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TEACHER IDENTIFICATION OF PRINCIPAL BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT TEACHER AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE, AND RELATEDNESS

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RONDA KESLER

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TEACHER IDENTIFICATION OF PRINCIPAL BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT TEACHER AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE, AND RELATEDNESS

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Curt Adams, Chair

Dr. Beverly Edwards

Dr. Kathrine Gutierrez

Dr. Brigitte Steinheider

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Abstract

This qualitative research examined teachers' perspectives of specific behaviors of principals that promoted teachers' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness through the lens of Basic Psychological Needs Theory, a mini theory of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2009). Guiding research questions included: *What principal behaviors promote/hinder teacher autonomy? What are specific principal behaviors/actions that promote/hinder teachers' overall professional growth and professional competence? What relational behaviors do principals extend toward teachers that positively and/or negatively affect teachers' relatedness and/or sense of belonging?* Approximately 100 teachers throughout the state of Oklahoma chose to respond to an anonymous descriptive survey of five open-ended questions. Findings depicted teachers detailed and abbreviated scenarios describing their principal's behaviors that both promoted teacher autonomy, relatedness, and competence (as defined by SDT). Findings for autonomy supportive behaviors included: communicates teacher value and respect; trust extended; differentiated and individualized professional development; teacher practice; leadership opportunities; and time given. Competence promoted principal behaviors included: practice feedback; learning opportunities and resources; coaching/demonstration teachers; affirmation and encouragement; discipline support, and classroom support. Relatedness promoted behaviors included: accessible; open communication; positive and encouraging; interpersonal skills/caring; belief in teachers' professional ability; affirmation; personable and supports teachers with student discipline. This study was predicated on the need for site leadership to understand and choose to engage in specific behaviors that empower autonomy, increase competence, and nurture relationships with teachers in order to create an educational environment where they choose to enter, stay, and flourish.

Keywords: autonomy, competence, relatedness, Self-Determination Theory, principal leadership behaviors, Basic Psychological Needs Theory

Chapter 1

The Beginning

In the fall of 2004, I arrived as a Special Education teacher at an urban middle school in Oklahoma after leaving the Seattle area having taught approximately seven years. As teacher and Team Lead, I interacted daily with the cafeteria manager. At the midpoint of my first year, she began to speak into my life, stating repeatedly that I should become a principal. Each time she spoke, those words resonated in my spirit, and a dream was formed. Enrolling in a master's degree program for administration in the fall of my second year in OK, I began my path toward becoming a principal.

The spring of that year opened my eyes to what I would label as "the dark side" of administration: the misuse of position and power. The principal had gone out on FMLA and was replaced by an interim principal. During this time, one of my Special Education colleagues came to me seeking advice and support as her team leader. The assistant principal (AP) had asked her to mark a student present for the last month of school who had been sent home and would no longer be in attendance. It would not have been difficult to do the necessary paperwork to put this student on homebound, but this was not the option the AP chose. This left my colleague struggling with ethical, moral, and legal concerns and wondering if she could potentially lose her teaching credential. I agreed to speak with the principal on her behalf, hoping this was a misunderstanding. When I arrived in her office, she requested the AP to join us. After sharing my colleague's concerns, I was stunned with what followed. The assistant began to chuckle and proceeded to tell me that I would quickly find out when I became a principal that, "you will need to be creative." The two of them were clearly in agreement that their selected course of action would continue. My response was to state that I believed in creativity, but that putting the

credentials of one of their teachers on the line by committing attendance fraud was not only unprofessional but illegal, and I did not support their actions. I then got up and left, shaking and fearful that I would lose my job as a 2-year temporary teacher.

Seeking help from my district Special Education Coordinator, the inappropriate actions of the interim and AP were validated; she shared the information with the Director of Special Education Services. This interaction led to an eventual change of my position. The following year I was hired as a Behavior Coach via the district Special Ed department, which in turn led to a position as a Special Education Coordinator; I served 20 principals and their Special Education teams in this capacity. This position became my principal-in-training experience while finishing my administration degree, as I was able to closely observe and support the role of the principals. My eyes were opened to the importance of the actions, words, and methods by which principals interacted and engaged with their staff. With every decision and conversation, I became keenly aware of the influence that accompanied the positional power of the principal and the daily opportunities they had to either inspire and support or discourage and quench teachers' well-being. I made it a personal goal to internalize and eventually enact the principal behaviors that helped teachers to thrive when I had the opportunity to serve as principal.

A year after the completion of my administration degree, I received my first principalship. Three years in, I made the decision to enter this doctoral program. Having seen firsthand the influence a principal has on their staff, as well as wanting to improve my own skills as a practitioner, my research focused on principal behaviors and the subsequent effect on teachers' well-being and their ability to thrive in the workplace. The following dissertation describes the process and outcomes of the next steps of my journey…

The Study

Is the teaching profession in public education in a state of crisis? Researchers, as well as federal and state agencies report multiple factors that point to this conclusion. Teacher attrition rates resulting in teacher shortages across the country are occurring at increasingly alarming rates; if current trends continue, there could be potentially as few as 200,000 available teacher hires each year by 2025, resulting in a gap of more than 100,000 teachers annually (Sutcher et al., 2019). Simultaneously, teacher preparation programs overall enrollments have decreased by 37.8 % nationwide in the last five years equaling approximately 240,000 teachers in total (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2017a & 2017b). As a result, emergency certifications have become a dominant alternative route for states and districts to fill teacher positions leading to different challenges for building a strong, stable, and effective teaching corps (Eger, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher turnover, shortages, and erosion of entry standards are occurring in a context of depressed teacher salaries (Boser & Straus, 2014), a lack of teacher preparation (Marinell et al., 2013), and poor working conditions (Loeb et al., 2005). Equally difficult are the ongoing pressures put on teachers to have strong student performance outcomes regardless of their level of education, training or experience (Killeavy, 2006). With teaching and education facing threatening conditions, it is reasonable to question how teachers are going to possibly meet the demands and expectations placed upon them by all stakeholders in the current work environment. To paint a clearer picture of the current state of education, a deeper glimpse of these factors is warranted.

A foreshadowing of an impending teacher shortage due to high rates of teacher attrition within public education in the late 1990's caused grave concern to school districts across

America (US Department of Education, 1999). Predictions of teacher shortages are now a reality. At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, more than 330 headlines across the nation were indicative of teacher shortages from coast to coast; just two years prior, similar articles were only 24 in number. Excerpts from recent articles include the following:

- "Nevada needs teachers, and it's shelling out $5 million to get them." (Whitaker, 2015)
- "First marking period in Philly ends with many teacher shortages." (Graham, 2015)
- "[San Francisco] Principals say state teacher shortage now a crisis." (Markovich, 2015)
- "Why Oklahoma is racing to put nearly 1,000 uncertified teachers in its classrooms." (Nix, 2015)

Given the high teacher attrition rate and number of individuals who have not had the educational background or training to teach, there is clear concern as to whether there are qualified individuals in the classroom (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Not only are teacher shortages looming, but the stress of teaching is reaching new heights for those already in the profession (Loeb et al., 2005). Reasons for increased stress range from class sizes and salaries, to unhappiness with administrative practices such as lack of support, classroom autonomy, or input on decisions to policy issues such as the effects of testing and accountability (Loeb et al., 2005). Children, especially in urban districts, are coming to the classroom unprepared both academically and emotionally; as such, teachers' roles have broadened beyond traditional academic responsibilities to also include work as a social worker and/or counselor (Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Loeb et al., 2005). Low salaries also add to personal stress, leaving many teachers to take on second jobs (Talley et al., 2018). According to the latest survey completed by the U.S. Education Department in the 2015-16 school year, 18 to 20 % of teachers in the US work an additional job to make ends meet.

Furthermore, although most contemporary efforts to improve student learning have targeted teachers' motivations (e.g., increasing competition among schools for higher performing students) and capacities (e.g., the teaching standards movement), inadequate working conditions seriously undermine any potential hope these efforts may produce and are contributing factors to teachers becoming disillusioned and choosing to leave the profession (Goddard et al., 2006). Regrettably, these types of deteriorating conditions in the educational environment do little to attract teachers to the profession.

Federal, state, and district performance outcomes are also pressures that rest on the shoulders of teachers and school leaders. The former *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) has been replaced by *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015), both of which hold states to high standards of accountability for academic test proficiency, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates. Each state, district, and public school is required to set goals that close achievement gaps and increase graduation rates. The extensiveness of these requirements and demands on quality performance for all teachers continue to grow, regardless of their level of experience (Killeavy, 2006). Whether career or novice teacher, the expectation of outcomes is essentially the same: high levels of student academic performance measured within the context of student scores on what is typically a one time a year, state mandated test (Killeavy, 2006). Ultimately, the weight of responsibility to achieve these goals lies most heavily on the classroom teacher whether seasoned or new to the profession (Killeavy, 2006). Knowing how to meet these expectations, however, may be elusive to the novice and emergency certified educator. Questions continue to be raised as to how the Federal government, State Departments of Education, and school districts are going to support teachers against these difficult odds (Sutcher et al., 2019).

When reflecting on high attrition rates, stressors in the workplace, and systemic pressures

placed on teachers for high performance outcomes, the charge of educating our youth can feel almost insurmountable. The combined effects of the contributing factors above paint a holistic picture of American education in crisis. Principals are at the front line of this crisis. As evidence reveals, school principals' actions can nurture and support the thriving of teachers in such context, or their inactions or negative actions might deepen teacher stressors (Goldberg, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2015). In these current tumultuous times in public education, the premise of this study purports that it is more important than ever to intently consider the role of the principal in supporting the professional growth of teachers and their instructional capacity within the classroom.

Given all the stressors and negative challenges surrounding the teaching vocation, it is important to understand and identify how school leaders might work with teachers in ways that elevate their knowledge and skills (Goldberg, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005). School leaders are in influential positions to affect conditions in which teacher thriving or teacher stress and alienation form. Research on teacher well-being and job satisfaction shows that positive interactions with the principal are critical: they promote higher levels of teacher effectiveness (Goldberg, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2015), enhance teacher collective and self-efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993), foster teacher-principal trust (Forsyth et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), shape transformational processes (Anderson, 2017; Leithwood, 1994), build organizational citizenship behaviors (Bogler & Somech, 2004), guide effective professional learning (DuFour, 2004), and enhance instruction (Ingersoll, 2004). Applicable to novice, emergency certified and struggling teachers, Kitchen (2009) asserts that principals who establish and carry out a plan of support for development and improvement help nurture a teacher's professional capacity.

Evidence from the studies cited above makes a case for school principals as essential to fostering conditions from which teachers can learn, grow, and thrive in the profession. This study intends to add to the literature by asking teachers to describe specific principal actions that they experienced as supporting their psychological needs. The study occurred within the current educational environment inundated with teacher shortages and inexperience, high stressors in the workplace (Gibbs & Miller, 2014), and a laser-like focus on data, test results, and accountability (ESSA, 2015). The intent was to understand teacher experiences within this context; specifically, to elicit from the teachers identifiable principal behaviors which promoted or hindered their basic psychological needs in the workplace.

Statement of the Problem

In 2015 in the state of Oklahoma, headlines in the Tulsa World newspaper read, *Crisis hits Oklahoma classrooms with teacher shortage, quality concerns* (Eger & Habib, 2015). The article went on to discuss how Oklahoma was losing teachers at a dramatic rate to neighboring states offering better salaries. In addition, it stated that a higher-than-normal number of teachers were opting for early retirement. Fast forward almost four years, a news station in Oklahoma City reported in an interview with Shawn Hime, the executive director for the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, "Five or six years ago, we had 25 to 30 emergency certificates a year: this year we're now approaching 2,000 emergency certified teachers in our classrooms" (Eger, 2019).

Given the more recent factors playing out in the educational field including unprepared instructional staff and high levels of personal and professional stress, principals need to know how to best support their staff in these increasingly difficult times (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Recent reports emphasize the escalating numbers of unprepared instructional

staff (Podolsky et al., 2019), as well as the high levels of personal and professional stressors teachers are experiencing (Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Talley et al., 2018). These challenges set the stage for this study.

The research problem emerged from two lines of inquiry: leadership research and self-determination theory applied to the educational context. Evidence from leadership research informs us that a strong relationship exists between a teacher's level of professional satisfaction and capacity, their interactions with the building principal (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008), and teacher retention (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Principals with the know-how to invest and build teacher capacity tend to nurture, strengthen, retain, and attract the current and future workforce (Adams et al., 2016). Where administrative support and a strong connection between the principal and teacher exist, teacher satisfaction and morale are intact (Goldberg, 2000). The quality of the principal-teacher's interaction cannot be understated, as it is one of the strongest determining influences on staff motivation, commitment, growth, student learning, and working conditions (Leithwood, et al*.,* 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Research on individual self-determination has identified psychological needs as conduits for human thriving (Reeve et al., 2008). For teachers, supporting and activating competence, relatedness, and autonomy has been shown to build enthusiasm for teaching and to foster creativity in their instructional endeavors (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Niemiec and Ryan (2009) surmised that when the social environment in which an individual operates obstructs their psychological needs, they may function below his or her ability. These researchers concluded that the opposite was also true; individuals who experience a healthy and nurturing relational social network are more energized and possess positive psychological states, functioning at higher levels of their capacity (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Additional research has shown that when individuals' psychological needs are satisfied, they are more likely to set professional and personal growth goals, build healthy relationships with their colleagues, and contribute to the workplace (Reeve et al., 2008). With a teaching core very different than just a few years ago (Sutcher et al., 2019), principals could benefit from being able to grasp and respond to the changing needs of teachers, understanding how they can best support and guide teachers' professional growth.

What remains unclear in the literature is evidence regarding specific principal behaviors that teachers perceive and experience as supporting or hindering their psychological needs. If two key goals of site leadership are to create an educational environment where teachers choose to enter, stay, and flourish, as well as for students to prosper and reach their potential, principals must understand and intentionally participate in leadership behaviors that promote thriving in teachers and build teacher capacity (Adams et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and name specific behaviors of principals that both promoted and hindered teachers' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as described by teachers. By doing so, this information could ultimately help building leaders function with a more intentional focus that will shape and create working environments where teachers choose to stay, grow, and thrive. With this goal in mind, teachers' responses were sought through an anonymous descriptive survey which allowed them the freedom to provide honest and open self-disclosure of their experiences with their principals. Although a number of quantitative studies have been completed, this researcher is unaware of a qualitative study that elicited the descriptions of experiences from teachers in their own words. As a result of the deeply personal and sometimes emotional stories told in the open-ended survey

questions, it was hoped that principals will see themselves within these descriptions, inspiring honest self-reflections that will both challenge and shape their words and behaviors. Ultimately, the purpose and hope of this study was to influence the behaviors of current and future principals toward support of educators' autonomy, relatedness, and competence while avoiding the negative actions and interactions that hinder teachers' ability to thrive and build their professional capacity.

To accomplish this goal, this study was guided by three research questions that were aligned with SDT's Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) core components of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What principal behaviors promote/hinder teacher autonomy?
2. What are specific principal behaviors/actions that promote/hinder teachers' overall professional growth and professional competence?
3. What relational behaviors do principals extend toward teachers that positively and/or negatively affect teachers' relatedness and/or sense of belonging?

Definitions of BPNT Core Components

The following definition of terms used in this study establish the understanding of the three core components of BPNT and distinguish the difference between psychological needs and psychological needs support.

1. Basic Psychological Needs as defined by Deci & Ryan, (1985)
    a. Competence: the need to feel capable of achieving desired outcomes; to master both internal and external forces.

b. Relatedness: the need to feel close and valued by others; to have a sense of belonging to peers, family and community.
c. Autonomy: the need to feel in charge of one's own choices; the originator of one's actions in carrying out an activity.

2. Psychological Needs Support: (Cox & Williams, 2008; Jang et al., 2010; Levesque, et al., 2004; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Sheldon & Filak, 2008; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004)
    a. Competence Support: provide - optimal challenge; positive feedback; encouragement; clear guidelines & expectations.
    b. Relatedness Support: provide - sincere concern; warmth; unconditional regard; emotional support.
    c. Autonomy Support: provide - sincere interest; choice; opportunity for self-direction; meaningful rationale; minimizing controlling language, imposed goals or pressured evaluations; fun elements.

Organization of Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation will be organized by chapters. Chapter 2 will focus on a review of the principal leadership literature that emphasizes the roles and functions of school leaders, in conjunction with the principal's role in building teacher capacity. Chapter 3 will discuss Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the conceptual framework for the study, discussing the mini theory of psychological needs and its application in education. Chapter 4 will describe the research design, the method of data collection, and explain how the data was analyzed. Chapter 5 will be a report of the findings resulting from the data collection and analysis. Chapter 6 will be a discussion of the findings and applications of BNPT, discussion of my transformational process as a principal leader incorporating BPNT into my practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has shown that behind quality schools is a strong building leader (Louis et al., 2010). His or her influence in the areas of creating a positive social-emotional working atmosphere, providing day-to-day support, and investing in building teacher capacity are enabling conditions for teacher satisfaction (Leithwood et al, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008). Without a happy, healthy, and productive teaching corps, and the understanding of how to implement these conditions, principals will struggle to create a sustainable environment for teacher retention or build teacher capacity (Adams et al., 2016). An exploration into the leadership literature offers insights into how principals have created thriving workplaces.

Core Functions of the Principalship

The following literature review highlights multiple researched-based best practices effective principals utilize daily. Two strands of this evidence were explored: 1) critical core functions of the principalship, and 2) principal leadership behaviors that build teacher capacity. Critical core functions of the principalship consists of four leadership responsibilities: build a vision; develop climate and culture; improve instruction; and communicate with stakeholders (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2008). The second research strand addresses how principals support teaching capacity by developing people, building teacher efficacy, promoting purposeful organizational dialogue, engaging in instructional communication between the teacher and principal, as well as leading, promoting, and inspiring professional growth (Leithwood, et al., 2008; Louis et al.,2010).

Several scholars organize critical functions of the principalship into responsibilities related to the overall leadership of the school. Vigilant engagement in vision, culture, instruction, and communication often distinguish principals who are capable of leading improvement from

ones who struggle to advance larger school goals and aspirations (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2006a). As principals engage in a generative manner with school members in functions related to leading and managing schools, they can lay a strong foundation on which to build an environment where teachers have chosen to work, invest, and grow (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008). Engagement, however, is not always generative, making it important to identify factors that distinguish effective principals from less effective ones.

Building Vision

Day, Leithwood, and Sammons (2008) conducted research which determined that school staff perceived the headteachers' [principals'] leadership as the most significant driving force behind increased and/or sustained school effectiveness and improvement (Day et al., 2008). They found that when the primary strategy of the building leader is to align structures and cultures with vision and direction, they can create expectations, aspirations, cultures and structures that are able to sustain performance (Day et al., 2008). This clarity of understanding is key to influencing work in the classroom and to raising the standards for and proficiency achieved by students (National College for School Leadership, 2001). Additionally, principals with clear vision focus the attention of staff on what is important and does not allow them to get diverted or sidetracked with initiatives that will have little impact on the work of the pupils (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Researchers' (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Yukl, 1989) work on organizational leadership posits that effective leaders [principals] engage in visioning as a two-phase stabilization process he calls *Setting Direction*. The first phase is met with a sense of urgency as the leader must quickly establish clear, short-term priorities. In the later phase, more involvement of staff is

necessary to develop and revise the school's direction in order to promote a widespread and deeply held vision that will help the direction to remain constant, even if new leadership occurs.

Other leadership scholars add elements of visioning processes. Hallinger and Heck (2002) describe visioning as a process in which leaders and school members establish group goals and set expectations for high performance. Goldring and her colleagues frame visioning in the context of planning (Goldring et al., 2007). She and her colleagues argue that planning focuses on the precise communication of a shared direction and coherent policies, practices, and procedures for realizing high standards of student performance (Goldring et al., 2007). Lin (2000) cautions that expectations and goals set in visioning should apply to all students, not just a specific select subset of students such as college-bound or those seeking advanced placement.

