Field notes that I incorporated into the interview process were essential throughout this compilation stage to increase the trustworthiness of the transcribed interviews (see Creswell, 2009). I organized the data into a database. At this early stage of the analysis process, I did not make any judgments but sought to arrange the raw data accurately for future consideration of analysis. Through this pre-coding phase, I became familiar with the data.

**Disassemble.** The second phase of the analysis cycle was to disassemble or break apart the data into smaller, workable bits. I started with the initial or open coding of the interview responses. The interview transcripts were scrutinized for repeated words, recurred phrases, and similar ideas. I repeated this process and examined the possible dimensions of the emerging categories. Additional context from field notes taken during

data collection provided robust evidence for making meaning and gleaning deeper understanding.

**Reassemble.** In the reassembly stage, the initial, open coding I performed in the disassemble stage helped me clarify the data and how the data related to broader concepts (see Yin, 2016). The coding process assisted in finding patterns and themes (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) for the reassembly phase. I graphically organized the segments of data and concepts into lists. To refine the analysis process, I used a spreadsheet to assist with organization throughout the repeated process of coding in this reassembly process or pattern coding phase. Pattern coding is a second stage coding method and an initial analytic strategy that helped me confirm the concepts and categories from the data and see how they were related (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic groups of data emerged that aligned with characteristics of transformational leadership. Data that did not align required me to consider further analysis or to handle as a discrepant case in the study. I sought to ensure that the data were valid based on the procedures described for the data collection and analysis of this study (see Yin, 2016). The reassembling phase alternated and was repeated with the next phase of this disassembling step. Analytical coding entailed reflection on the data in the process of interpreting it. Once I was certain that I captured the essence of the data during this process, I labeled my final themes.

**Interpret.** During the fourth phase of analysis, I constructed a narrative using the reassembled data. It was necessary to recompile the data in a new way or disassemble the data in a different manner than done earlier in the analysis. I used a matrix to help organize the data for an effective narrative that addressed the research questions of the

study. Interpretation is the use of data to derive and conclude meaning from patterns and themes found to assist in understanding the study (Yin, 2016). During this step of the analysis process, I selected appropriate excerpts from the interview transcripts that illustrated themes that emerged. Clark and Veale (2018) suggested employment of a summary table that provided a concise display of the findings and thematic relationships.

**Conclude.** A conclusion that arose from the interpretation of the study to a higher conceptual level was the final phase of data analysis. A conclusion is not simply a restatement of the findings. Ways to conclude a study include a call for new research, challenging established stereotypes, revealing new concepts, making discoveries, generalizing, or calling for action (Yin, 2016). I concluded this study with a call for new research and presented a narrative format for sharing the findings from the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative case studies, attention to trustworthiness is vital to perform robust, defensible empirical studies (Yin, 2016). Interpretations from data must be accurate; conclusions must be drawn on evidence collected from sources tested for consistency (Yin, 2018). Transparent methods and consideration of evidence were essential to demonstrate authenticity and strengthen soundness of the conclusions of the study. Elements of trustworthiness addressed in this study included credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility of a study assures proper collection and interpretation of data. An element that augments trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative approach is



triangulation of participant selection. A variety of participant views and perspectives gleaned from real-world experiences serve as a methodological benefit in qualitative research (Yin, 2016). I provided evidence of variation in this study by using the participation of administrators and classroom teachers spanning K-8 grades. A second way I increased the credibility in this study was by ensuring the interview protocol was trustworthy to answer the research questions of this study. I asked three degreed professionals that have experience working in a comparable setting to the study to ensure quality and content validity of the guiding questions. A third way I sought to provide a trustworthy study was in the overt manner that I addressed the limitation of any bias in the data gathering process by the use of a deliberative reflective bracketing approach. Yin (2018) stated that reflexivity may include a slight or indirect influence between a researcher and interviewee that may be created by a conversational, somewhat informal tone in the interview. Yin cautioned that reflexivity may pose a methodological threat. A further step I used to increase credibility was to use member checking with the participants to check the findings of this study for accuracy from their data. This process was conducted with each participant to ensure the findings accurately reflected the participants' intended response.

### **Dependability**

Dependability regards the ability to reliably replicate a study or rely on the findings from a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is challenging to replicate qualitative studies, so there must be a consistency of results from collected data. Audit trails documented each step of the research process through the reporting of final

recommendations. One main process I used to increase the dependability of this study included the reflexive journal that I kept to provide information concerning the data collection process. The memos, fieldnotes, and journal accounts revealed my process of thinking as a running record of how the study was conducted in an ethical manner (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, I provided audit trails that included how I made decisions to determine the categories made for the themes of the study.

### **Confirmability**

The final element to address when securing the trustworthiness of a study is confirmability. The data from a study must be organized, authenticated and the findings appropriately interpreted with accounting for reflexivity, reflecting on how the data were collected and interpreted. Values and expectations are influential, and researchers need to be aware of biases and presumptions that may affect their study (Yin, 2016). Part of the trustworthiness of this study involved the reflexive journaling process. I also used bracketing to mitigate preconceptions that may affect the credibility of the study. Bracketing is a methodological principle in which the researcher's preconceptions are identified and put aside before a participant's experiences are shared (Wall et al., 2004). Bracketing also assisted me to understand the participant's actual experience and point of view by putting previous knowledge and my personal beliefs aside.

### **Transferability**

Trustworthiness is essential for robust, enduring research. Transferability in a qualitative study is a process whereby a reader or another researcher decide the applicability of findings from a study that may apply in a different context (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). This study was strengthened by ensuring credibility and validity through properly collected data, documented, interpreted, and represented in a way in others would reach the same conclusions if given the same data (see Yin, 2016). Detailed description, also termed thick description, added to the validity of the study. Detailed description enables others to recreate the findings from this study and enhance transferability. This process of collecting data in a trustworthy manner may increase the transferability and application of the findings from the setting of this study to another location (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility, dependability, and confirmability are elements of trustworthiness that must be addressed for a reliable qualitative study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Researchers must use codes of ethics endorsed by professional associations to conduct research (Yin, 2016). Research integrity depends on the implementation of ethical standards that are imperative for confidence that the study's results are truthful, valid, and reliable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). Yin (2018) stated researchers need to use scholarly integrity while striving for the highest ethical standards. Yin (2018) added that researchers must avoid bias, plagiarism, and deception through omission of contrary results.

To ensure adherence to ethical principles of conduct for this proposed research, I earned a National Institute of Health Certificate of Completion to learn more about ethical research protocol and law as well as assist in the process of approval from the IRB at Walden University. The IRB approval number for this study is 01-11-19- 0455527. I explained the research protocol and gave verbal assurances of confidentiality to all

participants. I provided written assurances of confidentiality and acquired signatures for informed consent from each participant. A discussion regarding the clarification of roles, a description of the study, and the intention of transparent protocols took place with each participant before the hard copy of the informed consent form was signed.

Ethical dilemmas are part of qualitative research, with nearly all case studies involving human problems that consist of essential researcher-participant relationships. Saldaña (2016) stated that researchers must be rigorously ethical in the treatment of participants. Ethical treatment includes researchers being open to contrary evidence and protecting participants through actions such as assuring informed consent, avoiding deception to protect participants from harm, protecting confidentiality and privacy, taking precautions to protect especially vulnerable groups such as children, and selecting participants equitably and fairly (Yin, 2018).

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. If a potential participant had chosen not to be part of this study, I would have thanked them for their time and consideration. If a participant who had agreed to be part of the study decided to leave the interview process, they would have been released with impartiality, and I would have invited another participant to join the study from the pool of potential participants. Any data that were collected from the released participant would not be included in the findings of this study. In the event a participant missed a scheduled interview, I would have sent an email to inquire about the possibility of rescheduling a date and time compatible with their personal schedule. If there was no reply to the inquiry within 5 days, I would have recruited another participant. Should I have encountered an adverse

event during the interview process with a volunteer participant, I would have stopped the procedure, sought to deescalate the situation appropriately, thank them for their time, and have them return to their schedules. Notation of the occurrence would have been documented in the data collection process of this study, however, none of the data collected from the discontinued interview would have been included in the study.

Providing remuneration to a voluntary participant of a study is an ethical conundrum. Kelly et al. (2017) found that monetary incentives are important in achieving high participation rates in qualitative studies. I offered a monetary incentive of a \$30 gift card to a local grocery store for the participation of each voluntary participant. Offering such remuneration in this community was appropriate because gift-giving is considered a sign of honor and respect as well as a signal of appreciation and togetherness (see Lettenberger-Klein, Fish, & Hecker, 2013). The purchase receipt from the grocery store was retained with the receiving participants' signature sheet for 5 years. I will keep these receipts in a locked fire safe in my home and shred them with other paper documents from the study.