The set of practices described above are aimed at developing a shared understanding about the school; these mutually derived activities and goals work in tandem to help reinforce a sense of purpose (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). A component of this purpose should be a rigorous and ambitious curriculum provided to all students in core academic subjects (Murphy, 2005). Staff participation in the selection of district and school wide curriculum facilitates buy-in and usage of high-quality curricular programs. Rigorous curriculum selection must be reinforced by a school-wide goal to develop quality instruction, understanding that the level of rigor offered through the curriculum is only as effective as the quality of instruction that maximizes student academic and social learning (Murphy, 2005). Having these types of goals that are challenging but achievable help school staff members to make sense of their work while enabling them to find a sense of identity within their work context (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Having a vision that begins with high expectations for all, clear and public standards, and a belief that all students can learn and achieve academic success, is the starting point for an

effective leader that teachers will want to serve alongside (Porter et al., 2008). Holding to these ideals and setting a course to achieve them has been found to be one key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students, as well as for raising the overall achievement of all students, according to researchers at Vanderbilt University (Porter et al., 2008). Principals must act on what they believe, make it known, and inspire their staff to rise up and meet their expectations (Seashore et al., 2010). Seashore and her colleagues (2010) found that principals who were rated highly by their teachers, had created a healthy instructional climate or had taken sound instructional actions, and had been able to nurture a strong vision that teachers understood as non-negotiable - the vision being that all students can learn.

Climate and Culture

In addition to a clearly articulated vision, teachers are drawn to an effective principal leader who unequivocally understands that creating a climate that is safe and orderly is foundational to learning (Goldring et al., 2007). Building leaders also make it a point to create a learning and emotional atmosphere in which students feel supported and responded to by the adults in the school (Goldring et al., 2007). Principals understand that this same supportive and responsive atmosphere is important for teachers as well; when the tone and feel of the building is *non-bureaucratic*, teachers are empowered to form a professional community that understands, buys-into, and owns the academic and social learning goals of the school (Goldring et al., 2007). Teachers are not isolated but work collaboratively, sharing strategies and helping each other to improve instructional practices.

A collaborative working culture must place academic learning at its center (Philips, 1997). Philips found that in schools where teachers are more concerned with building friendly relationships with each other rather than based on academic learning, test scores tended to be

lower. As the principal intentionally develops a collaborative culture with shared goals and values that are focused on student learning, shared work, collegial practice, and reflective dialogue, they can restructure the working environment to meet specific organizational needs (Louis et al., 1996; Seashore et al., 2010).

University of Washington researchers - Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, S., Russell, Samuelson, and Yeh - went on to further describe elements of a hospitable climate they found to be key to learning. These included:

> respect for all members of the school community, without regard to the professional status or position; an upbeat, welcoming, solution-oriented, no-blame, professional environment; an effort to invite and involve staff in various school-wide functions; and a parallel outreach to students that engaged and involved them in a variety of activities (p. 55).

Leithwood and his associates (2006) call this phenomenona *Redesigning the Organization.* Specifically, they are referring to principals who develop a collaborative working culture, restructure the work environment to promote specific organizational needs and initiatives, and reach out beyond the school walls to develop and build positive relationships with external stakeholders by fostering connections with the larger environment (Day et al., 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Organizing the educational workplace to include these practices will allow staff members to make the most of their motivations and capacities (Seashore et al., 2010).

Operations

Promoting collaboration requires organizational structures that facilitate this value (Leithwood et al., 2004). Goldring (2007) titles this structure *Implementing.* She describes this as the process of putting into practice the policies and activities necessary to realize high standards

for student performance. Common planning times, opportunities to conduct peer observations and coaching sessions, and opportunities to attend professional developments with colleagues are all examples that the educational leader may have to provide and/or modify to strengthen the school collaborative processes (Leithwood et al., 2004). The ability of the school leader to develop internal collaboration is not enough, however, to meet the high expectations and academic achievement essential for all students. Goldring (2007) also emphasized both the importance of supporting teachers, as well as the internal structures established within the school. This occurs by securing and using the financial, political, technological, and human resources necessary to promote academic and social learning. In short, *supporting* ensures the resources necessary to achieve the core goals and systems established by the educational institution (Goldring et al., 2007).

School Management

Equally important, effective principals know how to manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. According to Mendels (2012), effective leaders hire well and retain high-performing teachers. They also know how to give teachers the support and backing they need at various stages of their careers (Mendels, 2012). Darling-Hammond (2007) states that one of the primary reasons' teachers leave the profession is, "unhappiness with administrative practices (such as lack of support, classroom autonomy, or input on decisions)" (p. 6). Regarding data, effective principals know how to use it to inform and guide instruction, learning to ask useful questions about the data using collaborative inquiry alongside teachers (Portin et al., 2009). They purport that strong principals know how to go about their jobs systematically, utilizing strong organizational techniques and strategies to carry out the varied functions and responsibilities.

Improve Instruction

Instructional leadership has always been a critical role of the principal (Louis et al., 2010). Research has found that successful leaders have a laser-like focus on the quality of instruction at their schools (Portin et al., 2009). Successful principals also implement rigorous curriculum and high-quality instructional programs and are involved with faculty to develop and implement assessment systems at the classroom and school-wide levels for systemic accountability (Marzano et al., 2005). Discussions about instructional strategies are held with teacher teams and the individual teacher; although some teachers prefer to be left alone, effective principals are able to overcome barriers put up by teachers and pursue these strategy discussions (Portin et al., 2009). In a Wallace Foundation (Louis et al., 2010) studies of high-performing principals were found to make frequent, short, and often spontaneous classroom visits, always providing follow-up feedback of what they found to the teacher; low-performing principals were found to miss the feedback element. In addition to this important practice, high performing principals build teachers' schedules intentionally to accommodate team planning, collaboration, and professional growth opportunities (Portin et al., 2009). Through these types of intentional instructional practices, principals are able to enable teachers to teach at their best.

Given the diverse populations across suburban, rural, urban, Special Education, English Language Learners, and Gifted/Talented student populations, it is incumbent upon the principal to *advocate* for the needs of all students within and beyond the school (Goldring et al., 2007). This includes advocating for a rigorous curriculum, eliminating barriers that prevent all students from accessing all classes. It also incorporates ensuring that special needs students receive content-rich instruction, in addition to managing the parental pressures that often create favoritism in placing students in particular classes (Goldring et al., 2007).

Monitoring is another systematic process that is a *must-do* for effective principals (Goldring et al., 2007). This is a process in which leaders systematically collect and analyze data in order to guide their decisions and actions for continuous improvement (Goldring et al., 2007). Systems to be monitored include curriculum, students' programs of study, the quality of instruction through ongoing classroom observations and assessments, procedures put in place to improve quality instruction, the effectiveness of professional development, and student achievement.

Stakeholders and Communication

Wise principals work to strengthen the community by creating links and collaborating with all stakeholders, both internal and external, to share expertise and ensure children's well-being (DfES, 2004). Creating linkages to families, businesses, and institutions in the community is critical to advance the academic and social learning capacities of students and staff alike (Murphy, 2005). Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) found that parents respond in a positive manner to teacher outreach regarding low-performing students. This outreach was in the form of meetings, sending materials home, and communicating with parents when their child was having problems. Learning-centered principals' model and involve staff with community collaboration; the development of norms and practices regarding the importance of parent connections; and provide trainings and involvement opportunities for staff to develop the collaborative skills needed to work effectively with parents (Murphy et al., 2006).

Communicating with all stakeholders can frequently be a weak process for principals. It is critically important that they develop, utilize, and maintain systems of exchange among members of the school and with its external communities (Goldring et al., 2007). School leaders must communicate clearly, specifically, and continually with internal and external community

members the goals and performance data of the school for purposes of accountability and gaining support (Goldring et al., 2007). To accomplish this, leaders must use multiple forms of communication appropriate for the unique members of the school community. Varied, purposeful communication with all school stakeholders is essential, as principals are accountable to pupils, parents, partners-in-education, the Board of Education, and the entire community for contributing to the education of society on a broader scale (DfES, 2004).

Summary of Core Functions of the Principalship

In reflection of the principal core functions, a significant number of responsibilities were identified, denoting requisite roles, tasks, and functions of effective principals (Goldring et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2006). As clearly described, each specific practice is critical in helping to establish working conditions that allow teachers to make the most of their professional motivations, commitments, and capacities; all core areas are intertwined and have shown to be related to the instructional strength of the teacher (Leithwood et al., 2008). When developing each of these practices, principals are charged to weave these core facets together in hopes of increasing the engagement of teachers: possessing and utilizing a specific set of skills which include leadership with data; honesty and relationships; fostering ownership and collaboration; recognizing and developing leadership; and instructional awareness and involvement (Leithwood et al., 2006a). If the roles and functions described above are implemented applying the skill set identified by Leithwood and his colleagues (Leithwood et al., 2006a), principals have the opportunity to shape their schools into learning organizations, setting the tone for a positive learning environment for every teacher and student within their building (Senge, 1990).

Principal Leadership Behaviors that Build Teacher Capacity

Simply knowing *what* effective principals do, however, does not automatically result in being a good leader. We now turn to leadership literature focusing on studies that reveal specific principal behaviors that can develop and build teacher capacity and well-being. Albert Bandura's (1986) research on efficacy describes capacity as the characteristics of individuals that equip them to accomplish goals, undertake tasks, and overcome fears. A principal's influence in the areas of creating a positive social-emotional working atmosphere, providing day-to-day support, and investment in the building teacher of teacher capacity, are strong determinants for teacher satisfaction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008). Within the following studies of principal behaviors and responsibilities lie the supposition that, if done well, teachers – regardless of their years of experience - can thrive and grow in their instructional effectiveness when serving under an effective principal.

Developing People

The core practices of *developing self and working with others* emphasizes building effective relationships and a professional learning community through performance management and effective professional development for staff (DfES, 2004). Developing people is a crucial responsibility of the principal and includes: the provision of individualized support and consideration to the staff; offering intellectually stimulating activities, work, and professional development; and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004). Principals who practice these behaviors communicate respect for their colleagues, placing a value on their personal feelings and needs (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Strong leaders, whether in business or education, incorporate supporting, recognizing,

and rewarding stakeholder behaviors (Yukl, 2006). Teachers who exhibit superior skills, a *can-do* spirit, promote collaboration, and work hard on behalf of students should be recognized and rewarded for their effort by leadership (Yukl, 2006). By doing so, the principal communicates the values and focus of the school's educational mission.

It is imperative that principals cultivate leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision (Knapp et al., 2010; Seashore et al., 2010). The lonely leader at the top who makes all the decisions and has all the answers, is no longer capable of being effective in today's climate of school leadership (Seashore et al., 2010). Effective principals come to know the skills and knowledge of their faculty and staff, encouraging them to step into leadership roles and responsibilities within the school setting (Mendels, 2012). Referring to a Wallace Foundation study (Louis et al., 2010) the research team made a notable finding that effective leadership from a variety of sources – principals, teachers, staff teams and others – is associated with better student performance on math and reading tests. The same report states that when comparing lower achieving schools with higher achieving schools, the higher achieving schools invited all stakeholders to have greater influence on decisions (Portin et al*.,* 2009). Most noteworthy, and possibly surprising to some, is that researchers found that principals "do not lose influence as others gain influence" (Wahlstrom et al*.,* 2008, p. 9). A shared vision and the development of the school's stakeholders serve as a uniting motivational focus for school staff and members of the community (DfES, 2004).

Insightful principals know what is going on in their teachers' classrooms because they are in them on a regular basis (Westerberg, 2013). They have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of their staff; know how to build on these strengths and reduce the weaknesses; and can design their program of staff development based on the real needs of their faculty and school

(DfES, 2004). One of Leithwood and Montgomery's original studies (1982) focused on the role of elementary school principals in program improvement. It found that approximately 50% of elementary principals actually make an effort to assist the teacher to improve their instructional efforts. Since the turn of the century, with the societal and governmental demands for school improvement and reform, the supervision and coaching role of principals toward their teachers is now one of the most important roles they play as instructional leader resulting in more time spent in classrooms (Cagle & Hopkins, 2009). The following studies describe very specific, positive, and influential actions and behaviors by principals as they interact with teachers.

Building Teacher Efficacy

Hallinger's (2003) model of instructional leadership and Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) meta-analysis focus on school leaders' aims of capacity building. Both studies recognized the importance of staff members not only possessing knowledge and skills needed to accomplish organizational goals, but also having the motivation to persevere in the application of those skills. Bandura (1986) gives this individual type of capacity the name *teacher efficacy.* In this model, Bandura states that people are motivated by what they are good at. These *mastery experiences* are the most powerful sources of efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Ten years later, Hipp (1996) conducted a study titled, *Teacher Efficacy: Influence of principal leadership behavior.* Her intent was to determine which leadership behaviors have the greatest influence on two types of teacher efficacy: 1) general teacher efficacy (GTE) – a general belief by a teacher about what *we* as teachers can do, and 2) personal teacher efficacy (PTE) – what a teacher believes *I* can do. Eleven principal behaviors were identified that, when practiced, can reinforce and sustain teacher efficacy (Hipp, 1996): models behavior; inspires group purpose; recognizes teacher efforts and accomplishments; provides personal and professional

support; promotes teacher empowerment and decision-making; manages student behavior; creates a positive climate for success; fosters teamwork and collaboration; encourages innovation and continual growth; believes in staff and students; and lastly, inspires caring and respectful relationships. Twenty-five years after Bandura's original study (1986), Seashore and her colleagues (2010) found the same still holds true - building capacity that leads to a teacher's sense of mastery is highly motivational . It is a logical conclusion, then, that principal behaviors that contribute to the building of teacher capacity have a direct and positive influence on teacher motivation and their willingness to learn within the context of which they work (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In the early 2000's, attention was beginning to be drawn toward teacher attrition (Richards, 2003). Concerned, Richards (2003, 2005) completed and published two back-to-back studies that focused on principal behaviors that encouraged teachers to stay in the profession. The first of these studies was centered on new teachers who had been in the profession between two and five years. The second study focused on teachers' perceptions at three career stages: the first five years, six to ten years, and teachers with eleven and more years of experience. Results showed that all three groups agreed upon the same top five valued principal behaviors, although the order was slightly varied (Richards, 2005):

1. Respects and values teachers as professionals
2. Is fair, honest, and trustworthy
3. Supports teachers with parents
4. Is supportive of teachers in matters of student discipline
5. Has an open-door policy – accessible, available, willing to listen

Beginning teachers reported that their greatest need is emotional support and safety.

Principals most greatly appreciated are those who act as cheerleaders and coaches, offering praise and positive feedback versus the role of a critic. The six-to-ten-year veteran teachers most appreciate being respected as professionals. In addition, they value principals who protect them from abusive parents and students who are disrespectful. Eleven year and upward career teachers state that their greatest need is for the principal to respect their knowledge and expertise. Also important to these veteran teachers is the principal's character and being asked to be involved with decision-making and leadership opportunities within the building.

In reflection, the above studies delineate and/or share common outcomes regarding positive and essential principal behaviors and practices that promote teacher efficacy and job satisfaction. However, two functions were not fully explored which others have found to be critical aspects of principal leadership behavior: reflection and professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

Promoting Purposeful Organizational Dialogue

As previously stated, teachers are the mediators through which principals work to influence and improve student performance (Louis et al., 2010). Several researchers agree, cooperative principal-teacher relationships and their healthy interactions significantly and positively affect classroom environments (Adams, 2014; Leithwood et al, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Adams, Olsen, and Ware (2017) go on to purport that it is the school principal that has the power to set the mindset and shape behaviors by which: "Student learning capacity is activated or suppressed. Principals, through the push and pull of leadership, can influence teachers and other school members to create learning conditions that activate the natural curiosity, interest, and motivation in students" (p. 7). This type of influence is not exercised haphazardly or accidentally; it can only produce the desired outcomes as a result of intentionality

and purposeful communication with teachers (Adams et al., 2017).

Building on the leadership practices described by Leithwood and his colleagues (2004; 2008), additional studies of principal leadership functions added to their body of knowledge noting that each of the leadership practices were dependent upon cooperative interactions between school principals and teachers (Adams et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2008). Specifically, it is through conversations between principals and stakeholders that the vision and direction are set, curriculum is selected, supportive environments are nurtured, professional development is determined, and resources are created (Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008). These leadership functions rely on meaningful and honest conversation. Studies by Groysberg and Slind (2012) and Lowenhaupt (2014) agree that being able to engage in conversation is a core and defining element of leadership. It is through intentional conversations between principals and teachers that teacher capacity is supported, and student learning capacity is influenced (Groysberg & Slind, 2012).

According to Groysberg and Slind (2012), when conversations between the principal and teachers are held with intentionality, discussions occur, and decisions are made that involve results specific to educational goals and structures which directly affect student capacity. The principal chooses to engage in conversations with teachers that lead to clearly articulated rationales, which in turn lead to mutually agreed upon outcomes (Adams et al., 2017*).* This approach known as *leadership as organizational conversation* elicits a broader understanding of the school's direction, and it increases buy-in and ownership by those who are invested in helping to improve the school's outcomes (Adams et al., 2017).

Principal-Teacher Instructional Reflection and Dialogue

Two additional behaviors by principals were found to positively affect teacher capacity

and well-being in a study by Blasé and Blasé (1999). They asked teachers two questions in their study:

1. What characteristics of school principals positively influence classroom teaching?
2. What effects do such characteristics have on classroom instruction?

The outcomes of their study showed that effective principal-teacher interaction about instruction included processes such as inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation - all which empower teachers to build repertoires of flexible alternatives rather than being assigned rigid teaching methods and procedures. From this information, Blasé and Blasé (1999) created a model of effective instructional leadership consisting of two major themes: a. talking with teachers to promote reflections, and b. promoting professional growth.

Based on their data, the researchers found that dialogue was a valued practice that effective principals used to encourage teachers to critically reflect on their learning and professional practice (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Within this dialogue, five primary talking strategies emerged. The first was *making suggestions.* During post-observation conferences and informally in day-to-day interactions, principals made constructive suggestions that were purposeful, appropriate, and nonthreatening. These suggestions were characterized by the following: listening; sharing personal experiences; using examples and demonstrations; giving teachers choice; contradicting outdated or destructive policies; encouraging risk taking; offering professional literature; recognizing teachers' strengths; and maintaining a focus on improving instruction. The effect of making suggestions is to enhance teachers' reflective behavior. In the study, teachers reported positive effects on their motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, efficacy, sense of security, and feelings of support (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

A second talking strategy behavior practiced by effective principals was the *giving of*

feedback (Blasé' & Blasé, 1999). Principals who practiced this skill, verbally held up a mirror and played the role of a critical friend, providing another set of eyes that focused on observed classroom behavior. The content of the conversation was specific, with principals exhibiting a caring and interested attitude; they provided praise while simultaneously establishing a problem-solving orientation when responding to or initiating concerns about students. In addition, principals made themselves available for follow-up conversations. These aspects of feedback promoted increased teacher reflection, instructional creativity and variation, risk-taking, and improved teacher motivation, efficacy, and self-esteem.

Modeling was the third talking strategy employed by effective principals in the Blasé and Blasé study (1999). Teachers stated that principals who demonstrated teaching techniques both in the classroom and during conferences were impressive and motivating for their own reflective behavior. Principals who modeled positive interactions with students and promoted a positive, up-beat educational climate, also inspired teachers.

Blasé and Blasé (1999) found that another powerful talking tool used by effective principals is that of *using inquiry and the solicitation of advice/opinions*. Asking frequent, positively phrased questions regarding instructional matters lent itself to increasing teacher motivation, self-esteem, efficacy and reflective behavior. Affirming statements, followed by questions regarding their practice, challenged teachers to think about why they do what they do. An example of this practice may be the following: "You ask wonderful thought-provoking questions. Should you give kids longer to think about their answers?" (p. 362) When principals used this deliberate technique, intentionally not providing a suggestion for the answer, teachers engaged in the art of reflection, discovering that they either have the answers within themselves, or have the direction needed to pursue growth.

The fifth and last talking strategy that the Blasé and Blasé (1999) study revealed was the art of *giving praise*. When principal praise was focused on specific and concrete teaching behaviors, praise significantly affected teacher motivation, self-esteem, and efficacy. Some teachers reported that when they received praise from their administrator, it enhanced innovative thinking and the seeking out of professional development opportunities, as well as reflective discussions and collaboration with their colleagues.

Leading, Promoting, and Inspiring Professional Growth

Almost 43 years ago, Brody (1977) wrote a journal article titled, *A Good Teacher Is Harder to Define Than Find.* He makes a powerful assertion that still resonates today stating that every now and again, an innately outstanding teacher comes along; in most cases, however, excellent teachers are made. Brody (1977) believes that teachers need to be encouraged and their growth supported in order to become educators. Insightful educational leaders are able to identify emergent needs of teachers and design staff development opportunities that address their needs (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). The identification process includes teacher needs assessments and allowing them voice and choice as to the workshops in which they would participate (Drago-Severson, 2004). Equally motivating is when the principal also attends the same workshop, becoming a learner alongside the teachers, participating in staff development sessions (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

Supportive collaboration among educators is a second key strategy for promoting professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Effective principals have realized that facilitating collaborative networks with fellow educators is essential for successful teaching and learning to take place (Seashore et al., 2010). These administrators provide team planning, modeled teamwork, and actively promote peer observation and debriefing (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

Peer observation was not limited to within the school; many principals facilitated visitations to classrooms at other schools and even other districts (Portin et al., 2009).

Spending consistent time in classrooms has proven to be a highly effective communication and training tool between principals and teachers. Based on a study by the Wallace Foundation (Seashore et al*.,* 2010), principals who are intent on promoting growth in both students and adults spend time in classrooms observing and commenting on what works well and what does not. In addition, they shift the pattern of the annual evaluation cycle to one of ongoing and informal interactions with teachers, typically numbering between 20 and 60 interactions a week.

> Their visits enabled them to make formative observations that were clearly about learning and professional growth, coupled with direct and immediate feedback. High-scoring principals believed that every teacher, whether a first-year teacher or a veteran, can learn and grow" (Seashore et al*.,* 2010, p. 14).

Developing coaching or mentoring relationships among educators has proven to be an essential professional development strategy that has emerged in literature (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Kafele, 2015). Twenty years of research by Joyce and Showers (1995), concluded that classroom implementation of a training design is only effective when training includes peer coaching at the classroom level. Blasé and Blasé's study (1999) encouraged teachers to become peer coaches; using this technique inspired teachers to look for innovative ways to teach and build confidence as teachers engaged in this peer coaching process. An action research effort published by principal Baruti K. Kafele (2015) concluded that as close to the first day of school as possible, new teachers should be paired up with competent veteran teachers who are able to serve as mentors and/or coaches to help the novice teachers grow.

In their research, Blasé and Blasé (1999) identified three additional strategies effective principals encouraged:

1. *Encouraging and supporting the redesign of programs:* Effective principals challenged teachers to redesign their instructional programs, supporting diverse approaches to teaching and learning, including student groupings and intervention strategies for students in need of remediation. Every effort was made to provide the necessary resources whenever possible to facilitate this process.
2. *Implementing action research to inform instructional decision-making*: Action research informs best practice and causes teachers to evaluate classroom data, driving meaningful decision-making processes as teachers collaborate to redesign their teaching programs.
3. A*pplying the principles of adult learning, growth, and development to staff development:* Teachers stated that effective instructional administrators, "created cultures of collaboration, inquiry, lifelong learning, experimentation, and reflection consistent with the principles of adult learning and an understanding of teachers' life cycles, roles, and motivation" (p. 366). When implemented, the effects of these actions promoted greater teacher motivation, self-esteem, and reflective behavior.

Their efforts focused specifically on principal behaviors and their effects on teachers, suggesting that effective instructional leadership should be embedded in the school culture, is expected by teachers, and routinely delivered (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

Summary of Literature Review

In summary of the research, it is clear that high expectations of principals exist. In all the studies described in this review of the literature, however, one statement circles back to the pressing dilemma facing principals in today's educational environment: "The quality of

administrative support is often the top reason teachers identify for leaving or staying in the profession, …" (Sutcher et al., 2019, p. 17).

Although research has been available and presumed to be acted upon by principals across America for several years, open questions remain about specific leadership behaviors teachers perceive and experience as supportive of their psychological needs. A gap in the research literature exists which describes the specific actions, words and supports principals provide teachers which they identify as beneficial to meeting or thwarting their psychological needs as they engage with their principal.

It was the intent of this study, therefore, to narrow the focus to that of the teacher: to hear their voice regarding principal behaviors that both supported and hindered the promotion of teachers' well-being and capacity through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Chapter 3 will be a discussion of SDT's Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000b), the conceptual framework on which this study was grounded.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory Synopsis

Self Determination Theory (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009) as used to frame the empirical investigation for this study. At its core, SDT assumes that people are by nature active, engaged in their surrounding environment, and are continually absorbing new information and skills; as active human beings, they are subconsciously integrating and processing all aspects of daily life into a coherent and purposeful psychological structure (Reeve et al., 2008; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Based on multiple studies over 35 years, SDT has been able to explain why some individuals struggle to set goals and/or know how to reach the potential that lies within, while others possess the internal drive to accomplish goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002; Reeve et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One such study by Deci and Ryan (2000) concluded that in schools, the difference between internal volition and unmotivated academic behavior of students, depends on whether the innate psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are supported or hindered by the *external* social environment. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) found that individuals operate below their potential when the social environment thwarts psychological needs. They found that the opposite is also true – when a nurturing relational network is present, individuals typically function at higher levels of health, energy, and a positive psychological state (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The three psychological needs just named are reflected in one of the three mini-theories of self-determination known as Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BNPT), (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). The psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are core human needs that when met, enable individuals to prosper and flourish.

Within the field of education, the more a teacher's psychological needs are supported, the

more enthusiasm and creative energy they can bring to the classroom (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The opposite is also true. When pressures to produce specific student outcomes are imposed, teachers become more reliant on extrinsically focused strategies (such as strict adherence to a curriculum) that undermine more interesting and inspiring teaching practices that might otherwise be implemented (Pelletier et al., 2002). Research has shown that to the degree or extent that principals and legislatures fail to understand and consider the motivation of teachers, and instead try to control the classroom in order to produce guaranteed results for the purpose of accountability, the more all involved in the learning process will experience a stifling of creativity, motivation, and learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2002). To prevent such conditions from overtaking schools, Adams et al (2016) argue that, "School leaders can design and monitor local efforts to build a climate that energizes the motivation, engagement, and performance of their school's teachers" (p. 170).

Teachers thrive when their thoughts, beliefs, emotions, interests, and surroundings are integrated and harmonious (Reeve et al., 2008). If the desired state of teaching is for teachers to be engaged, active, and thriving, it seems logical that principals would desire to possess the knowledge and understanding of how their own behaviors might at times nurture and at other times thwart the inner energy behind optimal teacher growth and well-being. When specifically applied to the interactions and behaviors between teachers and principals, BPNT has the potential to bring clarity and insight to the type of environment that fuels teacher agency and maximizes their capacity to learn and grow (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Basic psychological needs mini theory describes the social ingredients of such a thriving environment and the psychological forces from which high teacher functioning transpires (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), thus, the conceptual framework used for this study.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory

BPNT assumes that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are the basis for an individual's autonomous self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The development and purpose of this mini theory was to investigate the degree to which the satisfaction of these three components facilitate learning, development, and well-being (Reeve et al., 2008). In order to understand BPNT as the conceptual framework that guides this study, it's important to take a deeper look into the three basic human psychological needs and the social conditions in the educational workplace that support teachers' ability to thrive.

Definitions of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

Autonomy is a psychological need that reflects a deep sense of volition and understanding of self (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Teachers who possess a deep sense of autonomy, engage in their work with a belief that they are in charge of their professional choices, attitudes, and actions in and outside of the classroom (deCharms, 1968). Educators who exercise their autonomy do so because they possess the internal determination, drive, and empowerment to set goals or outcomes and determine their own course of action by which to achieve them (Deci & Ryan, 2012). As teachers assert autonomy and achieve their desired results, a cycle of empowerment occurs that causes them to demonstrate even greater professional engagement, vitality, and creativity in their school life activities and relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Competence is closely related to autonomy in that to achieve it, personal empowerment must be exercised. Teachers who feel competent in their role as educators believe themselves to be capable of mastering the subject they teach and feel that they possess the skills and capacities to achieve the desired outcomes they set for themselves and/or their students (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Ford and Ware (2016) describe competence simply as "the

knowledge and skills a teacher possesses and brings to his or her daily instructional practice as acquired from education and/or teaching experience" (p. 7). Competence is not a fixed state; one's level of competence is fluid and dependent upon the context and nature of the task at hand (Ware & Ford, 2018), and thus, is typically accompanied by a growth mindset. Educators who hold to their sense of competence are driven to build on existing skills and capacities; they believe that if given the opportunity, they can achieve a desired goal (Connell & Welborn, 1991; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

The third key tenet of BPNT is relatedness. Relatedness is the social-emotional tie that binds together autonomy and competence. When teachers are secure in the relationships within their environment, they are freer to risk, learn, and explore, strengthening their sense of competence and autonomy (Cox & Williams, 2008). Teachers have a strong need to feel connected to their colleagues in their common pursuit of their goal of educating students (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). Relatedness includes the longing to feel secure in one's social environment, as well as to feel loved and respected (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). When this relational connectedness is present, teachers tend to feel a sense of acceptance, belonging, and believe themselves to be an integral part of their school community (Jang et al., 2010).

Psychological Needs Support

Need-support is different than the psychological need. Support comes from the social environment and reflects relational experiences that interact with psychological states to affect personality, mindsets, motivations, and behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2020). This is an important distinction as school principals cannot control teacher psychological needs; they do, however, have a role in fostering conditions that can nurture or impede the activation of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy support is different from autonomy in that it lies within a social context experienced in structures and processes in the educational working environment (Assor et al., 2002). Autonomy supportive school environments provide opportunities for teachers to be empowered. For example, principals who create space for teachers to use their professional discretion and judgement situate instructional practices within the scope of teacher influence and control, an important condition for self-motivation and creativity (Assor et al., 2002). Another example may be when expectations are presented by the principal; providing a meaningful rationale for the request helps teachers to feel respected instead of simply being told what to do and how to do it. Nurturing initiative is another form of autonomy support; encouraging and affirming a teacher's desire to try a new instructional approach to increase student engagement, is an example that inspires self-initiation and creativity (Assor et al., 2002). A supportive environment for nurturing teacher autonomy is one that supports teacher innovation, problem solving, shared decision-making, and reflective dialogue on school topics (Sinden et al., 2004). In short, it is the social-relational context that cultivates and supports teacher agency.

Competence support emphasizes personal improvement and the provision of learning opportunities over superior performance (Cox & Williams, 2008). This type of environment provides teachers with, "ongoing, rich professional development experiences characterized by opportunities to set optimally challenging goals, experience mastery (both personally and vicariously) and receive positive and constructive feedback" (Ford & Ware, 2016, p. 7). When interacting with teachers, principals might engage in conversations highlighting effective teaching practices observed during a walk-through (Cox & Williams, 2008). Conversations and follow-up questions might also be focused on a teacher's instructional practice that cause them to reflect, along with providing valuable feedback to help improve their teaching (Westerberg,

2013). As a result of these types of conversations, suggestions for professional development or other resources unique to that teacher's specific needs may be provided. Teachers perceive the conversation to be one of affirmation for personal and professional growth when experienced in a competence supportive environment where the goal of the principal is to provide clear guidelines and expectations for personal improvement and learning for the teacher (Cox & Williams, 2008).

Relational support occurs and grows within the context of interactions between principals and teachers, and teachers and their colleagues (Olsen, 2017). These interactions result in a sense of attachment and acceptance, belonging, and security wherein the teacher can risk vulnerability, and come to believe they are a critical member of the school community (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017). Relationally supportive conditions in the work environment help combat the situational stressors teachers experience day to day (Ford & Ware, 2016). Teachers feel safe enough to take chances and build relationships within the school community, both with their principal and their colleagues (Olsen, 2017). These conditions may include recognition for hard work and improvement, which creates a safe environment where teachers are able to risk vulnerability (Ford & Ware, 2016). Lastly, teachers experience a relationally supportive school environment when they experience a building leader who cares about them personally and is willing to take the time to get to know their strengths and weaknesses (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Leaders as a Catalyst of Teacher Needs Support

Psychological needs exist within every individual (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). All of us experience a need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness support. Principals have considerable positional opportunity to influence and affect the well-being of their staff based on

daily decisions and actions by which they interact and communicate (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017). Ford and Ware (2016) posit that leaders who understand the importance of meeting the psychological needs of teachers within their building have gained crucial insight into how schools work. These astute school leaders operate with the understanding that schools are powered by people, and people have needs that must be met for anything of substance collectively to emerge. Support of teacher psychological needs in an educational setting could come through a variety of ways: teachers' interactions with their principal, the vision of the school, collegial relationships, and other social contexts, all acting to nurture a teacher's motivational resources and his/her self-regulation of action (Reeve et al., 2008).

When school leaders give specific attention to supporting teachers' sense of well-being, leadership practices and behaviors may have a positive effect on teacher autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ford & Ware, 2016). Although few studies have applied BPNT as the framework to evaluate principal behaviors and their effect on teacher thriving, there are studies of leadership practices that describe principal behaviors that support teachers' growth and well-being (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Sheppard, 1996). In a school environment where support of teacher well-being exists, there is a distinctive look and feel that begins at the top. Principal behaviors have the capacity to emphasize a value for collaboration, open communication, and promote professional development; they are able to inspire and motivate teachers toward engaging in pedagogical learning opportunities which increase their skill and instructional practices (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Sheppard, 1996). Additionally, principals who rely more on their relational and pedagogical knowledge of teaching rather than on positional power and authority have more influence and see greater results in teacher growth and motivation (Blasé & Kirby, 2008; Treslan & Ryan, 1986). Even within the context of teacher evaluations, where psychological need

support is in evidence, research has shown more positive effects on teacher improvement when these contextual conditions are present (Richards, 2005).

Other efforts by principals to help build teacher capacity and competence cover a broad spectrum of practices (Ehrgott et al., 1993). Wragg, Hayes, Wragg and Chamberlain (2000) state that principals' most common efforts of teacher assistance were to offer "in-house support and advice, goal setting, observing teacher's lessons, sending them on courses, and giving opportunity to observe good practice" (p. 332). If principals are committed to reciprocal communication, consistent in their expectations and objectivity, and support teacher growth efforts in a variety of ways, principals will facilitate teacher pedagogy improvement, help to raise teacher standards of instructional rigor, and thereby improve student achievement (Sheppard, 1996; Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). Although SDT was not the conceptual framework used in these studies, the actions of the principals involved in the research were practiced with intentionality and showed a clear effort to support and promote teacher well-being.

Unfortunately, there are also studies of principals whose behaviors were in direct opposition to and thereby thwarted the psychological needs set forth in SDT. Two studies were completed that resulted in glaring concerns (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Roth et al., 2007). The first concluded that the more teachers' satisfaction of autonomy is undermined, the less enthusiasm and creative energy they bring to their teaching endeavors. This reduction of creativity plays out as teachers rely more heavily on extrinsically focused strategies that crowd out more effective and inspiring teaching practices that would otherwise be implemented; this is due to extrinsic pressures from their districts and state agencies (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Supporting this premise is a study of Israeli teachers; those who felt more controlled in their own professional activities were in turn, less autonomy supportive of their students (Roth et al., 2007). Thus, it is

critical that administrators recognize the power of psychologically supportive behaviors and begin to intentionally and strategically incorporate these into daily practices with their faculty to maintain effective levels of motivation, creating a positive learning climate for both teachers and students (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Several years ago, Bridges (1992) identified three common sets of responses that principals typically followed having identified an ineffective teacher, none of which include competence supportive behaviors. The first response was to tolerate and assist. When principals identified a teacher as a poor performer, administrators often looked the other way, hoping the teacher would resolve the weakness himself, in general, tolerating and even protecting that teacher. Some principals went so far as to give overstated ratings on evaluations, giving perceived approval and validation to that teacher's performance. This type of response appeared to be self-serving on the part of the principal as they avoided uncomfortable confrontation and effort in supporting the teacher; this caused the teacher to have a false sense of competence resulting in a perpetuation of ineffective behaviors (Bridges, 1992).

Secondly, Bridges (1992) described three typical responses by a principal toward an identified teacher who was considered ineffective:

a. transfer between schools within the district with better chances to improve with the new conditions,

b. placement in a position of assisting individual students or

c. reassignment of the incompetent teacher to a non-teaching position, such as librarian or even driving the school bus.

A fourth response may have resulted if none of these three options were selected: open criticism wherein the principal identifies a specific problematic behavior by a teacher, withdrawal of all

assistance and support, and finally, begin an extensive documentation process of the concerns (Bridges, 1992). Upon review of these choices of principal behaviors, an obvious lack of effort to help the teacher improve became a glaring reality. Nowhere in these four responses is there evidence of autonomy, competence or relational supports being offered on the part of the school leader toward these struggling teachers.

Almost twenty years later, the Center of Education Progress (2010) reports the same principal responses are still occurring. Practices among administrators and districts have not changed much over the course of time; rather than doing the work to develop teachers or the work needed to dismiss ineffective teachers, many administrators choose other ways to re-assign them (Chait, 2010). They may transfer teachers to other schools or reassign them to non-teaching positions. Although some of these measures have shown to help some principals solve difficult situations, these efforts have failed to produce assistance to the struggling teacher, thwarting any opportunity that may exist to meet their basic psychological needs or improve their practice. With the high rate of teachers leaving the profession and teacher shortages becoming more prevalent, Chait's (2010) research confirms the critical need for principals to become aware of their own behaviors and the effect these behaviors have on teachers' psychological needs. It is essential that principals understand their role in engaging in behaviors that positively support and promote teachers' well-being and ability to thrive in the workplace.

Application of BPNT to the Study

Within the past few years, researchers have identified BPNT as an important leadership paradigm by which to build teacher capacity and create an environment where teachers can thrive (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017). Unlike other research, this study sought to elicit personal descriptions of the specific experiences, thoughts, and feelings of teachers through their

replies to the open-ended research questions that were aligned to the BPNT components of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Specifically, need-support was used as a framework to make sense of teacher responses to questions about principal behaviors they experienced as both generative or constraining to their instructional development.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

Purpose of the Study Reviewed

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and name specific behaviors of principals that both promoted and hindered teacher's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as described by teachers. Given the educational climate in Oklahoma, the experiences of teachers throughout the state currently in the field working across all types of educational settings: urban, suburban, and rural were sought. The state of Oklahoma was selected based on the current teacher shortage touching nearly every community (Eger & Habib, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). The survey was conducted in spring of the 2014-2015 school year when a noticeable shift toward a teacher shortage was becoming more apparent, resulting in an increased focus toward teacher retention and the principal-teacher relationship.

The mini theory of Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000b), a sub-theory of SDT, was the theoretical lens selected for this study. Its purpose was to capture teachers' descriptions of specific positive *and* negative principal behaviors that would help inform current and future principals how to practically engage in supportive behaviors and interactions with teachers, while avoiding the negative behaviors and interactions that hinder the meeting of teacher psychological needs as defined by SDT.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three overarching questions that incorporated the three elements of this theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They were as follows:

1. What principal behaviors promote/hinder teacher autonomy?
2. What are specific principal behaviors/actions that promote/hinder teachers' overall professional growth and professional competence?

3. What relational behaviors do principals extend toward teachers that positively and/or negatively affect teachers' relatedness and/or sense of belonging?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive survey research design to establish evidence relevant to the research purpose. One of the foundational tenets of a qualitative study is to conduct research in the natural setting of the participants to interpret experiences in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Creswell, 2007). Nardi (2014) states, "If the goal is to understand human behavior in its natural setting and from the viewpoint of those involved, then an appropriate method is often a qualitative one" (p. 17). Surveying teachers who were currently in the profession was an essential pathway to achieve this goal. It was important to hear from the participants in their own words to allow for an authentic, personal description of what the respondents held to be important to them as the questions applied to their own professional teaching experiences and setting.