I password protected and safely stored the electronic files that contained audio recordings and transcriptions of in-person and phone interviews. The artifacts will be kept in a locked fire safe in my home. A separate storage device such as a USB drive will house the names and email addresses of participants. I will secure the data for 5 years in a locked fire safe and then dispose of the data through shredding of paper documents and proper destruction of the USB drive that contains electronic files from the study. I will remove data located on my computer hard drive.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the methodology that I used to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. I discussed how the participants for this study were obtained, the instrument protocol, and my role as the researcher. Informed consent was obtained before the commencement of data collection. The proposed methodology for this exploratory case study included qualitative data collection and analysis through the use of responsive interviews and coding for emergent themes. In Chapter 4, I address the data analysis process and results of this study to answer the research questions based on the transformational leadership conceptual framework.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to explore the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. The results of this study lead to a greater understanding of strategies and practices to improve leadership capacity and academic outcomes for AI/AN students. After conducting semistructured, responsive interviews, I analyzed data to identify categories and themes that emerged. I used reflective journaling in the bracketing process to help define my biases (see Wall et al., 2004) and to critically examine and interpret the experiences and data. Data centered around two research questions:

RQ 1: What are K-8 administrators' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

RQ 2: What are K-8 teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

Details of the findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4. This chapter includes information about the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, evidence of trustworthiness, and provides a summary.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted on an American Indian Reservation in two American Indian turnaround schools located in the Northern Great Plains. Even given the similarity

in settings, the organizational environment of the two schools varied considerably. One was a public school located on an American Indian reservation and had been removed within the year of study from the lowest state school improvement status, Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). The rankings of schools in the state in which the study was conducted included General Support, Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), and CSI. The change in status occurred after administrative cooperation had been approved in the autumn and before the data collection in the spring. The second school was a tribal grant school governed by a local board with oversight by a tribal board. The administrator in the second school was replaced in the autumn of the year the study was conducted. The school board hired an interim administrator, who was a staff member, for the remainder of the year. No certified teachers returned for the next school year due to nonrenewal contracts or resignations. Additionally, more intense educator fatigue than usual could have influenced participants because the data were gathered in the spring shortly before the end of the school year and after unusually harsh winter conditions. These unforeseen circumstances, beyond the control of the study, may have affected participants' responses.

### **Demographics**

Eight participants volunteered for the study. Two participants were administrators from the same school, each with at least 2 decades of experience working in American Indian reservation schools. One administrator had 7 years, and the other administrator had 8 years of managerial experience with the rest of their years of experience as



classroom teachers on American Indian reservation schools. There were no administrators at one school site that met the participant criteria of the study. Six participants were teachers. Their experience spanned from 2 years to 3 decades. One teacher had been a paraprofessional before becoming a teacher. Each participant was assigned codes to correspond to the sequence of interviews to maintain confidentiality. Each of the participants varied in levels of educational experience that ranged from 2 to 30 years. The total years of experience in the education of the public-school staff equaled 97 years. The years of experience in the tribal grant school staff equaled 12 years. Years of experience teaching in American Indian reservation schools also varied. Table 1 presents the participants' demographics.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Participant code	Gender	Grades serving	Years of teaching in reservation schools	Years administering reservation schools	Years in other educational settings/roles	Years of service at the site	Total years of service
WA1	F	K-7	13	7	1	7	21
WA2	F	K-12	14	8	4	8	26
WT1	F	1	28	0	2	26	30
WT2	F	3-5	9	0	11	5	20
RT1	M	5-6	2	0	0	2	2
RT2	F	3-4	4	0	0	4	4
RT3	F	K-2	3	0	0	3	3
RT4	F	7-8	2	0	1	2	3

**Data Collection****Interview Framework**

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning people have made from a situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative researcher works to make sense and describe how people interpret experiences. A semistructured interview guide was written for data collection and to assist in obtaining data to answer the research questions (see Appendices A and B).

All responsive interviews were conducted in person at the participant's school site during non-instructional time, and each of the eight participants had one scheduled

interview. The length of interviews varied from less than 30 minutes to 3 hours, dependent on each participant's evocation of information that added to the conversation. Yin (2016) stated that the relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee is not strictly scripted and will change somewhat as it leads to a type of social connection when data are gathered. All efforts were made to complete each interview within the 60-minute time frame; however, it became clear that some participants needed more time to explain their ideas and describe their perceptions of effective transformational leaders on American Indian reservation turnaround schools.

I digitally recorded each of the interviews and then personally transcribed each interview verbatim. By doing transcription as close in time to the interview as possible, I could more readily absorb the data, including contextual clues, and begin a form of pre-analysis while the data were still fresh in my mind. This initial part of the analysis process was helpful later in that I referred back to the transcripts when coding. An opportunity to member check the findings of the study was performed to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. I emailed the participants to review the findings and ensure there were no discrepancies between my interpretations of the data and the participants' perceptions. Follow-up with participants was completed by sharing the results of the transcripts and analysis of findings to participants via email.

### **Interview Process**

I emailed the Human Resource Department of each school requesting assistance to identify certified K-8 administrators and K-8 teachers who were returning for at least a second year of service. An email was sent to potential participants to take part in the

study. I followed the data collection process, as described in Chapter 3, except for one step. I omitted the introductory meeting due to uncontrollable and unusually harsh winter weather conditions.

I emailed information regarding confidentiality to potential participants before interviews for the data collection portion of the study were conducted. The purpose of the study along with an explanation of the procedure, representative questions, a summary of the voluntary nature of the study, risks, and benefits of being in the study, and the process for privacy in the securing of data was communicated at that time. The volunteers then contacted me by reply email if they were interested in participating in the study. I exchanged emails with potential participants to set and confirm interview dates and times. Some of the interviews had to be rescheduled multiple times due to weather conditions.

Before each interview commenced, I presented opportunities to clarify questions concerning the study and interview. The consent and gift certificate payment forms were reviewed and signed. Once the participant had their queries clarified, and there were no other concerns, the interview began with a verbal thank you for taking the time out of their schedule to take part in the study. I then took the interviewee's demographic data before eliciting responses to the open-ended interview questions.

Responses to the queries were recorded to aid in the transcription of the interview. I transcribed each of the interviews, and each transcript was then used for the coding process and analyzed for interpretation. The recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure, password-protected electronic file in a locked fire safe in my home. A separate

USB drive contained the names and email addresses of participants. Data will be protected for 5 years in a locked fire safe as required by Walden University IRB requirements. I will then dispose of the data by shredding paper files and destroy the USB drive. At that point, I will also remove the data from the computer hard drive.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of data analysis is to answer the research questions of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data must be collected, organized, and then a unified description of the data constructed for interpretation of the results and realistic conclusions to be drawn (Bengtsson, 2016). Vaughn and Turner (2016) cautioned researchers to use a systematic process when analyzing qualitative data to provide focus and highlight meaning. They recommended coding for topics and themes because it is a challenge to decide what is worth examining (Vaughn & Turner, 2016).

Eight responsive interviews in this qualitative study resulted in a substantial amount of data recorded electronically and by handwritten notes taken during the interviews. According to Yin (2016), qualitative research is susceptible to selectivity and bias. Bengtsson (2016) shared that researchers analyze text differently, mainly in the order of steps taken. To analyze the data for this study, I first read the data to familiarize myself with it, looked for references from Burns's (1978) conceptual framework of this study, and recorded my thoughts in a reflective journal. Next, I used Bengtsson's recursive four-step data analysis cycle of decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation. The following are the steps I used to analyze the data to maintain quality and trustworthiness: (a) re-read the text to make sure the important

content had been captured into meaningful units, (b) used open coding and applied the participants' words verbatim from the data to examine possible dimensions of categories, (c) identified patterns or relationships from the previously generated open codes and created sub-categories and categories, and (d) created short phrases to capture the substance or the voice of the participants to present the themes. During these steps, I selected data excerpts to support the findings presented in the results section of this study. The process is documented in a table to assist with the systematic analysis of the data.

### **Coding Strategy**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cautioned that there should be an analysis during the collection or compilation of data process in qualitative research. A researcher has opportunities during the interview process to extend the discussion through questioning and collect additional data that helps reveal the underlying phenomenon and deepen understanding (Bengtsson, 2016). I used bracketing during the data collection and compilation stage to inform my decisions and to assist in the analysis of data. After compilation, I needed to disassemble and analyze the data for clarification and the revelation of categories. I transcribed each interview and then took each script and open-coded it to obtain and highlight recurring words, phrases, and ideas. Data were read using frames of reference from Burns's (1978) conceptual framework. Inductively developed constructs of importance were developed from the responses to the questions.

**Open coding.** I organized the data using vocabulary from the transcripts that indicated elements of effective transformational leadership (see Table 2). The left column of Table 2 signifies the participant group. The middle column shares an excerpt from the

interview text, and the right column identifies the open codes. The data displayed in Table 2, *Sample Open Coding for All Participants*, provides an example of this process. The codes derived from participants' repeated words, phrases, and ideas assisted in the beginning stages of understanding K-8 administrators' and teachers' perceptions of effective transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains.

Table 2

*Sample Open Coding for All Participants*

Participant group	Interview text excerpt	Open codes
Administrator	[Encourage staff to take risks] by having confidence in them.	Hold others in high esteem
Teacher	[Develop trust through] mutual respect and the understanding that while we may differ, we are here for students.	
Administrator	Students stay for homework help. They have a chance of help there at the end of the day.	Culture of learning
Teacher	Encourage a culture of learning and failure as a part of learning.	
Administrator	We have a lot of intervention meetings.	Meetings
Teacher	We [Elementary] have weekly staff meetings.	
Administrator	Routines and procedures [are important] for kids [students].	Routines and procedures
Teacher	Consistency is tied to safety. When students feel inconsistency, it creates a sense of nervousness. It is just not healthy.	



The first cycle of coding, open coding, revealed that building trusting relationships through fair actions towards stakeholders, assuming the best, and holding others in high esteem while coming from a place of humility were important to effective transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools located in the Northern Great Plains. Respect for others' cultures was also important. Additionally, administrators and teachers indicated that cooperative meetings, discussions, and various types of written communication were elements of effective transformational leadership. Commonly referred to as integral to effective transformational leadership, was the significance of a culture of learning set in a safe working environment with a willingness to learn and make mistakes. Furthermore, using data to set expectations, monitor progress, and uphold accountability was significant to effective transformational leadership. Other identified factors were those of having structures in place for routines and procedures, prioritizing initiatives, and introducing initiatives strategically to staff. Investing in staff in terms of retraining and retaining, yet not overwhelming them with the change, and leading by example were also factors of effective transformational leadership.