Owens (2002) describes multiple uses of a descriptive survey design. The first is its *uniqueness.* A descriptive survey is constructed to elicit the unique experiences of the participant which allows the researcher to gather information not available from other sources. Secondly, a standardization of the focus of information sought was gathered as each participant was asked the same questions. Lastly, the survey data complimented and extended previously existing research by furthering the application of the conceptual lens of SDT.

Another important feature of this descriptive survey was the use of open-ended questions (Cargan, 2007). The purpose of using open-ended questions was to avoid pre-determined options from which the respondents could choose which may contain bias or conditioned responses (Cargan, 2007; Owens, 2002). In so doing, this form of questioning allowed for spontaneous

answers that might provide a fuller picture of what the participants believed, experienced, or held as important (Cargan, 2007). This type of questioning also allowed for sensitive questions to be posed, creating a venue for the responses to be as lengthy and detailed as the participant chose to answer (Owens, 2002). The wealth of this type of information provided by the respondents became the information from which the outcomes of the study were derived and made sense of.

Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed across the state of Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) and/or local teachers' union representative of each district. By sending the survey electronically through OEA to its 19,275 educator members, enough respondents engaged in the survey to provide an adequate sampling that would facilitate the identification of themes and trends from the data collected. Members of the OEA board felt that the outcomes could increase principal support of teachers, and thus, OEA was willing to distribute it (Appendix A; Doug Folks, personal communication, October 19, 2015).

Having received IRB approval, (see Appendix B) the electronic format included a cover letter describing the study, as well as incorporated an assurance of anonymity of the participant's responses. (See Appendix C). Section I of the survey consisted of seven questions identifying educational employment characteristics of the participants. Section II was comprised of the five open-ended descriptive survey questions requiring personal responses by the participants.

Section I: Participant Demographic Information

The purpose of Section I was to provide general teacher demographics of the survey respondents. Specific connections of the demographics were not correlated to teacher responses of the open-ended questions in the data analysis, as this was not the purpose of the identifying information. Included were questions identifying the gender of the teacher, their placement in the

range of years taught (i.e., 1-3, 4-9, etc.), and whether they taught in a rural, urban or suburban setting. A further identifying question included the grade level configuration in which the teacher taught: early childhood, elementary, middle school or high school. In addition, teachers were asked how many years they had taught in the same school, and if they were Nationally Board Certified. Lastly, teachers were asked if they had received a rating below *effective* for any teaching domain on the current year's evaluation. This set of identifying information's sole purpose was to inform the researcher and the reader of the make-up of the sample cohort who provided the data gathered.

Section II: The Survey

Section II was comprised of five open-ended questions requiring personal responses by the participants. The question design served to drill down to candid, specific experiences and interactions between principal and teacher that elicited honest, personal, and emotionally reflective responses. These questions were aligned to SDT's three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, focusing on principal actions and/or behaviors that promoted or hindered teacher growth, capacity, and ability to thrive.

Each question was designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect separately on both positive and/or negative interactions and experiences with their principal. Three of the questions were designed to help teachers focus on positive interactions they had with their principals. The first asked teachers to reflect on principal practices that supported and encouraged their overall professional growth. The second asked respondents to describe specific actions their principal had taken to help them improve in an area of professional struggle. The third was more general in that it asked teachers to think of a time where s/he had experienced significant support from the principal in any capacity, and to describe that support. Teachers

were also asked to think of a time when they experienced a lack of support from their principal and to describe the specific actions/interactions that caused them to feel that way. Lastly, teachers were asked to provide advice to their principal, or any principal, regarding specific ways to support a teacher's professional growth.

Data Collection

Response rate is often a challenge for email surveys as it is typically low to moderate (Owens, 2002). However, the use of an electronic delivery system (email) that provided a link to an anonymous data collection platform (Qualtrics), provided participants an assurance of anonymity and freedom from fear of repercussions by those who might read it. This freedom resulted in the type of data the researcher hoped for - detailed descriptions of experiences and accompanying feelings resulting from interactions with the principal from the perspective of the teacher. In addition, the electronic survey provided the opportunity to reach and create a cross-sectional cohort of the focus population (educators) within a specific time frame whose responses represented a larger population (Owens, 2002). Collecting data that was a genuine and honest reflection of the participant was of primary concern, and as such, a qualitative descriptive survey was the logical choice of research design.

Data Analysis

As a result of the question design, data analysis was more streamlined and made easier to establish categories and trends. Each question was analyzed, and the responses were categorized into the three components of BPNT based on the definitions provided in the conceptual framework section. This was followed by subcategories within each. In short, by answering five open-ended questions, the researcher used the teachers' responses to make sense of their described experiences with their existing or previous building principal by identifying decisions,

words, and behaviors by the principal that influenced teachers' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, both positively and negatively - the heart of the research focus.

Sense was made of the data by establishing themes and categories that cut across the open-ended survey responses (Creswell, 2007). When reflecting on the data, it was important that a focus was kept on learning the meaning/interpretation the participants held regarding the questions being asked (Cargan, 2007). Upon analyzing the respondents' replies to the open-ended questions, aspects of the content frequently qualified for one or more of the three categories of BPNT; the more content expressed, the higher the frequency the participant's answer overlapped. Also, when analyzing the content of the responses, it is typical that the answer variations will cluster around similar themes and sub-themes, allowing the responses to be coded into more than one category (Cargan, 2007). This proved to be the case.

When reflecting on the data, it was important to maintain the integrity of the responses provided by the participants regarding the questions being asked (Cargan, 2007). Upon initial review, it became apparent that the original problem to be addressed in this study did not receive enough data, and thus, had to shift in focus. Originally, the study focused on those teachers identified in the evaluation process who were considered ineffective, that is, received a score below *effective* as defined by a rubric and placed on a professional development plan (PDP) as a result. Qualitative research is an emergent design; as is often the case, the phases or the process of the research may change or shift after data begins to be collected (Creswell, 2007). Due to a lack of response to the survey by teachers receiving a PDP during the 14-15 school year, the focus of this study was broadened to incorporate all 96 teachers who responded.

When conducting content analysis on the open-ended question responses, an open coding

technique was used. Open coding is the first step in the data analysis process that allows the researcher to take the information acquired from the open-ended questions and segment it into categories of information. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness were the first level of categories or domains for the data to be segmented. This was followed by further data reduction by adding the subcategories that were a result of trend groupings (i.e., professional development or discipline support) within each of the three BNPT domains (Creswell, 2007).

The process began by first printing out the anonymous participant responses by the question number. Using cross-case analysis of the respondents replies to the standardized open-ended survey questions (Patton, 2002), individual responses were categorized by the domains of autonomy, competence, or relatedness based on the definitions provided within this study. A tri-color coding system was used to coincide with each of these domains - a different color for each psychological trait. Each participant response was highlighted to its corresponding domain; for those responses that could be applied to more than one domain, the corresponding color highlighter was also used, matching the highlighted portion to one or more of the three domains. Within each BPNT domain for each of the five questions, content responses were further grouped by common themes that emerged within that category such as communication, professional development, affirmation, practice feedback, and principal belief in teacher's professional abilities. The responses were then glued to a tri-fold board for ease of reference. A narrative reporting format was used to explain the findings which are presented in the next chapter, focusing on trends and outcomes as they relate to the three research questions guiding this study, identifying and separating the behaviors that hinder from those that promote and support teacher psychological needs.

Limitations of the Study

Integrity and credibility in qualitative research demand the researcher to acknowledge their preconceptions and assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my case, my background as an educator and practicing administrator has undoubtedly shaped my view and opinions regarding the importance I place on the principal-teacher relationship and thus, how I approached the design and data analysis of the study. As such, every effort was made to put steps in place to maintain credibility of the research and its outcomes, such as an electronic anonymous descriptive survey by which I could draw from the direct descriptions of the participants. In addition, interpreting their experiences by closely adhering to the definitions of the BPNT components was critically important for accurate categorization of their responses. I recognize that however diligent this effort, my personal experiences may still influence this process.

A second limitation of this study regards the singular viewpoint from which the outcomes of this study was derived - that of the teacher. Given that the communications were solely from the teachers' perspectives, the full context of some of the situations described may or may not have been complete or fully accurate, as the parent or administrator's viewpoint were intentionally excluded. In addition to the data being solely from the perspective of teachers, the self-reported data derived from the teachers can cause the data provided to be potentially skewed or incorrect. In addition, the memories of the event(s) described may be inaccurate, thereby altering the exactness of the actual occurrence and thus, description. However, since the focus of the study was to gain perspective and insight from teachers, their viewpoints served as a credible source of information since it is their interpretation of events that lead to the descriptions they stated. This limitation has minimal effect on the credibility of the outcomes.

Thirdly, the number of participants may also lend to a few limitations of the study. Although the number of respondents was 96 in total, not all of those 96 answered every question, creating a fluctuation in the numbers of responses. Also, given the high number of OEA members, it was disappointing that just short of 100 teachers replied to the survey. It is unknown if OEA sent the survey to each district president or to each individual member. In retrospect, publishing the link on additional sites such as *Facebook* or *Linked-In* may have produced a higher response rate. Additionally, 82% of the participants taught in urban districts resulting in suburban and rural teacher voices to be underrepresented in the findings. Individuals who live in an urban demographic in Oklahoma are approximately 67% of the population (Eger, 2019); therefore, the response rates of teachers in urban districts were 15% higher than the relative demographics of the state population, potentially affecting the outcome.

Summary

The chapter outlined the methodology that was used in this qualitative descriptive survey study. Initially, the purpose of the study was restated along with the guiding research questions. A discussion of the research design followed, immediately trailed by a description of how the survey was distributed. Section I contained participant educational demographic information, while Section II described the open-ended survey questions. A discussion of data collection, data analysis, and limitations were presented to conclude the methods portion. Chapter 5 will be the presentation of the findings resulting from the survey.

Chapter 5: Survey Findings

This chapter will provide findings from teachers in Oklahoma who completed the descriptive survey regarding principal behaviors they experienced as nurturing or thwarting their psychological needs. Teacher demographics captured from the survey are reported first. Next, responses to the open-ended questions are organized by the research questions for the study, relaying the primary themes and trends represented by teacher responses as they fall within the conceptual framework of BPNT/SDT's autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Participant Demographics

The following information describes the participating respondents of the Qualtrics anonymous descriptive survey (Appendix D). Those who engaged in the survey were 96 in total: seven male educators and 89 females. The group with the highest number of respondents had taught 21 plus years and totaled 36. The second largest grouping had taught between 11-20 years with 33 respondents, followed by the teachers with 1-10 years of experience equaling 23 participants. Eleven teachers were Nationally Board Certified, having participated in a rigorous learning process while teaching; to obtain this status, the number of educators who taught in an urban district far outweighed that of their colleagues by totaling 73 as compared to seventeen suburban and six rural participants. Additionally identified, were the grade level configurations in which teachers taught. From greatest to least, the breakdown was as follows: Elementary = 59, Middle School = 15, High School = 12, and Early Childhood = 10. Also surveyed were the number of years participants had taught at the school where they currently served during the time of the survey. The majority of teachers, 62 in number, fell within the 1 - 5 years range. Eight teachers had been at their school for 6 - 10 years, eight for 11 - 15 years, six for 16-20 years, and nine had been at their schools 21- 29 years.

Open-ended Survey Question Trends

Section 2 of the survey posed five open-ended questions. These questions were designed to elicit findings that answered the three research questions that guided this study. The findings presented in this section are the research question outcomes based on teachers' responses after they were analyzed and sorted into the three BPNT categories. The categories were then further analyzed to establish the trend outcomes which are detailed in the following sections. The survey questions and their response rate follow:

a. Describe practices by your principal that support and encourage your overall professional growth. Responses rate: 95%
b. If you have struggled in an area of teaching, what specific actions has your principal taken to help you improve? Response rate: 53%
c. Think of a time when you experienced a lack of support from your principal. Describe the specific actions that caused you to feel this way. What would you have liked the principal to do instead? Response rate: 93%
d. Think of a time you experienced significant support from your principal. Describe the specific actions you found supportive. Response rate: 88%
e. What advice would you give your principal, or any principal, regarding specific ways to support your professional growth? Response rate: 86%

Autonomy

Research Question # 1: What principal behaviors promote/hinder teacher autonomy?

Behaviors that Promote Autonomy

Communicate Teacher Value and Respect. The most consistently appreciated principal behavior expressed by teachers, was the value and respect shown to them by their administrator.

Beautifully stated, “Mr. ___ is very positive, and I truly feel he believes in me, which encourages me to try new things and really work to grow as a professional.” Many teachers, regardless of their years in the classroom, believed they had something to offer and/or share with their peers, whether it be fresh eyes, wisdom gained by experience, depth of knowledge, passion, and love for students; this belief was described as being nurtured as a result of the respectful treatment communicated by the principal. Noticing and verbalizing teachers’ strengths and providing an opportunity for them to share their skills and abilities were positive principal actions repeatedly stated by teachers.

> *Multiple responses:* My principal has always ensured that I knew that my position was integral to the school; They made me department chair and took me out of Special Ed; Verbal acknowledgement of my talents for one! I had a principal that acknowledged me in front of my peers and gave me leadership opportunities to present something I had done in the classroom to the staff; Great encouragement for me to become a leadership team member. She supported my decision. I felt validated and it helped me accomplish a goal.

Based on their descriptions, teachers considered these actions as a form of empowerment and affirmation that motivated, inspired, and promoted their self-view as capable educators.

Inviting teachers into a school design process was an action of particular empowerment. One teacher stated it most succinctly, communicating a sense of value and a desire to be involved in shaping the culture of the school with the following piece of advice: “Have a vision for your school and let the staff help you create it.” Teachers desired to help establish school-wide procedures and incentive programs: “Let them [teachers] have input on procedures, policies.” Others expressed eagerness and increased participation to meet school-wide needs

when asked to help make schedules for lunch, recess, and elective classes. Some teachers described feeling respected and an important part of the school community when sought out by the principal to help support others or the school at large. For example, a teacher stated: "Supporting me in being a leader in professional development for others, specifically identifying my strengths; trusting me with responsibilities beyond the classroom; providing opportunities for mentoring others; responsibilities given in areas of trust." Inviting participation, asking for help, seeking teachers out to be involved were admin actions that promoted teacher volition and thriving.

Multiple educators stated feeling highly supported when the principal treated faculty as professionals, exhibiting a heart to support, not dictate - an action highly desired by teachers from their principals. Simply being allowed to determine the class structure and schedule to match the students' learning styles was perceived as a form of respect extended to teachers by the principal: "Allows me to teach in a way that will best support my learners; Permits me to structure my schedule to fit my students learning styles." Another stated it this way: "He hires good teachers, then lets them do their jobs without micromanaging." One educator who had experienced a new principal at the time of the survey was grateful to now have a building leader that recognized the merit of this teacher's practice and was willing to verbalize that value. In like manner, a teacher of Special Education students with severe cognitive disabilities appreciated being understood by the principal as one who held high expectations for the students and was viewed as taking his/her job seriously.

Trust Extended. Principal trust was referenced as a source of autonomy support in its presence and an impediment to autonomy in its absence. When teachers were asked, *what advice would you give your principal,* one teacher responded with a simple cry of, "Trust us!" This

resounding message by several teachers was repeatedly communicated in the survey responses to the question represented by the quotes below: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Caroline: My advice for my principal would be to ask the teachers their opinion on how to teach, and to trust her teachers to teach.

Gerald: Don't tell them how to teach or demand they teach a certain way or when to teach a subject.

Ruby: Trust that I know what I'm doing when I've proven myself.

Harry: If you believe we are good teachers, then let us teach the way we want.

Candice: Allow choice and flexibility.

Julia: Let us guide PLC work.

Marian: Have PLC's be a true meeting of teachers, with no admin or 'leader,' allowing the team to organically find their role and place on that team and trust them to be on task.

Clearly, principals' belief and trust in teachers' ability to design their own lessons and hold a professional meeting with colleagues was an important attribute of what teachers considered to be a supportive principal behavior.

In addition to the previous quotes, a few respondents also stated how important it was for the principal to be open to new ideas proposed by teachers in conjunction with a willingness to allow teachers to try new implementation strategies of core content: "She is open to new ideas and trying new things; Always open to new ideas." For one teacher, it was being allowed to try new ideas and implementation strategies in the classroom that were beyond the confines of the curriculum.

I had a principal at my previous school that was awesome – one of the best things he did

was allow me to think outside the box and try new approaches with my students. I work with kids with autism, so this was huge. Haven't had that kind of principal support since I left.

Principals who were willing to sit down with teachers and engage in open and rich discussions about education, teaching strategies, and best practices were stated to be those who believed in their teachers as professionals and modeled a willingness to come alongside. A particularly strong example is shared below:

> My principal treats us as professionals and expects to be our support not our dictator. She provides regular opportunities to speak with her by making herself available during our prep time on certain days but gives us the ability to decide whether we are in need of her assistance by not requiring we meet with her.

Other educators described a variety of behaviors by which their principals exhibited trust toward and belief in teachers' professional ability. For some, it was not only important that the principal be open to new ideas but was helpful and able to brainstorm *with* the teacher, offering or promoting new alternative teaching techniques: "I found support through open and honest problem-solving conversations that led to new ideas and solutions to try. This conversation occurred due to an openness about all team members needing help at times." This simple action by the building leader allowed the teacher to be innovative and creative. An autonomy supportive principal was described as a leader who came alongside to support when asked to do so, but otherwise, trusted and believed in teachers' ability to develop and deliver quality lessons; "he leaves us alone and doesn't try to micromanage our classroom, but his door is always open when you need to ask questions or get advice."

Other forms of enacted principal trust in teachers were also named. One educator stated,

"He hires good teachers, then lets them do their jobs without micromanaging." Stated differently, a teacher said, "My principal treats us as professionals and expects to be our support, not our dictator." When asked what advice a teacher would give a principal, a teacher said, "Give me direction, and then trust me to do what you ask, then if I am struggling or not following through, clarify and give more support and direction." Encouragement of discussion and/or the exercising of flexibility by the principal to allow plans to change as a result of that discussion, was important to this teacher: "Willingness to discuss education; my principal encourages discussion; my principal encourages discussion and lets the plans change if the need is there. It is never *her way or the highway*." Teachers who were trusted to do their job, as well as be able to engage in purposeful and professional discussion, appeared more likely to believe that their principal trusted in their ability as an educator, an action that promoted motivation and sense of well-being.

Professional Development (PD). Differentiated and individualized improvement strategies offered to teachers were described as particularly supportive of autonomy. Some teachers were free to tell their principals the areas they wanted to improve, what strategies they believed would help that to happen, and/or select the professional development (PD) they wanted to attend. Multiple teachers made positive statements regarding their principals who allowed teachers to select their own PD based on their professional reflections that resulted in the determination of their own growth needs/goals: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Helen: Behavior management - offered to send me to a conference.

Billy: He often sends struggling teachers to observe my teaching.

Herman: Provided resources specific to the area of struggle.

Justine: One on one direction; suggestions for improvement.

Carmen: Directed me to other teachers who are successful in that area.

Marc: Worked one on one with me; taught class to model any action I may need more assistance with.

Casey: She is constantly seeking opportunities and information to help improve our particular needs.

Hazel: Last year I took on a new program that had only been introduced to our school the previous year. She made sure I had support from the person that served our area for that program and she also had the school teaching coach help me adjust to the new program.

Along this same line, a teacher described the building leader as taking the time to see his individual professional strengths and needs, and as such, forwarded district PD via email that the principal felt would be beneficial for the educator. Others stated that their building leader didn't force them to take whole-school directed PD but were instead, allowed to seek out their own based on their unique specific professional needs and interests. Teachers offering advice to principals stated similarly requested principal actions:

> Let teachers choose their own professional development. Don't assign across the board PD for the entire staff. Recognize and appreciate the diversity and abilities of your staff; Let teachers choose PD they feel fits their professional goals rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Different teachers described follow-up conversations that occurred throughout the year in the form of check-ins; these resulted in additional supports provided that helped promote the reaching of their individualized growth goals.