**Pattern coding.** I organized the data using vocabulary from the open coding cycle of analysis (see Table 3). The left column of Table 3 indicates the open codes. The middle column shows sub-categories, and the right column identifies categories. The data displayed in Table 3, *Open Codes to Categories*, provides an example of the progression. The second coding cycle, pattern coding, revealed relationships among the previously generated open codes. I re-examined the data from the first cycle of coding and found

links among codes that I arranged into sub-categories and eventually categories. For example, the open codes of (a) assume the best, (b) build trust, (c) cultural awareness, and (d) fair actions developed into the sub-categories of relationships established through interactions that evidence genuineness and trust; cultural regard; and fairness is important for healthy work relationships. Those sub-categories were then grouped into the category of interpersonal interactions.

In this cycle of coding, I used a process of handwriting on paper pads, printouts of transcripts, and memos before I made revisions in documents on the computer. I merged and retitled categories in the context of patterns found among the open codes. Additionally, I continually looked for supporting data during this phase of analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Open Codes to Axial Categories*

Open codes	Sub-categories	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assume the best</li> <li>▪ Hold others in high esteem</li> <li>▪ Come from a place of humility and learning</li> <li>▪ Respect values and culture</li> <li>▪ Gain trust through sincere actions that show investment</li> <li>▪ Culturally based education</li> <li>▪ Fair actions</li> </ul>	<p>Constructive, respectful, and optimistic viewpoints and interactions</p> <p>Relationships should be established through interactions that evidence genuineness and trust.</p> <p>Respectful consideration and appreciation of others in the school community are necessary for progress.</p> <p>Cultural Regard</p> <p>Fairness is important for healthy work relationships.</p>	Interpersonal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expectations/accountability</li> <li>▪ Professional Development</li> <li>▪ Mentor</li> <li>▪ Create a safe work environment to try something and fail</li> <li>▪ Culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Monitor Progress</li> <li>▪ Use data to make decisions</li> <li>▪ Re-staff</li> <li>▪ Careful change of programs</li> </ul>	<p>Administrators should provide thoughtful curriculum and training that allows for professional risk taking in the classroom.</p> <p>Acceptance and support of continual learning for administrators and teachers are important.</p> <p>Gather and use data to monitor progress and make decisions.</p> <p>Flexibility of thinking that leads to wise program and staffing changes is necessary.</p>	Professional and Personal Development

Administrators' and teachers' perceptions of effective transformational leadership were similar, yet they differed in priority as evidenced through the recurrence of words and phrases in their responses. Pattern coding revealed relationships between the open codes that formed sub-categories and then categories. The coding process furthered my understanding of the data to answer the research questions regarding K-8 administrators' and teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains.

Administrators related that organized consistent inculcation of expectations were the most critical element for the success of transformational leadership followed by interpersonal relationships; professional and personal development; and communication. On the other hand, teachers shared that interpersonal relationships were most important, followed by organized consistent inculcation of expectations; professional and personal development; and communication. Yet still important, communication decreased in standing for both groups as a result of this coding cycle.

Although there was no individual participant's response that yielded highly discrepant data that contradicted emergent themes between the administrators and teachers, there were differences between the collective responses of the two research sites. The teachers at the first research site, the public-school district, had more years of experience and more experience teaching in American Indian reservation schools than the teachers at the second research site, the tribal grant school. There were no administrators to interview at the second research site. Both research sites expressed interpersonal interactions and professional and personal development were the two most critical

elements of effective transformational leadership. There were differences between the significance of organized, consistent inculcation of expectations and communication. I used recurring words and phrases when I found sub-categories and categories through pattern coding and compared the two school sites. Four themes emerged from the coding process.

I continued the cyclical analysis process of coding to find redundancy in themes of importance to better understand the responses and create deeper meaning before I interpreted the data. I wanted to fully comprehend the reactions between the two schools regarding transformational leadership as perceived in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. During pattern coding, data points emerged that aligned with American Indian values that Christensen (2015), Faircloth (2017), and Warner (2015) shared of respect, humility, compassion and caring, honesty, generosity, and wisdom.

Next, I compared the administrators' and teachers' responses to find perceptions of each values' importance. The importance of values was found through a reexamination of the transcripts and finding references to the six values. I then compared the values between the two school sites. The first school presented one change in the classification of values. The second school had only teachers interviewed, and there were no changes in classification. The data again revealed respect as the most referred-to value. References to compassion and caring were often cited in both schools when administrators' and teachers' responses were combined.

## **Emergent Themes**

The data analysis of this study involved a cyclical process. I analyzed and interpreted data and synthesized meaning to determine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of effective transformational leadership in Northern Great Plains reservation turnaround schools. Initially, the text of open-coded responses led to codes and labels. The ensuing cycle of pattern coding allowed me to use context to form categories and cluster concepts that emerged. I grouped similarly coded data and discovered themes that answered the research questions. I analyzed the perceptions of participants at each site separately and then the perceptions of participants between the two research sites. I examined the themes that emerged through cycles of coding and analysis of the interview data for rival explanations. Four themes emerged: (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff; (c), administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff; and (d) a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration. The four themes that emerged are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Themes*

Categories	Themes
Interpersonal interactions	Resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization.
Professional and personal development	Administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff.
Organized, consistent inculcation of expectations	Administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff.
Communication	A structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration.

The final stage of analysis elicited further consideration that guided the alignment and emergence from the collected data in the context of Northern Great Plains American Indian values of respect; wisdom; humility; compassion and caring; generosity; and honesty. I will discuss these transformational thematic values in the results section that follows.

**Discrepant Cases**

I considered discrepant cases during the data analysis stage of this study. Discrepant cases, also referred to as rival explanations, strengthen studies through skeptical thinking (Yin, 2016). A researcher critically examines facts regarding actions and events, participants' candidness, and assumptions to identify rival explanations that support the study's framework. Researchers should search for patterns and reasonings that disconfirm or challenge expectations of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I evaluated and questioned participants' responses during the interviews and throughout

data analysis. Participants' responses were examined for rival thinking in the context of the protocol's research questions. No discrepant cases were found that contradicted the themes that emerged from the data.

### **Results**

This qualitative exploratory case study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning effective leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Collected data centered around perceptions of strategies and approaches considered effective in transformational leadership. Explanations during responsive interviews addressed the research questions:

RQ 1: What are K-8 administrators' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

RQ 2: What are K-8 teachers' perceptions of transformational strategies and approaches in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains?

Four interview questions that guided each participant's responsive interview were (a) how does a transformational leader inspire and motivate others to achieve common goals to improve student learning?; (b) how do effective transformational leaders encourage staff to take risks and challenges to increase student achievement?; (c) how do effective transformational leaders develop relationships that evidence respect and trust with colleagues, students, and families?; and (d) in your school, what effective



transformational communication strategies have been used to build a shared vision and encourage a sense of community? Data collected from the interview responses were analyzed, and the findings synthesized into themes.

Emerging themes from administrators and teachers established from collected data are presented in Table 4. Themes emerged from cycles of pattern coding that revealed (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff; (c) administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff; and (d) a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration. Further analysis established alignment of the themes with six of the Northern Great Plains American Indian values.

Themes elicited from the context of the interviews from both research sites provided a natural alignment to the traditional values of Northern Great Plains American Indians. Bass (2008) imparted that the use of values motivates followers to create shared visions and reach common goals. The similarity of values is vital for the inspiration of a collective vision and the advancement of an organization (Groves, 2014). Through the process of analyzing data, I realized the Northern Great Plains American Indian values were identified repeatedly in the context of the interview responses (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Emergent Themes and Northern Great Plains American Indian Values*

Emergent themes	Northern Great Plains American Indian values
Resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization.	Respect
Administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff.	Wisdom Humility
Administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff.	Compassion and caring Generosity
A structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration.	Honesty

Respect was the value most referenced for successful transformational leadership by both administrators and teachers. Administrators and teachers indicated the tenets of honesty, compassion and caring, wisdom, humility, and generosity as important. When all participant responses were considered collectively at each site, values were more closely aligned than when administrators' and teachers' responses were separated. Respect, compassion and caring, and generosity were expressed as similarly important. Honesty, humility, and wisdom differed slightly. The first school site mentioned honesty and wisdom more than humility, and the second school site referred to the value of humility before honesty and wisdom. Both referred to generosity the least.

Burns (1978) related that transformational leadership used values to work toward common goals. Cycles of coding and analysis of the interview texts revealed the Northern Great Plains American Indian values of respect; wisdom; compassion and caring; honesty; humility; and generosity. I aligned the transformational thematic categories with values found in the interview responses. The result was contextual alignment of (a) respect with resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization; (b) wisdom and humility with administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff; (c) compassion and caring and generosity with administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff; and (d) honesty with a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration. As I present the findings of the study, I incorporate these Northern Great Plains American Indian values into the discussion.

Evidence for the results of this study was framed from the principles of Burns's (1978) transformational leadership and based on the emergent themes and six values of Northern Great Plains American Indians (see Christensen, 2015; Faircloth, 2017; Warner, 2015). The substantiation of evidence was exemplified in the participants' responses to the interview questions. Data revealed themes that addressed and answered the two research questions of this study regarding K-8 administrators' and teachers' perceptions of strategies and approaches as effective transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. As the themes are developed in the following section, I will incorporate these values into the findings of this study.

**Theme 1**

Theme 1 is that resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization.

**Northern Great Plains American Indian value: Respect.** Findings from this study indicate transformational leadership that is resilient, and authentic, which focuses on student's academic and social-emotional progress, also relates succinctly to the Northern Great Plains American Indian value of respect. American Indians find and express great value for self, family, community, all life, and a higher power. Listening without interruption, speaking positively, and realizing everyone has a purpose are attributes of respectful behavior. Respectful relationships that are fair and consider cultural values are essential for transformational success (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013). Respect was considered foundational by participants for essential relationship building (see Table 5).

Administrators and teachers in this study agreed that teacher input required listening skills and honest, authentic feedback delivered respectfully by administrators. RT1 reasoned that "conversations need to happen with the staff and (administration) really needs to listen to whatever the idea is," and that "real feedback includes both positive and negative conversations." WT2 shared an appreciation of administration "nipping things in the bud" and "being consistent with rules, so everyone feels safe." WT2 acknowledged success when administration approached a problem with a process approach, such as:

What can we do? What have you tried? How can we approach this? What can we do differently? And (the administrator) does this with every student. (The administrator) even gives up own her lunches and teaches by mentorship and from experience.

RT2 shared the need for mutual respect, trust, and the importance for administrators to understand that while staff may differ to some extent in beliefs and practices, they respect each other and work for the students' academic success. WT1 discussed the issue of staffing and that even when restructuring a school's organizational employee framework:

You still have a place in the school, even if a member had to move positions, so that is showing respect. Longevity and openness and talking, so you're transparent and honest will eventually build a certain amount of trust, and it is a matter of opening yourself up, wanting to visit, having a good rapport with your students and your teachers.

RT4 stated that open-mindedness and willingness to learn were critical for relationship building. RT3 felt that administrators must not instill a culture of perfectionism and of never admitting mistakes because it eventually becomes a source of fear. To build trusting relationships, WA1, an administrator from the first research site in the public school, said that finding people who have specific skills to develop into leadership roles and then "let them (the teachers) have it" and try to "help as much as possible in the process without taking over" builds teachers' trust. WA1 stated, "You've got to get the right people on staff that have those skills and use them." The position that

every person should be used and held accountable was common with participants at this school site.

Participants communicated respect and trust derive from relationships that value culture and fairness. RT2 stated that staff needs to, “actually get to know the culture and what’s happening here” and have “a positive outlook on people and respecting [cultural] values.” RT3 expressed the need for administrators to come from a place of humility and learning, especially giving reverence to other cultures and the history of the community.

They must be willing to learn and be willing to ask questions and make mistakes.

They must be authentic and honest, as that is the underpinnings of any good relationship and especially any relationship in the school built on that trust. So, authentic, honest, respectful, and operate with integrity. If you are true and you are honest, no matter, you can disagree or even be offended at times, but then think about it and realize OK, that person comes from a good place, so there must be a reason for it, so let’s talk it out rather than be defensive.

Creating a thoughtful, positive, and safe environment was found essential for teaching and learning in a risk-free environment to promote academic and professional growth. WA1 shared, “You ensure a healthy environment. You don’t have to treat everyone the same, but you need to be fair to people and realize there are times when they go through things in their personal lives.”

## **Theme 2**

Theme 2 is that administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that foster a culture of learning for students and staff.

**Northern Great Plains American Indian value: Wisdom and humility.** The second theme that emerged in this study emphasized the need for administrators to provide insightful support for the teachers that fosters a culture of learning for both the staff and students. This theme correlates with the Northern Great Plains American Indian values of wisdom and humility. Wisdom is a collection of understandings based on one's culture, gained over a lifetime of learning, and meant to be shared for the benefit of others. The value of humility, in which no one is above another or less than another, is considered an important aspect of flexible thinking for skillful problem solving, important for a culture of learning that exhibits insightful support.

Having the wisdom to recognize staff members' competencies and use their skills to the greatest extent for the good of the organization was appreciated by administrators. Bass (2008), Burns (1978), DeMatthews et al. (2015), Gipp (2015), and Green (2013) agreed that to be successful, transformational leaders must know their followers' values, needs, and capacities. Continual learning for teachers' and students' success supported by the administration through a thoughtful curriculum and professional development that allows for professional risk-taking was considered essential by the study's participants for effective transformational leadership. According to the responses of the participants, to encourage staff to take risks and challenges requires respectful, collaborative relationships situated in a consistent and safe environment that embodies a culture of learning. The collection and use of data to monitor progress and make program and staffing decisions were also found important (see Table 5).

WT1 conveyed that being allowed to “take calculated risks with new programs and then monitor data for success, or not” was important for feeling free to take risks in trying new teaching strategies or embarking on new instructional programs. WT2 stated that being allowed to “fail and not feel like we’re failing...never any put-downs,” was critical for taking on risks and challenges. WT2 further stated that the administrator “... lets us do what we are good at doing.” RT1 expressed that simply allowing risk to happen can be empowering to teachers and leading by example was important. “Students need to see their teachers fail at things.” All participants in the study identified safe learning environments based on collective goals as essential for building a culture of learning.

Working collaboratively in a safe environment allows individuals to access the wisdom of others and as well as impart their own. Lindquist (2015) informed that practice during day-to-day living with others transfers knowledge, and an indigenous view of knowledge is that it is a “living thing.” RT2 referred to the need for schools to be a “safe environment for teachers” that is a “positive and collaborative safe space” to be treated as a “collective classroom community, just like we create for students.” RT3 discussed encouraging a culture of learning and failure as an important part of learning for students, as well as adults. Effective leaders encourage more mistakes and active learning together because “failure is how we learn.”

Professional development to support school initiatives followed by appropriate data collection and monitoring was considered critically important by participants to support adult learning, professional growth, and wisdom. RT3 shared the importance of having, “PD to broaden our minds and tailored to the communities we work in and the



[school] community's needs." It was deemed important that insightful support of staff be predicated on data.

### **Theme 3**

Theme 3 is that the administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff.

**Northern Great Plains American Indian value: Compassion and caring and generosity.** The third theme that developed in this study revealed that transformational leadership expects and will support the faculty and staff to build a collaborative team where each member of the team works together for the common vision of the school. This collegial team adeptly incorporates the Northern Great Plains American Indian values of compassion, caring, and generosity. Compassion and caring through love and concern for one another was referred to by participants when they conveyed the importance of staff remaining at the school and building trust with students and their families through consistent, caring behavior. The value of generosity includes collective work toward goals through individuals sharing and giving freely of their time and talents. Participants expressed that generosity of personal and professional time contributes to the well-being of others within the school community. Participants also communicated that generosity is important for the collective attainment of an organization's goals.

According to participants of this study, constancy leads to the stability of a school as does compassion and caring for stakeholders (see Table 5). Continuity of a dedicated well-trained staff who enjoys initiatives organized with incremental changes by a committed administration, who lead by example was found vital for successful

transformational leadership. Christensen (2015) conveyed that for leadership activities to grow and be successful, there must be unity and connection. The constancy of leadership with change efforts and clear expectations of staff was considered imperative. WA1 advised administrators, “tweaking things a little bit and making sure that everything was set up so that teachers could be successful” is essential for success. WA1 went on to inform, “There should be incremental, focused change to not overwhelm the staff. You’ve got to let people be successful with one thing before you add another piece.” Organized support implemented with small, clearly identified steps for staff was expressed by teachers and administrators as necessary, but most often by administrators.

Consistent behavior and expectations by staff who make an effort to personally know the students and their families were believed essential in building relational trust that leads to success according to the majority of interviewees. RT2 informed, “Consistency is tied to safety. When students feel inconsistency, it creates a sense of nervousness. It is just not healthy.” It was conveyed by both administrators and teachers that leading by example greatly enhanced relational trust and stability with students and staff. WT2 stated, “She [principal] gives up her own lunches for the kids.” The teacher went on to state, “She [principal] gives the [stressed] teacher a little half-hour down. Her half-hour of breathing.”

Staying employed at the school long enough to see a change effort sustained was significant for trust, especially the trust of students and their families. Administrators and teachers shared that visiting with students during breaks throughout the school day and getting to know their name to individually greet them daily and, “having one-on-one

conversations” in the hallways with the children was critical in building thriving, trusting relationships that evidenced care and led to greater stability within the school. WA2 counseled, “You have to stay. You got to be here, and you’ve got to show that you’re invested in their children.” A consistent, caring staff was found essential for the stable functioning of a school.

#### **Theme 4**

Theme 4 is that a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration.

**Northern Great Plains American Indian value: Honesty.** Honest communication within a shared vision was identified as important for successful transformational leadership and a strong learning community. This theme encompasses the Northern Great Plains American Indian value of honesty. Honesty, as a Native American value, is considered critical to successful leadership (see Gipp, 2015). Ideas and opinions for verbal and written interactions and strategies that build a shared vision and encourage a sense of community were numerous. The majority of participants indicated they were motivated and inspired to achieve common goals by leaders who communicated those goals; supported collaboration; and listened to, and used, stakeholder input. All participants spoke about the importance of collaboration and working toward common goals.

Successful leadership must sincerely, respectfully, and regularly communicate. Regular, candid communication was recognized by administrators and teachers as organized systems that could be depended upon by stakeholders such as those for staff

meetings; parent nights; personal conversations on school grounds' as well as in the community with staff, families, and community members; letters to guardians; emails; texts; and formal feedback after lesson observations. These elements were found to be important for building a community that is caring and accountable to its members.