Other forms of professional growth support were noted as well. A few stated that his/her

principal found funds to support a teacher-requested PD that was off site; several teachers' travel and registration was paid to attend national conferences out of state. For one teacher struggling with behavior management in the classroom, the principal offered to send the teacher to a conference focused on behavioral techniques within the classroom. Additionally, teachers expressed appreciation for principals who recognized their needs and shared articles or sought out PDs for them that were unique to their individual interests:

> Directing me to resources or teachers experiences in my area of need; approval for requested P. D. opportunities outside of the district; Any time I have requested to attend a specific lecture or training she has approved my time off.

Actions involving listening to, responding to, and providing individualized professional development and resources to teachers based on their differentiated goals were all examples of critically held forms of autonomy supportive actions on behalf of the teachers.

Personalized Feedback. A few teachers requested and received teaching materials and/or technology resources that were specific to lessons which they believed would enhance their classroom teaching strategies and improve student engagement. Having taken on a new program new to the school a year prior, a teacher stated the following:

> Last year I took on a new program that had only been introduced to our school the previous year. She made sure I had support from the person that served our areas for that program and she also had the school teaching coach help me adjust to the new program. She herself checked in often with feedback and support to help make our program work.

A second teacher described the principal as one who was willing to give 1:1 instruction and make suggestions - not mandates - for improvement *when asked*. A third principal was described as having offered specific suggestions based on the teacher's personality and management style.

A teacher who sought out the principal with a distinct area of need was provided resources not commonly available but known to the principal.

Within the arena of practice feedback, some teachers described their principals as ones who sat down with them at the beginning of the year to collaborate and specifically set goals and create an action plan for their unique professional/personal development: “He requires that teacher's set yearly professional growth goals in writing and then reviews them with us.” These 1:1 or small group conversations were followed by checkpoints throughout the year along with an honest reflection of their teaching experience. One teacher described his/her principal as being open to new ideas, as well as being willing to suggest alternative teaching techniques to help the teacher push through student learning barriers. Within these reflective conversations, autonomy supportive principals offered feedback/solutions to problems as respectful suggestions and not dictatorial demands. A particular teacher’s reflection stood out as both honest and possessing a growth-mindset; she described the following situation with personal vulnerability and clear respect toward her principal because of how he handled the situation:

> Publicly and privately given many words of encouragement and support for what I do well. One time when I made very bad choices in a class time, the reaction from the principal was to discuss alternative directions I could have chosen and plan ahead for when a similar situation arises.

Reflection and feedback cycles took the form of ongoing professional conversations between teacher and principal. The principal might frequent a teacher’s classroom and provide written and/or oral feedback within a short amount of time that was positive and specific. Or, conversations would often begin with the teacher asking the principal to observe for feedback on specific strategies: “I asked for ways that I could improve. She was very specific and encouraged

me to try different strategies." Follow-up dialogue would include affirming statements by the principal and reflective questions to the teacher that helped them to dissect segments which they felt needed improvement such as one teacher's idea: "First honoring what I am doing right, then asking if 'several suggestions' would be helpful. Also asked, "Have you tried…?" This type of communication often allowed the teacher to self-identify an area of struggle, then problem-solve the solution with the support of the principal. In a different yet similar situation, the principal followed with suggestions that may help the next time if the teacher appeared stuck. When a teacher described herself in this situation, she described her principal as one who, "seeks opportunities and information to help improve my particular needs." Other teachers expressed similar appreciation for principals whose feedback was specific to what they saw on a walkthrough or a requested observation made by the teacher – principals didn't offer a general *good job but* provided the following: "Specific suggestions to try; Reflection conversation; Specific feedback and resources to improve it." Based on the survey results, teachers who wanted to improve appeared to dismiss generalized support, but respected and responded to principals who offered individualized, specific, and honest yet affirming feedback.

Several teachers described their principal as not only giving the teachers freedom to voice their ideas, but also encouraged *out of the box ideas*. The joy in one teacher's description of her principal's support is clearly apparent:

> I came up with the crazy idea of taking elementary students (third graders) away for a week to do a series of STEM activities in another state. Not only did he back me, he suggested ideas, helped with fundraisers AND drove the bus for the trip to help us keep costs down.

Similarly, others not only stated their admin's support of their ideas, but also enjoyed

the empowerment they felt:

> Supporting teacher ideas, and by implementing best practices based on our ideas; One of the best things he did was allow me to think outside the box and try new approaches with my students. I work with kids with Autism, so this was huge; Everything we have attempted, Mr. ____ has been completely onboard with.

When principals were open to new ideas and experimenting with new strategies proposed by teachers, they expressed their deep sense of internal satisfaction and well-being. Teachers also felt empowered to risk and design classroom practices that they believed increased student engagement and improved student outcomes.

Educators who struggled in different areas of professional practice found support from their principals when they asked for help and received it in a manner unique to their need. A few educators who sought out the principal were supported by being directed to other colleagues on campus: “Directing me to resources or teachers experiences in my area of need; Let me observe another teacher.” Others seeking support were allowed to attend workshops or observe teachers outside the district, allowing release time from their own class in order to observe: “Let me go outside the district for expert help; Approval for requested Professional Development opportunities outside of the district.” A few teachers went on to describe follow-up reflection conversations between the teacher and principal, helping teachers internalize their learning, supporting their professional learning.

Leadership Opportunities. Provision of leadership opportunities was a strong recurring principal move that has helped support and encourage teacher autonomy. A large number of teachers felt it highly important that principals support their ideas, ask them for help to nurture other teachers, and encourage them to share their best practices and expertise. These teachers felt

supported and trusted when they were given opportunities to provide professional development for their peers. *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Jamison: Supports my growth by providing me opportunities to provide PD to staff, team lead, and asks for my help

Josephine: presenting PD at staff meetings

Burt: Team leadership

Lauren: opportunities for school leadership

Betsy: Allowed me to be PLC facilitator

Specifically, a few teachers described being asked to provide onsite workshops after school for novice and/or struggling teachers in specific content areas. One teacher expressed the following when asked how his/her principal can support teacher growth: "Supporting me in being a leader in professional development for others; Trusting me with responsibilities beyond the classroom." Noticing teachers' abilities to support others' professional growth, providing venues for them to serve their peers in leadership capacities within the building, were leadership actions that were depicted as significant to promoting teacher growth.

In addition to peer coaching opportunities, many principals encouraged school leadership opportunities in a variety of venues. These opportunities ranged from Team Lead, Teacher-in-Charge, leading Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), leading presentations at staff meetings, engaging in interviews with media outlets, providing PD on district PD days, and mentoring other teachers. Most poignant of all was a teacher who stated: "simply being asked for help by my principal." This teacher described past principals that thought or believed they had to do it all; in so doing, they inadvertently denied teachers the opportunity to share their strengths

with others, grow in leadership, or simply be provided the joy of helping. That teacher described feeling valued, appreciated, and supported by the principal when asked to help, having been given opportunities to grow when asked to provide a PD at staff meeting.

Principals who identified specific teacher strengths resulting in asking teachers to lead colleagues' professional development or pursue a leadership path, inspired a sense of empowerment. Teachers described principals who promoted their leadership strengths by encouraging them to mentor others, were given additional leadership responsibilities, or were encouraged to pursue higher education degrees and/or leadership positions within the district. Providing teachers with opportunities for professional leadership is a powerful mechanism for promoting teacher motivation, communicating teacher value, enhancing growth and support opportunities.

Time Given. *Time* given in a variety of forms to educators by principals was a behavior that had a significant effect on the individual teacher. One teacher described a personal example of which the principal provided her with time and personnel to organize her classroom, one of whom was the principal. When the teacher and principal were discussing general frustrations experienced by the teacher, it became apparent that the struggle was not classroom management, but the teacher's organization of teaching materials, seating design, and student access to supplies. In response, the principal offered to get a small team of teachers together to help organize the room with the principal contributing as well. This made a deep impression on the teacher.

When asked, "What advice would you give a principal?" one educator expressed the desire for administrators to be cognizant of and show respect for a teacher's time, making every meeting worthwhile. Directly stated, another teacher said, "Value our time. Teachers need to nest

in our classrooms. We need time to organize and make our rooms fit for students. Too often our tasks are piled on, without being given more time." Also communicated was the desire for administrators to clearly outline expectations when changes are made, followed by adequate time to make the requested adjustments.

Quantitatively speaking, time was highlighted as a precious commodity for teachers; principals who honored and showed respect for teachers' time were highly regarded. One teacher answered the *advice* question by interpreting the principal's actions as a show of respect when teachers were given the "ability to decide whether we are in need of her assistance by not requiring we meet with her." However, when there was a need for assistance, others stated that they were grateful that the principal's door was always open when they needed help or advice:

> She set time aside for me to bring any concerns and helped me work through problems; Providing class coverage so team members could meet to plan cooperatively. It was showing us that she valued our time together, it was uninterrupted and collaborative.

Both of these statements expressed a strong sentiment of the importance of trust and respect conveyed in the form of time.

Other teachers communicated actions of principals who gave of their time to discuss discipline, parent interactions, and teaching strategies. One teacher told the principal that the teaching team was struggling with discipline in general across the grade level. The principal gave the team time during a PLC to identify the specific issues/students of concern, and brainstormed strategies with the teachers to address each one. "This year in particular, my team has been struggling with classroom behavior. She sat down with my team and helped us devise strategies that will work for this particular group of students." Related to matters of discipline, other

teachers described their administrator as one who took the time to provide unconditional support with the strategies suggested by teachers for students struggling with self-regulation and/or their parents:

> We have had several students that were acting out causing others to be in danger. She supported our request for further actions such as Homebound or suspension; Defended my actions to a parent; I had an issue with a parent questioning my teaching and grading, and the principal backed me up unconditionally, removed the student from my class, and warned the parent, saying they were no longer allowed in the building without an escort.

Through their responses, educators communicated clearly that time invested by the principal in the manner needed by the individual teacher, was a significant contributor for promoting teacher empowerment.

All of the actions taken by these principals were identified as key principal behaviors by respondents. Each reflected the individualized support requested and received by teachers that they described as both helpful and significant contributions toward their professional practice, promoting their ability to thrive as well as a deep satisfaction in their professional endeavors.

Behaviors that Hinder Autonomy

When analyzing teacher responses and organizing them into trends, it was clear that some of those who answered this question carried with them strong emotions based on the difficult and negative behaviors and actions they experienced from their administrator. To best encapsulate and communicate their experiences, actions lacking understanding of the importance of teacher autonomy primarily focused on principals' lack of trust/respect toward teachers, coercive practices, and an unwillingness to be solution oriented.

Lack of Trust/Respect. As previously described, the show of trust and respect from

administrators were necessary foundational behaviors voiced by teachers, both as human beings and as professionals, to meet their psychological need of autonomy. When it was non-existent, teachers experienced what they expressed as acts of blatant disrespect. Multiple teachers described situations that left them unsupported or belittled in front of parents or colleagues. Explicit examples were stated as follows:

> Believing the student without the teacher having had an opportunity to state what happened; Believing a parent's complaint and taking his/her side in front of the teacher, parent, and student without having fully investigated, if at all; Refusing to support discipline with the rationale that a teacher needs to handle his/her classroom no matter what; Refusing to listen to teacher ideas for handling discipline situations; Chastising a teacher in front of peers.

Each of these actions by the principal served to cause teachers to question their own judgement and value to the profession, diminishing their sense of autonomy.

Survey outcomes illustrated that principals should provide consequences that fit student behavior; not doing so was interpreted as a lack of respect from the principal toward the teacher. Those who rarely sent students to the office or made office referrals unless serious in nature, believed that their referral should have resulted in stronger consequences than what was administered. Two incidents described by the same teacher, portray two different principals who she believed were treating her with disrespect, undermining her authority in the classroom either with students or with a student's parent. These situations as described, depict an overt disregard of the teacher's judgement by both principals, exhibiting autonomy hindering behaviors:

> *Principal 1 Scenario:* My first year teaching I had a student who antagonized others and at times disrupted our classroom. Even then I knew the value of keeping discipline

within the classroom, so I always worked with him myself, but I did keep the principal in the loop as to the more major incidences. Near the end of the year, he finally stepped over the line of what I felt could appropriately be handled by me. He was bullying another student about the visible symptoms of a medical condition she had been living with or the last few years. I finally wrote a referral and sent him to the principal. She talked to him, and told him if he would apologize, she would just forget about it. She tore the referral up in front of him. Obviously, I had already gone through the apologize and make it right with the person you hurt step, so I felt like she didn't trust my common sense. I also felt completely undermined. As a teacher who had never sent a student to her, I feel that when one finally did show up in May it should be taken a little more seriously than the students from classes that were sent on a daily basis. After she tore the referral up in front of him, I lost all credibility with that student. Needless to say, in my next nine years teaching under her, I kept almost all discipline in my room. And once, she even found a way to undermine that.

Principal 2 Scenario: With past principals I have experienced situations where I was not backed up with a parent by the principal, she went as far as siding with the parent in front of me and requesting I change the child's grade due to the pressure the parent was putting on her. This principal should have backed me up and stood by the district grading policy rather than cave to a parent. The rest of the year with this parent was a nightmare, because she then went to the principal over ridiculous thing.

Differentiation is a skill that respondents believed should be applied by administrators toward teachers as a form of respect for the individual. One teacher stood against principal action of over-generalized disciplinary comments made to everyone at a staff meeting, inferring that

those comments should be made only to those to whom it applied: “Generalized disciplinary comments are NOT appropriate for faculty meetings.” Several educators expressed frustration toward principals that didn’t respond to them as individuals; their suggestion was to seek to understand the unique needs of each educator, and then provide support accordingly:

> Not to provide one size fits all PD; Individualize based on performance; Allow all teachers to design their own professional development plan; Let teachers choose PD they feel fits their professional goals rather than a one-size-fits-all approach; Ask your teachers what they need support with and then provide it. I hate it when I am forced to attend PD on the whim of my admin; Listen to me and let me tell you what *I* want to improve; Listen to your staff on the PD they need; Let teachers choose their own professional development. Don't assign across the board PD for the entire staff. Recognize and appreciate the diversity and abilities of your staff; Let us explore professional development that we feel is relevant to our teaching, school, and let the faculty help create it.

These teachers clearly stated their disdain for principals who didn’t listen to their staff or provide the unique supports requested, regardless of whether or not it was aligned to their content or professional needs.

As previously described, many teachers responding to the survey stated that trust given to them by the principal was a powerful motivator, inspiring them to higher levels of growth and development as professionals. The opposite is also true; principals who chose not to trust or empower their teachers to lead, were felt to undermine their growth efforts, promoting frustration and isolation instead of autonomy. A teacher described their principal as one who lacked trust in the teacher’s ability to provide leadership to colleagues, even though the teacher had been given

the responsibility to lead the weekly PLC: “My principal was allowing me to lead PLC’s, but then would not allow me to select the agendas, making it less meaningful for my team. If I am going to be empowered to lead, then I would like to be able to also make decisions.”

Still others expressed feelings of betrayal by principals who didn’t follow through with requested support. Three examples are stated as follows: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Jasmine*: Our principal has our backs only until he turns around and talks to someone else. I would like him to stick to his word. If what I want or need can’t be done, tell me that first rather than telling me one thing and then doing another thing and passing the blame onto someone else. You’re the boss. You get the credit for what goes right AS WELL AS the heat for what goes wrong. It is common for our principal to say he will talk to someone, only for us to discover later that conversation never happened, or not at all the way he promised. It is disrespectful and unprofessional.
>
> *Kenneth:* Our school district got a new special education director who has no background in special education. The new director keeps asking me to do things that are not right. The law does not allow me to do them. I then get in trouble by the new director for not doing these things. I went to the principal about it but yet nothing has happened. It still continues. I won’t do them.
>
> *Tasha:* I had a principal who did practically nothing when I wrote a student on a referral. Kids didn’t mind getting sent to her office because they could play with her toys. She rarely ever backed me up. It got to the point where I had to take care of my own discipline because she wouldn’t do anything. I would like for her to have done her job. I RARELY EVER wrote a referral; when I did write one, I expected her to take care of it

because it was serious.

At the core of some respondent's advice was a strong need to be respected as professionals; one teacher summarizes this sentiment by stating, "... sincerely act like you believe we are professionals with value." The above examples are of hurtful actions by principals that undermined teachers' confidence and sense of assurance that their principal believed in their professional ability.

Coercive Practices. Coercive practices by principals took many forms, but all examples were described with much frustration and resentment by teachers. A teacher expressed frustration at feeling like the words spoken to the principal fell on deaf ears; when asked for input by the principal, the teacher described the principal as usually doing the opposite of the input given, causing the teacher to feel invalidated and dismissed**.**

Evaluations are highly personal and viewed by teachers as an assessment of one's professional ability; a teacher described the principal as one who would not give teachers ratings higher than a 3 because giving a 4 required extra paperwork. The teacher's effort put forth was not acknowledged by the principal because of what the teacher believed was the principal's desire to take the easy road.

Resentment toward principals who micromanaged or caved to parental pressure was strong. "Teachers are micromanaged at my school. We are told how to decorate our walls, when to teach certain subjects and how long to teach them. When teachers are off schedule when she observes us, we are marked no matter why we are off schedule." Offense was taken toward principals who were unable to stand up to vocal parents and didn't ask for the teacher's perspective; these principals were viewed as folding to parent pressure: "Usually centered around parents - our principals are so quick to fold when a parent is vocal, that they don't see how the

action they take (or don't take) impacts everyone!! Consistency is key!"

Although a variety of hurtful practices have been described by teachers, a standout coercive practice named was the act of playing favorites - showing partiality to those who could "do no wrong in her eyes but did nothing for the kids." Also stated was, "Don't pick favorites to get all the reward, stipends and general run the school." In addition, principals who kept the staff from working together or had lied about what people said, were strongly resented by educators who wanted to interact freely with their colleagues. Instead of being treated with the trust, dignity, and honesty they felt they deserved, this form of promoting isolation was perceived as an act of control.

Not Solution Oriented. An equally strong theme that arose was teachers' need for their principal to be solution-oriented, as well as allowing teachers to be part of that process. Several shared their frustration about principals who hid in their office, were inaccessible for consult and guidance, or made all the decisions without input by those affected. Many teachers communicated their desire to make professional contributions but stated that the principal made it clear that their opinions were not valued. One of several examples was a grade level team who devised a plan for supervision in the cafeteria; the principal wouldn't sit down with them to listen or consider their idea: "A grade level wanted to assign seats at lunchtime but admin that is already in the cafeteria wouldn't agree to monitor. We were *told* that the teachers would have to be in the cafeteria daily to monitor."

Another teacher approached her principal about teaching English Language Arts (ELA) standards using a thematic approach in conjunction with the Social Studies and Science curriculums; the response from the principal was a lack of willingness to consider the idea:

I was feeling frustrated about the amount of time I had to teach social studies and science.

She told me I could only teach these two subjects for a max of 30 min a day because I had to have an hour of language arts instruction. I tried to explain that language arts standards could be met while teaching social studies and science. I tried to give examples but felt as though she didn't want to hear them because at the end of the conversation, she repeated that I could only teach those subjects for 30 min a day.

Similarly, an educator described the building leader in this way: “She liked to make it seem as if she was taking our suggestions on things then turned around and did the opposite.” Regarding school-wide procedures, two different teachers wanted to discuss their idea with their principal:

Principal 1 Response: She stated that her position (on a procedure) was non-negotiable. I would have wanted to walk her through that procedure so she could understand my point of view.

Principal 2: I would have liked the principal to actually listen to my concerns and ideas instead of *saying* I am "listening" and disregard any input from teachers.

All of these examples of autonomy hindering principal actions/behaviors - lack of trust/respect toward teachers, coercive practices, and not solution oriented - exemplified the negative behaviors experienced by teachers who relayed a desire to positively contribute to the workplace.