RT3 shared that laying a foundation together and creating goal setting and vision work collaboratively with the entire staff with “focused positivity” is critical. RT1 communicated the need for being on the same team trying to reach the same goal with leadership asking, “What do you think about it? How can we make it better as a group, as a team?” WT1 asserted, “strong leadership with partnering with the teachers — that’s what’s effective.” WT1 continued to express the qualities of an effective transformational leader as one who has the “...ability to lead without micromanaging. The ability to work cooperatively and collaboratively with the people around you. And probably the biggest thing is, nobody raises their hand to take the credit.” Many participants communicated that generosity of time and effort toward a common goal was essential for successful transformational leadership.

WT2 declared that taking “pride in relationships” was extremely important for successful communication. The teacher shared several examples of how a transformational school leader can communicate to build relationships. This teacher shared various stories of students and families from the school community that provided evidence of the importance of building respectful regard between the school community and family members. Methods used included newsletters; notes; emails; text messages; home visits; bulletin boards; face-to-face conversations; short weekly staff meetings at

grade, department, and administrative levels; parent nights; school messages broadcast on local radio stations; Facebook; and School Messenger — a communication product that shares information from schools to families promptly using email or phone calls. WT1 shared that at the parent committee group every month, they try to do something fun to build respectful, cultural regard. WA2 stated:

I talk to all of our parents multiple times during the school year. If I see them in the community, I make time and reach out and say hi, and ask them different things that are going on. Parents appreciate it when the teachers call them and talk to them. Good reports, bad reports even.

WA1 always made positive calls concerning the students to families and attempted “to understand what’s happening and encourage them (the families).” WA1 stated, “It is important to make connections with families, understanding who is related to who is who.” RT1 expressed that incorporating faculty, staff, parents, and students into regularly scheduled meetings is necessary because “the school is really the center of the community.” Interview respondent RT2 relayed that communicating with families is vital for positive relationships. It is critical for school personnel to talk with parents and guardians and discuss academic progress, behavioral issues, and to “really get to know the students and what the students like and what they want from the school...treat students like people.” Administrators and teachers found positive communication over time crucial for building trusting relationships.

“Regular face-to-face staff meetings and the sharing of our staff institutional and cultural knowledge that already exists in our school,” was expressed by RT3 as an

influential element for transformational leadership. Colleague RT4 augmented this thought and wanted to have administration:

Start the relationship as soon as the school year starts. Then a lot of positive phone calls or positive visits. A lot of parents in my class too, they want to know what's best for their kids. They *do* know what's best for their kids. They want to know, like, how my knowledge and their knowledge of what's best can come together. And that takes up time.

Regarding adults who work at school, WT2 shared that the gathering of facts before action is respectful and yields trust. An effective transformational leader “gets people to do things and think it was their idea.” First, the leader presents it, then asks for opinions, and then does it. That communication process leads to trusting relationships. RT4 thought that just assuming the best intentions and then having open conversations brought about trusting, successful communication. Research from Mette (2014) revealed an essential element for the success of turnaround schools in rural communities was open communication. WA1 said, “I just bring them in, and we just talk about it. Lay it all out. Figure out how we can get along, how we can compromise. And, move on. I don't let things just fester.” WA1 also noted that it was important to not play favorites with people and keep things as confidential as possible. The results from both school sites, administrators, as well as teachers, revealed merit for consistent organization and dissemination of communication of honest, authentic feedback (see Table 5). Communication must be organized, regular, honest, transparent, and have actions that follow-through.

In summary, when examined collectively the references within the text of the semistructured interviews to the six Northern Great Plains American Indian values were: respect, compassion and caring, honesty, wisdom, humility, and generosity. Respect and compassion and caring were referred to more often than honesty, wisdom, and humility. Generosity was the least referred to with direct language. I considered strict definitions when coding for values; anecdotal support and stories were categorized. Themes that aligned with the values were (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization/respect; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff/wisdom and humility; (c) administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff/compassion and caring and generosity; (d) a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration/honesty.

### **Discrepant Data**

Discrepant data may affect the validity of a study's results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016, 2018). No data were outlying in this study. Slight differences in responses between the school sites may be partially explained by differences in professional educational experience. The first research site was a public school located on a reservation at which participants were more experienced than participants at the second school site with a collective experiential age of 90 years. The second site was at a tribal grant school where participants had less experience than participants at the first school site with a collective experiential age of 11 years. Irrespective of experience or stage of

turnaround the school was experiencing, there were appreciable similarities in perceptions of effective transformational leaders. The responses were hand-coded to identify and better understand the data and exposed differences.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Yin (2018) shared a way to build the trustworthiness of a study is to build credibility. The methods to collect and analyze data must be trustworthy for data to be considered truthful. Transparent research procedures, which include exhaustive searches for evidence and contrary evidence, must be presented (Yin, 2016). To strengthen reliability, researchers must make procedures as explicit as possible. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of a study determine its trustworthiness.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is established by the correctness of a study's findings, the proper interpretation of its data, and the accuracy of its conclusions (Yin, 2018). To increase the credibility of this study, I triangulated two data sets during the analysis process. I used text from the bracketing process, field notes, and the interview transcripts. Through interviewing administrators and classroom teachers covering K-8 grades, evidence of variation was achieved. I accessed as many participants as possible for a semistructured interview and data from their responses examined. The limitation of bias in the data gathering process was through a deliberative, reflective bracketing approach.

To enhance credibility, I member checked the findings of the study with participants to obtain feedback and ensure accuracy as explained in Chapter 3. Yin (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advocated a researcher set aside assumptions to lessen



the possibility of prior knowledge or experiences being woven into a study. I gave interview participants a chance to corroborate the data collected from their interview along with the analysis of the findings. Yin (2018) stated that the opportunity to corroborate or contradict data and findings enhances the accuracy and construct validity of the study.

### **Transferability**

The transferability of this study is limited due to the small sampling size obtained from the two sites in this study with a small population in unusual, rural settings. Thick description was sought to extend the transferability of the study, to the extent possible. Detailed descriptions of the study were provided to recreate procedures, context, and participant interactions. Open-ended questions guided the semistructured interviews to enhance understanding and collect various viewpoints and experiences.

Part of the trustworthiness of this study involved the reflexive journaling process. It is imperative to consider reflexivity or the position from which a researcher approaches the phenomenon and the influence a researcher has on the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I intended to obtain data through a comfortable interview session during which each participant felt emotionally and professionally safe and free to share information. Henderson's writings (2018) reminded researchers that cultural beliefs can be subtle yet significant in evoking feelings that perpetuate perceptions and prejudices. I used bracketing to moderate preconceptions that may have affected the credibility of this study.

Bracketing (Wall et al., 2004) is a reflective process that assists in identifying preconceptions and attitudes that might be brought into the research situation. The process of bracketing my thoughts helped me mentally prepare for the interviews as well as reflect on what I learned during the interviews. I used a combination of transcribing from a recorder, handwritten notes, and word processing for my journaling to organize thoughts and consider how to apply what I learned in the interview environments to the data analysis process.

### **Dependability**

Bracketing supported dependability in a journaling context and assisted me in stably relating the phenomena. Bengtsson (2016) stated that dependability is the stability of data over time and conferred the importance of documentation by the researcher of any revisions to the analyzing process. I created audit trails that included how I made decisions for the themes that emerged from the study. I also provided audit trails to document each step of the research process through the reporting of final recommendations. I kept a reflexive journal to offer information concerning the data collection process. My process of thinking was revealed through memos, fieldnotes, and journal accounts as a running record of how the study was conducted in an ethical manner (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were collected from eight participants at two different sites from administrators and teachers. This triangulation, a process of collecting data from two or more sources and finding whether the data lead to the same findings, also enhanced the dependability of this study (see Yin, 2016).

**Confirmability**

I implemented bracketing before, during, and after data collection to address the issue of potential bias during the compilation of data and the stages of analysis. Detailed description, also termed thick description (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012), added to the credibility of the study by helping reduce reflexive influences (see Yin, 2016). Through a detailed description, it is possible to recreate the findings from this study and match the context of the study with the situation (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants reviewed the findings of this study, as explained in Chapter 3, to ensure the appropriateness of their meaning during member checking. The information given by the eight participants interviewed for this study yielded data that supported participants' perceptions. No new data emerged that changed the repeated themes found in the analysis process. This study was strengthened by ensuring reliability through properly collected data, documented, interpreted, and represented in a way that others would reach the same conclusions if given the same data (see Yin, 2016).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the findings regarding the research questions of the study and shared analyses regarding the perceptions of administrators and teachers concerning strategies and approaches of effective transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Themes found through the analysis of the qualitative interviews that aligned with Northern Great Plains American Indian Values were (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the

organization with respect; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff with wisdom and humility; (c) administration that expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff with compassion and caring and generosity; and (d) a structure for collaborative communication supported by the administration with honesty. An examination of the discoveries and relationship to related literature is presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership in two American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. A qualitative exploratory case study approach was appropriate because this manner of research takes place in a real-world setting, occurs naturally, and is discovery-oriented to uncover and interpret meanings (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). A postmodern position was taken within a case study design because truths associated with this phenomenon are multiple and individually understood. I gathered descriptive, small-scale narratives in a natural, responsive, nonthreatening environment to assist in making meaning of managerial processes aligned to a transformational leadership framework (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through the review of literature and analysis of data from this study, information on transformational leadership specific to the relatively rare settings of American Indian reservation turnaround schools may provide leaders at these types of institutions much-needed guidance on how to improve their performance, and in turn, the performance of their students and schools.

The findings of this study revealed themes of effective transformational leadership that aligned with American Indian values. Alignment was found with (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization with respect; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff with wisdom and humility; (c) administration that expects and supports steadfast,

collective work by all staff with compassion and caring and generosity; and (d) a structure for collaborative communication supported by the administration with honesty. Between the two research sites, the public school and the tribal grant school, and among the administrators and teachers, there was an agreement regarding the characteristics needed for successful transformational leadership.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This exploratory qualitative case study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. This study's literature review included an explanation of the fundamental concepts of transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools, the challenges leaders face, and cultural insights. The majority of the literature examined for this study was qualitative case study methodology involving transformational leadership, data related to turnaround schools, cultural aspects of leadership, and proposed leadership styles that influence change that supports higher achievement. In the following section, I present the four themes that emerged. Based on the findings of the study, I provide an interpretation of transformational leadership in Northern Great Plains reservation turnaround schools.

### **Respectful, Resilient, and Authentic Relationships**

The first theme revealed in the data was as follows: Respectful, resilient, authentic relationships that focus on students' academic and social-emotional progress are necessary throughout the organization. This theme aligns with the Northern Great Plains

American Indian value of respect. It also supports Burns's (1978) conceptual framework. According to Burns, the most powerful motivators and inspirations are those anchored in genuine and deep human relationships. Participants from both research sites reported that transformational leaders work diligently to forge deep relationships with stakeholders that foster consistent behavior. Consistent behavior from leaders needs to demonstrate respect for others: peers, family, culture(s), and students. Followers' perceptions are critical to a leaders' success, so leaders need to value their followers' culture (Burns, 1978; Christensen, 2015; Edwards, 2015; Gipp, 2015; Green, 2013; Henderson, Carjuzza, & Ruff, 2015; Stewart et al., 2017; Santamaria, 2014; Tippeconnic Fox et al., 2015; Vandayani et al., 2015). This study indicated that successful transformational relationships grounded in respect were imperative. The cultural value of respect was considered to be extremely important. Respect may be evidenced in a multitude of ways. Examples include behaving reverently toward elders, listening attentively, not interrupting, trying others' ideas, and speaking positively about others.

Relationships that were respectful and fair and that encouraged the inclusion of cultural values were seen as essential for successful transformational leadership. Burns and Bass (2008) indicated that transformational leadership was supportive of cultural values. Burns (1978) did not stipulate American Indian values in his transformational leadership theory, yet his framework does support the use of values and a collective purpose by leaders who must understand their followers' culture. Participants at one school site shared that they started the school year in a positive way with family and community events. But one participant cautioned, "If you are going to dis the culture, you

really shouldn't be in this school. We usually smudge [burn herbs to make smoke for prayer, cleansing, or healing ceremonies] Friday afternoon. We have an honoring wacipi [pow wow or celebration] at the end of the year for graduation." Another participant advised that "Staff need to lead a culturally relevant and culturally based education and have culturally responsive PD" for trauma-informed teaching, positive behavior management, and restorative justice. RT4 reported that, "a positive outlook on people and respecting [indigenous] values [is needed]." According to many participants, successful transformational leaders gather ideals from the local culture and incorporate cultural values as a motivational tool for students and classroom management.

Based on the findings that formed this theme and that reflected the Northern Great Plains American Indian value of respect, it is clear that the transformational practice of building respectful, authentic relationships that incorporate cultural intelligence should be implemented in schools, especially schools committed to the academic and social-emotional growth of students on American Indian reservations. Administrators' and teachers' responses from both research sites were similar in their perceptions of successful transformational leadership strategies and their affiliation with Indian values. The findings of this study revealed that relationships that are respectful, fair, and consider culture are essential qualities for transformational leadership in Northern Great Plains reservation turnaround schools.

### **Insightful Support with Wisdom and Humility**

The second theme revealed in the data was as follows: Administrators need to offer teachers insightful support that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff.



Linked to this theme were the two Northern Great Plains American Indian values of wisdom and humility. Administrators and teachers from both sites also found commonalities in their thinking about insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of risk-taking, of learning, and of collective work toward a goal—all of which are promote success. The insights gleaned from the study's data are supported by Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory. Burns's paradigm taught that leadership is a reciprocal process with a collective purpose. According to Moriano et al. (2014), organizations report a higher personal performance when organizational leaders support risk-taking and proactive, innovative behaviors.

Wisdom, humility, and honesty were values referred to by both sites' participants. But administrators and teachers at the two research sites revealed slight differences when discussing the values. The first site's participants, who had more experience, referred to honesty more than wisdom and humility. The second site's participants discussed humility more than honesty and wisdom. Perhaps the second school site's participants were more in tune with humility and the need to learn because they were younger and less experienced. Thus, wisdom would be a goal to be attained over time.

Administrators often referred to honesty and wisdom when sharing their perceptions of successful transformational leadership. This finding may be due to the need for administrators to consider an entire organization, and the actions and interactions of staff, for the benefit of student growth. Teachers referred to humility, compassion, and caring. The difference may reflect the fact that teachers work closely

with students every day, while administrators are somewhat removed from close day-to-day student interactions.

According to participants, administrators often referred to the importance of constancy and of using organized, incremental changes, whereas teachers referred to the importance of relationships and administrators who led by example more often than did the administrators. This may be due to the fact that administrators are responsible for, and need to view, the organization as a whole. Administrators may see the effects of stress on staff who are tasked with implementing sudden or large changes in their work. Teachers work personally and intensively with students daily. The importance of relationships is recognized throughout the various levels of a school, but teacher-student and teacher-family interactions are focal points for successful learning. Teachers also reported that they appreciate administrators who know how to implement the changes they ask of their staff.

In supportive work climates, staff are urged to try new approaches and take different points of view to improve creativity and performance (Henker et al., 2015). One administrative participant advised staff to take risks and supported risk-taking “by having confidence in them [staff].” That administrator was respected for engaging and motivating staff to collectively raise performance by applying the wisdom used in support of others’ success. Participant WT2 said, “She [the principal] allows us to fail [if trying something new] and then we don’t feel like we are failing. There are never any putdowns.” Participants agreed that schools need to support their staff wisely to foster a culture of learning.

These findings direct school administrators and teachers to insist that mutually desired changes must be structured incrementally and that everyone involved in the change must have a measure of humility, which is needed to realize learning and change. Wise, insightful support for teachers can foster a culture of learning. When the findings of the two research sites were compared, participants at the site with the most experienced teachers, who had turned around and raised performance levels at their school, considered consistency and stability with organized, incremental changes more important than did participants at the site with less experienced teachers and which had not yet raised academic performance. This could be viewed as “wisdom” versus “youthful exuberance.” Transformational leadership requires a degree of wisdom and humility to realize insightful support for stakeholders in Northern Great Plains American Indian reservation turnaround schools.

### **Steadfast, Collective Work with Compassion and Caring and Generosity**

The third theme in the data on perceptions of effective transformational leadership was as follows: The administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff. The Northern Great Plains American Indian values of compassion and caring and generosity are essential elements of this theme. Burns (1978) deemed leadership to be a process in which leaders use relationships to make organizational change and work collectively toward goals. The findings of this study corroborated Burns’s transformational leadership theory. For example, all eight participants in the study referred to the importance of having a shared vision and working toward common goals. Burns advocated that leaders engage and motivate followers to work together to raise

performance by developing trust, respect, and loyalty. Each participant in this study referred to the importance of respectful collaboration as well as work toward common goals.

The accomplishment of shared goals through teamwork is stressed by transformational leaders (Newman & Butler, 2014). In regard to organizational change based on shared goals of teams, a teacher said, “Our interventions are working. We’ve gotten ourselves out of priority status and we are a progressing school. This is our second year of being a progressing school.” The teacher went on to say, “We [staff] stay true to the school, stay true to the culture, stay true to the spirit, stay true to the reason why we are here. We’re still here for the right reasons.” Collective, purposeful work toward shared goals by an administration that led by example and gave generously of its time and talents were found to be significant for successful transformational leadership.

It is clear that school administration needs to support and expect unwavering dedication to their students from all staff. This expectation of dedication ought to be proven through collective, steadfast work toward common goals. Dedication and collective work can be evidenced through actions that exhibit the American Indian values of compassion and caring and generosity as shown by the giving of time, skills, and talents that are essential for students’ academic and social-emotional growth and success.

### **Honest, Collaborative Communication**

The fourth theme revealed in the data was as follows: A structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration. The Northern Great Plains American Indian value of honesty was a partnering value that aligned with

this theme. Transformational leaders emphasize teamwork and communicating the accomplishments of shared goals (Newman & Butler, 2014). Burns's (1978) conceptual framework supports the interactions of stakeholders in pursuit of common goals. Participants revealed that collaborative communication leads to trusting relationships, which are important to attain goals.

Transforming leadership points followers to mutual interests that lead to the well-being of others (Bass, 2008). Administrators referred to collaborative communication more often than did teachers. This may be because administrators are responsible for the coordination and motivation of staff to meet objectives and, ultimately, accomplish the common goals of the organization.

The findings of this study supported Bass (2008), who imparted that a transformational leader personifies and communicates the attributes of optimism and open-mindedness. When referring to the positive mindset of her administrator, a participant shared the adage, "You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar." The participant went on to say: "I honestly can't think of instances where someone was not motivated to do what they needed to do. It is a wonderful place." Another teacher stated: "We focus on positivity." Teachers' willingness to support and encourage each other and their administrators and interact positively for students' success was prevalent at the school site.

In contrast, a participant at one of the sites identified a culture of perfectionism and never admitting mistakes: "A negative workplace is dangerous because it's going to trickle down and hurt the [school] culture and that can eat away at your own classroom

culture too,” and “Fear of making a mistake is deeply embedded [currently at that school].” Professional honesty was expressed as a neglected, yet desired, value.