Competence

Research Question #2: What are specific principal behaviors/actions that promote/hinder teachers’ overall professional growth and professional competence?

Behaviors that Promote Competence

Practice Feedback. Many educators identified mutual feedback between principal and

teachers as a critical principal move to support educator growth and sense of competence. This included rich discussions around student or school data that was aligned with school goals and district or state standards. Weekly grade level/department PLCs were stated as the opportune venue for these types of discussions to occur. As a result, teachers felt free to ask for professional development for specific growth needs, and to provide the principal with site level feedback.

Respondents communicated that teachers looked for principal actions to include open, honest, and respectful feedback that was truly intended to support and promote collaboration and teacher success:

> One-on-one conferences discussing my teaching strategies; Suggestions for using closure on a daily basis; Gentle corrections when needed; Encouragement, honest feedback; Specific suggestions of strategies; Encouraging, helping with resources, positive feedback, constructive criticism.

In a specific example, a teacher described their success: "This year in particular, my team and I have been struggling with classroom behavior. She sat down with my team and helped us devise strategies that will work for this particular group of students. Knowing the students well, the principal included herself as part of the intervention strategy." A different principal honored a teacher's initiation who had the courage to ask if the grade level team was allowed to use PLC time to provide guidance and support for a struggling teammate; together, the grade level team determined wrap-around supports and resources.

Not surprisingly, when principals expressed positive, complimentary, and encouraging feedback, teachers' responses communicated a sense of well-being and confidence as evidenced below:

> When the principal noticed my students' engagement and excitement during a project;

When s/he is interested in what we are learning in class; Compliments during prospective parent tours; He said to a parent in a meeting the reasons he has confidence in me; She is very good about letting us know when we are doing a great job; Publicly and privately given many words of encouragement and support for what I do well; Positive encouragement of good teaching practices; public acknowledgement of jobs well done.

It was noteworthy that these actions by the principals were unsolicited, non-evaluative, supportive responses that acknowledged teachers' dedication and skill.

Specific feedback and encouragement by principals were competence supportive practices desired by teachers. "I found support through open and honest problem-solving conversations that led to new ideas and solutions to try. This conversation occurred due to an openness about all team members needing help at times." Others similarly stated that their principal created an atmosphere where there was freedom to struggle, seek advice, and be open about needing help at times. One teacher stated that the principal made it a point to first honor what the teacher was doing well; the principal then asked if the teacher would be open to suggestions. In this instance, the principal's suggestions were prefaced with questions such as, "Have you tried …?" or "Have you considered…?" That particular teacher was grateful that the principal began by seeking to understand what the teacher had already done rather than assuming a lack of effort or skill. Instead, an offer of resources, ideas, and constructive supports followed.

Observations and/or video-taped teaching sessions by the principal, followed by reflection conversations were stated as highly supportive to teacher practice. One teacher was grateful that the principal was willing to work with them 1:1; the administrator also modeled the skill by teaching it in the classroom. Some educators described themselves as courageous enough to participate in a video-taped lesson suggested by the principal that was then followed by a

feedback discussion with the principal and/or other teachers in a PLC session. Another teacher also chose to be filmed in action in the classroom at the suggestion of the principal. Resulting from a reflection conversation with the principal, the teacher was able to identify instructional behaviors that were inhibiting the desired outcomes and was able to make course corrections as a result of this coaching strategy. Each of these scenarios was an example of a unique individualized support offered by the principal that promoted professional growth in teachers.

Learning Opportunities and Resources. Prevalent across several teachers' experiences were district and/or site learning opportunities that were provided as competence support offered by principals who sought to help teachers improve in their content knowledge and craft. Support for many teachers came through PLC's wherein peer and principal discussions occurred weekly; these conversations normalized teachers' frustrations and struggles, giving them hands-on experience and concrete ideas for implementation of strategies and techniques in the classroom. Additionally, PLCs were frequently named as a consistent place of support and training where small groups of teachers were able to get grade level specific support from their principal and each other. Other teachers described their principals as those who regularly sent out PD opportunities through school email that were offered by the district. Additionally, many educators described their principal as using staff meetings, Saturdays, or after-school time to offer school-wide opportunities for staff development; topics changed regularly to meet the needs of the different content areas within the building.

A variety of district and/or site resources made available to teachers were also provided by some competence supportive principals.

> Allowing us to suggest/seek suggestions from each other; Informs us about training opportunities that she believes will enhance teaching and learning; Approval of

attendance of professional development workshops in subject area; Sharing professional articles; Regular staff meetings, PLC team training, encouraged to go to trainings; having a book study; professional development trainings onsite after school; She finds PD that may help but does not pressure you.

Other forms of resources and learning opportunities made available by several principals were professional books, videos, and curriculum training – all vital forms of support offered to enhance teacher competence and capacity.

Additionally, below is a listing of the multiple actions made by principals that teachers named as those they believed to be meaningful to improve their level of skill: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Lydia: Weekly walk-throughs based on the rotation of four indicators from the Teacher Leader Effectiveness (TLE evaluation) rubric; teachers were given immediate feedback that wasn't counted toward their observation/evaluation

Abigail: He requires that teacher's set yearly professional growth goals in writing and then reviews them with us

Esther: Training specific to site-based vision

Ruth: Online articles, outside resources and support

Amos: Provided weekend/after school on-site PD opportunities

Nathan: Sought out and suggested PD that may help but didn't require/pressure anyone to attend

Luke: Paid for and sent teachers to conferences outside the district

Paul: Informed teachers of local training opportunities

Bart: Modeled expected behaviors; used protocols in staff meetings that could be used in

the classroom

Benny: Provided specific suggestions of teaching strategies

Darrell: Allowed teachers to purchase classroom teaching supplies out of Title I dollars

David: Provides ample training of school-wide, site-based curriculum and goals: i.e. Love and Logic; Toolbox; Conscious Discipline; Eureka Math, etc.

Martha: She turns most of our staff meetings into staff development opportunities. She often uses protocols that we can employ in our own classrooms; Putting out opportunities for growth

Learning opportunities and the provision of competency-building resources, were described as core components provided by principals to promote teacher growth and development. Also evident from the items cited, educators benefited from different types of learning venues, highlighting principals who acted in a manner aligned to understanding the importance of varied adult learning styles. In sum, a teacher simply stated, "She offered and found me help."

Coaching/Demonstration Teachers. Coaching support and the opportunity to observe and debrief with demonstration teachers, were prevalent in the teacher statements as actions by principals to help teachers who described themselves as wanting or needing to improve. Coaching was typically described by teachers as district personnel who functioned with the specific purpose of working with a teacher to overcome an identified area of struggle. This included: "planning, in-class modeling, side-by-side teaching support followed by gradual release; it could also include pre- and post-conferencing." Equally popular to coaching opportunities were observations of demonstration or master teachers by struggling teachers, both onsite and at other campuses; principals provided class coverage in order for the observations to

be possible. Additional statements follow:

> Recommendations of other good teachers to observe and with which to converse; Offer of going to observe master teachers; Letting me observe other teachers that are highly effective in an area of concern; Allowed opportunity for peer observation; Observing other teachers, using a buddy teacher system; Allow teachers to observe other successful teachers either in your building or at other schools.

This was a strategy utilized by principals that was well-received by respondents, as it gave teachers fresh ideas; they could see new strategies in action that they were able to walk away with, apply to their own classroom, and implement immediately.

Although similar to the reflection and feedback cycle, several teachers made a distinction in regard to relational buy-in toward principals who *offered suggestions versus mandates* when giving feedback in response to both their walk-through and formal observations. Based on the survey, teachers clearly understood that when a principal made suggestions, they were communicating that improvement or change needed to occur. One teacher respectfully gave principal feedback describing the importance of positive, honest, and collaborative interactions:

> Begin with a positive note before diving into an area of need. Give suggestions of specific support you can offer, don't just offer support. Be real when you don't know and have the attitude that we are a team, working on a solution together.

Two others made it clear that belittling teachers isn't helpful: "Do not belittle teachers that seem to struggle, especially in front of students or other colleagues; Teachers are often told everything they need to improve and what they didn't do right." However, with the tactic of suggestions, a door was opened for a collaborative interaction between principal and teacher, allowing the teacher to respond to the suggestions and offer ideas or solutions as respectfully stated below:

> I believe that effective principals inspire professional growth by coaching, encouraging and listening to teachers; Notice the good or excellent and then maybe suggest ideas in that area. That makes the teacher feel supported and comfortable and able to expose what they need help or growth in.

Teachers with similar thinking also pointed out positive principal actions as those who asked guiding questions, shared professional experiences and resources, or gently pushed back to redirect or help teachers dig deeper into their reflection process. Overall, teachers reported feeling nurtured and professionally fed by these collegial, interactive discussions with their principal.

Affirmation and Encouragement. Several educators agreed that encouragement and positive words went a long way to affirm their confidence as an educator. This took many forms: "Verbal acknowledgement, supportive emails, supportive notes; acknowledgment of best practices or highly effective teaching practices to school visitors such as ILD's and superintendents' visits." Others stated principal actions that included: "Positive encouragement of good teaching practices; Public acknowledgement of jobs well done; Praise and Suggestion over Criticism; Positive feedback, support, innovative ideas; Acknowledgement that you do great things!" These teachers identified these principal moves as important to sustaining a positive working climate.

Especially meaningful to three teachers was when the principal spoke highly of the teacher to parents or visitors. One teacher was given compliments by the principal during parent tours. Another principal bragged about the teacher to parents during a parent/teacher/administrator conference. A third principal told a parent in a meeting the reasons he had confidence in the teacher when the parents were questioning the teacher's ability with

their child. Based on descriptions by survey participants, public and private words of affirmation and positive feedback contributed to building teachers' confidence and feelings of competence as a professional.

Advice offered to principals by teachers confirms that affirmation is an essential aspect of communication requested by teachers. "I think it's important to highlight things going right along with the criticism," suggested an educator. Another participant recommended that principals look for opportunities to affirm teachers: "Look for every possible chance to give encouragement for a job well done, just like we should do for our students." In like manner, "Recognize when teachers are going out of their way to do well with their students." This need for recognition was further expressed by educators as the need to be consistently encouraged and acknowledged for their work as professionals:

> Teachers are given so many extra duties not in their job description. Teachers are often told everything they need to improve and what they didn't do right. With students, it takes 7 positive comments to atone for 1 negative comment. The same goes for teachers. Especially for those who are giving everything they can to the profession.

The acts of listening, informing, and affirming were pieces of advice given by educators to administrators that are foundational to building their sense of competence and receiving the growth support they desired and needed to thrive.

Discipline Support. Four teachers responded to this question with their focus on support with student discipline, describing how the principal stepped into difficult behavioral situations to support the teacher with students and/or parents. The first teacher stated, "While the student is still difficult and this was not a magic fix, because of what my principal did we now have the parents support and we are working together to help the student learn to control his behavior."

The second teacher reported, “When struggling with a class with very challenging behavior, she gave specific suggestions; she gave me thought provoking questions to help me identify for myself what changes I could make.” This educator was first challenged to reflect internally through strategic questions asked by her principal, resulting in professional growth in classroom management skills. A third teacher described his/her experience below:

> Principal would find out from me which particular kids were causing problems in a class and would confer with them one-on-one to let them know he was watching them and they had better not act up in my class anymore. If he did receive a referral on them (from me) he would treat it seriously and there would be great consequences. Amazingly, it worked.

Lastly, a teacher described how she broke up a fight. The principal prompted her to file charges against the child who had hurt her in her efforts to stop the fight. Each of these examples were displays of principal behaviors that supported teachers with student discipline, making a lasting impression.

Classroom Support. Principals who held true to their first role and responsibility as a teacher and lived that out through their daily actions, promoted skill building and competence in their staff. Teachers noticed when principals modeled the behaviors they expected from teachers and students on a daily basis and were motivated to incorporate them into their practice. This included being a day-to-day example, modeling protocols at staff meetings and trainings that could be employed in the classroom.

> Modeling expected behaviors; PD’s almost every week in staff meetings or at PLCs; Very helpful to provide alternative teaching techniques; modeling how to work with parents to make them better parents; Model professionalism in all ways - write well, speak well, present well; By giving real world examples of different ways to attempt to

teach in a different way.

Modeling not only provided teachers with additional strategies to use in the classroom, this action promoted respect toward their principal as expressed in the above responses.

Building leaders who were willing to engage with teachers in their classrooms and offer various forms of academic support were consistently named as helpful and supportive. Although not a new teacher, one educator described the behavior of the principal: “I have started a new grade level mid-year and it was very overwhelming, but I felt surrounded with support from admin.” Another teacher expressed, “She made a point to check on me daily to see if I had any unmet needs as a teacher.” One teacher stated that the principal provided class coverage so that team members could meet to plan cooperatively. This communicated to the team that she understood their need for uninterrupted and collaborative work and plan time. An educator was pleasantly surprised at the beginning of the year by the principal:

> My current principal found information on Pintrest that pertained to the program I teach and shared it with me at the beginning of the year. I loved it and immediately made it an integral part of my students’ work. Her [the principal] interest in my success in guiding this program makes me excited with the positive gains my students are making, and she makes me feel great about what we have accomplished.

In a very different scenario, one teacher described a situation in which she had made some very poor choices during class time. Instead of chastisement, the principal’s action was to engage with the teacher in brainstorming a variety of alternative instructional techniques that could have been chosen. The discussion ended with the teacher being challenged by the principal to select one or two of the options identified and prepare a plan to handle a similar situation that may arise in the future.

Principals who provided classroom support regarding the social/emotional nature with students, as well as difficult parents, was important to multiple teachers. A teacher described his principal as one who acted quickly for a struggling student: “Child with emotional and behavioral problems was identified quickly and proactive actions were taken immediately with family.” A second teacher states, “I had an issue with a parent questioning my teaching and grading, and the principal backed me up unconditionally, removed the student from my class, and warned the parent, saying they were no longer allowed in the building without an escort.” A third educator relayed a difficult situation wherein the principal acted with firm and decisive action:

> I had a parent who was not feeding her child at home. I talked to him about calling DHS. He supported me. He let me call from his office on the speaker phone and supported my decision in doing so. When the parent came to the school angry and demanding to speak with me, he refused to let her.

Teacher Advice. The fifth survey question asked educators, “What advice would you give your principal, or any principal, regarding specific ways to support your professional growth?” Responses reiterated most of the findings already shared with an emphasis on the importance of including positive feedback along with constructive criticism, noting that respect and encouragement are essential to the delivery. Several teachers offered heartfelt and specific advice that is best described in their own words: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Martha*: Positive support is so important to encouraging any person to pursue improving their professional life. It is easier to take criticism from someone you respect and trust.
>
> *Aaron*: Notice the good or excellent and then maybe suggest ideas in that area. That

makes the teacher feel supported and comfortable and able to expose what they need help or growth in.

Adam: Provide positive feedback when you can.

Lillian: It would support my growth to hear suggestions outside of a TLE meeting in a non-threatening way.

Anabel: I believe that effective principals inspire professional growth by coaching, encouraging and listening to teachers.

Travis: If you are criticizing for any reason do it with the teacher only and in a way that conveys your concern for the teacher.

Caroline: Do not belittle teachers that seem to struggle; especially in front of students or other colleagues.

Michael: Begin with a positive note before diving into an area of need. Give suggestions of specific support you can offer, don't just offer support. Be real when you don't know, and have the attitude that we are a team, working on a solution together.

Laura: Constructive criticism is always helpful.

Mary: Give teachers an opportunity to explain why something went wrong and discuss ways to improve in a nonpunitive way.

Carrie: Not to focus on only the negative; discuss the positive points.

Nellie: Teachers are often told everything they need to improve and what they didn't do right.

Those educators who offered this advice reflected a desire to receive feedback from their administrator, but to do so with a delivery that was sensitive, genuine, and honest. These basic tenets of respect and affirmation were communicated as foundational to teachers' ability to

receive the feedback offered.

Behaviors that Hinder Competence

Several survey respondents cited principal actions that were in opposition to the supportive behaviors described in the previous section. Educators stated that their building leaders didn't support their growth and development as professionals, but instead, described a decrease in their sense of competence depicted in a variety of hindering principal behaviors.

Accusations/Jumping to Conclusions. The following descriptions are filled with strong sentiments regarding the treatment teachers professed to receive by their principal. Numerous educators gave feedback describing actions made by their principal that caused them to feel belittled, falsely accused, or humiliated in front of their peers. Below is a series of direct quotes by multiple educators that best describes their experience: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Susan: Former principal tried to embarrass me in front of other staff by undermining and questioning what I was doing in class; my teaching assignment was changed four times in one year.

Michelle: They tend to dog you, watching and waiting (targeting) for someone to do something wrong so they can jump on you, write a PDP, and threaten you with your job.

Vincent: My principal was constantly telling me what I was doing wrong and would yell at me instead of speaking to me as an equal.

Cameron: My principal jumped to conclusions and made a decision without asking me what really happened.

Hailey: I received a public berating and again in private as well. She should have helped me to know – privately - what I should be doing differently and shared in a way of

concern instead of making me feel like a terrible person and a terrible teacher."

Herold: In the past, a principal threatened me with disciplinary action. One principal told me I was too demanding when I asked for help with a student. It was the first and only time I ever asked him for help.

Hector: Be slower to jump to conclusions.

Geoffrey: Hear my side of the story instead of only taking the word of someone else.

Journey: The principal severely chastised me in front of other teachers. I didn't think that was right.

Jacob: Don't let parents put teachers down; don't submit to pushy parents if teachers are performing and using best practices.

Jon: He makes all the decisions, gets no input. We experienced teachers know when someone is not going to make it. Principals need to listen to staff."

Janice: Constant criticism; always looking for me to make a mistake or fail. I felt scared, and I could not do my job.

Communicated within these quotes is the pervasive message that building leaders who engaged in threats and intimidation, belittling educators in front of others, critical statements, not seeking to understand or listen to the teacher's point of view, strongly hindered teachers' ability to thrive in the workplace.

Lack of Principal Capacity. Instances of concern over principal actions were expressed by a number of teachers. These behaviors included actions that: exhibited a lack of willingness to equip them to handle a variety of situations, lacked specific feedback that would promote professional growth, and exhibited a clear lack of content knowledge to support instruction. Quotes from teachers are the basis of these assertions: *(All quotes are anonymous participants*

presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)

Sandy: I was struggling with a student on a Behavior Improvement Plan (BIP); I had no prior knowledge of this sort of behavior. I received no feedback, suggestions, training, etc. It would have been nice to have help to prevent future outbursts, training, and warnings.

Rachel: Give me tools instead of criticism.

Burt: Being told I wasn't strong enough to team-teach (in my 2nd year). I would've responded better to specific, constructive feedback.

Deborah: We received our MAP scores back and instead of mentioning how much the majority of our students had improved, focused on the few that did not make as much growth. Later we were told that our scores were good, but it did not help how we felt after we were already told we were not doing our jobs.

Andrea: The principal never really saw me doing well when I taught kindergarten in 2014-15. She never praised my class or thought that I had improved in my teaching and relating to kindergartners. I wish she would have found positives and admitted that I was doing a good job.

Douglas: Show me don't tell me.

Keith: I have had principals who are not familiar with best practices enough to understand or support instruction. They couldn't understand that I was using monitoring and adjusting even with lots of supporting evidence. It was frustrating that they didn't know what to look for.

Kristi: Lack of understanding of district behavior policy.

These teachers' statements expressed their desire for principals to know their own craft, have the

ability to model best practices, give specific feedback that accurately reflected a teacher's ability, and to affirm teachers who were doing well or growing in their level of professional competence.

Relatedness

Question #3: What relational behaviors do principals extend toward teachers that positively and/or negatively affect teachers' relatedness and/or sense of belonging?

Through the emotion and descriptions represented by survey respondents in the previous sections, *relatedness* is clearly not a stand-alone or static concept but appears to be ever evolving and fluid based on the interaction and/or connectedness that is a result of actions and behaviors exchanged between principals and teachers. The following descriptions by teachers, depict principals' relational actions and behaviors that have created an atmosphere and environment in which teachers communicated a sense of belonging and freedom to grow.

Behaviors that Promote Relatedness

Accessible. Accessibility incorporated a variety of forms of relational support exhibited by principals. Presence and visibility were two types of accessibility that some teachers agreed promoted teacher belonging by the principal: "The principal walks the halls several times a week. She had her hand on the pulse of the school." Similarly, a few principals were described as those who listened to teacher needs and made it a point to make themselves available during scheduled teacher prep times for questions and support. One teacher stated, "She has an open-door-policy and has always been helpful with any issues or needs I've taken to her." Open-door-policy was a popular trend among respondents, highlighting the emphasis for availability and the opportunity to connect with or seek guidance from their principal. "She set aside time for me to bring any concerns and helped me work through problems," conveyed a teacher. Another said, "One of my first principals was wonderful. His office was always open to you. Never degraded

you or made you feel less."

Open Communication. Principal behaviors that promoted communication with teachers were repeatedly stated as an important form of relational support. Teachers cited principal behaviors that included asking teachers for feedback and seeking their ideas and thoughts regarding a variety of topics. A few stated that they counted on the weekly meetings with their principal as a forum to discuss a wide range of questions and educational matters, commenting on the consistency of the principal's commitment to get to know his staff and their strengths. A teacher stated, "I found support through open and honest problem-solving conversations that led to new ideas and solutions to try." The skill of active listening when a teacher was talking, giving the teacher the respect and attention deserved, were principal behaviors greatly appreciated by another teacher. *Two-way conversations,* was a phrase made repeatedly by participants, implying that not only did the principal talk, but teachers were allowed to express themselves. Honestly stated, a teacher shared the following: "Her door was always open to listen to ideas, problems and concerns. You might not always get the answer you wanted, but you truly knew you were heard."

Positive and Encouraging. Positive and encouraging statements by the principal were significant for many teachers. One educator felt encouraged after the principal's visit to the classroom was followed by a note, sharing the positive impressions so apparent in the warm learning relationship evidenced between the teacher and students. Another teacher relayed feeling encouraged following a friendly conversation that showed the principal's awareness of that teacher's professional growth interests. Several teachers stated that their principal created an environment free of repercussions or judgement wherein they felt freedom to express their ideas, to engage in rich discussions surrounding the topic of teaching, and to share personal

information. Using humor to create a fun and supportive work environment that fostered relationships among staff, were actions by principals greatly enjoyed by teachers. “Honesty; trust; encouragement; great intentions; understanding; lots of positive comments and praise; backs me up when I need it; very supportive,” are all positive and encouraging actions and behaviors teachers attributed to principals whom they described as promoting relatedness and a sense of belonging.

Interpersonal Skills/Caring. The importance of a principal’s interpersonal skills was strongly communicated as a high value practice. Clearly expressed in the teacher quotes below, it was often the small acts of kindness and caring that made strong impressions on teachers, influencing their sense of belonging and promoting their well-being: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Pamela:* She made time to sit down and talk with me. She gave me an opportunity to speak openly and provided me with help for my problem
>
> *Percy:* Allowing me to take off with no guilt when my father died
>
> *Quinton:* Family emergency; She checked on me every day
>
> *Trey:* Just the recognition of me as an individual and the challenges I'm facing. We as
>
> *Kendal:* Teachers get so overwhelmed sometimes we don't need a solution we need compassion

Another teacher described a conversation with the principal as a heart-to-heart discussion in which the principal openly shared how he had moved through similar struggles experienced as a teacher. The teacher described walking away from the conversation having felt invited into a new level of relationship. One teacher summarized their thoughts in this way: “The Best principals treat all from custodian to master’s degrees with honor and respect. He led by example

and we were all eager to help him, our school, and our kids in any way."

Belief in Teacher's Professional Ability. Strong positive sentiments were expressed by many teachers who stated that their principal treated them as professionals and valued their contributions to the school. These teachers welcomed the accountability provided by their principal because it was built on a foundation of mutual goals for the students and a belief that the teachers could deliver strong instruction to meet the needs of the children. One teacher epitomized this concept with the statement, "My principal holds every person in this building to the highest standard possible. I work with an AMAZING group of individuals, and we are on our toes 100% of the time." The environment promoted by this particular principal was relayed as one of a growth mindset and belief that every teacher was highly capable and their expertise needed within the learning community. Instead of resentment toward the accountability, this teacher responded with appreciation for being believed-in by their principal and was inspired to rise to the daily challenges. When excellence was the standard delivered with a strong "we can" by their principal, many teachers surveyed responded with a personal effort to grow and give their best. *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Margaret:* He led by example and we were all eager to help him, our school, and our kids in any way.
>
> *Destiny:* When the principal noticed my students' engagement and excitement during a project. When she/he is interested in what we are learning in class.
>
> *Latasha:* When struggling with a class with very challenging behavior, she gave specific suggestions, she gave me thought provoking questions to help me identify for myself what changes I could make.

Barbara: The principal walks the halls several times a week. She had her hand on the pulse of the school.

Teachers expressed an increase in motivation and desire to be part of their school when led by principals who communicated through their words and actions that they believed their teachers were highly capable professionals.

Affirmation. In addition to principals expressing belief and confidence in their staff, communicating affirmation was a principal practice that several teachers expressed as highly important to their sense of connectedness with their principal. Administrators who attended performances and/or announced the results of tournaments over the intercom to the entire school made teachers feel that their efforts were rewarded. In like manner, teachers felt affirmed when principals acknowledged their accomplishments or gave public praise of a job well done. Teachers felt seen and invited into relationship when the principal engaged in frequent and positive feedback, offering specific praise given in oral or written forms.

In a personal example, one teacher's comment summed up the importance and power of the principal's acts of affirmation and encouragement: "Mr. _____ is very supportive. He is encouraging and truly makes me feel like I can do anything. I know that he supports me with all the adventures we explore!!" Another teacher felt significant support through the following actions of the principal: "Positive encouragement of good teaching practices, responsibilities given in areas of trust, public acknowledgement of jobs well done." Lastly, a teacher listed specific principal behaviors that promoted his or her sense of belongingness and relatedness: "Praise and Suggestion over Criticism, Humor and Creating a Fun and Supportive Work Environment, Fostering Positive Relationships among Staff (allowing us to suggest/seek suggestions from each other)." All of these examples of affirming practices by principals were

behaviors that promoted teachers' sense of belonging and relatedness within the school environment where they served.

Student Discipline. Student discipline was a topic that received a considerable number of comments by participants. When principals were supportive and willing to step into difficult student/parent situations, the principals won the hearts of their teachers. The following three descriptions are examples of principal actions that promoted teacher belongingness and their ability to thrive: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Celeste:* Principal would find out from me which particular kids were causing problems in a class and would confer with them one-on-one to let them know he was watching them, and they had better not act up in my class anymore. If he did receive a referral on them (from me) he would treat it seriously ad there would be great consequences. Amazingly, it worked.
>
> *Shannon:* When she saw me in a situation and stopped and watched the kid being defiant; she made comments supporting me until the kid complied. It was helpful.
>
> *Christopher:* I have an extremely disruptive student this year. On a daily basis he blurts and makes noise during lessons. His parents are not very supportive. They have not assisted us in correcting the behavior in any way. After many, many phone calls from both myself and the principal, as well as a couple of face to face meetings with me, my principal called them to a meeting where she presented them with a plan that she had sat with me and made outlining a specific discipline plan in which he would be suspended each time from now on he did not comply with directions given. The parents were outraged and were very rude. She stopped them in their tracks and gave them a lecture

about how I am an award-winning teacher, and they are lucky that he was in my class (etc.) and described in great detail how unfair it was to the other 25 students in class that their son on a nearly daily basis made them unable to learn. She then told them that he could not return to school until each of them shadowed him for the full school day (on separate days). The very next day, his mom shadowed him (and he acted like his usual self). The day after, his dad shadowed him (and he acted like his usual self). That afternoon the dad asked politely to meet with us, and we did. He apologized and honestly told us he had no idea how bad the behavior had become. He also admitted and apologized that they had previously done nothing to support us. While the student is still difficult, and this was not a magic fix, because of what my principal did, we now have the parents support and we are working together to help the student learn to control his behavior.

Personable. Educator advice was plentiful, using strong statements that communicated the importance of building leaders being personable toward teachers. Behaviors considered personable were described as being approachable, positive, encouraging, and creating a work atmosphere of fun. Additional personable and engaging behaviors suggested were to smile frequently, exercise reasonableness when responding to situations, and treat all staff fairly. A few teachers suggested that principals show concern and be personally supportive to educators in order for them to feel professionally supported. One teacher advised, "Tell them you care about them, that they are doing a great job, and ask how they can serve their teachers."

Behaviors that Hinder Relatedness

Candid statements by teachers follow that both emphasize their desire for connectedness with their principal but are denied that experience. Each of the following trends discussed are in

opposition to the core attributes of relatedness and are described as being withheld from several teachers based on their survey responses described below.

Criticism/ Lack of Praise. Behaviors by principals described by educators included criticism and a lack of praise or affirmation. Teachers spoke of their principals contributing to emotional pain, feelings of isolation, and frustration as illustrated by the statements below: *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

Susan: Our department had two teachers out long-term. I had to cover their lesson plans and grading. I would have liked acknowledgement that I was going above and beyond in my job.

Jill: They did not let me know how I was doing; there were no words of encouragement.

Bill: Compliment as well as criticize.

Lisa: More understanding. Less threats to the innocent!

Cathy: Constant criticism; always looking for me to make a mistake or fail. I felt scared, and I could not do my job.

Steve: The principal severely chastised me in front of other teachers. I didn't think that was right.

Grace: The principal never really saw me doing well when I taught kindergarten in 2014-15. She never praised my class or thought that I had improved in my teaching and relating to kindergartners. I wish she would have found positives and admitted that I was doing a good job.

These examples vividly illustrate the negative effects upon teachers when they experienced these behaviors from their principal. They expressed thoughts of self-doubt, felt threatened and unseen, each undermining their confidence and well-being.

Doesn't Listen. When teachers were asked what advice they would give their principals regarding specific ways that could support their teachers, listening was a principal action that was most often mentioned. When educators experienced principals who didn't listen, respondents didn't withhold their thoughts and/or feelings regarding the importance of this principal behavior. A clearly painful experience is described below:

> The current principal at my school, who knows nothing about me because he is new to the school, treats me as though I don't love my students and has no understanding about what I have done over the last few years for my students all without the support of administration. He has not even busted my room this school year to see how my classroom runs, yet the teacher above me that teaches the same type of kids and subjects he has nothing but praise for, he has gone so far as to accuse me of things the past school year that did not happen, and he wasn't there to know, yet *instead of hearing* what really happened has a very condescending attitude toward me.

Another teacher wanted to talk about the delivery of his lessons, with the principal; to do so, the teacher invited the principal to frequent his classroom. The principal agreed but never came. Similarly, a second teacher expressed frustration at the principal's unwillingness to listen to their concerns and ideas; instead, the principal said she was listening, but in reality, was described to have disregarded any input from teachers. A third participant communicated feelings of injustice when he described his principal as taking the word of someone else regarding a situation and not seeking him out to listen to his side of the story: "Listen to my side of the story instead of taking the word of someone else perspective." A fourth respondent felt she had proven herself as a solid teacher; she stated that she wished her principal would listen when

she was talking to her and trust that she knew what she was doing. Lastly, frustration is heard in the following: “She is bad about not listening-really listening to what is being said. She sets her mind on her ideas and won't budge from that.” All of these expressed feelings of rejection and frustration, were a result of administration who didn’t take the time to listen, seek understanding, or make an effort to get to know their staff - evidence of hindered relatedness supports.

Unavailable/Avoids. A number of teachers who desired principals to be visible and available found themselves without administrative access or student support. *Hiding out in the office* or being unavailable was a habit that frustrated several teachers. A teacher commented, saying:

> Staying in her office too much. Not present dealing with struggles on a regular basis like we do. I would like for her to be in the halls and lunchroom backing up teachers and leading with us in watching and redirecting kids.

Several others expressed frustration saying that when they needed to have a conversation with their principal, they were not or did not make themselves available. An educator stated, “She was too busy to hear my concern and was short with me. She asked me to return or asked me to send an email.” Another teacher expressed frustration when a conversation regarding a problem was requested, and it didn’t occur. A different respondent also stated that it was very difficult to get a chance to talk to their principal when it was needed. In an effort to be understanding, another teacher said, “I don’t have a lot of meeting time with the principal. I feel like I’m interrupting a lot. I know she is busy.” Time is a precious commodity in a school setting. Based on the above examples, when principals were consistently unavailable and didn’t mark out time to give to teachers, it was a behavior that was perceived as rejection, not only hindering relationship between teachers and their principals but held the potential to thwart a teacher’s well-being.

Lacks Interpersonal Skills/Caring. In a similar manner, teachers expressed a desire to have their principal show compassion and concern toward them as people. All *Beth* (names used are all pseudonyms) wanted her principal to tell her was to have a great day; it never happened. *Teresa* was struggling and wished her principal would try to put his feet in her shoes (empathy) and be willing to talk with her about a situation she was experiencing. *Katie* needed a family leave due to her father's illness, and she struggled having the proper forms from Human Capital. She needed, but didn't get, more support with this matter. *Julie* said that sometimes her principal was harsh. She felt that this was due to his stress load, but felt it was difficult to approach him when she wasn't sure if today would be a good or bad day. Speaking on behalf of herself and her colleagues, *Candice* voiced, "Tell them you care about them, that they are doing a great job, ask how they can serve their teachers."

Lack of Discipline Support. Teacher's need for discipline support is one of the most crucial needs expressed by respondents. The next few scenarios described by teachers relay situations they described as leaving them frustrated, on their own, and even at physical risk from students due to lack of principal support. *(All quotes are anonymous participants presented and are referenced by pseudonyms, 2015)*

> *Cooper:* I had a principal who did practically nothing when I wrote a student on a referral. Kids didn't mind getting sent to her office because they could play with her toys. She rarely ever backed me up. It got to the point where I had to take care of my own discipline because she wouldn't do anything. I would like for her to have done her job. I RARELY EVER wrote a referral; when I did write one, I expected her to take care of it because it was serious.
>
> *Daisy:* I had a very violent student who had beat me and a co-worker up. We called for

help, but it took our principal forever to get there. Once she got to the room, she let the kid go to her office and call his mom. She listened to the student and parent first before talking with me and the other adults present to get the full story. She never once asked if my co-worker and I were ok. We had to ask to be seen by a doctor. Both my co-worker and I ended up having surgery from damage that student caused. Our principal put the student back in our classroom within 30 minutes and we had to continue teaching that kid after having been beat up by him. He never got in trouble by the school. When I threatened to press charges on the kid my principal got angry with me and actually warned the parent. The parent got mad at me, but she moved the kid to another state to keep me from filing charges.

The words used to describe each of these scenarios, clearly depict principal actions that were not only lacking in support, but antagonistic in some cases; each one an example of principal behaviors that hinder teacher relatedness.

It is difficult to measure the internal effect of these varied types of negative actions toward teachers by their principals in the trends described above. However, it is obvious by the experiences and emotions conveyed in these statements that positive relationship was desired by educators, but it was too often denied by their principals.

Findings Summary

The findings presented in this chapter capture the results of the descriptive survey. It is evident that teachers have strong feelings and opinions regarding the behaviors of and interactions with their principals, both positive and negative. What is also clear through the experiences they shared, is the expression of their psychological needs, and the desire to have those needs supported. The closing chapter offers a discussion of the findings, examples

of principal application, and the researcher's transformation process.

Chapter 6: Research Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss evidence from the empirical portion of the study as related to leadership behaviors teachers experience as supportive of their psychological needs. This research was predicated on the need for principals to understand and engage in specific behaviors that facilitate teacher autonomy, competence, and relatedness. What has remained unclear in the literature is evidence from the voices of teachers regarding explicit principal behaviors that teachers experience as supportive or thwarting of their psychological needs. This chapter advances three claims from the survey results about need-supportive leadership behaviors and three claims about need-thwarting practices. These claims are supported with findings from this study and integrated with existing literature.

Teachers Identify Principal Behaviors that Support and Hinder Their Basic Psychological Needs

A key hope of this research effort was affirmed: hearing the joy and anguish in teacher's stories experienced because of interactions with their principal. Current and future principals could now learn from the successes and failures of other administrators whose intentional and inadvertent words and actions supported or denied the meeting of teachers' psychological needs. Reading the words expressed by teachers in the findings provided the desired insight into the specific behaviors of principals that either nurtured or were a denial of the interactions and relationship participating teachers desired to have with their building leader. Teachers shared both detailed and abbreviated experiences that occurred with their principal that both supported and hurt their autonomy, relatedness, and competence (as defined by SDT, Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The survey outcomes of principals' behaviors and actions described by teachers are discussed in the following claims.

Principal Behaviors Advance Teacher Autonomy

Autonomy is defined as the need to feel in charge of one's own choices and be the originator of one's actions in carrying out an activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Teachers who exercise their autonomy do so because they possess the internal volition, drive, and empowerment to set goals or outcomes and determine their own course of action by which to achieve them (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Many survey participants identified autonomy supportive interactions and behaviors they encountered with their principal.

Extending trust and providing leadership opportunities proved to be vital acts of autonomy support. Teachers who were given leadership responsibilities reported feelings of increased motivation and importance to the organization. Leadership opportunities served as drivers for empowerment that built confidence in teachers' skill and ability to support and guide their colleagues with professional content and strategies. Principals who understood and expressed belief in their teachers, showed their trust by allowing them to lead PLC's, serve as Team Leaders, teach professional development, etc. As teachers were encouraged to exercise their autonomy and set a course to achieve their professional goals, a cycle of empowerment was described by teachers that motivated them to initiate and demonstrate even greater professional engagement, vitality, and creativity in their school life activities and relationships. Other critical elements proved important to teacher autonomy support as well.

Principals who tuned into the individual strengths and needs of their staff promoted autonomy support in a variety of additional ways. Two-way communication focused on professional topics that consisted of an equal exchange between teacher and administrator, serving to stimulate vibrant conversations that focused on best practices. Time given to listen to teachers' new ideas or provide the resources and differentiated professional development tailored

to the unique needs of each teacher, was interpreted as the principal's deep understanding and ability to *see* and acknowledge the individual. In summary, autonomy supportive behaviors by the principal were identified as: nurturing teacher innovation, promoting participation in site-based problem-solving, encouraging shared decision-making, and engaging in reflective dialogue about teacher practice and school vision.

Adverse, Coercive Principal Behaviors Quench Teacher Autonomy

School environments where teacher autonomy was described as hindered were those where teachers expressed significant emotional frustration and distress due to what they perceived as adverse principal behaviors. Principals who micro-managed teachers through actions that were viewed as dictates, caused teacher autonomy to be stifled due to their inability to exercise professional decision-making involving curriculum, scheduling, and teaching strategies. Teachers perceived these actions as a lack of trust and respect from their principal.

Others believed their principal to be narrow-minded and controlling, exhibiting practices that were coercive toward teachers. Some described principal behaviors that took a parent's and/or student's side without investigating the position of the teacher. Still others described the principal who did not support the individualized needs of teachers regarding the provision of resources or professional development or was unwilling to engage in a discussion about classroom practices, to name a few. The inability to engage with a principal who was not solution-oriented or open to professional interchange left some teachers feeling professionally and emotionally shutdown. Principals who engaged in one or several of these behaviors, quenching a teacher's deep sense of self clearly hindered the self-motivation and creativity that are the vehicles of a teacher's autonomy (Assor et al., 2002).