Participants at the site conveyed concern for the lack of students’ academic and social-emotional success.

Schools need to understand the importance of respectful, collaborative communication and the power of positive, honest interactions over time. Communication skills are not limited to respectful verbal interactions. They also include listening and using staff input in decision making.

The findings of this study suggest a natural alignment between the emergent themes about the perceptions of successful transformational leadership strategies and the values of Northern Great Plains American Indians. For successful academic growth and for the social-emotional well-being of students, transformational leaders must work in schools, especially turnaround schools on American Indian reservations, to establish authentic relationships based on respect. To motivate staff and collectively raise staff and student performance, insightful support based on wisdom and humility needs to be offered to stakeholders in order to foster a culture of learning. Steadfast, collective work must be carried out by compassionate and caring staff who give generously of their time and talents for the progress of students. Finally, honest, collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative case study had limitations of researcher bias, size in a limited participant pool, and assurance of confidentiality. Bracketing, reflective journaling,

member checking, substantiating the broadest participant pool possible within a narrow context, and abiding by confidentiality and interview protocols helped mitigate the limitations of this study. The in-depth description of a real-life phenomenon followed by critical analysis in a bounded system is a goal of a case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and the design may assist in moderating certain limitations of a study.

I used a bracketing process to address researcher bias before each interview commenced (Wall et al., 2004). I reminded myself to focus on the responses to each protocol prompt and ensure deep understanding through follow-up questions. During each interview, I considered my beliefs regarding preconceived attitudes that might interfere with the collection of data. I adhered to the interview protocol. Additionally, I used a reflective journal to critically analyze the data after the interviews and review the findings (see Yin, 2016).

The transferability of this study may have been constrained by a small sample size of eight participants in a limited participant pool with a disparate ratio of inexperienced teachers to experienced and certified administrators and teachers. Few participants were involved in this qualitative, case-study research that provided subjective data. It is typical in qualitative research to purposely select a small sample of participants who have experience with the phenomenon of study and can answer the research questions (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Responsive interviews were conducted to gain detailed description through robust discussions, but the resultant data from those discussions do not necessarily represent perceptions of all employees on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. This study was a small exploration of

administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding transformational leadership. More themes may have emerged with additional participants. The findings of this study might be applied in other similar settings to include grant schools on other reservations within the boundaries of the United States, BIE schools, and public schools with a high number of Native American students. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide if the findings of the study are transferable or applicable to other contexts (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Assurance of confidentiality was a potential limitation of this study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). The study was conducted in unique small settings in an extremely rural region. Participants from both sites travel many miles for professional responsibilities and training as well as personal needs. Therefore, the compulsory expectation of confidentiality in the research study was especially important in this small study. Guarantees were made to the participants to alleviate concerns regarding confidentiality that enforcement and strict compliance with the protocols of the tribe and university are to be respected.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this small, qualitative case study, I recommend further research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Further investigation on a larger scale into (a) the level of educators' degrees and areas of specialty; (b) the perceptions of the dominant and nondominant cultures of the educators; (c) similarities and differences of regional public-school systems, Bureau of Indian Education, and tribal grant school located on reservations with similar student



demographics; and (d) similarities and differences of culturally concentrated schools across the United States is recommended. Further investigation into related areas of study could be through qualitative, exploratory case studies that use purposeful sampling to find perceptions of successful transformational leadership. Establishing credible and reliable links between the actions of transformational leaders and the improvement of turnaround schools located on American Indian reservations may lead to a greater understanding that assists leaders in expediting the necessary changes for a successful turnaround.

Successful school turnarounds emanate from transformational practices that are egalitarian, respectful, and likely to be flexible and motivate staff to a common goal (Bass, 2008). Building capacity, communicating a vision, and shaping school culture are related to successful turnaround schools (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Also associated with successful school turnaround are collective work by administrators and staff to reduce societal inequalities and increase educational opportunities for students and the practice of collaborative decision-making for an improved work climate. These practices align with Indigenous leadership (Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015).

Although transformational leadership is the most studied and influential style of leadership (Berkovich, 2016; Dinh et al., 2014; Dionne et al., 2014; Guerrero et al., 2017) according to the literature reviewed for this study, there has been limited research conducted concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015; Mette & Stanoch, 2016). The majority of the literature reviewed for this study was a qualitative case study

methodology. However, the implementation of single or multiple quantitative case studies with cluster sampling to determine perceptions of effective transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools has the potential to result in wide-ranging, objective data. Variables of a quantitative study could include (a) the level of educators' degrees and areas of specialty; (b) the dominant and nondominant cultures of the educators; (c) similarities and differences such as academic, social-emotional, and behavioral scores of regional public-school systems, Bureau of Indian Education, and tribal grant school located on reservations with similar student demographics; or (d) similarities and differences of academic, social-emotional, and behavioral scores in culturally concentrated schools across the United States.

There is insufficient evidence regarding proficiencies necessary to turn around and maintain improvement in American Indian reservation turnaround schools (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Qualitative exploratory case studies using purposeful sampling to explore leaders' skills and aptitudes through an examination of leaders' educational backgrounds and current levels of their schools' competencies may prove useful in understanding proficiencies necessary to turn around and maintain improvement. Additional investigation using qualitative exploratory case studies with purposeful sampling to ascertain the similarities and differences of regional public-school systems, Bureau of Indian Education, and tribal grant school located on reservations with similar student demographics, as well as culturally concentrated schools across the United States will support and extend a limited body of knowledge in understanding effective transformational leadership in the unique setting of American Indian turnaround schools

located on reservations. Non-American Indian leaders need to reconcile leadership practices with American Indian leaders' values and practices (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015). Competent transformational leaders who appreciate cultural intricacies and educational demands placed on educators in American Indian reservation schools are needed to assist in successfully affecting sustainable change.

Effective leadership is essential to address the distinctive circumstances relevant to American Indian cultures. Successful leaders choose suitable methods of leadership specific to their followers and the unique situations in which they work, and it is fundamental for leaders to know their followers' capacities and values (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; DeMatthews et al., 2015; Gipp, 2015; Green 2103). A quantitative case study using simple sampling to find a representative sample for the perceptions of the dominant and nondominant cultures of educational leaders may prove helpful in understanding how to best address the unique circumstances of American Indian reservation turnaround schools. Successful leaders must choose fitting methods of leadership with sincere consideration to culture.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. This study helped reduce the gap in research regarding the practice of transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools. The results of this study may increase the understanding of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of transformational leadership as effective leadership. It is recommended that educational leaders of schools

on tribal lands learn of this study's findings through a presentation to the Tribal Council's Health, Education, and Welfare Committee.

### **Implications**

A study's implications involve its transferability to a conceptual level higher than that of the specific findings of a unique study (see Yin, 2016). Suggestions for positive social change from the results of this small, qualitative exploratory case study regarding perceptions of transformational leadership may immediately benefit the personnel of a school where it has been implemented. Ultimately, the change may lead to greater societal stability for the local community as well as neighboring communities in the Northern Great Plains. Turnaround schools located on other American Indian reservations in the Northern Great Plains or, perhaps, in regions throughout North America may benefit from the findings of this study. By implementing transformational leadership strategies, the problem of low student achievement and high administrative turnover might be remedied.

Transformational leadership is a holistic, respectful, values- and change-oriented, collaborative, and optimistic form of leadership that engages and energizes followers (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Green, 2013; Mette & Schribner, 2014). An organization led with the elements of transformational leadership, as found successful by participants in this study, also exemplifies positive aspects of successful social order: (a) respectful, resilient, and authentic relationships that consider culture and fairness; (b) wisdom with humility that concedes flexible thinking used for insightful support for others' success; (c) compassion and caring with generosity in the giving of time and skills working

toward collective goals for constancy and stability; and (d) honest, collaborative communication.

Leaders are a primary source to enact organizational change. Leaders in turnaround organizations must gain skills in cultural literacy and develop respectful relationships to understand the culturally diverse characteristics, categories, and groups of community members and people with whom they work (Lumby & Foskett, 2011; Ylimaki et al., 2014). All participants in the study considered appreciation and respect of culture crucial for successful transformational leadership. The participants from the first school site in this study referred to respecting students' culture and building relationships as necessary for successful administrating and teaching while the participants at the second school site suggested the direct use of culture by administrators and instructors as central to efforts in facilitating students' social-emotional safety. Administrators and teachers reciprocated personal and professional respect, admiration, and affection at the research site that had improved its standing with the State Department of Education. Through respectful relationships, leaders may develop a greater understanding of how to best guide their organization toward improvement as well as societal stability.

Participants in this case study expressed gratitude for perceived support from transformational leaders in the area of professional development. Creating a learning environment based on the respectful consideration of an individual's abilities and needs to raise collective performance was valued. The sharing of wisdom in support of others' success through training with follow up is extremely important for professional growth at personal as well as organizational levels.

According to the findings of this study, caring and compassionate relationships developed through consistent behaviors by administrators and teachers evolve into trusting relationships conducive to learning and growing personally, academically, and professionally within the organization. Constant, caring practices are essential for the success of adults and children. According to Holme et al. (2018), the most effective leaders are those who are caring and anticipate the good in others. Participants at both research sites communicated a protectiveness in caring for the physical, as well as social and emotional safety and welfare of the students in their charge and each other. Participants reported that the actions of successful leaders must be dependable and consistent over time, so everyone feels safe.

The findings of this study indicate that successful transformational leaders share honest and timely communication in a variety of ways. Participants reported that purpose-driven communication and collaboration with stakeholders improve practice and creates essential acceptance for collective work toward goals. The approaches to communication advocated by the participants in this study promote the natural flow of ideas that may transcend school settings. Participants in this study also indicated communication should be constructive.