Principal Behaviors Supportive of Teacher Professional Learning, Enhance Teacher Competence

Competence support by school leaders emphasizes personal improvement and learning over superior performance (Cox & Williams, 2008). Survey respondents agreed. Principals who emphasize a value for collaboration, open communication, and promote professional development, are able to inspire and motivate teachers toward engaging in pedagogical learning opportunities which increase their skill and instructional practices (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Sheppard, 1996). A prevalent desirable principal action expressed was the teacher observation and feedback cycle. Teachers who experienced both affirmation and feedback from their principal described situations where they were able to grow in their instructional skills from this form of direct interpersonal reflection. Educators also described growth in their professional skills as a result of their principal providing the opportunity to work with a coach in a feedback coaching cycle, given time to observe a master teacher, and given time in PLC's to discuss best practices with colleagues.

Other forms of competence support were also provided by several principals. Opportunities to learn through a variety of professional development venues were offered, as well as school-wide resources being made available for teacher use. Principals who were actively engaged in classroom support through instructional modeling, frequent walkthroughs with immediate feedback, and who were willing and had the content knowledge to provide instructional guidance, were considered supportive by their teachers. In addition to instructional support, principals who supported teachers in their behavior management efforts won the hearts of their teachers. Administrators who were willing to provide training, offer management strategies, or stand behind teachers when dealing with angry parents or disobedient students,

identified these as leadership behaviors that helped them to be successful. Principals who exercised these multiple forms of competence support, helped educators grow in their capacity as teachers and helped them to feel capable of mastering the skills and reaching the outcomes they set for themselves and/or their students (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Professional Incompetence and Demeaning Principal Behavior Hinders Teacher Competence

Principal behaviors that hindered teacher competence were strongly opposed by educators. Lack of discipline support and difficult parents were two areas of intense frustration and hurt expressed by teachers. Highly detailed descriptions of situations in which principals took the word of the student or parents over that of the teacher, were provided by multiple teachers. The actions taken by their principals resulted in the devastation of each teachers' sense of competence, a lowering of teacher confidence, and the destruction of the relationship as viewed by the teacher toward the principal.

Additional actions taken by principals that hindered competence were focused on instructional practices. Some principals were described as those who didn't provide professional development or any other mechanisms for teacher growth. Others were portrayed as lacking instructional competency; this resulted in a lack of respect from the teacher, in addition to deep frustration with the principal's inability to support their instructional growth. Some educators stated that their principal would frequently walk through their classroom but not provide any feedback, or the feedback provided was a typical *good job* that lacked in specificity and genuine affirmation.

Lastly, and deeply hurtful, were behaviors that were demeaning. These consisted of teachers describing being humiliated in front of their peers by being verbally dressed down or

more subtle forms of humiliation such as being moved to multiple assignments throughout the year. Unsubstantiated accusations that were the result of the principal jumping to conclusions or taking the word of another without the accused being given an opportunity to respond, left teachers feeling they had no recourse. These careless or inadvertent behaviors by principals undermined teacher capacity and were destructive to their well-being.

Principal Behaviors of Kindness, Accessibility, and Safety Promote Teacher Belonging

Educators' survey responses reflected a deep desire to work in an environment wherein the psychological need of relatedness and belonging are a priority of the principal. Teachers expressed a longing to feel safe enough to take professional chances without fear of repercussions by their administrator and were encouraged to build relationships with other members of the school community (Olsen, 2017). Survey participants indicated that genuine, caring, and personal interchanges with their administrator focused on topics beyond the classroom which helped to create an atmosphere where they felt secure and seen as an individual. Smiles, follow-up questions about personal situations, and specific words of encouragement were contributing factors to this perception. Additionally, principals who made themselves available and accessible for classroom support, professional conversations, and provided a listening ear or offered advice, were appreciated by teachers who felt stuck, frustrated with a student, or just needed a fresh perspective.

Lastly, educators who expressed a positive relationship with their administrator, described principal behaviors that provided positive and encouraging, yet honest and specific feedback about their classroom practices. They were able to receive their principal's feedback because it was delivered respectfully with the intent to help the teacher grow. These interactions resulted in a sense of attachment and acceptance, belonging, and security wherein the teacher felt

they could risk vulnerability and believe they were a critical member of the school community (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017).

Principal Inaccessibility and Lack of Interpersonal Skills Hinder Teacher Relatedness

Behaviors and actions by the principal that were deemed to be hurtful and destructive to participant's sense of belonging were also prevalent. Most frequently noted were principals who appeared to hide in their office and avoid being in the classroom. Teachers perceived this unavailable behavior as arrogant, a form of rejection, or simply uninterested; each action, whether perceived accurately or not, was a hindrance to a positive relationship between the principal and teacher. Teachers who desired classroom support and input were especially frustrated with the sense of isolation they experienced; some expressed a need to be listened to but not given the opportunity because of the principal's inaccessibility. Others expressed offense at the lack of concern exhibited by the principal when personal difficulties beyond the classroom were happening; the lack of a kind word or approval for time-off due to physical or family issues was hurtful. Similar behaviors were simply interpreted by some educators as a lack of care for the well-being of teachers and staff. A few summed it up as the principal just being rude and lacking interpersonal skills. Without a positive and safe relationship between principal and teacher, all three psychological needs are at risk of not being met.

Relatedness is Key

Cox and Williams (2008) remind principals that wise administrators understand that a healthy social-emotional climate and culture are the foundation that binds together autonomy and competence. Without question, visible throughout the principal behaviors just described, is confirmation that it is difficult to separate relatedness support from autonomy and competence support, as the latter two cannot truly exist without relatedness also being present (Cox &

Williams, 2008). Clearly, as evidenced in the survey outcomes, principals who understand the importance of relying more on their relational and pedagogical knowledge of teaching rather than on positional power and authority, have more influence and see greater results in teacher growth and motivation (Blasé & Kirby, 2000; Treslan & Ryan, 1986).

When teachers are secure in the relationships within their environment, they feel more free to risk, learn, and explore, strengthening their sense of competence and autonomy (Cox & Williams, 2008). When that security is absent or obstructed as explicitly described by several teachers, one may function below his or her ability (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). As evidenced in the findings, principals who engage teachers with positive relational behaviors and interactions can set the stage for teachers to feel a sense of attachment, acceptance, belonging, and security. The teacher is then free to risk vulnerability and come to believe they are a critical member of the school community (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017). Throughout the descriptions provided by teachers, each voiced a desire and need for a principal who cares about them personally and is willing to take the time to get to know their strengths and weaknesses (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

A key goal of site leadership is to create an educational environment wherein teachers choose to enter, stay, and thrive. Principals must understand and choose to intentionally participate in leadership behaviors that promote teachers' well-being and ability to flourish, and to enhance teacher capacity, enabling both teachers and students to prosper and reach their potential (Adams et al., 2016).

Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of this research was to identify teachers' perceptions of specific positive and negative principal behaviors that supported or hindered teachers' basic psychological needs

(Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The descriptive survey identified significant evidence of specific principal behaviors which substantiates and extends BPNT research literature. Principals' actions and behaviors are a powerful influence that promote or hinder the meeting of teachers' psychological needs.

This research has further established that principals need to understand and intentionally participate in leadership behaviors that promote teachers' ability to thrive and flourish (Adams et al., 2016). Astute school leaders operate with the understanding that schools are powered by people, and people have needs that must be met for anything of substance collectively to emerge (Ford & Ware, 2016). Using the lens of BPNT, school leaders can choose to reflect on their leadership habits and develop behaviors that empower, grow, and nurture those they lead and serve (Ford & Ware, 2016). As a result of this study, the explicit descriptions of principal behaviors from teachers' perspectives that both promote and hinder teacher psychological needs, could serve as a guide for principals in their understanding of how to accomplish this goal. The following section explores potential applications of this research study.

District Hiring Practices

Leaders are not created equal. Not all leaders possess the learned or innate qualities that naturally promote and nurture their staffs' psychological needs. As evidenced by the research outcomes, some building administrators are very intentional in their efforts to create environments where teachers thrive, while others create environments where teachers feel shut down, fearful, and unwilling to risk vulnerability due to hurtful words or a wide range of hindering leadership behaviors. To gain insight when hiring a prospective principal candidate, districts use a wide variety of tactics.

Strategies typically utilized by districts strive to identify prospective principals who

are the *right fit*. These may include online application systems, written responses, phone interviews, individual or group interviews, etc. Another practice is the use of questionnaires. Whether in-person or in written form, most districts have designed strategic questionnaires that help the interviewer ascertain information and qualities that either support or negate the type of individual desired for the position. Inclusion of questions focused on BPNT may provide valuable and insightful information that could identify the selection of the right candidate who understands the importance of understanding teachers' psychological needs.

Based on teachers' descriptions in the research study outcomes, principals who nurture the psychological needs of their staff were highly respected, deeply appreciated, and more willingly followed. Thus, establishing a hiring structure designed to elicit information regarding the candidate's capacity to nurture and develop staff psychological needs, could be a valuable tool for districts to develop and incorporate into their hiring process. By utilizing this strategy, the selection of individuals who align with the district's values for developing and retaining staff, could become more attainable.

District Principal Leadership Training of BPNT

Once administrators are hired, continuing education for principals in the training and development of BPNT applied to leadership practice would seem a worthy endeavor Internalization of this conceptual lens combined with the principal's awareness of their own behaviors as they interact with staff, is a transformation process that requires willingness, practice, reflection, and time. A recent study in a business setting indicates training managers in displaying need-supportive behaviors did not have a positive effect on their employees. (Tafvelin, et al., 2019). Managers were trained for one week, and the effectiveness was assessed over the following three to four months. Based on my own transformation process over the

course of my five-year research process, it is reasonable to purport that these internalized changes cannot be accomplished in that short of a time span.

Over the five-year period of conducting and analyzing this research, my own transformation process occurred. Having read the responses by the participants multiple times, using them as a mirror when reflecting on my own leadership behaviors and analyzing them according to the three tenets of BPNT, I became increasingly cognizant of my own actions that both thwarted and supported teachers' psychological needs. As I continued the research work, I began to incorporate it into my professional work, internalizing and making leadership shifts that have changed how I now lead. Over time, as I went about my daily core functions of the principalship, I began to evaluate and discuss with my leadership team how to approach these functions using the lens and terminology of BPNT. It is now part of my daily approach to leadership which incorporates how I relate to my staff, support their competence and capacity, encourage autonomy, and create the organizational systems that are put in place.

This is not an overnight process, but a highly intentional and focused one that to be implemented, must be afforded the gift of time. The process is itself steeped in autonomy and is unique to the individual leader. However, I do believe that with ongoing training, focus groups using reflective discussion cycles, role play and coaching opportunities, districts can design and implement an intentional comprehensive training process that supports the development of leaders who will then be better able to implement BPNT into their leadership practices, resulting in teachers having their autonomy, competence and relatedness needs met.

BPNT Implementation in a Principal's Leadership Practice

During the midpoint of my research, several K – 5th grade level teachers and the leadership team analyzed student writing data and evaluated their vertical alignment. We came to

the conclusion that as a school, we needed to set a school-wide goal of increasing student writing skills and ability through intentional cross-content skill development and application. Applying BPNT to this instructional shift, the administrative team assessed the levels of autonomy and competence of the teaching staff in terms of their willingness and skill to implement this new focus. To begin this process, several aspects were considered.

First, the team discussed the various degrees of teacher competency regarding their knowledge and implementation of the writing process. By doing so, we determined the varying levels and types of professional development that would need to be provided in order to strengthen teacher competence and capacity. In addition, the admin team was able to identify teachers whom they would need to engage in a coaching cycle based on classroom observations and goal-setting conversations. We also identified potential teacher leaders who could serve as demonstration teachers and mentors to their colleagues. This led to a natural follow-up discussion regarding those who functioned in this instructional area with a strong sense of autonomy.

Identifying those teachers who had a passion and strong knowledge of the writing process was critical to building teacher capacity. Empowering those teachers to come alongside their peers who needed support by leading workshops, mentoring teammates, or leading PLC's, proved to be an important shared leadership move that would further teacher autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2012) for those leading, while increasing the competence of those receiving their guidance. Trust would be extended and modeled by admin toward teachers, as well as teacher to teacher (Olsen, 2017); collegial conversations would center around writing instruction; and increased confidence and competence surrounding writing instruction would be natural outcomes as teachers engaged together in this growth process. Foundational to these efforts would be the

intentional use of relational strategies.

Relatedness is the social-emotional tie that binds together autonomy and competence; when teachers are secure in the relationships within their environment, they are free to risk, learn, and explore, strengthening their sense of competence and autonomy (Cox & Williams, 2008). The administrative team recognized that in order for teachers to be willing to be vulnerable and risk growth in this new instructional focus, we would need to be accessible for questions and professional discourse, visit classrooms with regularity, and provide frequent affirmation and suggestions delivered with honesty and kindness. Most importantly, the administrative team was committed to creating a climate and culture wherein teacher-leaders and teachers were free to risk asking questions without feeling criticized, knew they were cared for personally, and valued for their commitment to their students and their profession (Ford & Ware, 2016; Olsen, 2017).

Awareness and intentionality of the application of BPNT were the two core components that constituted the leadership team's ability to institute this instructional shift with success. Creating change within the school environment based on a clear understanding of teachers' psychological needs, allowed us to design and plan the change process with specificity of action. Applying and engaging in a wide variety of behaviors identified in this research, allowed us to develop and promote an environment in which teachers were thriving, and a healthy portion of their psychological needs were met.

Research Practitioner Transformation

After having conducted the descriptive survey and engaged in ongoing analysis of its data, a subtle invasion of BPNT concepts began to influence and alter my actions and behaviors as a principal practitioner. Reading and re-reading the survey participants' responses created an

increased awareness and ongoing reflection of personal leadership practices and how they were implemented. Gradual changes based on these reflections began to occur, creating leadership shifts that served to promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness with educational staff. Over time, most leadership decisions became filtered through and influenced by the lens of BPNT. Where leadership functions had previously been practiced as principal-driven responsibilities, the lens of BPNT served to create an approach that was more attuned to the individual, professional, and relational abilities/needs of the educational staff. As a result of this subtle and gradual shift, teachers began to notably thrive and grow in their instructional capacity; there has been a palpable energy and sense of purpose shared by staff that has developed. Although tired at the end of every day, many teachers have verbally conveyed that they are going home more deeply satisfied in their work, communicating with words what could be categorized as their growing autonomy, increased competence, and strong sense of belonging.

As I have grown into this internalized application process of BPNT, schoolwide changes have occurred. Teacher-leaders are sharing their expertise, engaging in collegial conversations with their peers and administration that includes transparent reflection. Teachers are sharing strategies with their colleagues, creating units of study and materials together, and evaluating student outcomes based on their united efforts. Professional development opportunities are ongoing through staff meetings, PLC's, articles, and trainings that are largely based on the individual needs of the teachers. Relationships between team members are strengthening naturally as a result of their common focus; administration is able to take a support role by providing affirmation, encouragement, and honest feedback. In short, because of developing a conscious leadership lens of BPNT, I have become more cognizant and intentional in regard to my leadership behaviors. Teachers are being provided opportunities to share their expertise,

grow in their professional capacity and be supported emotionally and relationally.

Closing Statement

As I conclude this research, the world is experiencing a life-altering pandemic. Psychological needs are more acute as individuals experience a loss of loved ones, students fluctuate between on-site and online learning, and a sense of fear and isolation are perpetually weighing on everyone's mind. As a school principal, the need to utilize and apply BPNT to my daily leadership functions is more profound than ever. Staff members, parents, and students are looking to principals to provide a sense of security, guide them through these tumultuous education waters, and maintain some semblance of focus and normalcy as we work together in new roles and functions to educate our students. Supporting teachers' autonomy, competence and sense of belonging is more critical than ever. I am grateful for the timeliness of this research and for the leadership shifts I have made and will continue to make as I internalize and practically apply BNPT in my professional practice.

Approaching the principalship through the lens of BPNT has the potential to create a leadership paradigm that incorporates and builds upon substantiated leadership research, while embracing the realities of the human psychological needs that emerge from the heart and as a result of life events. If principals' functions of setting vision and mission, school management, operations, improving instruction, building climate and culture, and developing people were implemented utilizing BPNT as a guiding framework, I believe that every member of the school community would have the opportunity to exercise their strengths and areas of passion, grow professionally, and belong.

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Appendix A

Oklahoma Education Association Approval Letter

October 19, 2015

To: Ronda Kesler Kendall-Whittier E.S.

From: Doug Folks Communications Specialist

Re: Dissertation survey

We would be happy to share your dissertation survey with our members. Please send me a brief description of the research and a link to which we can send people.

Call me if you have questions.

Alicia Priest, *President* **Katherine Bishop,** *Vice President* **David DuVall**, *Executive Director*	323 E. Madison PO Box 18485 Oklahoma City, OK 73154	405.528.7785 800.522.8091 okea.org

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission Exempt from IRB Review AP01 November 10, 2015 **IRB#:** 6101

Date:

Study Title: Principal Behaviors that Help Teachers Improve

Approval Date: 11/10/2015

Principal Investigator:

Ronda Rae Kesler **Exempt Category:** 2

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the
  exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program
  and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.
  Please ensure that the Qualtrics link includes the approved consent form as the first page of the survey.

  If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

Survey Participant Consent Form

Survey Consent

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at The University of Oklahoma studying teacher perceptions of principal practices that support teacher growth and development. As a teacher in Oklahoma, you are being invited to participate in this research because your views and attitudes are very important. The purpose of the project is to collect information from teachers that can be used to better understand how principals support teachers in continuously improving their instruction.

If you agree to participate, please select the "yes" option below. The survey will open up, and you may complete it electronically as directed. The survey will take approximately 10-20 minutes depending on the length of your answers. If you choose not to participate, please indicate that intention by choosing "no" below. I will be notified of your intent.

Participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on any benefits to which you are entitled. There are no risks attached to your involvement nor will you be compensated. The records of this study will be kept confidential, and no one except myself and my dissertation chair, Curt Adams, will have access to the raw data. Electronic surveys will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you as a participant.

If you have concerns or complaints about this research, I can be contacted at 918-946-5216. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or about your rights and wish to talk to someone other than the individuals on the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board at (405)325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration to participate in the project.

Sincerely,
Ronda Kesler
Doctoral Candidate
University of Oklahoma

Please indicate below whether or not you choose to participate. If you choose to participate, select "yes." If you choose not to participate, select "no."

- Yes
- No

Demographic Information

Please identify your gender.

- Male
- Female

Please list the classification of your current school district.

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

Please identify the grade configuration of your school.

- Early Childhood
- Elementary
- Middle/Junior High
- High School

How many total years have you taught?

How many years have you taught in your current school?

Are you Nationally Board Certified?

- Yes
- No

Please identify your overall evaluation rating for the 2014-2015 school year.

- Superior
- Highly Effective
- Effective
- Below Effective
- Ineffective

Did you receive a rating below effective or ineffective for any teaching domain during the 2014-2015 school year?

- Yes
- No

Describe practices by your principal that support and encourage your overall professional growth.

If you have struggled in an area of teaching, what specific actions has your principal taken to help you improve?

Think of a time when you experienced a lack of support from your principal. Describe the specific actions that caused you to feel this way. What would you have liked the principal to do instead?

Think of a time you experienced significant support from your principal. Described the specific actions you found supportive.

What advice would you give your principal, or any principal, regarding specific ways to support your professional growth?

Appendix D

Section I: Participant Demographic Information

Participant Gender:	**Male**		**Female**			
(count)	7		89			
Avg. Years Taught:	**1-5 yr.**	**6-10 yr.**	**11-15 yr.**	**16-20 yr.**	**21-29 yr.**	**30 + yr.**
(count)	13	10	18	15	22	14
Nationally Board Certified:	**Yes**	**No**				
(count)	11	85				
School District Classification:	**Urban**	**Suburban**	**Rural**			
(count)	73	17	6			
School Grade Configuration:	**Early Childhood**	**Elementary**	**Middle/Jr. High**	**High School**		
(count)	10	59	15	12		
No. Yrs. at Same School:	**1-5 yr.**	**6-10 yr.**	**11-15 yr.**	**16-20 yr.**	**21-29 yr.**	**30 + yr.**
(count)	62	8	8	6	9	
Evaluation:	**Rating of 3 or Above on All Indicators**		**Rating of 2 or less on Any Indicator**			
	93		2			