A positive mindset that includes flexible thinking in conjunction with a degree of humbleness that allows leaders to learn from those in their charge was found critical to the success of transformational leaders. Participants included administrators and teachers whose frequency and depth of responses indicated an understanding of the importance of a positive attitude. The responses also revealed the participants possessed a passion for

helping the students gain the confidence and skills for success in school, but as importantly for life and society beyond their time in school. They were excited and proud to be teaching, and teaching ‘these students’ [those in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains] in particular. All participants exhibited a keen desire to explain their situation and impart their thoughts on transformational leadership. Some participants revealed pride in their administrators, whose transformational leadership they enjoyed. The participants in this study described their position in the organization as being intensely personal and professionally fulfilling. Respect for peers and the transformational leaders was evident through smiles, reports of events, and tears. Administrators and teachers shared a profound passion for the common goal of student achievement and success..

The common goal of academic achievement and life accomplishments for students was apparent and referred to often by both research sites’ participants. Both sites voiced a desire for students’ success in life beyond school. However, at the research site considered more successful as proven by state-level standards raised to an acceptable academic status, there was strong kinship or family spirit evident. The participants at that site spoke about how they cared for each other and were compassionate with the students and their families. Participants referred to collaboration and passion for students as well as respect for their administration more often than the less successful research site. Staff from both research sites exhibited a sense of urgency in sharing their perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Throughout positive and

passionate dialogue in the interviews, a conviction of purpose was evidenced by accounts of respect and love for students. Implications for positive social change based on this small, qualitative case study regarding transformational leadership involve the elements for social order of respectful relationships, support of others, consistency of behavior for stability, collaborative communication, a positive mindset, and work toward collective goals through consideration of cultures, use of wisdom, compassion and caring, honesty, and humility. Organizations led with these elements of transformational leadership may also lead to societal stability for the local community as well as neighboring communities.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Transformational leadership is a collaborative and respectful process that uses compatible values and contextual factors (Burns, 1978). The literature reviewed for this study suggests that transformational leaders need to use values, a collective purpose, and understand their followers' culture to attain common goals. There have been few studies that have explicitly linked American Indian values that support elements of successful transformational leadership. Transformational leadership exists when relationships and interactions among members of an organization improve the proficiencies and expectations of the organization, so goals are reached (Bass, 2008). I sought to understand perceptions of how leaders effectively guide American Indian



reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains. Participants' responses confirm elements of transformational leadership from the conceptual framework of this study that are essential for success.

This study addresses a gap in the literature about practice concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools. There should be further studies to replicate the findings of this research by gathering administrators' and teachers' perceptions of effective transformational leadership in other American Indian turnaround schools. Insights of leaders' strategies for (a) inspiring and motivating others to achieve common goals; (b) encouraging staff to take risks and challenges; (c) developing relationships that evidence respect and trust; and (d) providing a means of communication to use to build a shared vision and encourage a sense of community to improve student learning are needed. Participants' in-depth explanations and descriptions of their perceptions confirmed that Northern Great Plains American Indian values of respect, wisdom, humility, compassion and caring, generosity, and honesty aligned with themes of (a) resilient, authentic relationships focused on students' academic and social-emotional progress is necessary throughout the organization; (b) administrators need to offer insightful support for teachers that fosters a culture of learning for students and staff; (c) administration expects and supports steadfast, collective work by all staff; and (d) a structure for collaborative communication needs to be supported by the administration.

The findings of this study indicate that transformational, responsive leadership is necessary for improved instruction and academic achievement of Northern Great Plains

American Indian students in turnaround schools. School leaders should adopt and implement transformational leadership practices, as described in this study. If school leaders adopt and implement transformational leadership practices, meaningful and lasting relationships could be enjoyed among school stakeholders. There would be an improvement in student learning within a collegial and respectful environment, and stability realized for the good of the students, their school, and their community.

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## Appendix A: Administrator Interview Protocol

- I. Greeting and Establish Rapport
- II. Review Consent Form
- III. Review Definition of Transformational Leadership
- IV. Obtain Background Information
- V. Participant Questions
- VI. Interview Questions
- VII. Close of Interview

### **I. Greeting and Establish Rapport**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I sincerely appreciate your support and dedication to education and American Indian education. I'm studying the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools. The questions I'll ask you in this interview will guide our discussion in just a minute.

### **II. Review Consent Form**

Before we begin, I'd like to review the consent form with you.

### **III. Review Definition of Transformational Leadership**

I've based this study on authors who have written about transformational leadership. I want us to have the same understanding about transformational leadership before our interview starts. As you know, transformational leaders respect cultural differences and diverse points of view as well as understand the need to motivate and build a united foundation to improve academic outcomes. This type of leader realizes the

importance of positive relationships and reciprocal interactions through collective, collaborative communication among leaders, teachers, students, and the community. Transformational leaders also improve learning conditions through goal setting and planning that help to develop teachers' professional competencies and improve academic outcomes for students.

I appreciate that you work in a challenging setting with high student and staff turnover. Although you may have worked in other settings as an educator, I am going to ask you to share your views on the characteristics and practices of transformational leadership you think would be effective leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains.

#### **IV. Obtain Background Information**

Before we begin the interview, I'd like to ask you some background information that will help me with my study.

Name:	Female/Male
Grades currently administrating:	Years administrating at site:
Years administrating in reservation schools:	Years of administrating:
Years of teaching in reservation schools:	Years of teaching:
Other role(s) in education:	

#### **V. Participant Questions**

I have four general questions and some probing questions I'll ask you for clarification. I will audiotape the interview and take notes as we work through the questions. I want to remind you that I'd like you to share your perceptions of

transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains, only. Can I answer any questions for you before we begin?

## **VI. Interview Questions for Administrators**

1. How do you inspire and motivate others to achieve common goals to improve student learning?
  - Tell me about a time when....
2. How do you encourage staff to take risks and challenges to increase student achievement?
  - Give me examples...
  - Tell me how you challenge staff...
3. How do you develop relationships that evidence respect and trust with colleagues, students, and families?
  - Tell me more about...
  - Give me a specific example of a time when...
  - What did you notice about your relationships with colleagues and families once respect and trust were secured?
4. In your school, what effective transformational communication strategies have you used to build a shared vision and encourage a sense of community?
  - Tell me more about...
5. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**VII. Close of Interview**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your experiences and views will help me further the understanding of transformational leadership in exceptional settings, such as this one. I will reach out to you after I analyze my data and see if what I find agrees with what we've discussed today. What is the best way I can reach you?

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Interviewee code number: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview start time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview completion time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

- I. Greeting and Establish Rapport
- II. Review Consent Form
- III. Review Definition of Transformational Leadership
- IV. Obtain Background Information
- V. Participant Questions
- VI. Interview Questions
- VII. Close of Interview

### **I. Greeting and establish rapport**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I sincerely appreciate your support and dedication to education and American Indian education, in particular. I'm studying the perceptions of K-8 administrators and teachers concerning transformational leadership on American Indian reservation turnaround schools. The questions I'll ask you in this interview will guide our discussion in just a minute.

### **II. Review Consent Form**

Before we begin, I'd like to review the consent form with you.

### **III. Review Definition of Transformational Leadership**

I've based this study on authors who have written about transformational leadership. I want us to have the same understanding about transformational leadership before our interview starts. As you know, transformational leaders respect cultural differences and diverse points of view as well as understand the need to motivate and build a united foundation to improve academic outcomes. This type of leader realizes the

importance of positive relationships and reciprocal interactions through collective, collaborative communication among leaders, teachers, students, and the community. Transformational leaders also improve learning conditions through goal setting and planning that helps to develop teachers' professional competencies and improve academic outcomes for students.

I appreciate that you work in a challenging setting with high student and staff turnover. Although you may have worked in other settings as an educator, I am going to ask you to share your views on the characteristics and practices of transformational leadership you think would be effective leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains.

#### **IV. Obtain Background Information**

Before we begin the interview, may I ask some background information that will help me with my study?

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Female/Male</b>
<b>Grades currently administrating</b>	<b>Years administrating at site:</b>
<b>Years administrating in reservation schools:</b>	<b>Years of administrating:</b>
<b>Years of teaching in reservation schools:</b>	<b>Years of teaching:</b>
<b>Other role(s) in education:</b>	

#### **V. Participant Questions**

I have four general questions and some probing questions I'll ask you for clarification. I will audiotape the interview and take notes as we work through the questions. I want to remind you that I'd like you to share your perceptions of

transformational leadership in American Indian reservation turnaround schools in the Northern Great Plains, only. Can I answer any questions for you before we begin?

## **VI. Interview Questions for Teachers**

1. How does a transformational leader inspire and motivate others to achieve common goals to improve student learning?
  - Tell me about a time when....
2. How do effective transformational leaders encourage staff to take risks and challenges to increase student achievement?
  - Give me examples...
  - Tell me how you have been challenged...
3. How do effective transformational leaders develop relationships that evidence respect and trust with colleagues, students, and families?
  - Tell me more about...
  - Give me a specific example of a time when...
  - What have you noticed about relationships with colleagues and families once respect and trust have been secured?
4. In your school, what effective transformational communication strategies have been used to build a shared vision and encourage a sense of community?
  - Tell me more about...
5. Is there anything else you would like to add?



**VII. Close of Interview**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your experiences and views will help me further the understanding of transformational leadership in exceptional settings, such as this one. I will reach out to you after I analyze my data and see if what I find agrees with what we've discussed today. What is the best way I can reach you?

---

Interviewee code number: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview start time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview completion time: \_\_\_\_\_